

## The priesthood is not just for ‘saints’

SIR — Joseph Seferta (letter, July 10) is right to draw attention to the chronic shortage of priests in this country. Yet whatever the arguments for and against allowing the ordination of married men as standard practice, this would amount to little more than window-dressing, doing virtually nothing to confront the vocations crisis at the heart of the matter.

What is needed, in the first instance, is a renewal of sound and proper catechesis for all Catholic children, so that boys will be less likely to lapse from the faith, and will grow up with a better understanding of the sacraments and the priesthood, making them more receptive to any potential calling to Holy Orders.

Secondly, as they grow older, the boys (and the girls too for that matter) should be encouraged to think more deeply about their vocations. The all-too-apparent consensus that marriage is for “normal” people while the priesthood and religious life are only for “saints” must be banished — though the importance of marriage and family should of course be equally stressed.

Ultimately, we have to trust that God will preserve the order of priests until the end of time. Nonetheless, there are many ways we can cooperate with this great work of His before we consider asking men to run the constant risk of physical, mental and even spiritual burnout by juggling the raising of families with the manifold pastoral, liturgical and other duties of the priesthood.

*Yours faithfully,  
Matt Showering  
Bath, Somerset*

SIR — I read with interest your coverage (Home news, July 17) of a very significant event: several of our bishops have declared their support for the ordination of married men and urge the bishops' conference to respond to Pope Francis's clear invitation, that proposals be made to Rome to this effect.

The arguments for change have already been convincingly made; now we should think seriously about where married candidates for ordination might be found. Research suggests that there are considerable numbers of married laymen whose life and involvement in the Church show them to be *viri probati* (men of proven worth), who could be invited to become priests. It has also found that many of our married permanent deacons at some time considered the priesthood and might be prepared to take this next step. Finally, we know that among the many priests whom the celibacy law obliged to quit priestly service when they married, not a few have proved their continuing loyalty in lay involvement in their parishes. Some of these would dearly love to serve again as priests.

It is sometimes suggested that proponents of married priests disapprove of celibacy. Absolutely not: as Joseph Seferta (Letter, July 10) says, there will

always be those who know themselves to have received from God the spiritual gift to lead a mature celibate life and their prophetic witness remains precious. But they are few — as Jesus himself said (Mt 19:11-12) — and it is wrong to make such a charism a condition for ordination.

The huge response to Bishop Hollis's call shows that the time is right for married priests, and Catholics in this country are ready and willing to welcome them.

*Yours faithfully,  
Mike Kerrigan  
Chairman, Movement for Married Clergy, by email*

## A priestly clash

SIR — The idea that the Pope and bishops should “stop hesitating” and allow Catholic priests to marry (Letter, July 10) is astounding. Men committing to the priesthood are not mere functionaries (like electricians, teachers or plumbers), but icons of Christ himself.

Married non-Catholic clergy are well represented in literature and comedy regarding the near impossibility of combining the necessary “otherworldliness” of their vocation with the obligations of Christian marriage. All that bitterness, exclusion and sense of neglect has been depicted by many a spouse and child in Trollope and Dickens, through to Alan Bennett and beyond.

The fact that the sacrament of marriage exhorts a man to “forsake all others” cannot sit alongside the vows taken during ordination to the priesthood — also, of course, a sacrament.

It is a daily difficulty for the married layman to turn his mind and heart to God, and Catholic priests should continue to be spared that potential clash between the domestic and the divine by remaining unmarried.

They are all our Fathers and I believe we shall not want. Our Heavenly Father will answer our daily prayer that He “send more labourers to the harvest”.

Our ordinariate married priests deserve our understanding and prayers for help in balancing their home life with their spiritual calling.

*Yours faithfully,  
Hillary Blake (Mrs)  
By email*

## Rewards of celibacy

SIR – Matt Showering (Letters, July 24) moves nearer to the heart of the matter of celibacy. When I entered the seminary many decades ago, I was very challenged by the notion of self-sacrifice involved in almost every aspect of the training. It caused much change in attitude among us eager young students.

One finds this theme time and again in Scripture calling for that sacrifice we often call selflessness. When well motivated it is rewarded by a hundredfold improvement in emotional conversion to greater interior peace and love. This is particularly so in the conversion to sexual purity. In a more affluent society, the challenge is especially difficult but the yearning for what the Lord offers never dies. We just need challenging time and again, especially through an absence of criticising others and a renewal of personal faithful commitment.

*Yours faithfully,*  
Bryan Storey  
*By email*

## The chaste Apostles

SIR – In discussions about priestly celibacy, we need to keep in mind what Jesus said and did. Jesus could easily have called 12 Jewish men who were married. No. Jesus actually chose nine single men to lead his Church. Only Peter, Philip and Bartholomew were married. Half-way through his ministry, Jesus asked all of the 12 to remain continent with their wives in future. This they gladly accepted. All except Judas, who was a womaniser as well as a thief.

All the evidence suggests that “celibacy” really does go right back to apostolic times. Only in the 13th century did it become a definite requirement before priestly ordination.

As we see from the great saints, this charism certainly gives glory to God, and long may it continue to do so.

*Yours faithfully,*  
Diarmuid Collins  
*London N22*