

We must present a solution to Rome

AT no time has the state of the Church been one of tranquillity and peace. There have been contentious issues of real concern, that is in the nature of our Christian community.

We are experiencing such a period in these early years of the 21st century, a time of disquiet and uncertainty, yet the vibrancy of faith shown to us in the person of Francis is, without question, providential.

When Bishop Erwin Kräutler in Brazil asked for advice on the scarcity of priests to serve in his huge diocese, he received the reply that he should present a solution to Rome and not expect Rome to solve all the problems. In consequence, the Brazilian Bishops have set up a national Commission to examine the option of married priests.

Nearer to home, with the recent intervention of three retired bishops, Crispian Hollis, John Crowley and Thomas McMahon, supporting such a move, this is becoming an issue of some urgency which can no longer be ignored.

No-one is suggesting that the option of marriage solves all our current problems, of course it doesn't. There will always be a place for celibate vocation alongside that of a call to priesthood. But the two vocations, marriage

and priesthood, are not mutually exclusive.

It is nonsense when a priest has to resign his ministry because he has fallen in love and wishes to marry, only to be replaced in his parish by an ex-Anglican, married with three children, as happened recently in Coventry.

I am afraid that I cannot agree with Cardinal Vincent Nichols when he is reported as saying that this is not a pressing issue. It most certainly is. When parishes are being closed or amalgamated and men in their 60s are having their work load doubled at a time of life when it should be diminishing, something is wrong and it must be recognised. In this coming Year of Mercy it is time to invite back those who resigned their ministry when they wished to marry.

Now is the time when our own bishops should set up a commission to examine the options, to talk through the details round a table of Christian charity before the celebration of the Eucharist becomes an occasional event rather than food for the pilgrim in a pilgrim Church.

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Crisis in priesthood needs new blood

IN reply to Fr Storey and Catherine Venture (*The Catholic Times*, 17th July), I congratulate those bishops who have said we need to ordain married men (*virī probati*) to the priesthood because of the great shortage of priests. If they and I did not care about giving God to the people we would be failing in our Christian duty.

It used to be a mortal sin to miss Mass on Sundays and Holidays of Obligation and not good either to miss weekday Mass. Now we have many Mass-less weekdays and when our parish priest was away one weekend recently we had no Mass for our over 1,000 Sunday Mass-goers. Where we had four priests we now have one who is nearing retirement age.

Our diocese has priests in their 70s and 80s, many are officially retired, and some have had major surgery for life-threatening illnesses but are obliged to say public Masses for priest-less churches even when they are not parish priests.

In the past I had to ring

priests regularly to attend the death beds of patients to give them the Last Sacraments. Nowadays many die without a priest. When I was rushed into hospital recently there was no chaplain, not even a nun or lay one. In any case only a priest can give absolution and anoint the dying.

Our major cities have problems of massive immigration, homelessness and poverty. I do not observe unqualified laity dealing with these. Also priests are obliged to keep the Judaeo-Christian teachings of caring for their parents and family members like everyone else. In my experiences they are much better at doing it than many lay people who are so busy 'doing things for the Church' and going on expensive holidays while they ignore their parents and relations.

Other European cardinals support a married priesthood. The Church's Eastern rite has always had married priests and we now have married convert priests here.

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