

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 3, 2009 at 6:59am

Vatican denies studying new rules for priests who father kids

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NCR Today

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The Vatican has denied an Italian report that it recently convened meetings to study the situation created by priests who violate their vows of celibacy by having relationships with women and fathering children.

The Italian daily *La Stampa* reported on Sunday, August 2, that the Congregation for Clergy was considering a new set of rules for such cases, which the newspaper described as "very widespread" in developing nations as well as some European countries, "such as Austria". (The reference to Austria likely had in mind the case of Fr. Joseph Friedl, a popular pastor who recently acknowledged living with a woman for more than 25 years.)

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According to the *La Stampa* report, the rules under consideration would create a "guarantee of social rights" for the women and children involved, including the right of any offspring to be included among the priest's legitimate heirs; would distinguish sharply between the priest's personal property and ecclesiastical holdings, which could not be inherited; and in at least some cases, would permit the priest to continue exercising ministry.

The *La Stampa* article indicated that part of the motivation for the Vatican review was fear of large legal settlements against the church, similar to those spawned by the sexual abuse crisis in the United States.

This morning, however, the Vatican spokesperson, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, issued what he

described as an "oral" rather than a "formal" denial of the *La Stampa* report, describing it as "without foundation."

Lombardi's denial was distributed to journalists via e-mail mid-morning on Monday.

Recent months have witnessed a number of high-profile cases that spotlighted tensions over priestly celibacy in the Catholic church. In May 2009, for example, Archbishop Paulin Pomodimo of Bangui, the lone archdiocese in the Central African Republic, resigned after a Vatican investigation confirmed reports that several of his priests had been living in what amounted to common law marriages with women and the children they had fathered.

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