

Rome does right by resigned priest

James Ewens | Sep. 6, 2012 Examining the Crisis

Two years ago I wrote an article for *NCR* titled "[Surely Rome Can Do Better.](#)" [1] It described the complexity of resigning from the priesthood ? especially if you wish to get married ? and was published in the "Examining the Crisis" section of the website. Forty-five people wrote comments to the article, but it was a phone call I received from an attorney that really caught my attention.

He offered to defend me, for free, when (not if) the Jesuits sought to discredit me publicly for what I said in the article about how superiors were told to protect confidential material that might end up in court. I was very appreciative of his kind offer, but said I thought it unlikely this would occur because there were 50 witnesses from the "superiors school" who had heard the same material.

I write this update because something quite unexpected occurred after the article appeared in *NCR*. The local provincial offered to assist me in obtaining papers from the Vatican that would ratify the marriage I had contracted (on my front lawn, with seven Jesuit priests in attendance, in 2006). I accepted his assistance because he agreed I would not have to complete the onerous five page questionnaire the Vatican had previously sent, asking for detailed information on my sexual history from the past 45 years.

With legal help, paid for by the Jesuits, I wrote a letter listing dates of entrance, vows, etc., places of work, the year I resigned (2002). This was supplemented by "support letters" written by four Jesuit friends, for reasons the canon lawyer thought important -- perhaps to affirm that I was an honest person, had been a Jesuit for 45 years, and was, indeed, 70 years of age and happily married.

At any rate, after a year's wait, Benedict XVI wrote me a letter, in Latin, saying, in effect, my "irregular marriage" of six years could now be "regularized." On June 15 my wife and I, for the second time, promised to be faithful to each other, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health.

It took ten minutes, and occurred ten years after I had left the priesthood.

One might ask, "Why bother, after so many years -- with so much water under the dam?" I did it to right the balance, closing the books on decisions that were carefully made and deserved honest recognition by the official church.

I have appreciated the assistance given me by the Wisconsin Province Jesuits. And I encourage other resigned priests whose marriages aren't fully recognized to take advantage of the revised Vatican policies on this issue. It's the dioceses responsibility to clean up their records and recognize marriages of resigned priests. The priests need to push the diocesan authorities on this. It's a matter of justice and due process of the law. (Besides, I'm told, Rome only cares about two issues: how old are you, how long ago did you leave?).

Rome, can, indeed, do better -- and, at least in this one case, has. Finally.

Editor's Note: For resigned priests, Mr. Ewens recommends the following news story: [Congregation can more easily laicize priests](#)

[2]. Mr. Ewens said, "Church leaders could take care of this situation with a simple solution, if they would just carry out the actions outlined in this document. But as the document says, the officials must take the initiative."

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