

## Simple equation: no priests = no Church

The recent letters published in the *Universe* regarding the importance of celibacy for our (Latin) priesthood seem to be missing the point. Jim Allen (*Celibacy is best to serve God*) is either unaware or ignorant of the current problem in the Church regarding the dire shortage of priests. The Archbishop of Edinburgh recently stated as a fact that 'no priest – no Eucharist – no church'. So while Jim Allen may see a celibate clergy as the best means of serving God, it looks like the demise of

the Church as we know it.

There are very few vocations now to the priesthood - this is a fact.

Fortunately, our Anglican brethren are helping us out, with the ordination of married clergy (almost 100 currently), who with their wives and families, are an excellent example of the married state.

Celibacy was certainly not in the mind of the Lord when he instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, or when he appointed a married man as our first Pope. The early Church only got round to establishing celibacy as a means of remedying some of the abuses that had arisen in the Church. Pope Francis' "observations on the origins of celibacy", started more than a thousand years ago by a Pope, are now "archaic, an antiquity that needs to be considered" (as reported in March 2015, to a long-time friend.)

Jim Allen takes as two examples of celibacy, St John and St Paul. While John may well have been the disciple 'loved by the Lord' he was not chosen to be the rock on which Jesus founded the Church. As for Paul, his rather plaintive appeal in 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 5 - "why can't I have a wife, like Peter and the brothers of the Lord" needs some considering before quoting him as an advocate for celibacy, as Catherine Venture appears to do, in her letter of July 17th.

Finally, while Fr Storey is right to acknowledge the witness of very many celibate priests, this witness is sadly overshadowed by the dreadful scandals that are currently facing the hierarchy as the record of abuse by celibates at all levels is under the spotlight of current investigations.

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## Crisis in priesthood shows change needed

To reply to Fr Storey and Catherine Venture (*Letters 17th July*), I congratulate those bishops who have said we need to ordain married men (*viripro-*

*bati*) 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 Holydays 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 Massgoers. Where we had four priests we now have one nearing retirement age.

Our diocese has priests in their 70s and 80s, many are officially retired, and some have had serious illnesses but are obliged to say public Masses for priestless churches even when they are not the 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 experience 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 that ignore their parents and relations.

In the 1980s Cardinal Hume was so concerned about aging priests and the lack of young ones coming forward he had a survey done to find out what the situation would be in this century.

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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