

Priestly Celibacy and the Rise of National Priests' Associations since Vatican II

This chapter briefly traces the history of priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church, its reasons, and the crisis in vocations the discipline created, partly as a result of the Second Vatican Council's praise of sexuality in marriage. A collateral movement questioned how authority should be distributed among the hierarchy, the clergy, and the laity, that is, what sort of ecclesiology should obtain?

In response to the priest shortage, and the Council's call collaboration and greater respect for the laity came novel structures, among them priests' senates and parish councils, as well as voluntary national priest associations. Strictly top down demands from the hierarchy were not acceptable as in the old days, but that those most affected had, at least, to be heard. In the United States, it was the National Federation of Priest Associations, a diocesan based organization. Employing the social science to accumulate data on opinions and preferences regarding possible reforms was another novelty.

Rather than end mandatory celibacy the Church's solution to the growing shortage of priests was to reestablish the permanent male diaconate. It was halfway measure and a source, for an increasing number of women in the Church, of dissatisfaction. In addition to the permanent diaconate, parish life coordinators would manage parishes without pastors; for the rest, priests would work harder, retired priests pressed into service on weekends, and dioceses looked abroad to Europe, South America, Africa, the Philippines and elsewhere for priests to encardinate.

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Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way, for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's Church?

1 Tim. 3:2, quoted by a reader from Versailles, Indiana, Criterion, 20 November 1998, 5.

"If anyone says that it is not better and more godly to live in virginity or in the unmarried state than to marry, let him be anathema."¹

Council of Trent

In the Old Testament, sexual intercourse was seen as conflicted. On the one hand, fruitfulness in marriage was honorable and compulsory for all. On the other, even when not sinful, it was regarded as defiling (as was menstruation). Rabbis, whose priesthood was hereditary, were required to observe continence during their period of temple service and recent mothers underwent a rite of purification, a practice rooted in Leviticus. Similarly, in many Catholic countries from the Middle Ages even to the twentieth century new mothers underwent "churching," a rite readmitting them to the community and attendance at Mass.

In the New Testament (I Cor. 7: 32-35), St. Paul praised celibacy and virginity as a more perfect state, freeing men and women from the anxieties consequent to marriage (necessarily taken to mean a division of both love and obligation).² In Matthew's Gospel celibacy is the way, if freely accepted, to consecrate oneself to God "for the sake of the kingdom of God" It required special grace and therefore was not for everyone--"He that can take it, let him take it" (Matt. 19:11, 12, 19.). Thus, the idea of celibacy--embracing a life that precluded sexual intimacy--had been present in the Church since apostolic times. And yet nearly all the Apostles were married, as were many priests and bishops in the early Church,

¹ Catholic Encyclopedia, (1908), 487. Peter Hebblethwaite also notes that in the 1100s there were a number of monk popes (e.g., Hildebrand, Gregory VII), for whom celibacy was a matter of extending the monastic ideal. Paul VI: The First Modern Pope, (Paulist Press, 1993), 497. The early nineteenth century also saw efforts to get rid of celibacy in parts of Germany, but the movement was condemned by Gregory XVI, in 1832.

² "I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction." For those who could not bear the weight of celibacy, "it is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor 7: 2-6, 9, 27-28, 36).

as Timothy shows. Some forty popes were legally married, and some, including Gregory the Great (590-604), were the children or descendants of married priests, bishops, and popes.³ From the end of the fourth century to the last years of the tenth, three popes had sons who succeeded them as pope, one pope was the son of a bishop, and seven popes were the offspring of priests. While for the first three centuries it was a matter of choice, most bishops were unmarried or left their marriages after ordination. Generally speaking, marriage was permissible if priests were married before the diaconate, but it had to be monogamic--no remarriage if the wife died.

The first general laws binding priesthood to celibacy were papal decrees and declarations of regional councils in Europe and Africa. The Spanish Synod of Elvira, 300 (near Granada), imposed celibacy on bishops, priests, and deacons, and ordered married clergy to live in continence under pain of deposition.⁴ In 325, however, the Council of Nicea overwhelmingly rejected compulsory celibacy for all. If married before ordination, the wife did not have to be put aside; but if celibate at ordination, then no marriage. This was followed by the first papal decree to hold clerical marriage unlawful of Pope Damasus' (366-384): "That since intercourse is a defilement, surely the priest must undertake his duties with heavenly aid."⁵ In the fifth century Nicea again obtained: married clerics need not dismiss their wives, but were obliged to live together without the "act of love--a spiritual marriage replaced a carnal one."⁶ However, since other councils disagreed the question remained unsettled. Synods of the sixth and seventh centuries, while recognizing the position of clergy wives, laid down strict rules for bishops--their wives should not live in the house of their former husbands, while actual separation seems not to have been required for lower clergy. Still, for some centuries to come, clergy marriages, while unlawful, were deemed valid.

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Carolingian Empire, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, with Norsemen and other invaders running amok, the papacy was in eclipse, the plaything of powerful Italian or German families (as would happen again in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries). Episcopal sees were given to "rude soldiers" as fiefs, inheritable by their sons. Clerical immorality was endemic, priests and bishops openly married and begot children who then inherited benefices, leading Peter Damien (1007-1072), to condemn the times in his *Liber Gommorrhianus*. Papal campaigns against corruption ensued. Under Benedict VIII, c. 1018, clerics were forbidden to marry or cohabit with a woman,

³ Joseph Fichter, S.J., *Wives of Catholic Clergy* (Sheed & Ward: Kansas City, Kansas, 1992), 46. *Criterion* readers learned that a pope, St. Hormisdas, died in 523, fathered the martyred pope St. Silverius, d. 538. Adrian II, d. 872, was perhaps the last married pope. Fr. John Dietzen's Question Corner, *Criterion*, 9 November 1990, 17.

⁴ *Indiana Catholic and Record* (hereafter, IC&R), 22 June 1951, 4.

⁵ *Criterion*, 2 July 1999, 2; New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2d ed., 325.

⁶ New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2d ed., 322-328.

and if they did, their children were declared serfs of the Church with no claim to ecclesiastical property. This was to stop the families of priests secularizing ecclesiastical holdings--parish lands and property; it is still thought by many to be the real reason for an unmarried clergy.

The great reformer Gregory VII (1073-1085), whose vision for the Church was to have it "free, chaste, and catholic," is regarded as the true restorer of celibacy through enforcement of existing laws by his legates and his frequent letters to bishops. In line with Gregory's efforts, the first and second Lateran Councils declared clerical marriages illicit and invalid, and this time it stuck; the first, in 1123, in declaring marriages of subdeacons and priests invalid, "marks the victory of the cause of celibacy."⁷ Innocent II called the second Lateran Council in 1139 to get rid of an anti-pope and to enforce celibacy for those in holy orders, beginning with the subdeaconate. Henceforth, all clerical conjugal relationships were reduced to concubinage. The fourth Lateran Council confirmed the rule.

The period from the 1200s to the 1500s, however, was again one of decline. For example, in England the Royal Almoner and future cardinal, Thomas Wolsey, was given a large house and gardens in 1510 by Henry VII. There he lived with his wife, Joan Larke, in a "non canonical" marriage that produced two children. This was no "hole and corner" relationship, and when Joan publicly wed a wealthy landowner, Wolsey gave her "in marriage as a father might--even fixing on her a dowry"⁸ With married clergy and concubinage common (in England unchaste clergy merely paid a fine, a good source of Church revenue), with Luther and Calvin opposing celibacy, and despite powerful rulers agitating for changing the discipline, the Council of Trent (1543-1565) reaffirmed the Lateran ban on a married clergy: "If anyone says that it is not better and more godly to live in virginity or in the unmarried state than to marry, let him be anathema."⁹

In America, the connection between celibacy and the celebration of the Eucharist found emphasis in the 1829 pastoral of the provincial council of Baltimore; that in undertaking Holy Orders priests renounced "the prospects of worldly gain and the claim of worldly enjoyment." The exalted status and set-

⁷ Catholic Encyclopedia (1908), 485.

⁸ The girl was placed in a nunnery, but the boy, known as Thomas Wynter, was given every preferment from Wolsey. Even the archbishop of Canterbury of the day, Warham, was said by Erasmus "to have had a wife who was not excluded from the knowledge and society of his friends." Charles W. Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies: The Life of Cardinal Wolsey (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 86-88.

⁹ Catholic Encyclopedia, (1908), 487. Hebblethwaite also notes that in the 1100s there were a number of monk popes (e.g., Hildebrand, Gregory VII), for whom celibacy was a matter of extending the monastic ideal. Paul VI, 497. The early nineteenth century also saw efforts to get rid of celibacy in parts of Germany, but the movement was condemned by Gregory XVI, in 1832.

apartness of the clergy was recompense for what had been given up, paid for in the coin of “goodness and justice and truth” signified by purity. “[W]hen the sacred vessels were placed in our hands, we were charged to have the altar . . . decorated with purity of virtue . . . to bear and watch the tabernacle in the holy attire of virtue, . . .” exhibiting “spiritual cleanliness, splendor, purity, and charity”¹⁰

It is worth noting that celibacy’s rigors were always well understood: The 1908 Catholic Encyclopedia observed, “The one serious objection [against celibacy] is the difficulty which it presents for all but men of exceptionally strong character and high principle.” Candidates for the subdeaconate on their way to priesthood were to “anxiously to consider again and again what sort of burden this is which you are taking upon you of your own accord. Up to this you are free.” Once ordained, however, it is no longer lawful “to turn back from your purpose.” Having taken on chastity, one is unable to contract a valid marriage. Hence, for such a one sexual activity is not only a sin, it is a sacrilege.¹¹

To summarize: the principal reasons advanced for celibacy are: it is a perfect consecration to God, permitting of no division of love and effort in that the absence of family responsibilities frees the priest for the work of the kingdom; ritual purity is maintained, as intercourse is judged unseemly with the celebration of the Eucharist—as a virgin had brought forth Christ, so only “virgins” should bring forth Christ in the Eucharist.¹² As the New Catholic Encyclopedia puts it, clerical celibacy is most proper to sacerdotal ministry; it is not depreciative of marriage, but rather is the “condition for greater freedom in the service of God.”¹³ This is the Pauline utilitarian argument against the divided effort that marriage entails where family comes first, not parishioners. As a practical matter, it also obviates the threat of an heir’s claim to Church property. Besides the expense of family there are the problem of the seal of confession and the compromise of effort that married missionaries would entail. Nonetheless, celibacy is a Church law--a discipline, and therefore subject to change. Faced with a shortage of clergy in many countries, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) gave permission for a diaconate of married men of mature years and “proven life.” Since then the papacy has found it useful to dispense from celibacy married Protestant ministers who convert and seek ordination.

As concerns about a shortage of priests began to appear early in the twentieth century, some fixed on mandatory celibacy as the cause, optional celibacy the cure. The issue had been before the Holy

¹⁰ Bishops Pastorals, Vol. I, 1792-1940, 56, 57

¹¹ Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, 1908), vol. III, 481.

¹² Gary Wills, Papal Sins, ch. 9, 133.

¹³ Catholic Encyclopedia, 1908, 483.

See at least since Pius X (1903-1914), and in 1920 Benedict XV found it necessary to “solemnly” testify that the Holy See would “never . . . mitigate, much less abolish, this most sacred and salutary law [of celibacy].”¹⁴ Two years later the clergy shortage in Italy and elsewhere inspired Pius XI in his encyclical *Ubi arcano*, not to change the rule, but to call for Catholic Action by the laity to take up the slack in vocations. In 1926 Indianapolis Bishop Joseph Chartrand complained that there were “barely enough priests” for the diocese’s requirements,¹⁵ and in 1954 Archbishop Paul C. Schulte also drew attention to the dearth of priests, blaming parents for failure to inculcate “compelling faith” in their children. Schulte also cited celibacy and an “unwillingness to break strong filial ties at home” for the decline (presumably a consequence of smaller families).¹⁶ The year before Pope John XXIII surprised everyone with his call for a Vatican council, the Indiana Catholic and Record decried parental opposition to vocations, especially for girls (“grace is being abused”).¹⁷ The problem was real: in 1960 Schulte again spoke of “the dire need for an increasing number of vocations.” In a letter to the archdiocese he observed that in 1946 there were 221 priests for its 100,000 people (a ratio of 1:453); in 1960 the archdiocese had but 263 priests for 190,000 communicants (1:722).¹⁸ Given the situation, it is surprising that not until 1962, the very eve of the council, did the American bishops establish a vocations committee.¹⁹

At the council itself, the great obstacle to frank discussion of celibacy was that it would open to the light of day the existence of thousands of clerical concubines around the world, not least in Italy. Nonetheless, in 1963, before and throughout the council’s second session, there was speculation in the European press that celibacy might be dropped; the French were seen to be pushing the issue. The situation was such as to bestir some 70 bishops, worried at the “possible abolition of this law,” to rally to its support. Yet momentum for change grew, and by the fourth and last council session the press had drawn attention to the thousands of priests requesting the Holy Office to release them from celibacy. Some bishops wanted it made optional--a married clergy coexisting with a celibate one. Belgium’s Cardinal Augustin Bea was one who pointed out that celibacy was a law and therefore open to change; moreover, in the Eastern Rite married clergy were not seen as second class. The well-informed council observer, the pseudonymous “Xavier Rynne,” believed that had the issue come to a vote the bishops might have split more or less evenly, as they had on a married diaconate.²⁰

¹⁴ Blanchard, Catholic Power, 328, f.n. 44.

¹⁵ IC&R, 26 March 1926, typescript box.

¹⁶ IC&R, 16 July 1954, 1.

¹⁷ IC&R, July 1959, 4.

¹⁸ Criterion, 14 October 1960.

¹⁹ IC&R, 11 May 1962, 12.

²⁰ Rynne, 2d sess. 104; 3d sess., 84, 85; 4th sess., 148-150.

During the 1964 session the Criterion noted that while celibacy is purely ecclesiastical law, and therefore changeable, it has its roots in the Gospels—the example of Christ, early Christian tradition, and was formulated into law at the council of Elvira, early fourth century. Although married deacons were “much discussed,” none of the Vatican II fathers proposed to weaken celibacy. Pope John XXIII had said he could abolish celibacy but would never do it “because the Church has taken this sacrifice upon itself freely, generously and heroically.” At the third session the council voted 1,364 to 830 “against proposal to permit young men to be ordained as deacons without the requirement of celibacy.” L’Osservatore Romano: “We are authorized to say definitively that the law [of celibacy] remains in all its vigor.”²¹

A year later, to head off the growing movement among those bishops who wanted to deal with the issue it was still necessary for Pope Paul VI to forbid the council to discuss celibacy as “not opportune.”²² Regarding it as “most appropriate today, especially today, in helping priests to consecrate all their love completely and generously to Christ,” Paul VI announced his intention “not only to preserve this ancient law as far as possible, but to strengthen its observance.”²³ Consonant with the pope’s wishes, the decree on priestly life issued the last day of the council confirmed the law.

Yet something had to be done to deal with the clergy shortage and that something was to revive the permanent diaconate, opening a new role for the male laity.²⁴ As ordained laymen, they could perform the duties of priests except for the sacrament of reconciliation, anointing the sick, and consecrating the Eucharist. (While it was particularly intended for poor countries where the priest shortage was most acute, by 1997 four of five deacons labored in affluent nations, fully half in the U.S.)²⁵ Concerned over the millennial-long link between celibacy and the priesthood, unmarried candidates (at least 25 years of age) were to swear to celibacy; married candidates (at least 35 years of age, with their wife’s permission); those whose spouse later dies ordinarily are not to remarry without giving up their clerical status as deacons. It

²¹ Criterion, 9 October 1964, 3, 12; 16 October 1964, 8.

²² Interestingly, “inopportune” was the argument of those at the first Vatican Council opposed to the declaration of papal infallibility. Now the shoe was on the other foot.

²³ Rynne, Fourth Session, 148-150. There was plenty of discussion among the bishops in private conversations, but they were extremely reticent in public.

²⁴ It is styled “permanent” to distinguish it from the temporary stage of deacon for seminarians on the way to the priesthood itself.

²⁵ Criterion, 19 November 1999, 10.

was not necessary to state that the priesthood remained restricted to males.²⁶ Two years after the council (June 1967), the Pope Paul VI composed a prayer for vocations and issued *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (On the Sacredness of Celibacy), pronouncing this “heavy and sweet burden” a “total gift” to God, a “dazzling jewel.”²⁷ Three days later, on his own authority (*mortu proprio*), the pope permitted (if territorial bishops agreed), single and married laymen to officiate at marriages, funerals, distribute communion, preach, and read the scriptures.²⁸ Although Indianapolis would be among the last American dioceses to accept the male diaconate, early on it extended the reading of scripture and the distribution of communion to women. To lighten the clerical load in parishes where the numbers “are great,” the priest “feeble” or absent,” in 1971 Indianapolis Archbishop George J. Biskup announced that the Holy See had authorized lay Eucharistic ministers as a “privilege.”²⁹ For fear of endangering the male celibate priesthood (serving at Mass seen as one of the most important ways to foster such vocations), more than two decades would pass before Rome’s acceptance of altar girls.

In retrospect, the issues that led to the crisis in the Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council in the United States and elsewhere, a crisis that persists into the twenty-first century, were in the main two: authority and reform, or put another way, democratic governance and change. Concretely, they appeared first as birth control and priestly celibacy. Partly as a result of the council’s open praise of sexuality in marriage, discussion of priestly celibacy appeared almost as soon as the close of the council, December 1965. As celibacy is the greatest obstacle to priestly vocations, this was not surprising. So confident were many priests that it would be made optional, a seminarian of the Evansville diocese studying in Rome married during the council.³⁰ What followed was a kind of point-counterpoint duel between statements of the pope and the bishops on one side and reformers, often armed with poll results, on the other.

This was not lost on the laity. In December 1966, Criterion readers learned of a survey financed by the liberal bi-weekly National Catholic Reporter highlighting the salience of the authority and celibacy issues. Sent to nearly 6,000 priests, 86 percent of respondents saw the need for diocesan personnel

²⁶ The first lay deacon in the U.S., a married Anglican priest with four children, was appointed in 1969 by Bishop Fulton Sheen of Rochester, New York. Criterion, 1 June 1969, 4. A widowed deacon might remarry for obligations to young children, aged or infirm parents, or the deacon met some great need of the Church.

²⁷ McCarthy, Catholic Tradition in 20th Century, 15. Of course virginity cannot be a requirement for priesthood given the early practice of the Church and the Eastern Church.

²⁸ Criterion, 30 June 1967, 1.

²⁹ Criterion, 26 Feb 1971, 1. In 1994 Rome left girls as Mass servers up to the bishops; many pastors had used altar girls long before.

³⁰ Conversation with Fr. Francis Bryan, 13 June 2008. Doubtless there were others.

committees, with half citing a lack of communication with their bishops; another large majority (62%) favored making celibacy optional.³¹ The next year Fr. Hillary Ottensmeyer, O.S.B., rector of St. Meinrad Seminary, serving, as it were, on the front lines, was quoted in the Indianapolis Star as blaming the fall-off in vocations on the “ ‘over-rigid’ structure imposed by the Church.” He reported that nearly all the students and faculty at Meinrad were “progressives,” with most of the seminarians of the opinion that celibacy should be optional, as did Ottensmeyer himself.³² The rector was on to something: Six months later a survey of 17,000 priests by the National Association for Pastoral Renewal found that 55 percent of the respondents wanting the freedom to marry.³³

Higher-ups were of a different mind than seminary rectors or polls. Having failed to quiet discussion and debate (“the heritage of priestly celibacy” would in no way be “abandoned or compromised”), in 1967 at their annual November meeting the American bishops issued a major doctrinal pronouncement, “The Church in Our Day.” Admitting that the priesthood was in “crisis” (“it may not be too much to say that countless priests today dwell in the desert of their temptations”),³⁴ the bishops reasserted their support of celibacy and lamented the expectation of change: “It would . . . be irresponsible on our part to hold out any hope that this discipline will be changed³⁵ and rebuked priests who called for optional celibacy, declaring reports of change in the discipline “without foundation.”³⁶ Publicly marching with the pope’s June statement, celibacy was an obedience, a matter of good order in the Church, and “should be seen by clergy and laity alike as God’s Will for his Church *at this time* (ital. added).”³⁷ As for poll results: “there is never sound reason to believe that the voice of the layman [n.b. the masculine] concerning the faith is heard . . . in any mere counting of hands. . . . Numbers count only if those who compose the total really know.”³⁸ The bishops also voiced their concern “about the attitude” of some priests, seminarians, and laity “in regard to the traditional discipline of priestly celibacy,” citing relevant council documents and

³¹ It received 3,000 returns, or 51 percent. Excluded from the survey were pastors and monsignors, older, settled, and less likely to marry. *Criterion*, 16 December 1966, 1.

³² *Star*, 12 October 1967, sec. 1, 1.

³³ *Star*, 17 November 1967, sec. 2, 31. “No opinion,” 7 percent.

³⁴ *Bishops Pastoral letters*, vol. III, 122.

³⁵ *Bishops Pastoral Letters*, vol. III, 52, 201-211.

³⁶ *Bishops Pastoral Letters*, vol. III, 92.

³⁷ *Bishops Pastoral Letters*, vol. III, 149. “At this time” would seem to be leaving the door open to change, but the whole tenor of “The Church in Our Day” on freedom, authority, infallibility, and religious assent (140-150), undercut any ground for any individual to go against bishop, pope or the Church. Yet “Human Life in Our Day,” November 1968, the bishops’ response to the outcry over Paul VI’s birth control encyclical, opened the door for licit dissent which “The Church in Our Day” had closed.

³⁸ *Bishops’ Pastoral Letters*, Vol. III, 120, 121. Judging by the polling done by CARA, the bishops are as dedicated to polling as any.

the pope's June encyclical reaffirming the discipline. "United" with the pope, the U.S. bishops "proclaim with a single voice the same teaching . . . without reservation."³⁹ The teaching of Vatican II was "clear and unmistakable," though, admittedly, "not necessarily infallible teaching."⁴⁰

Behind the scenes it was not so simple. Since the bishops were far from being of one mind on the subject, few probably shared the assertion of *Sacerdotalis* that celibacy was not a barrier to vocations. Some were not happy with their November 1967 statement and a real debate had erupted at the meeting; one in three bishops (68 of 213) did not want to make the statement public, unmistakable evidence that many favored changing the rule. And if the matter was really closed, why had the bishops used the expression "at this time" and two years later declare that they did not intend to "foreclose free and responsible discussion of these issues"?⁴¹ As growing numbers of priests left, polls continued to show significant numbers of laity and clergy favoring optional celibacy (42 percent of Catholics polled by Gallup in 1969 agreed that priests should be allowed to marry, versus 49 percent opposed). The pressure for change in the decade following the council was immense and persistent. Not even service in the papal household was proof against the chafing of celibacy: In March 1969, the Indianapolis Star carried news of a 50-year-old prelate, the pope's chaplain no less, who, desirous of becoming a father, was released from his vows by Paul VI to marry a 37-year-old during Lent. Msgr. Geovanni Musante was but one of a thousand priests who asked papal permission to marry that year.⁴²

In April 1969, the American bishops tried again to scotch any hope that celibacy would be made optional. While noting the organized "systematic opposition" to celibacy, they resolved that "in no way" would it be "abandoned or compromised" and promised a full treatment in short order. An eleven-page paper was ready by their November meeting. Pastoral in tone, stipulating a crisis existed, the bishops held to the tradition in emphasizing the value of the celibate's "total availability." To abandon it would "raise cultural, economic, educational, and pastoral problems of the gravest kind without proportionate gain."⁴³ At the same time, the bishops commended the efforts of those priests who were helping those who left to "continue their commitment to Christ in the lay state," an attitude, as we shall see, the Indianapolis Priest Association attached great importance to.⁴⁴

³⁹ Bishops Pastoral, vol. III, 91, 92. The suggestion of unanimity was disingenuous: There had been great debate at the meeting and nothing like consensus.

⁴⁰ *Criterion*, 24 November 1967, 3; Bishops Pastoral Letters, vol. III, 91.

⁴¹ *Criterion*, 31 November 1969, 3. In 1969 Paul VI authorized the ordination of four former Anglican priests who were married. Hebblethwaite, Paul VI, 496.

⁴² Star, 13 March 1969, 29; 30 March 1969.

⁴³ Bishops Pastoral Letters, Vol. III, 205, 208.

⁴⁴ Bishops Pastorals, Vol. III, 209.

If the stand of the American bishops in public was all that the Vatican could rightly expect, others were not so amenable: In January 1970 the Pastoral Council of the Netherlands (priests, monks, nuns, and laymen) voted 93-2 for optional celibacy. When all eight Dutch bishops supported the pastoral council, Paul VI ordered them to withdraw it: Celibacy could not be abandoned or even discussed, and the Vatican ordered all priests to repeat the vow of celibacy and obedience to superiors.⁴⁵ Yet later that July the president of the Indianapolis Serra Club (the laymen's organization to encourage young men to become priests) stated that celibacy was "not a settled matter." Thomas Murphy (a local attorney, president of the International Serra Club, and ordained for the archdiocese in 1985), pointed to the Dutch pastoral council's action and the large number of Chicago priests who voted for optional celibacy, as had the Indianapolis priest council.⁴⁶ In April 1971 Gallup found that by 52 to 41 percent priests asked if they should be permitted to marry answered "yes."

In 1967, when the impetus for reform provided by the Vatican Council was still robust, the American bishops had directed its committee on pastoral research and practices to undertake various studies. Eight areas had been contemplated, but only three--the historical, psychological, and sociological studies--were ever published.⁴⁷ The sociological study, "the most comprehensive and professional study of the American Catholic priesthood ever made," sampled nearly 6,000 clergy out of 64,000, with a 70 percent response, for a survey an extremely high rate of return.⁴⁸ Its release in April 1971 caused the sponsoring bishops considerable embarrassment, for its salient finding was the dangerous gap between bishops and priests on almost every issue:⁴⁹ On accepting remarriage after divorce, 82 percent of the bishops were willing to exclude all possibility of it, while only half as many--a minority of the diocesan priests agreed. Nor did the majority of priests accept the hierarchy's position on birth control, a gap which grew after *Humanae Vitae*, the encyclical intended to obtain the clergy's assent: While the percentage of bishops who believed artificial birth control was morally wrong held steady before and after the encyclical (84 to 83 percent, respectively), the 51 percent of priests who had agreed with the hierarchy before its issuance fell to 40 percent afterwards. Similar percentages reflected the relative unwillingness of bishops

⁴⁵ Sent privately to bishops November 1969, in February 1970 the order was announced. Indianapolis Star, 2, 4, 10 February 1970.

⁴⁶ Biskup, Box 18, Serra Club file.

⁴⁷ The other five areas were: doctrinal, spiritual, pastoral, ecumenical, and liturgical. The theological and sociological studies were conducted by the National Opinion Research Council (NORC), but at their meeting in Detroit the bishops opposed the theological section. Greeley, *Priests and Sociology*, IV. The survey was discussed in detail in Criterion, 23 April 1971, 1.

⁴⁸ 3,045 diocesan, 2,110 regular, 165 bishops, and 464 resigned priests.

⁴⁹ Pastoral Letters, vol. III, 1962-1974, 1.

compared to that of priests, especially young priests, to accept the judgement of penitents regarding their conscience in the matter. Worse, while 72 percent of bishops saw *Humanae Vitae* as a competent and appropriate exercise of papal teaching authority, only 36 percent of priests did so, and only 14 percent of priests age 26 to 35.⁵⁰ More than four of five priests would not insist on the standard of *Humanae Vitae* in the confessional and were also much less likely to encourage vocations, reflecting an occupational satisfaction of associate pastors no higher than contemporary semi-skilled workers.⁵¹

The issue of obligatory celibacy continued the survey's pattern of a significant gap between bishops and priests, and again especially young priests. Before World War II resignations from the priesthood had been rare. In the years immediately after Vatican II, one in five priests were planning, with varying degrees of certainty, to leave. Those who left or were contemplating leaving cited problems with the Church's structure (authority), the work they were doing, and to get married. For religious women contemplating resignation, seeking greater self-fulfillment, not so much marriage, was primary.⁵² Nevertheless, 85 percent of the hierarchy disapproved of making celibacy optional, versus only 38 percent of priests (and only 11 percent of clergy age 26-35) who disapproved of changing the law. Although a vast majority of the clergy said they would not marry were celibacy made optional (only 1 percent of bishops would while 22 percent of priests would marry), fully 24 percent of the bishops agreed "strongly" or "somewhat" that mandatory celibacy kept many potentially excellent priests from ordination, as did 55 percent of priests (72 percent age 26 to 35). The answers to "Was celibacy actually harmful to some priests?" were particularly revealing: Almost one in five bishops thought so, as did more than half the priests, and nearly three of four priests age 26 to 35.⁵³ Ominous, too, in light of the decades which followed, was that almost one in five bishops who expected change in the "law of celibacy" as did more than half of the clergy, while more than seven in ten priests age 26 to 35 thought that change would come. In all, in 1972 three of five priests believed that the Church would in time agree to optional celibacy within ten years, too.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Greeley, *Priests Study*, 1972, 101, 113, 116.

⁵¹ Greeley, *Catholic Myths*, 216, 217.

⁵² Dolan, *American Catholic Experience*, 438.

⁵³ The respective percentages were 19, 53, and 73.

⁵⁴ Greeley, 1972 *Priests' Study*, chapter 12.

The belief of many that mandatory celibacy was on its way out explains the large number of resignations when it became clear that that would not happen soon, if at all. Dissent over celibacy and birth control raised questions about the hierarchy's authority. While the sociological survey found that only 15 percent of the bishops "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed that "There were times when a person had to put his personal conscience above the Church's teaching," 52 percent of active, diocesan priests did so. Strikingly, while only 22 percent of priests over 55 agreed that at times one's conscience trumped the magisterium, versus the 80 percent of priests age 26 to 35 who thought so.⁵⁵ All the bishops surveyed saw premarital sex as always wrong, as did 80 percent of priests, but only 62 percent of priests age 26 to 35 agreed with their elders.⁵⁶ All in all, the discordant views and expectations regarding celibacy and sexuality, and authority and dissent that the survey data revealed made for an explosive situation.

Actually, by the time the sociology report was issued in 1971 the dynamite had already detonated. In the United States, from 1966 to 1970, over 3,400 priests--about five percent, resigned. Those who left cited multiple reasons: their inability to continue as a priest given the institutional structure of the Church (53%); the desire to marry (largely because of loneliness), (47%); personal growth, (46%); the Church's failure to face the relevant problems of the day, (39%); disagreement with some of the ethical or moral teachings of the Church, (35%); disagreement with some of its theological teachings, (29%). Notably, within seven years after the Council, 70 percent of the resigned priests had married, and another eight percent were engaged.⁵⁷ Three-fourths of the active diocesan clergy had had friends leave the priesthood; over half had more than three friends resign. Nearly half of diocesan priests re-thought their own status as a result of their friends leaving. Moreover, while clerical dissatisfaction showed itself in the number of those uncertain of staying, it also heralded a significant decline of clerical enthusiasm in encouraging vocations. The self-confessed net loss in active recruitment between 1965 and 1970 among priests was 34 percent, and lower still among young priests, the best recruiters. This was serious.⁵⁸

Many hoped that the 1971 Roman Synod might show movement on obligatory celibacy. Despite the meetings of laity, nuns, and priests in spring 1971 in all the dioceses and the statements and resolutions they produced, in the event, the five-week "celibacy" synod (the first to consult the laity in advance), came to very little, although the majority of the elected members believed some change was needed and a number of hierarchs asked to be allowed to ordain married men "of mature and proven life." Contrary to the expectations of the council reformers, as set out in *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, synods are wholly a papal operation: The pope calls it when he chooses, confirms its membership, settles where it will

⁵⁵ Greeley, 1972 Priests' Study, 312, 313; 268, 269.

⁵⁶ Greeley, 1972 Priests' Study, 101-103.

⁵⁷ Greeley, 1972 Priests' Study, 283, 284.

⁵⁸ Greeley, 1972 Priests' Study, chapter 13.

meet, sets its agenda, appoints the president and secretary, decides how the results will be communicated, and presides over it through his delegate. "Immediately subject to the Roman Pontiff," synods are a consultative body, not a decision-making one.⁵⁹ Given the papal synod's stranglehold and the position of Paul VI on celibacy, few should have expected change: The crucial resolution: "It belongs solely to the Supreme pontiff, in particular cases, by reason of the needs and the good of the universal Church to allow the priestly ordination of married men who are of mature age and proven life," was defeated by the pope's delegates, 107 to 87.⁶⁰ Having swept their well-meant advice aside, the losing bishops found the pope's assertion that the bishops "of the entire Catholic world" wanted to keep "consecrated celibacy" "galling."⁶¹

Criticism of the synod was harsh: The Criterion cited a British priest who said it had been an "appalling muddle"; Newsweek and Time magazines judged it a failure.⁶² So did Msgr. Raymond T. Bosler, Criterion editor, member of the archdiocesan priests' association, and an observer at the synod. Bosler found the synod's position on justice meaningful, especially its call for lay participation and for an increased role for women; yet the first week of the synod was "chaotic" and it was not representative enough. Worse, its stand on priesthood was a "disaster and dogmatic," in part because it upheld the church's 12th century law forbidding priests to marry.⁶³ A few months on Bosler will tell the Serra Club that the document on the priesthood was "completely disappointing." Unlike Vatican II, the progressives were a minority and the whole nature of synods had to be rethought.⁶⁴

In the years immediately following the Vatican Council (1962-1965), the group most affected by it was the diocesan clergy. Closest to the people in the pews, priests (assuming that they themselves had been imbued with "the spirit of the council") had the job of bringing the laity to an acceptance of new practices and new thinking. Many, having been tutored in their seminary days in the ideas that underlay the council documents, followed the sessions in Rome closely and were excited, even giddy, by the prospect of wholesale change. In summer 1966, an ad hoc group of some twenty Indianapolis area priests met at Marian College to discuss the documents and what actions might be taken in their light. Similar

⁵⁹ Hebblethwaite, Paul VI, 433.

⁶⁰ Denis E. Hurley, in Hastings, Vatican II and After, 147, 206. Dolan, American Catholic Experience, 436, says that many bishops at the synod urged getting rid of celibacy. The majority voted for a formula forbidding married male ordination, "even in particular cases," "excepting always the rights of the Supreme Pontiff." The minority voted for admitting that the pope had the power, "by reason of the needs and the good" of the Church, to ordain "married men of mature age and proven life."

⁶¹ Hebblethwaite's characterization, Paul VI, 585.

⁶² 15 November 1971 issues.

⁶³ Indianapolis News, November 30, 1971. See also Criterion, 22 Oct 1971, 1, for Bosler's views.

⁶⁴ Biskup, Box 18, "Serra Notes," January 10, 1972.**

groups of priests were meeting elsewhere in the archdiocese and across the country, all with the aim of “integrating the spirit and practices of Vatican II into the lives of the participants and the work of the diocese.”⁶⁵ Reform was in the air; in October the American Canon Law Society proposed for “study and experimentation” giving the laity a role in the election of bishops; eliminating the practice of transferring bishops to other dioceses “without grave necessity”; abolishing prior censorship of books and magazines; reformulating the laws to favor persons rather than institutions; and support for the full participation of women in the church (for some, “full participation” meant ordination).⁶⁶

Convinced that the Church in future would become participatory, less top down, in November 1966, following the example of Chicago’s clergy, eight Indianapolis priests met with Archbishop Schulte and received his “full approval” to establish a priest association. Later that month, responding to their call, eighty-three of the 285 priests of the archdiocese met at the Latin School to choose a steering group of a dozen made up of pastors, assistant pastors, college instructors, and a chaplain.⁶⁷ That January the archdiocesan clergy elected twenty-four priests as the Coordinating Committee of the Priests’ Association.

An augur of the controversies that would soon erupt in the post-council Church, was the open opposition to the archdiocesan priest association of Fr. Paul Courtney, pastor of St. Luke’s on Indianapolis’ north side and associate editor of the archdiocesan paper from 1948 to 1966, who had resigned from the Criterion about the time other priests were meeting to seek ways to put the council’s message into practice. Fr. Bosler “never understood what happened” to change his long time editorial partner from the moderate liberal Courtney had been to the enflamed traditionalist that suddenly emerged.⁶⁸ A young priest at the time remembered hearing that Courtney was “the greatest hater of Vatican II” among the local clergy.⁶⁹ Whatever the reasons, the St. Luke pastor broke with his past, publishing in 1966 a series of satiric poems deriding the council. One, “The Updated Church (A Conservative’s Lament),” reads

Latin’s gone--peace is too/Singin’ and shoutin’ from every pew.
Altar’s turned around--Priest is too/Commentater’s yellin’—“page 22.”
Communion rail’s goin’/Stand up straight!/Kneelin’ suddenly/Went outa date.
Processions are forming/In every aisle/Salvation’s organized/Single file.

⁶⁵ Biskup, Box 25. Indianapolis Catholic Archives.

⁶⁶ Criterion, 14 October 1966, 1.

⁶⁷ Criterion, 18 November 1966, 1.

⁶⁸ Doubtless, it owed something to the liberal stands Bosler took. Author’s interview with Fr. Thomas Murphy, date??

⁶⁹ Jim Doherty interview, no relation, 28 April 2005. Doherty left the priesthood in 1968.

Rosary's out/ Psalms are in/Hardly ever hear, A word against sin.
Listen to the Lector/Hear how he reads/Please stop rattlin'/them rosary beads.
Padre's lookin' puzzled/Doesn't know his part/Used to know the whole deal/In Latin by heart.
I hope all changes/Are just about done/That they don't drop Bingo/Before I've won!

A second Courtney burlesque, The Emerging Layman, was equally witty and dismissive:

The layman's emerging/Who let him out?
He's going to cause confusion/Without any doubt.

He's going to start checking/If things are right.
He may even wonder/If Father's real bright.

Who taught that chap/To pray out loud?
He was easier to handle/In a nice quiet crowd.

Someone grab his missal/Swipe his hymn book too.
Nudge him off the lectern/Back into the pew.

Submerge that layman/Lower the boom.
We'll have this Church again/Quiet as a TOMB.⁷⁰

On Good Shepherd Sunday, 1967, Fr. Courtney delivered a sermon filled with wholesale condemnations of what he saw as the bad tendencies of the day. Deeply unhappy with the Vatican Council, citing Pope Paul VI's criticism of the Catholic press for giving "currency to every kind of error," Courtney counted certain Catholic magazines--Commonweal, Jubilee, and America--as contributors to the "doubt and confusion if not outright loss of Faith" he saw all around him. As for the Criterion, Courtney advised reading it selectively, as he suspected "the Archbishop himself reads it." According to the St. Luke pastor, the laity could no longer rely on the "old-time assurance" that all priests preached and taught "the doctrines of the Church. Some have succumbed to a frenzied urge to question everything and to change whatever is older than the latest hit record," and he advised the laity to listen instead to the Holy Father and the Archbishop. The main target of Courtney's jeremiad was the "priest union." Pushed by "bright-eyed reformers," the "unfortunate union" was "a wholly unjustified infringement" upon the archbishop's authority and has "no authority whatever." Noting that "by a curious mischance" he had been elected to

⁷⁰ It's not clear where or when these poems were published, except it was in 1966. Xeroxed copy in author's possession. A third poem lampooned the Cursillo movement.

some “board or committee of this union”--“despite my vocal opposition.” He would “participate” in it solely to destroy it--and he expected to be soon ejected.⁷¹

Courtney’s vehemence was a measure of his fears for doctrine, especially the Real Presence in the Eucharist. He opposed the reception of Communion while standing instead of kneeling and singing instead of walking quietly to and from the altar; standing and singing, he felt, would lessen respectful devotion. He warned his parishioners to beware of false prophets and those who would “loosen the bonds of matrimony,” “make light of impurity,” and “ridicule the noble ideal of dedicated celibacy.” He abjured the lay person to “stop your ear” against those who attack the “Papacy, the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, the Christian ideals of purity.” Bewilderingly, given his furious language, Courtney concluded by assuring the laity that while he and many of his brother priests reacted differently to the changes in the Church, “we are all good friends and entertain the greatest respect for each other’s sincerity and priestly dedication.” Professing the “highest regard for the many sincere and devoted priests who are promoting this union” (i.e. the priests’ association), nonetheless, he believed them “on the wrong trail completely.”⁷²

To spread his message, Courtney distributed copies of the sermon and saw it published in the Criterion (he’d resigned from the Criterion the year before). The newspaper revealed that it published it at the wish of “higher authorities,” that is, the archbishop, proof that Schulte agreed with its substance. For its part, the Criterion limited its criticism of the sermon (and its author) by calling it the work of a “traditionalist.”⁷³ Courtney’s indictment resonated with many besides the archbishop. As everyone knows, then and later, after the council Catholics divided between conservative-traditionalists and progressive-liberals more or less on the grounds Courtney had listed.

The priests’ association’s coordinating committee responded to Courtney’s attack through its chairman, Fr. Robert J. Walpole, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Jeffersonville. Walpole noted that he and Fr. Courtney were two of twenty-four priests of a committee chosen in an election in which 83 percent of the clergy voted. It was formed because 180 priests of the archdiocese “expressed a desire for a ‘clerical association’ . . . in accordance with the spirit of renewal as suggested by Vatican II.” Walpole drew attention to the Vatican decrees on the “Bishops’ Pastoral Office” and the “Ministry and Life of Priests,” and to Archbishop Schulte’s own letter of January 1967, calling upon the association “to help form our Archdiocesan Senate.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Criterion, 5 May 1967, 2.

⁷² Criterion, 5 May 1967, 2.

⁷³ Criterion, 12 May 1967, 5.

⁷⁴ “Raps Priests’ Association: A traditionalist’s sermon on Good Shepherd Sunday,” Criterion, 5 May 1967, 2. Should this be 12 May 1967, 5??

Contrary to Courtney's hopes, after a near yearlong effort, the Priests' Association of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis (P.A.A.I.) held its first general assembly on Columbus Day, 1967. The 200 clergy in attendance at the Marott Hotel in Indianapolis elected a governing board of twelve, with annual general meetings to debate and pass resolutions. Five permanent committees--priestly life and training, personnel, communication, social action, and church and parish--reflected Vatican II concerns. Annual dues were \$15. The association existed to establish communication among the clergy, provide mutual assistance and solutions to the problems of priestly life, communicate with their archbishop, promote dialogue among the members and with the laity, and encourage the professional growth of the members. The meeting's keynote was that clergy, ridding themselves of "infantile" notions of authority, must speak up. Both Schulte and his coadjutor Biskup were present and were said to be positive, even effusive, in their reaction.⁷⁵ Albeit an ad hoc, unofficial group unknown to Canon Law, in its first two years the association enrolled nearly all of the diocesan priests and a goodly number of the clergy in religious orders in the archdiocese.⁷⁶

Armed with knowledge accumulated before and during the council, the animating spirit of the Priests' Association looked to reform longstanding practices. One change, in the spirit of the Church as the "people of God," was to give the laity a larger role. An association position paper noted that in the Medieval Era laymen had played important roles in the Lateran Councils of the twelfth century, even on the parish level where wardens elected by adult parishioners oversaw the financing and maintenance of buildings. "But the traumatic experience of the Reformation, with its over-emphasis on the priesthood of the laity and de-emphasis of sacramental authority, drove the clergy in reaction to eliminate almost entirely the democratic social structures developed in the Medieval Church."⁷⁷ Greater participation for the laity ("participatory democracy" was the slogan of the time) would also mean greater influence and participation for the clergy *vis-a-vis* the bishops. "Priests' problems"--personnel matters, assignments, clergy relief fund, etc.--were part of it. For example, when representatives of priests from all five Indiana dioceses met to pool ideas in December 1968, the two major issues were continuing education for priests and better communication with their ordinaries.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Constitution, sec. I, art. 2; Biskup Collection, Box 25, Archdiocesan Archives; Criterion, 20 October 1967, 1, 7. Fr. Daniel Buechlein, later bishop of Memphis and after 1992 archbishop of Indianapolis, served on the church and parish committee.

⁷⁶ The monks were never very active and connected through a single liaison-representative. Fr. Marty Peter interview, 29 November 2005.

⁷⁷ "Church and Parish," Biskup, Box 16, "Priest Association Coordinating Committee."

⁷⁸ Bishop Biskup, Box 25.

As priest associations proliferated across the nation, in February 1968 the National Federation of Priest Councils (NFPC) was founded in Chicago, with 120 of the nation's 153 dioceses represented, including all of Indiana's except Fort Wayne-South Bend. The issues that concerned the NFPC **were** due process in the Church, lay apostolate, canon law reform, special ministries, and communication with the hierarchy. The Indianapolis priest association would be well represented in the NFPC: Fr. Kenny C. Sweeney, president of the Indianapolis association, with two other priest-members, attended the NFPC's founding meeting. Indianapolis routinely sent two or three priests to NFPC annual meetings and some served as officers and on the board.⁷⁹ Fr. Marty Peter was especially active, serving on the NFPC board from 1973-1977, two terms as secretary, and a term as vice-president. As outgoing vice-president at the 1977 Louisville meeting, Fr. Peter served as program chairman. By then, the priests' senate having replaced the association in the archdiocese, Indianapolis sent two other representatives of the priests' senate to NFPC meetings, Frs. Joseph Beechem and Richard Lawler, the latter a member of the NFPC board of directors.⁸⁰

By late fall, 1968, influenced by the nation's civil rights movement and the controversy sparked by *Humanae Vitae*, the interests of the Indianapolis priest association had broadened to include virtually every issue broached in the heady atmosphere subsequent to the council. Among the nineteen resolutions adopted at its November 1968 general assembly, the members not only urged the archdiocese to "be more positive" on liturgical reform, secure Rome's permission to experiment with new rites for penance and the sick, establish parish councils, and embrace the collegiality of Vatican II; it also urged the archdiocese to make social justice a priority and create an "office for the poor."⁸¹ The archdiocese should impose no "grave limits" on the laicization of priests (resignations were already rife), adopt due process in governance, and prepare for an archdiocesan synod. Meeting with bishops Schulte and Biskup later that November (billed as "informational"), the board received no definite answers either on a liturgy initiative or the recommendation for an apostolate to the poor.⁸² The vigor of the concerns of the archdiocese's clergy also owed something to the suspension of nineteen Washington, D.C. priests by their Cardinal, John J. O'Boyle, in September 1968: The nineteen's refusal to repudiate their signed statement opposing the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* raised the issue of due process for priests at the hands of the hierarchy. Concerns soon expanded to include the whole question of the governing structures of the church. Parish councils and even diocesan pastoral councils, with clergy and laity sharing power with bishops, began to be discussed.

⁷⁹ Criterion, 16 February 1968, 1.

⁸⁰ Criterion, 1 April 1977, 5.

⁸¹ In April 1969, the association urged that every parish establish a St. Vincent de Paul Society and devote one percent of parish income to a central office for the poor. Criterion, 18 April 1969, 1.

⁸² Biskup, Box 25.

In October 1969, two years after the founding of the Indianapolis Priest Association, a delegation of ten met with Schulte and Biskup to discuss a broad range of issues. Assuring the bishops that they intended no confrontation, the delegation nevertheless pressed their views. Optional celibacy was the first item. As an alarming number of their friends and classmates and throughout the nation were leaving the priesthood, the association had voted 90-52 (63.4%) to urge Schulte and Biskup "to support in every way open to them" to make celibacy optional.⁸³ Since the vote for optional celibacy was so overwhelming, the delegation noted that the resolution did not call for "a study," as many groups were doing, but "comes right out and states the feelings of the priests" Archbishop Schulte replied that the pope and the American bishops were "100 per cent opposed" to such a change and neither Schulte nor Biskup, each made clear, could in conscience or conviction support the resolution. Rather, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' study being made would be "geared to a more positive view of celibacy." It would treat all aspects of priestly life, a necessity, Bishop Biskup felt, otherwise such studies were a "disservice," precisely his concern with the NFPC study.⁸⁴ The bishops were adamant: they could not support optional celibacy. In the board's view, on this point, the meeting was a failure. In early 1970 Paul VI will declare celibacy a "fundamental principle" of the Church.⁸⁵

Other matters raised in the two-hour meeting were the resolves of the association to unanimously support training priests, religious, and laity as community organizers (fine with the archbishop as long as parish involvement was not taken as official archdiocesan approval and the role of priests and religious was limited to motivating the laity); to cease holding meetings at places which racially discriminate (the Indianapolis Athletic Club and Knights of Columbus clubhouses); to conduct a survey and study to create genuine Christian communities in the parishes (the bishops approved); the need for an archdiocesan synod (Schulte said it would have to wait for the revision of Canon Law); "real" consultation in clerical assignments, (adopted 117 to 1; Schulte replied that he customarily discussed pastor appointments and usually associates, too, with the person to be appointed);⁸⁶ experiments in non-rectory residence to deal with the problem of residential incompatibility (97-35, the bishops approved a study only); and to leave clerical dress up to priests (87-36). Bothered that priests might not want to be recognized as such, the bishops emphasized that they should dress as professional men. The association also voted 117-10 to

⁸³ Criterion, 3 October 1969, 1. The 142 priests who voted on the resolution made up almost exactly half of the diocesan clergy of 283 listed in The Yearbook, 1969, 1970.

⁸⁴ "Report of the Meeting . . . October 20, 1969," Biskup, Box 25, "1970" file.

⁸⁵ Kennedy, Bernardin, 87; Criterion, 6 February 1970, 1.

⁸⁶ The priest association later elected four to the personnel board, all acceptable to Biskup. Criterion, 23 April 1971, 1.

condemn the shooting death of a prisoner and wounding of 46 inmates at the state prison at Pendleton (that was the association's prerogative, observed Schulte).

Contrary to the report that Archbishop Schulte was "effusive" at the prospect of the priest association, he was never pleased with it, early on calling it a "priest union," just as Courtney had. Schulte's coadjutor bishop, George J. Biskup, likewise felt threatened. In meetings with association representatives the two bishops were polite, but nothing would come of them. As the association passed more resolutions, more and more it seemed to be talking to itself.⁸⁷ Taken all in all, the association, fairly represented by its delegation, was a liberal group. The bishops were not. And while there was no formal presentation of the purposes of the association, Biskup, who saw its main task as creating "unity among the priests," thought it should concentrate on establishing "structures and programs" that did so. Above all, Biskup hoped that the association "might help avoid a polarity" that could harm the priesthood and the Church.⁸⁸

While the organization of the priest association of the Indianapolis archdiocese began with the overwhelming support of the clergy, in due course fractures appeared between the conservatives, moderates, and progressives. As the latter became dominant, the association became more controversial with the result that membership fell. Not entirely a generational matter of older priests at odds with younger ones, in that many leaders of the association were of Courtney's generation,⁸⁹ it was the progressives' willingness to confront archbishops Schulte and Biskup provided the greatest reason for the conservatives' defection; next was the association's strong stand on social justice, meaning the poor and especially African-Americans, when few of the latter were Catholic. The laity were perceived as quite conservative, and many priests did not want to go against their parishioners. Celibacy was another important issue and the progressives wanted the men who left the priesthood treated well.⁹⁰ By spring 1970, the progressive-conservative "polarity" that had emerged three years earlier with Courtney's criticism, immeasurably deepened. In an April letter to Bishop Biskup, the erstwhile defender of the association, Fr. Robert Walpole, apprised Biskup that he and six other priests (all ordained before World War II) had met to discuss whether "something could be done to counteract the present trend being taken by the Priests' Association." They suspected that some of the association's statements and motions "did not express the views of a majority--perhaps a silent majority"⁹¹ of the archdiocesan clergy. The seven had discussed several possible tactics: establishing a competing group, boycotting the association and

⁸⁷ Peter interview, 29 Nov 2005.

⁸⁸ Criterion, 3 October 1969, 1.

⁸⁹ Peter interview, 29 November 2005.

⁹⁰ Peter interview, 29 November 2005.

⁹¹ President Nixon's term at the time regarding supporters of the Vietnam War.

withholding dues, or encouraging all priests to join and, using voting proxies, take the association over. *Faute de milleaux*, they suggested that a priest senate might be the solution.⁹²

Later that April, at the fifth general assembly of the priests' association, Bishop Biskup repeated his hope for unity and noted that a priest senate was in the works. Then, in a studied rebuke of the association, the bishop did not stay to hear the guest speaker—the president of the National Federation of Priests' Councils, nor the report of the Indianapolis delegates to the NFPC meeting in San Diego on the due process case of the nineteen priests suspended by Washington's Cardinal O'Boyle. Undismayed, the members endorsed the establishment of an archdiocesan-wide pastoral council, the employment of a human relations professional to head the personnel office, continuing education for priests, and resolved to support individual conscience regarding military service [the Vietnam War], and archdiocesan cooperation in draft counseling.⁹³ Conservative priests likely found none of these palatable. The following meeting in November would be even less to their taste, but clearly, few conservatives attended. Those present resolved to petition the archbishop "to give favorable consideration to and use his good influence" to permit priests to marry and still remain priests (70 yea; 17 nay; 6 abstentions); to form teams expert on conscientious objection to speak in high schools and colleges; to have the new priest senate invite a professional personnel expert to guide it (77-0-3); to set up a committee to consider and vote on married clergy (64-0-4); and that the association respect the consciences of those who left the priesthood, thank them for their work, and support them in establishing themselves in society (70-0-3).⁹⁴

Of the many clergy who remained active in the national and local priests' associations, their alienation from the bishops and from Rome seemed only to increase. This was something the Curia had to address. In preparation for an October 1971 synod of bishop-delegates from all over the world, the Vatican Secretariat had prepared the schema "The Ministerial Priesthood." To gain a sense of the thinking of priests, nuns, and laity regarding "the crisis that exists in the priesthood," separate meetings for each were to be held in all the parishes.⁹⁵ Diocesan-wide meetings were scheduled for February, followed by regional meetings in March (Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin comprised Region VII), with the American bishops themselves to meet in April. The outlines provided for the parish meetings of nuns and the laity permitted clerical celibacy to be discussed, but only in the ways celibacy contributed to ministry by freeing the priest of competing responsibilities. Despite the effort to preclude discussion on its merits, nuns and laity alike overwhelmingly favored optional celibacy for priests (59 to 41%). They also wanted parish

⁹² The seven were Kavanagh (d. 2010), Carey (d. 1999), Courtney (d.1997), Mode (d.1971), Higgins (d.1993), Senefield (d.1987), and Walpole (d.1971). Biskup, Box 25.

⁹³ *Criterion*, 1 May 1970, 1; Biskup, Box 25, Indianapolis Catholic Archdiocesan Archives.

⁹⁴ *Criterion*, 20 November 1970, 12; Biskup, Box 17, file "Priest Association General Meeting, 1971."

⁹⁵ News release, 26 February 1971, Catholic Information Center, "Catholics Discuss Crisis in the Priesthood," Biskup, Box 27.

councils, with many groups also holding strong opinions on shared responsibility between priests and bishops (i.e., delegation of authority, collegiality, and the principle of subsidiarity).

Among the priests “there was general agreement” that celibacy and the priesthood were not necessarily related and there were “no theological barriers to a married Catholic clergy.” Furthermore, “the large majority” held “that celibacy should not be required for priesthood” and whatever problems existed regarding it “should not stand in the way” in changing the law. Celibacy, “if truly voluntary,” is a valuable witness to Christ, but since it may also be an “occasion of selfishness” it does not, “of itself,” provide such witness. Finally, “a significant number were of the opinion that priests who have resigned and married should be reinstated.” Obviously, given “the changing attitudes” regarding it, “celibacy must be discussed at the Synod.” As the Region VII report dryly observed, “Traditional arguments which are persuasive to older men have little meaning and no convincing power for younger men.”⁹⁶

The statement on the priesthood adopted at the National Federation of Priest Councils (NFPC) at its March 1971 convention, “Moment of Truth,” mirrored the stands taken by Indianapolis’ archdiocesan nuns, laity, and clergy a few weeks before. Based on its own survey on celibacy, the NFPC faulted what it regarded as the hierarchy’s lack of leadership and slowness to change, their outdated structures and called for shared responsibility, limited terms for bishops, experiments in church structures (“including an official ministry by women”), and “due process at every level in the Church.” While celibacy “is a precious tradition” and “must be preserved,” it must be made optional “immediately,” with married men accepted as priest-candidates and resigned and married priests “invited to resume the active ministry.” The statement called on the National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), the American delegates to the Synod, and the Synod itself to initiate the NFPC’s recommendations (“That moment is now!”).⁹⁷

Fr. James P. Dooley and Fr. Marty Peter represented the Indianapolis priest association at the Baltimore meeting, helping to swell the majority that adopted the “Moment of Truth” statement. At their 3 May 1971 meeting, the Indianapolis priest association responded with a series of seven resolutions, five of which touched on Rome’s sixty-page “Ministerial Schema” concerning priestly life. As the church fathers at the Second Vatican Council had refused to accept the Curia’s prepared schemas, the priest association, while acknowledging that it contained “some positive elements,” they rejected it, 54 to 1 (9 abstentions) as

⁹⁶ Biskup, Box 17, Pastoral Binders, 1970-1972. The 13 page report listed four choices for the Synod’s consideration: optional celibacy throughout life; optional celibacy to ordination; ordain mature married men; reaffirm status quo.

⁹⁷ Biskup, Box 25, “1971” file.

“predominantly juridical and negative,” and therefore an inadequate beginning for the “discussion of the priesthood in the modern world.” Instead, the priest association endorsed “The Moment of Truth,” which argued for optional celibacy (61-1-5) and provided a litany of the inadequacies of the hierarchy. It protested three of the four bishops delegated to attend the Rome Synod⁹⁸ as incapable of representing fairly the views widely expressed by clergy and laity supporting optional celibacy. In light of the American bishops’ disregard of the theological, sociological, and psychological studies they themselves had commissioned, it charged the U.S. hierarchy with being “inadequately informed and insufficiently sensitive” on the issue (42-15-7).

In a letter to Bishop, Fr. Jim Dooley cited the vote on celibacy “in the hopes that it will give you a means of understanding the feelings of one group of priests in the United States.” While promising to withhold publicizing their criticisms of the bishops, the resolutions would be sent to all the bishops and to the Roman Secretariat; the association would poll the priests in the archdiocese on “The Moment of Truth” statement and send the names of all those who supported it to the four American synodal delegates (37-7-11). Beyond the celibacy issue, the priest association voted to support the U.S. Senate resolution to withdraw American troops from Vietnam by 31 December 1971 (52-2-4) and to ask Congress to make “humane provision” for selective conscientious objection for persons who saw the Vietnam War as immoral (46-6-9).⁹⁹ It was an agenda breathtaking in its liberalism. It was not a program that many bishops would embrace, and if that was the kind of thing priests’ associations produced, well

As it happened, in its decree on Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*), Vatican II had called for the formation of priests’ senates to aid the bishops in running dioceses. Vatican directives and the bishops’ synod of 1967 were followed in May 1970 by continued Vatican urgings for such senates.¹⁰⁰ Rather than acting aggrieved, the Indianapolis priest association cooperated in setting up the senate. Work on a senate constitution began in early 1971. Hammered out by a committee of eight (five members elected from the priest association and three non-association members named by Archbishop

⁹⁸ The objections were to Cardinals Krol and Carberry and Archbishop Brynne--Bernardin was the fourth member.

⁹⁹ Priests’ Association of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, Resolutions, May 3, 1971, Bishop Box 25, “1971” file. Note the decline in the number voting at this meeting, 61, versus the 142 in 1969; this meeting never went over 64 total votes on any resolution, indicating that some had lost interest and others balked at challenging the hierarchy, leaving the field to the liberals. Still, at its demise in 1973 about half of the diocesan priests remained members of the association.

¹⁰⁰ Criterion, 15 May 1970.

Biskup), the constitution was overwhelmingly adopted, 272-10, in mid-October 1971,¹⁰¹ and its first meeting held in December. In the new senate, two priests were nominated by each of the eleven deaneries, but elected by all the priests; retired priests elected one representative as did the religious orders; two were ex-officio (vicar general and chancellor), with four priests appointed by the archbishop. The archbishop could be said to control seven votes of the twenty members (his own and six others).

Fr. Bernard Head, of the Marian College theology department and a member of the priest association, was elected senate president, along with a seventeen-member board.¹⁰² Strictly advisory, the new senate was to voice the interests and concerns of the priests to the archbishop. Fr. Head expressed the hope that it would lead to a diocesan pastoral council, while Biskup declared that the expertise it represented would be invaluable to him.¹⁰³ Meeting once a month with Biskup, in the first year of its existence the senate's concerns paralleled those of the priest association: financial support for retired priests and the setting of retirement policies; discussion of methods for choosing bishops; ecumenism and social action (asking Catholic organizations to shun facilities and clubs which practiced racial segregation); and pushing for parish councils.¹⁰⁴

In view of the preparations for a senate, the archdiocesan priest association at its eighth general meeting, December 1971, voted 68-0 (the membership roll stood at 139), to change its constitution, looking to develop the professional competencies of its members and to soldier on despite the creation of the new body.¹⁰⁵ Within two years, however, the priest association ended its affairs: It had lost membership and Schulte and Biskup ignored its resolutions. In 1973, in one of its last acts, the association sponsored a survey of twelve parishes (six within and six outside Indianapolis) on the laity's willingness to accept resigned priests, laicized or not, married or not. When it came to continuing full priestly ministry, laicization and marriage mattered a great deal to the 1,234 respondents: 47.2% were willing to see a laicized, unmarried man exercising "full priestly ministry"; 34.6% would accept a laicized, married man; but only 22.4% found a non-laicized married priest acceptable. It would seem that "disobedience" (non-laicization) rather than celibacy was the more important consideration.¹⁰⁶ While those

¹⁰¹ Biskup binder, 1970-1972.

¹⁰² Eight were elected by age cohort, eight by geography, and one from the religious orders.

¹⁰³ Criterion, 3 December 1971, Biskup, Box 21. The senate met with 150 of the presbyteriate at the Latin School, 14 February 1972. Criterion, 18 February 1972, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Criterion, 15 December 1972, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Criterion, 3 December 1971.

¹⁰⁶ Criterion, 9 November 1973, 5.

willing to keep resigned priests as ministers were in the minority, the percentage in favor of doing so were not insignificant.

As an organization of, by, and for priests, the association had been frank in putting forth what priests wanted and not much concerned at “what’s the bishop’s going to think about this.”¹⁰⁷ The senate, by contrast, had the advantage of official status, being the bishops’ organization; it met with the bishop and represented all the clergy. Given its origin and makeup, having to build consensus, it was politically cautious. Compared with the association it replaced, the senate was more “how am I going to relate to my boss,” taking care not to break communication with the bishops by threatening them. As one leader of the old association put it, priests are trained in the seminary to defer to the bishop, “and when they know the bishop doesn’t like something, they will dance around it.”¹⁰⁸

The senate had its accomplishments: internally, it achieved an elected personnel board to set policies, salaries, and benefits. The matter of assignments was not a small concern. Priests used to rue Schulte’s habit of filling the deceased’s post from among the attendants at the cemetery: “Come here Father,” Schulte would say, “I want you to take Fr. so and so’s place.” As a consequence, some priests, happy with their present duties (or fearful of risking an assignment they might like even less), began to avoid the cemetery rites. Alternatively, “it was not unusual to find out in the Criterion you had been shifted.”¹⁰⁹ Some priests had favored the senate as a democratic element; as late as 1975, Bosler’s replacement as Criterion editor, Fr. Thomas Widner, had been one.¹¹⁰ But two years later Widner concluded that the senate was useless: Many priests having lost interest, it was hard to get them to stand for election. Believing that the clergy lacked discipline, leadership abilities (for example, the senate’s failure to discuss the future of the Latin School), and hesitant to make a decision, Widner moved that the senate dissolve itself.¹¹¹ Precisely because the bishop was part of the mechanism and it did not take an adversary role, over time the senate proved more effective than the association, though much less progressive.

In the end, the senate was superseded by a still newer organization, the priests’ council, a structure mandated by the 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law. More official still than the senate it

¹⁰⁷ Peter interview, 29 November 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Peter interview, 29 November 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Peter interview, 29 November 2005.

¹¹⁰ Criterion, 15, 22 August 1975, 4.

¹¹¹ Priests, wrote Widner, can do what they do best--talk behind one’s back, gripe, etc. Criterion, 16 December 1977, 4.

replaced (senates had been called into being by the American bishops, not Canon Law), the new councils were consultative bodies of priests elected by peers. Its dual roles were to advise the archbishop and supply the needs of priests. Under the 1983 provisions at least half the members were elected by the priests (in Indianapolis, three-fourths). The council, a body of seventeen or eighteen, with the archbishop able to appoint up to six, was a near carbon copy of the senate it replaced. The officers (chairman, vice chairman, and secretary), were elected by the members while the president (by Canon Law, the bishop) chairs the meeting. In Indianapolis the elected officers, with the bishop, set the agenda. The urgent issues in Indianapolis were clergy morale and their relationship to the archbishop, agencies, and offices especially regarding parish life.¹¹² While discussion appears to have been open and candid under Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara (1980-1992), he would not countenance putting birth control, optional celibacy, or women's ordination on the agenda.¹¹³ What had begun in 1966 as a grass-roots movement of the clergy—a diocesan-wide priest association--had morphed by the late 1980s into a priest council that, in its deference to the hierarchy, appeared as rubber-stamping what it was told the archbishop wanted.

On the national level the National Federation of Priests' Councils (NFPC) similarly declined in membership and reformist zeal. One cause of the decline in zeal was that NFPC membership is not individual, but through membership on the priest councils of the dioceses. In the new century, the NFPC still spoke for priests, but had to be careful not to alienate the bishops. From its founding in the late 1960s to the 1980s the NFPC adopted progressive resolutions, but they came to nothing at the bishops' synods held in Rome. In the 1990s and later the NFPC no longer passed many resolutions; rather, it tried to dialogue with the bishops, but found it difficult to do so.¹¹⁴

As the expectation that optional celibacy would be one of the Vatican Council's reforms proved illusory, the initial exuberance of many priests following its close in 1965 quickly faded. Disappointment has been marked by a significant decline in vocations of priests and religious in the United States, a decline that has not abated in the decades since the council.

The biggest decrease came in the first dozen years. From 1966 to 1978, in the United States nearly 10,000 priests resigned.¹¹⁵ They were not replaced: Between 1967 and 1974 seminarians (47,500

¹¹² Criterion, 28 October 1994, 1. O'Meara, Pastoral letters, 1984, 1985.

¹¹³ Marty Peter interview, 29 November 2005. Fr. Peter was elected chair of the Archdiocesan Council of Priests; Frs. Richard Lawler and Paul Koetter, were vice chairman and secretary respectively. Criterion, 3 February 1984, 1.

¹¹⁴ Fr. Marty Peter interview, 29 November 2005.

¹¹⁵ Morris, American Catholic, 317. Nationally, 200 left in 1966; 750 in 1969; with steady declines in resignations to 181 in 1984.

in 1964), fell 54 percent, from 37,644 to 17,334.¹¹⁶ By 1984 they numbered only 12,000, by which time 241 seminaries had closed.¹¹⁷ From 1965 to 1999 ordinations fell from 994 to 460 a year; religious brothers, 12,271 to 5,728; religious sisters, 179,954 to 82,693. The nation's 58,632 priests in 1965 stood at 43,304 in 2004. Given the increase in Catholics from 45.6 million to 64.3 million, the 1:778 ratio of priest to Catholics in 1965, fell to 1:1,484 in 2004.¹¹⁸ Even this understates the problem. For example, while there were 44,472 priests in 2006, active diocesan priests in 2005 were less than half that (19,290)¹¹⁹ because many diocesan priests had assignments rendering them unavailable for parish work. Consequently, the number of U.S. parishes lacking a resident priest in 1965 jumped more than five times, from 549 (of 17,637 parishes) to 3,157 (of 19,026 parishes) in 2004.¹²⁰ In effect, the number of priests had been cut in half.

Priests also got older: the average age of diocesan priests reached 59 in 1999, as the average age at ordination, 26 in 1975, moved to 36 in 2000. As large numbers of priests are assigned to non-parish jobs, to take up the slack, permanent deacons went from zero in 1965 to 12,184 in 1999.¹²¹ Without the diaconate and the foreign-born clergy providing 32 percent of the ordinands in 2002, matters would have been much worse.¹²²

Matters were bad enough and the "solution"--recruiting foreign seminarians and priests from poorer nations despite their far greater need--was an unhappy one. In 1980 North America had 120 priests per 100,000 laity versus Latin America's 15 per 100,000. While North America and Europe counted 77.2 percent of priests, but only 45 percent of Catholics, Latin America and the Philippines combined were 45 percent of the world's Catholics, but only 12.6 percent of priests.¹²³ Since both educational opportunity and the relatively high social status of priests in Asia, Africa, and Latin America remain what they had

¹¹⁶ CARA study, cited in *Criterion*, 1 February 1974, 1.

¹¹⁷ Dolan, *American Catholic Experience*, 436, 437. The peak year for priests was 59,892 in 1967.

¹¹⁸ CARA Report, summer, vol. 4, no. 1, 5, 6; winter 2001, 5. The increase in parishes, despite the decline in priests, is explained by the movement to the suburbs and the difficulty of closing declining urban parishes. Another problem is that the Catholic Directory includes missionaries abroad in the count.

¹¹⁹ CARA Reports, vol. 12, no. 1, summer 2006, 7; No. 3, winter 2007, 3.

¹²⁰ As more Catholics moved to the suburbs, more new parishes had to be built; at the same time, city parishes continued to operate, though with fewer communicants.

¹²¹ CARA Report, summer, vol. 4, no 1, 5, 6; vol. 5, no. 1, 5; winter 2001, 5. Another problem is that the Catholic Directory includes missionaries abroad in the count.

¹²² *National Catholic Reporter*, 1 November 2002, 1. The priest to laity ratio in 1900 had been 1:899 and 1:652 in 1950; in 2000 it reached 1:1,257.

¹²³ *Criterion*, 25 July 1980, 3.

been in the United States before World War II, vocations in those parts of the world grew.¹²⁴ Yet in 2006, South America still counted but one priest for 7,138 Catholics; Central America and the Caribbean, 1 for 6,944; Africa, 1 for 4,694. From 1985 to the first years of the new century the U.S. attracted some 7,000 foreign priests from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. In 2006 alone, the 5,500 foreign priests working in the U.S. represented 16 percent of the clergy in the U.S.,¹²⁵ with the 772 foreign-born seminarians constituting nearly one-fourth of all seminarians. Of the 772, 83 percent intended to work in the U.S rather than return to their native country.¹²⁶

The decline in the ratio of priests to laity common throughout the U.S in the second half of the twentieth century was true of Indianapolis, as the archdiocesan directory attests: In 1950, the 119,095 laity could hear Mass in 118 parishes with a resident pastor, served by 219 diocesan clergy, a ratio of 1 priest to 544 laity; twenty years later, 261 diocesan priests served 209,412 in 144 parishes with a resident pastor, a ratio of 1 priest to 802 laity. By 2000 the number of laity in the archdiocese had reached 227,501, while parishes with a resident pastor had fallen to 106 (33 lacked resident pastors) and diocesan priests to 158, a ratio of 1 priest to 1,440 laity.¹²⁷ Full-time diocesan parish priests—173 in 1970, were 159 in 1980, 118 in 1990, and 109 in 2000 (and were expected to fall to 86 by 2010).¹²⁸ As the new millennium beckoned, priests and nuns had also to be found to staff nine Newman Centers, nine hospitals (two Catholic and seven others), five homes for the aged, and chaplains for six public institutions (three prisons, the airport, plus the sheriff, the police, and fire departments of Indianapolis).¹²⁹ According to one

¹²⁴ Criterion, 3 November 1995, 24.

¹²⁵ National Catholic Reporter, 24 February 2006, 3a, 7a, article based on CARA research.

¹²⁶ See Dean R. Hoge and Aniedi Okure, O.P. International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Maryland, 2006; CARA, vol. 11, no 4, spring 2006, 5.

¹²⁷ 2000 Archdiocesan Directory and Yearbook. There were 116 religious order priests, but few served in parishes; the religious order priests of 2000 would make the ratio one priest of either sort to 830 laity.

¹²⁸ Of 140 diocesan clergy listed on the archdiocese's website, September 19, 2011, subtracting the 37 retirees, 15 administrators, and 6 on leave left only 82. Two-thirds of these were listed as having multi-tasks—more than one parish or other duties. Indeed, very few of the 82 did not have additional responsibilities. These 82 diocesans were bolstered by 27 "other priests"—religious order priests and a dozen foreign priests (Hispanic, African, Indian), serving as pastors (10), associate pastors (9), and administrators of parishes (8).

¹²⁹ 2000 Archdiocesan Directory; Criterion, 3 August 1990, 1.

source, in 2006 (subtracting 46 “retired, sick, or absent”) there were only 106 diocesan priests available for assignment; of 139 parishes, only 91 had a priest in residence.¹³⁰

Despite the problems the shortage of clergy caused, many laity, religious, and fellow priests were supportive of the resigned clergy. At times, however, the pain felt at the departures and the sense that they had abandoned their posts found voice: In 1971 the associate editor of the Criterion, Beatrice H. Acklemire, confessed to being tired of hearing that the “best priests” were leaving. While glad they were no longer treated with “disdain” and made to feel “humiliated,” she refused to see them as “heroes,” finding that “repulsive.” Echoing her remarks, in the next issue three letters praised the editorial, two from priests of the archdiocese. One, a Beech Grove priest, expressing something of the bitterness of some of those who remained, cautioned Acklemire that “quitters, whether victims of concupiscence or intellectual pride, may loudly resent your rebuke.”¹³¹ In a lighter vein a 1976 cartoon in the Criterion showed a priest sitting alone at a restaurant, a banner in the background reading “Happy Reunion, St. Mary’s Seminary Class of ‘56.” The priest ruefully explains to the waiter, “I’m the only one left.”¹³² It is indisputable that many of the best priests persevered; likewise, many of the best left.

About a dozen years after the nation’s bishops established a vocation office, in 1975 the Indianapolis archdiocese got around to establishing its own. At first staffed by a single priest, two more were assigned full time in 1978. In the office’s first five years 71 entered the seminary, about 14 a year. According to the vocation director, the great attraction remained the desire to serve people; the obstacles were still celibacy and the sense that the work was too demanding and the pay risible.¹³³ Ironically, in March 1978 (one week after Vocation Week and after six years of worrying the issue), the priest senate voted 8 to 7 to close the Latin School, only 23 years after its founding. As a high school intended to nurture vocations, this was a bad sign. At the Criterion editor Fr. Widner lamented the action, believing the vote showed clerical ambivalence regarding vocations, with nuns and parents also lacking in enthusiasm.¹³⁴

Seen more broadly, the Latin School closing was part of a general shakeout in Catholic education in Indianapolis, having been preceded by the Sisters of Providence closing their schools at St. John’s, 1959, and St. Agnes, 1969 (the latter merging with Ladywood Academy, which was then sold to Cathedral High School in 1976, and became co-ed). The Sisters of St. Francis (Oldenburg) closed St. Mary’s

¹³⁰ FutureChurch website, 2006.

¹³¹ Criterion, 17 September, 4; 24 September 1971, 5.

¹³² Criterion, 21 May 1976, 4.

¹³³ Criterion, 12 October 1979, 25.

¹³⁴ There were lots of letters opposing the closing. Criterion, 10 March 1978, 1.

Academy, in 1977, as the Benedictine Sisters (Ferdinand) closed Our Lady of Grace, Beech Grove, June 1978. These closings ended the era of gender-segregated Catholic high schools In Indianapolis, a circumstance also expected to decrease vocations.¹³⁵

Obviously, as the number of clergy declined, more work fell on those who remained. In 1976, Jean Jadot, the apostolic delegate to the U.S., in a wide-ranging talk to the bishops (the need for new forms of parochial life, the failure to promote social justice, the role of women, “our arrogance” [?!]), addressed the problem of overworked priests. Candidly, he observed that while priests in their 50s were dying from overwork, too many laity, clergy, and bishops were unconcerned. If something was not done, “we will not be able to staff our parishes and institutions” as in the past.¹³⁶

Criterion editor Fr. Thomas Widner experienced first hand the consequences of the priest shortage in the physical and mental costs of the “many demands” levied on active clergy. In the early 1980s Widner left off writing columns and editorials during seven months in residence at the House of Affirmation, Whitinsville, Massachusetts, one of four such retreat centers in the U.S. He had come to the point where he “could no longer cope with the demands I placed upon myself in ministry.” At Whitinsville priests and nuns had time for reflection. Intensive psychological therapy led residents to look deeply within themselves, admit that one is human, and stop feeling so guilty. Widner saw the particular value of the nuns’ presence in supplying the women’s perspective. The Church’s problem, he came to think, was that it was “top heavy with male personnel” Moreover, in positing a lack of confidence in the person, he regarded the older spirituality as wounding and no longer viable: In his mind, that clerical culture “is dead.” Young people “are not interested in living a life in which they have to degrade themselves in order to be successful.” Scores of people, he felt, had come to see religious life as “demeaning.”¹³⁷

A little later Fr. Widner noted the pull and tug between the value of the witness of celibacy and its deleterious consequences—among them, the vocation shortage. On the one hand, as he remarked in 1983, celibacy--the challenge of selfless living--was the only unique sacrifice that priests make, the only “selling point.” On the other, he believed that priests and nuns failed to embrace it; they merely accept and live with it. “The tragedy is . . . we often can’t face the loneliness which is ours as priests”¹³⁸ “[W]e are killing ourselves” with overwork under the false sense that priests and religious could do any task they

¹³⁵ Criterion, 28 April 1978, 4.

¹³⁶ “A Watchman for the House of Israel,” cited in National Catholic Reporter, 6 February 2009, 5.

¹³⁷ Criterion, 25 September 1981, 5.; 2 July 1982, 11.

¹³⁸ Criterion, 27 May 1983, 5.

were put to.¹³⁹ As he had observed a few years earlier, priests were not necessarily better sociologists, or teachers, or preachers—and in the movies and on stage actors played the role better than the real thing. Still, in 1979 Widner was not ready to make celibacy optional.¹⁴⁰ In any case, it was not the only problem. He believed, and he thought priests generally believed, that sympathy and appreciation for their efforts was lacking, and hence, a felt sense of worthlessness.¹⁴¹

After hope died for optional celibacy, priests' requests for laicization became wholesale. Pope Paul VI turned down very few--about seven percent of 32,000 granted. Between 1963 and 1983 the Vatican recorded 46,302 dispensations to marry, and it may well have been that for every dispensation an equal number were refused or did not bother to ask.¹⁴² John Paul I seemed destined to continue his predecessor Paul VI's policy on laicization, granting 50 in his 34 days as pope. His successor, John Paul II, immediately halted laicization, except for a few deathbed cases. Under John Paul II two kinds of cases were acceptable: long lapsed priests who wanted to remedy a situation they were not able to quit (marriage, concubinage), and those who lacked the freedom and responsibility to become a priest (the person should not have been ordained in the first place, having been pressured by parents or others). For John Paul II and his successor, Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger, former head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), laicization was not a right. The dispensation from celibacy must come initially from bishops or superiors. John Paul II would change many things, but not celibacy, a discipline he confirmed soon after becoming pope in separate letters to bishops and priests in April 1979.¹⁴³

The Indianapolis archdiocese does not publish data on resignations, not even of those who obtain laicization. Like the Soviet Encyclopedia, photos and biographical sketches simply disappeared from the annual directory (though not from the necrology list).¹⁴⁴ In 1995, one reader, aware of the resignation of a priest ordained but two years, complained of the failure of the Criterion to report it; she wanted the newspaper to publish "all church news." By then the Criterion was under Archbishop Buechlein and it did not respond. In contrast, in the 1960s and 1970s the Lafayette diocesan paper would carry short items on

¹³⁹ Criterion, 17 June 1983, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Criterion, 20 April 1979, 4. His position was taken as criticism and much resented by some clergy and sisters ("May God forgive you" ran one), 4 May 1979, 4.

¹⁴¹ Criterion, 15 July 1977.

¹⁴² Hebblethwaite, Paul VI, 572, fn 2.

¹⁴³ Criterion, 13 April 1979, 4, "Pope John Paul II reconfirms celibacy." Criterion, 27 June 1980, 1. As the years passed, however, and as the American bishops requested in 1993, in 1994 Pope John Paul II accepted changes to make it easier for bishops to laicize sex offenders.

¹⁴⁴ For instance, the vicar general who ran the archdiocese for a year—the hiatus between the death of O'Meara and the appointment of Buechlein--disappeared from the 2001 Directory upon his marriage.

resigning priests, cite their service to the diocese, and wish them well. Lacking such notices, information on resignations for Indianapolis is scattered, and compiling the data hit or miss. As one sympathetic priest put it: Archbishop George J. Biskup (coadjutor, 1967-1970; archbishop, 1970-1979) “came at a difficult time when priests were leaving. It was kind of a scandal; there was some coverup. [Biskup] didn’t want [Bosler at the Criterion] to announce that a priest was leaving. But he made it comparatively easy for someone who was unhappy to leave.”¹⁴⁵ Consequently, the hemorrhage of priests in the archdiocese passed unacknowledged, quietly, leaving the laity with little sense of the size of the defections.¹⁴⁶

Some news did find its way into print: In an Indianapolis Star interview in 1971 Archbishop Biskup acknowledged that from 1966 to August 1971, twenty-seven priests had left--twelve in 1970 alone--all citing celibacy as the main issue.¹⁴⁷ One priest has estimated that from 1962 to the mid-1980s about 125 Indianapolis diocesan priests resigned.¹⁴⁸ Of Fr. Widner’s class of ten, a decade after ordination only five remained. From 1967 to 1981 the decline in numbers for Indianapolis theology students was 44 percent; for college seminarians 82 percent, with a fall in the number of Indianapolis archdiocesan priests of 20 percent. In 1981, while eleven priests died (eight had been active, three had retired), there were no ordinations in the archdiocese at all.¹⁴⁹ That year Criterion readers discovered that besides death and retirement, some 70 priests had been lost to the archdiocese since 1965, most between the ages of 35 and 50, necessitating that the priests who remained had to wear two or three hats. Celibacy and the desire for a family topped the list of reasons for leaving.¹⁵⁰

In still another pulse taking, in 1991 Fr. Jeffrey Godecker, assistant chancellor, reported that since 1970 the number of Indianapolis priests overall had declined 30 percent, with priests under 50 years of age halved. From 1981-1991 there had been a net loss of 44, about 20 to resignation. Were this to continue, by 2010 he estimated that only about 65 active priests would be available for assignment. In 1970 active priests numbered 225, with 150 under 50 years of age; in 1981, 177 were active, 111 under

¹⁴⁵ Fr. Tom Carey, Criterion, 11 September 1992, B35.

¹⁴⁶ Criterion, 7 July 1995, 5. There were two letters; the first in which she revealed the reason wasn’t published.

¹⁴⁷ Star, 15 August 1971, sec. 1, 1. Twenty-seven may have been an undercount; Fr. Widner in his column, “Living the Questions,” Criterion, 15 July 1977, 4, wrote that in 1970 and 1971 alone the archdiocese lost 24 priests through resignations.

¹⁴⁸ Fr. Francis Bryan, conversation with author, 19 January 2007. This roughly agrees with the recollection of former priest Paul Dooley, who years ago made an estimate based on the diocesan directories.

¹⁴⁹ Criterion, 11 December 1981, 4

¹⁵⁰ Valerie R. Dillon, Criterion, 10 April 1981, 4.

50; in 1991, 142 were active, with 50 under 50.¹⁵¹ In line with Godecker's report, the Priests' Council's 1991 report to the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council on various issues included the need "to encourage the universal church to reconsider . . . who can be ordained."¹⁵² Of the six ordained in 1992, the largest class in thirteen years, only two remained by 2001. Of the five ordained in 1993, by 2001 two had resigned.¹⁵³ Of the 111 theological students at St. Meinrad in 1992, only 17 were affiliated with the archdiocese.¹⁵⁴

Bad enough that the quantity of priests was inadequate, questions about their quality were raised soon after the council. According to Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), the research arm of the American bishops, among those who stayed were many theological conservatives—good news for the magisterium; less good in the eyes of Church authorities was that many were also thought to be gay or psychologically maladjusted. As part of their effort following the council to gather the facts, the bishops commissioned a psychologist and former priest, Eugene C. Kennedy, to ascertain the psychological health of priests. His report, "The Catholic Priest in the United States," found only 7 percent of priests were "emotionally developed," another 18 percent were "developing," with 66 percent "underdeveloped," and 8 percent "maldeveloped." Delivered to the American bishops in 1971, Kennedy's findings were never discussed by the bishops, let alone acted on.¹⁵⁵ At a November 1978 workshop on vocations, some bishops worried aloud about the quality of seminarians. Cincinnati Archbishop Joseph Bernardin, for example, believed that the Church was "getting weaker candidates for the priesthood."¹⁵⁶

Six months after Bernardin's comment, the Criterion asked Dr. John Nurnberger, head of the psychiatric department at the Indiana University Medical Center, Indianapolis, board member of St. Meinrad, and practicing Catholic, for his views on celibacy and laicization. In an unusually forthright article,

¹⁵¹ *Criterion*, 21 February 1992, 1, 8.

¹⁵² *Criterion*, 17 May 1991, 1.

¹⁵³ *Criterion*, 5 June 1992, 1; 25 December 1992, 4; 11 June 1993, 1; Archdiocesan Directory, 2001.

¹⁵⁴ Rudolph, *Hoosier Faiths*, 554.

¹⁵⁵ The study, by Fr. Eugene C. Kennedy, a psychiatrist, and Victor Heckler, was one of the eight sponsored by the bishops. Another study of priests in Western Europe and North America roughly tallied with the 1971 study. Fifteen percent of priests were found to be emotionally developed; another 20-25 percent had serious psychiatric difficulties often leading to alcoholism; leaving 60-70 percent with lesser degrees of emotional immaturity.

¹⁵⁶ *Criterion*, 24 November 1978, 4.

Nurnberger, a “pioneer in American psychiatry” with “impeccable credentials and experience,”¹⁵⁷ pointed out the obvious: family, not celibacy, is the normal social/psychological structure for a man. It is a deprivation. And while male celibacy is possible, some cannot in justice live a celibate life. On the other hand, seminary formation does change one’s frame of reference and prayer was important. In Nurnberger’s experience the problem with those priests who leave is that they never seemed to have seriously considered celibacy, had never made a decision about it; rather, it was “a passive, unanalyzed decision to satisfy parental demands.” As for laicization, putting a lid on it would save vocations and make those who leave more thoughtful about that choice. The downside is that those who leave without being laicized may turn against the Church. Why do some leave? In Nurnberger thought it was the perception of an environment of dogmatism, of “ancient” notions, and an inflexible institution. Leavings do hurt those who stay; morale suffers, especially the bishop’s morale. Granted, celibacy makes possible the freedom to give one’s all--nonetheless, Dr. Nurnberger concluded that a married clergy was a good idea.¹⁵⁸

More than a few of the U.S. bishops had been of Nurnberger’s opinion for some time. As late as 1986--eight years after the start of Pope John Paul II restorationist reign--a survey of the bishops found that nearly one-fourth of the 145 who responded (of 312 bishops) would allow priests to marry; 20 percent approved of asking married and resigned priests to return to active ministry; 30 percent approved of ordaining women as deacons, and almost 8 percent wanted women ordained.¹⁵⁹ In January 1989, the bishops’ Committee on Priestly Life admitted that mandatory celibacy was even more of a reason for leaving than it had been twenty years previously. Celibacy was the major reason for the lack of vocations, for leaving, and for the loneliness of those who stayed.¹⁶⁰

With deadening consistency, study after study and poll after poll of the laity presented the same picture.¹⁶¹ In 1992 Gallup asked: “Would it help [the priest shortage] to let married priests function again?”

¹⁵⁷ Lucy Jane King, M.D. and Alan D. Schmetzer, M.D., Dr. Edenharter’s Dream: How Science Improved the Humane Care of the Mentally Ill in Indiana, 1896-2012 (Hawthorne Publishing, Carmel, Indiana, 2012).

¹⁵⁸ Criterion, 4 May 1979, 16.

¹⁵⁹ A Fr. Sweeney did the survey. Rather than bow to Vatican pressure to suppress the results, he resigned from the priesthood. Hastings, *Vatican II and After*, 250.

¹⁶⁰ Hastings, Vatican II and After, 250.

¹⁶¹ The common conservative response to “unfavorable” poll results is the reminder that the “Church is not a democracy” and that “the Holy Spirit is the surest guide.” The first is undeniable and the second a matter for theologians, not historians who have to stick to secular evidence. Were the data otherwise, conservatives would trumpet the poll results. In that, conservatives are just like everyone else.

Fifty-one percent said “yes,” 28 percent thought it would make no difference, with only 18 percent believing it would hurt. The shift in attitude over time was striking. The 49 percent in 1971 who had favored married priests became 70 percent in 1992, with the approval of 82 percent of women polled. (By 1992 there were an estimated 20,000 married Catholic priests in the U.S.) In an indication of his own bias, Criterion editor John Fink took the trouble to point out the scientific nature of Gallup’s polls.¹⁶² The Criterion also carried stories on the number of married Protestant ministers functioning as Catholic priests (about 70 of 34,000 diocesan priests) noting that it is quietly done to avoid the celibacy debate.¹⁶³ In 1993 responding to the statement “It would be a good thing if married men were allowed to be ordained as priests,” 72 percent of the laity agreed “strongly” or “somewhat,” up 9 percent from 1987 and 20 percent from 1970. Asked: “Do you approve of married clergy?” 70 percent of both pre-Vatican and Vatican II cohorts said yes, as did 75 percent of post-Vatican II Catholics.

What about “women priests?” By generation, 48 percent of pre-Vatican II, 66 percent of Vatican II, and 72 percent of post Vatican II laity cohorts approved.¹⁶⁴ A 1999 report measuring laity support for expanding the priesthood found the same picture: 70 percent would accept married men as priests; 80 percent former priests now married; 63 percent celibate women; and 54 percent married women.¹⁶⁵

The laity’s willingness to open ordination widely is paralleled in the clergy’s. According to a survey of 1200 priests conducted by Catholic University sociologists early in the new century, 55 percent of priests think celibacy should be optional. Interestingly, if it were, only 12 percent said they would “probably” or “certainly” marry. Why so few? Most priests are now over 50, and since most of the late vocations had not married, why would they want to now? Secondly, younger ordinands now form the most conservative age cohort. The study found four principal reasons for the nine percent of the ordained who left within the first five years of ordination: Of heterosexual priests about 20-30 percent had fallen in love, with another 20-30 percent who felt lonely, unappreciated, and rejected celibacy (no specific woman involved); 30-40 percent of those who resigned, heterosexual or gay, were disillusioned with other priests or with the hierarchy. Five to fifteen percent who resigned were gays who rejected celibacy; as homosexuals, they shunned the double life, wanting an open relationship with a gay man. Another 5-10 percent had other reasons for resigning. What would have truly shocked the people in the pew, had it been generally known,

¹⁶² Criterion, 26 June 1992, 15.

¹⁶³ Corps of Retired Priests: U.S. (CORPUS) was critical of what it saw as hypocrisy. See Criterion, 3 July 1992, 2, 15. This was also a common view of many priests.

¹⁶⁴ D’Antonio, Laity, 75, 121.

¹⁶⁵ National Catholic Reporter, 1 November 2002, 1.

was that the study, noting that gay priests persevere in greater numbers than heterosexuals, suggested that perhaps up to half of the recently ordained were homosexual.¹⁶⁶

Beyond mandatory celibacy and the sex abuse scandals that became known in the mid-1980s and festered into the new century, angering the laity, other factors made for fewer U.S. vocations. Perhaps the biggest is demographic—Catholic families became smaller. The low birth rate of 1.85 children per family may produce one son, traditionally, the one who will perpetuate the family name. “Giving” a priest or nun to the Church is far more of a sacrifice when there are only two or three offspring, so vocations tend to come from families with four or more children.¹⁶⁷ Nor is the priesthood or the religious life any longer almost the only way to get an education or achieve professional responsibilities, as it had been for the children of immigrants during the ghetto years of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. As higher education and economic opportunity became far more available after World War II, the social status of priests and nuns correspondingly fell. In a secular society drenched with sexuality, the attractions of a celibate life dedicated to others, to say the least, are problematical, reinforcing the decline of clerical status.¹⁶⁸

It is also true that in a society and a culture where everything is open to debate, the Church’s insistence that certain practices cannot be changed and certain issues even discussed does not sit well. For example, the high rate of divorce in America not only hurts vocations, but many divorced Catholics want to be able to remarry in the Church and to do so without having to lie or render the children of the failed marriage quasi-illegitimate. As it stands, if the previous marriage is judged valid, the answer to remarriage remains “No.” Demands for expanded roles for women, even ordination, as well as ordaining married men, and acceptance of homosexuality are questions regarded by the Church as closed.¹⁶⁹ In the 1990s some Criterion readers registered strong reservations about vocations on this very ground. One, a mother of two “devout sons,” would not encourage them to be priests “because they would not be free to express their dissent with church policies they find offensive.” Since the hierarchy does not permit dissent, the result is hundreds of priests who dissent but are afraid to express it. Her sons “could not survive in such an autocratic atmosphere The hierarchy does not have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ National Catholic Reporter, 6 September 2002, 20, CARA Report, vol. 8 no 3, winter 2003, 3, 11. For priests’ attitudes toward celibacy see Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, “Changing Commitments and Attitudes of Catholic Priests, 1970-2001, cited in National Catholic Reporter, 8 March 2002, 9. CARA Report, vol. 8, no. 3, winter 2003, 3. National Catholic Reporter, 23 May 2003, 27.

¹⁶⁷ Cozzens, Priesthood, 134.

¹⁶⁸ Willis, Roman Catholic, 25

¹⁶⁹ Hastings, Vatican II, and after, 248.

¹⁷⁰ Criterion, 11 October 1996, 5.

Another reader wanted both women priests and a married clergy. Challenging Archbishop Daniel Buechlein's claim that a married clergy would not solve the shortage, the writer pointed out that there was no lack of Protestant clergy either in the mainline churches or among the evangelicals. On the contrary, there was heavy competition for pulpits with Episcopalians having had to declare a moratorium on ordinations.¹⁷¹ A third letter writer observed that the bishop of New Ulm, Minnesota had strongly endorsed married priests in his diocesan newspaper, the Prairie Catholic.¹⁷²

For decades, many parents had stopped actively encouraging vocations for their sons and daughters: In 1963, 67 percent of parents responded they would be "very pleased" to have a priest in the family; in 1974, 50 percent said so; in 1985, 55 percent. Asked in 2001 if they agreed with the statement, "I have encouraged my child to consider becoming a priest, sister, or brother," 48 percent "disagreed," another 19 percent "disagreed strongly," exactly the reverse of the 67 percent of parents in 1963 who said they would be "very pleased" to have a priest in the family.¹⁷³ Observed Criterion editor John Fink, "The Church has a problem."¹⁷⁴ None of this was good news to the hierarchy.

Early in his papacy, in 1981, John Paul II pronounced the shortage of priests was due to a spiritual crisis. This the Catholic University of America sociologist Dean R. Hoge later that decade denied: Crisis there was, but it was institutional, not spiritual. Institutionally, a great many things could be done to remedy the shortage: redistribute priests, recruit more seminarians, expand the permanent diaconate, ordain women, make active ministry less permanent, reactivate priests who had left to get married. In Hoge's view the most radical and dangerous tack would be to expand the role of the laity and do nothing to deal with the clerical shortfall. The danger was that Catholics might learn to do without the sacraments and bishops and become a congregational church. The safest path would be to ordain married men (which could be quickly done) and women; in the latter case, it would take longer and some claim that an all-male clergy is a doctrinal matter.¹⁷⁵ John Paul II, of course, held to his position, telling the bishops of Canada in 1988 that the priest shortage might be a test that would strengthen and purify the priesthood and renew it.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Criterion, 19 June 1998, 5.

¹⁷² Bishop Raymond Lucker; Criterion, 30 October 1998, 5.

¹⁷³ Criterion, 20 June 1986, 19.

¹⁷⁴ John Fink, Criterion, 12 Jan **2001**, 4, citing a CARA study.

¹⁷⁵ Criterion, 30 Oct 1987, 27.

¹⁷⁶ Criterion, 18 November 1988, 28.

In the meantime, the news from the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry was dire. Their report (a twenty-page pamphlet sent to the bishops in spring 1988, but not made public until January 1989), "Reflections on the Morale of Priests," found that many priests, believing that Vatican II was "being blunted or even betrayed," felt "trapped, overworked, frustrated." In addition to the central problem of mandatory celibacy, were loneliness, sexual and gender issues (feminism, women's ordination, homosexual ministry), and polarization within the church. Worse, the committee's mandate did not extend to discussion of possible solutions. This had a very bad effect. Priests were caught between "those angry and disillusioned" at the slow pace of renewal and the unreasoning and "well-organized opposition of the self-styled orthodox . . ."¹⁷⁷ In light of the situation, in March 1989, American bishops traveled to Rome to meet with the Curia, with Pope John Paul II holding a listening and watching brief. Ever the optimist, Indianapolis Archbishop O'Meara offered that the Curia and John Paul II had learned much. Three weeks later, however, in his letter to the American bishops, the pope sharply criticized the United States for its "radical feminism and polarization," and blamed the lack of vocations on the failure of the nuns to live up to their duty.¹⁷⁸

Given the pope's well-understood position, to no one's surprise a large majority of the over 200 delegates to the 1990 "celibacy synod" supported the practice, including each of its thirteen working groups, leaving only "isolated voices" to favor a married male clergy. One voice, (among many others), was neither isolated nor marginalized. In reporting the synod Criterion editor John Fink noted that in Oaxaca, Mexico, an estimated three-fourths of its 160 priests were not celibate, many with common law wives and having fathered children. Readers must have been far more shocked by the editor's almost casual reference to estimates that one-half of U.S. priests—hetero or homosexual--were similarly sexually active. After mentioning two recent highly publicized scandals (an archbishop involved with a woman and a priest, famous for his "safe house" ministry, for sexually exploiting young runaways),¹⁷⁹ the Criterion drew attention to the pope's permission for two married Brazilians to become priests after they agreed to

¹⁷⁷ Criterion, 13 January 1989, 15.

¹⁷⁸ Criterion, 24 March 1989, 1; 7 April 1989, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Archbishop Marino and Fr. Bruce Ritter, respectively. In 1990 an estimated 20 percent of priests were in a relationship with a woman, with an added 8 to 10 percent exploring such intimacies. Another 20 percent of priests were homosexually oriented, half of them sexually active, and 80 percent of priests masturbated at least occasionally. These are said to be low estimates. Wills, *Papal Sins*, 186.

give up living with their wives (with the wives' and their children's consent). Fink, married, seven children, clearly favored a married clergy.¹⁸⁰

So did the National Federation of Priest Councils: At its 1991 convention, noting that more than fifty former Protestant ministers were functioning as Catholic priests, NFPC delegates resolved 125 to 5 that the Church should ordain married men and women. Beyond morale and the problem of burnout, turning the argument that celibacy permitted the priest to give undivided love on its head, it was feared that overburdened clergy might lose touch with the laity, having to give up some tasks to continue to provide the Eucharist; priest-less parishes would see laity leaving the church. Fink regarded the NFPC as a "representative body," a way of saying that it ought to be taken seriously. To Fink, while few bishops had spoken publicly, "To both priests and laity, . . . the issue is simple; the Eucharist is more important than mandatory celibacy."¹⁸¹

However, as celibacy became understood as a given, no seminarian could feel misled. Consequently, while resignations continued to occur, their rate declined. By 1994 a Catholic University survey of priests sponsored by the National Federation of Priest Councils found fewer complaints. There were some: 27 percent found fault with the way authority was exercised; 18 percent cited unrealistic demands of the laity; 15 percent, overwork; 15 percent, loneliness; 14 percent having to express church teachings the priest dissented from. Another 14 percent cited celibacy as a problem: More than half of those polled said they would not marry if it were optional, 4 percent would "certainly" marry and another 13 percent "probably" would--about one in six, not a trivial number.¹⁸² One defender of celibacy, the sociologist/novelist Fr. Andrew Greeley of Chicago, estimated that the resignation rate in 1984 at 20 percent and that over 25 years, it would reach about 25 percent. Greeley pointed out that since 75 percent stick, the glass was more than half full and that dissatisfaction with the life was a greater influence on leaving than the desire to marry. About half simply discover that they don't like being priests. Why the decline in vocations? Fr. Greeley argued that recruitment by priests had declined--in places it had even ended because happy priests misperceive other priests as being unhappy, thanks to the loud unhappiness

¹⁸⁰ *Criterion*, 12 October 1990; 26 October 1990, 24; 2 November 1990, 1.

¹⁸¹ *Criterion*, 10 May 1991, 9. O'Meara died 10 January 1992. Buechlein was named 14 July 1992 and formally installed 9 September 1992. This reason for Buechlein's remark regarding the *Criterion* was its "shaky ecclesiology."

¹⁸² *Criterion*, 28 October 1994, 4.

of former priests. Abolish mandatory celibacy for good reasons, Greeley counseled, but it was not driving the vocation crisis.¹⁸³

It was just possible that by the mid-1990s Fr. Greeley was more right than wrong. One difference between the “Vatican II generation” and later ordinands was that in 2001 priests under 35 were less likely to dissent, were more pre-Vatican II in attitude, and were happier than those under 35 in 1970 had reported. Fewer under 35 in 2001 thought they would marry if celibacy were optional. Tellingly, they embraced “clericalism,” something that had been anathema to the under 35s in 1970. Then half the clergy saw the notion of the priest as set apart as a barrier to true Christian community; in 2001, three decades later, only 15 percent of priests under 35 thought so, lower than every older age cohort.¹⁸⁴ In 1970, 45 percent of those aged 26 to 35 had great difficulty in the way church authority was expressed; in 1994 less than 20 percent felt that way. In 1970 nearly 85 percent age 26 to 35 supported optional celibacy; in 1994 only about 45 percent did so, while over one-half of the older three age groups did so. In 1970 nearly 80 percent of the youngest priests supported inviting resigned and married priests to active ministry; in 1994 less than 40 percent did so, while 60 percent of middle-age priests wanted to invite them.¹⁸⁵

Faced with unpleasant data gleaned from polls, it was the hierarchy’s habit to denigrate their message by insisting that “the Church isn’t a democracy,” “the laity don’t know.” For example, the U.S. bishops funded the work of sociologists Richard A. Schoenherr and Lawrence A. Young for nine years until 1990 when they were displeased with the authors third report on findings. Three bishops in a letter to other bishops denigrated the work, rejected its “pessimism” and Fr. Schoenherr’s “personal agenda of anti-celibacy, and the notion that grace and faith insufficient factors rather than sociology and data are the last words.” Said Los Angeles Archbishop Roger Mahoney, “We live by God’s grace, and our future is shaped by God’s design for his church—not by sociologists.”¹⁸⁶

Thus, it was a surprise when Indiana’s bishops jumped into the polling business themselves in 1994. A three-year effort funded by the Lilly Foundation and led by a Purdue University sociologist, the

¹⁸³ “In Defense of Celibacy,” *America*, 10 September 1994, 10-15.

¹⁸⁴ Hoge-Wenger study, *CARA*, vol. 8, no 3, winter 2003, 3, 11.

¹⁸⁵ *Criterion*, 11 March 1994, 36.

¹⁸⁶ Their study, Full Pews and Empty Altars: Demographics of the Priest Shortage in the United States Catholic Dioceses. (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1993), covers 1966 to 1984, with extrapolations to 2005, and has Indianapolis data. They had projected that priest numbers would fall to c. 21,000 in 2005; instead,

project had the full support of all five bishops. A lengthy questionnaire covering a wide field was distributed to registered parishioners of the state's five dioceses. With every registered Catholic having an equal chance of being selected, the poll produced 2,636 usable responses (57 percent, a very high return). In addition, there were interviews with fifteen focus groups arranged by diocese and age cohort (50 and over, 30-49, and 18-29).¹⁸⁷ The ratio of registered to unregistered Catholics at the time was estimated at about two to one; and since the latter are more inclined to disagree with some Church teaching (often the reason why they do not register in a parish), limiting the pool to registered parishioners produced a conservative bias. This is especially true of the post-Vatican II cohort (born after the council) with its tendency to be more liberal and two and a half times more likely to be non-registered, along with males, and the divorced, separated, and single.

Despite the conservative bias of the respondent pool, the results generally were often liberal. On celibacy and the priest shortage, asked to respond to the statement "It would be good if married men were allowed to be priests," 35 percent of the registered parishioners of the Indianapolis Archdiocese "strongly agreed"; 28 percent "agreed somewhat"; with 18 percent "uncertain"; leaving only 20 percent who "disagreed somewhat" (8 percent) or "strongly disagreed" (12 percent). Put another way, those who strongly supported a married priesthood outweighed those who strongly opposed it 35 percent to 12 percent, with the combined "agrees" 63 percent to the "disagrees" 20 percent—in both cases about three to one. Since a married clergy is an issue on which the Vatican and the American hierarchy declared decided, if not decisive, opposition, it is clear that a solid majority of Indiana's Catholics in 1994 were at odds with church authority on a celibate male priesthood. Among the reasons is that many laity have come to believe that clerical celibacy is either too hard a discipline for heterosexual men--perhaps even a wounding one--or that the rule attracts too many of the wrong sort to the priesthood, or both. For example, while 43 percent of the Indianapolis laity polled "disagree somewhat" or "strongly disagree" with the statement that they "worry" "about the type of men" going into the priesthood, 30 percent admitted to such worries, with another 27 percent "uncertain." Such feelings, along with a decade's publicity of clerical sexual abuse of minors and others in the United States and abroad, have led a majority of the laity to

¹⁸⁷ Diocesan advisors were appointed by each of the bishops, with diocesan "coordinators" and a like number of independent advisors selected for their expert knowledge in theology or data analysis, all appointed by the research director, completing the "leadership team." In 1997 James D. Davidson, et al., The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans (Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.: Huntington, Indiana, 1997), was one result of the project.

disagree with the hierarchy on celibacy.¹⁸⁸ While raising other problems, a married priesthood would solve the priest shortage.

A few years on, polls showing strong clerical support for optional celibacy mirrored that of the Indianapolis laity. In 2001 the National Federation of Priests Councils surveyed, "Catholic Priests' Attitudes Toward Celibacy and Homosexuality,"¹⁸⁹ asking if celibacy should be a matter of choice for diocesan priests; 53 percent of the diocesan priests and 60 percent of the religious priests said "yes," 56 percent overall. Should resigned priests be invited to reapply as priests again? Fifty-two percent said "yes" (41 percent of diocesan priests, 54 percent of religious clergy). Seventy-two percent of all priests welcomed Episcopal priests, married or not, to function in the Church. If celibacy were optional, 12 percent of all priests said they would "certainly or probably" marry (15 percent of the diocesan, 7 percent of the religious). These were liberal results, but they held the promise of a more conservative clergy in future, for the older the cleric, the more accepting of optional celibacy. Younger priests were also less in favor of inviting resigned priests, married or single, to function. Those ordained after 1985--more likely to be "delayed" vocations--were more conservative and more accepting of the magisterium on social, moral, and theological issues. If celibacy were optional fewer of this group said they would marry. For priests ordained in the days of Vatican II or shortly thereafter, the rule had been the younger the priest the more liberal. That this reversed in the 1990s is not a surprise: Vatican II is ancient history to newly ordained priests, whether young or older, and they are theological conservatives.

As for bishops, whatever gifts a man might bring to high ecclesiastical office, certain constraints were determinative; the greater the office, the more notoriety, the less freedom of expression. As one expert in these matters has observed, that an Edward T. O'Meara or any man appointed bishop would disagree with Rome on a serious policy matter is extremely unlikely. In choosing a bishop, the Vatican distributes a questionnaire to bishops, priests, and laity of the diocese concerned, and others who know the candidate, asking for written answers in a dozen areas. One of the items queries the candidates' docility--to the pope, the apostolic see, the hierarchy, and his "adherence with conviction and loyalty" to the magisterium. A candidate soft on the "priestly ordination of women," birth control, or who supported optional male celibacy "would not be made bishop."¹⁹⁰ Bishops have privately acknowledged that John Paul II explicitly forbade them to discuss "contraception, abortion, homosexuality, masturbation, a married

¹⁸⁸ Davidson, 1994 unpublished study.

¹⁸⁹ The return rates were excellent; 72 percent for the 1,200 diocesan priests; 70 percent for the 600 religious. Summarized in CARA Reports, vol. 8, no. 4, spring 2003, 8.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas J. Reese, "Selection of Bishops," *America* (August 25, 1984), 68, 69. Not until the 19th century did popes claim the exclusive right to name bishops; previously, bishops were elected from the diocese by resident clergy and laity alike. For bishops or priests to transfer from city to city was forbidden by the canons of Nicea, 325, and Chalcedon, 451, and enforced in the late ninth century. *National Catholic Reporter*, 17 April 2009, 17, 20.

priesthood or women's ordination to the priesthood" other than to defend the *status quo*.¹⁹¹ A few did and they paid for their temerity. Weakland of Milwaukee has reported that he was singled out for chastisement at every *ad limina* visit; Hunthausen of Seattle suffered the humiliation of having a bishop imposed on him and his authority reduced. At any rate, whatever a bishop felt or believed, few or none would publicly agitate for making celibacy optional or taking back resigned priests, married or not, or differed with the Vatican on birth control. Acceptance of celibacy as an essential qualification for becoming a bishop rendered many a priest ineligible for the post; failure to oppose contraception disqualified more.

Complicating matters in O'Meara's case, however, was that he was a "Jean Jadot bishop." Under Jadot, the apostolic delegate to the U.S. (1973-1980), nominees tended to be more liberal, favorably disposed to the work of Vatican II, and more pastoral than before. Being named national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in 1966 meant that when the genial O'Meara came to Indianapolis, his parish work was a somewhat distant memory. In the judgment of one priest who came to know him well and loved him, when O'Meara "came to [Indianapolis] he was a theological and pastoral 'Rip Van Winkle'," possessing an "open heart but uninformed as could be about what parish ministry was like in the 1980s." Yet the executive committee of the priests' council had many good discussions with the archbishop, the priest recalled. O'Meara seems to have agreed with that assessment, on his deathbed telling the priest, "It's such a shame that my health is failing me now at the time when I am finally learning what it really means to be a bishop."¹⁹²

The celibacy issue made an early appearance on his plate: A "summary and collation of age group reports" showed that several priest age cohorts reporting low morale had argued the need to listen to priests about their concerns on issues confronting the Church. Two stood out: "celibacy is a *very real* issue" [ital. orig.], as was the "real tension for the priest standing/mediating between Rome and the folks in the pews." Using resigned priests to meet the shortage was also raised.¹⁹³ In his talk with the presbytery, 2 June 1980, O'Meara admitted that the clergy shortage in the archdiocese was "caused largely by an alarming number of resignations in recent years." Rather than bringing back resigned priests, the archbishop cited the possibility of moving to a permanent diaconate.¹⁹⁴ Since celibacy was a given and women's ordination ruled out, using laymen to ease the burden on priests seemed the only viable path.

¹⁹¹ A. W. Richard Sipe, Sex, Priests, and Power (NY: Brunner/Mazel, 1995), 44, cited in Cozzens, *Priesthood*, 118, 119.

¹⁹² Fr. Marty Peter interview, 2005. As an officer of the priests' council and later chairman of the personnel board, Fr. Peter met frequently with O'Meara, finding that "The man was open to growth."

¹⁹³ O'Meara papers.

¹⁹⁴ O'Meara papers, his talk with presbyteriat, June 2, 1980.

O'Meara's 1983 Quinquennial Report to Rome, his first, reported that "celibacy [was] generally held in high esteem" in the archdiocese. As for the priests who resigned, they did so because of difficulties with "faith, authority and celibacy" [albeit probably in the reverse of the order listed]. There was some comfort that while the majority of priests who had left since 1978 had not received dispensations, most continued to practice the faith.¹⁹⁵ O'Meara himself professed to having no doubts, telling the monks and seminarians at St. Meinrad Seminary in 1984 that "My whole experience as a pastor . . . fills me with the growing conviction day by day of the need for the witness that celibacy offers both to the Church and to the world for the sake of the Kingdom of God."¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, O'Meara's 1988 Quinquennial Report was more pointed than the 1983 version, in admitting to a "shortage of ordained clergy which becomes more acute each year." "So many demands are made on those still active that it is difficult for them to choose to take a day or more off for a workshop, recollection day, and even a retreat." Overwork meant decline in physical and mental health over time.¹⁹⁷ The 1988 USCC bishops committee's report on priestly life and ministry, "Reflections on the Morale of Priests," observed that every study or commentary on priests and the shortage of vocations "mentions sexuality (and specifically mandatory celibacy) as a major reason" for leaving the priesthood. Still, while celibacy explained both the vocation shortage and the personal unhappiness for many of those who stayed, the report did not countenance any change.¹⁹⁸

During O'Meara's twelve years as archbishop editor Fr. Widner and his successor, John Fink, the celibacy issue was aired in the Criterion. In a long letter in April 1980 a priest from the diocese recalled that the vocation director a few years previously had told his fellow priests that as long as celibacy held so, too, would the shortage of vocations. Declaring the future "bleak," the priest insisted that the issue must be openly discussed.¹⁹⁹ Widner thought it obvious that men did not want to enter the Church as presently structured, and so the Church must change. The desire to serve was not lacking; the desire for ordination was. Despite the bleak statistics, trusting in God, Widner professed to be optimistic.²⁰⁰

In 1983, after extensive consultation with priests and laity (a series of eleven meetings in the deaneries of delegates from practically all parishes as well as observers), Archbishop O'Meara moved to address a future with fewer priests in a time of growing numbers of new ministries and increasing pastoral demands. Ironically, the shortage loomed so great that what had been a three-man vocation team had to

¹⁹⁵ Quinquennial Report, 1978-1982, p. 20.

¹⁹⁶ O'Meara file, Homily convocation St. Meinrad, 7 September 1984.

¹⁹⁷ O'Meara papers.

¹⁹⁸ Biskup, box 17.

¹⁹⁹ Criterion, 4 April 1980, 6. It was not an easy issue: Two weeks later a reader responded unsympathetically to the notion that celibacy had to go. 18 April 1980, 6.

²⁰⁰ Criterion, 9 October 1981, 4.

be reduced to a single priest.²⁰¹ Twenty diocesan priests would reach age 70 that year, eligible to retire, and there were only fourteen men at various stages in their seminary preparation. Of the twenty-six diocesan priests who had died since 1978, twelve had been in active ministry, while another thirteen had resigned, leaving the ratio of diocesan priests in parish ministry to the laity at 1:1278. It was anticipated that in 1987 there would be a net loss of twenty-six diocesan priests, with the ratio of priest to faithful reaching 1:1583. Some parishes would have to be closed and others “clustered”--priests serving two or more parishes.²⁰²

As it happened, for pastoral and political reasons (and in the hope of a quiet life), O'Meara would never cluster parishes under a single priest; if unpopular decisions had to be made it was best to implicate clergy and, when possible, the laity. To do so, O'Meara turned to three elected bodies: a council of priests, a priest personnel board, and an archdiocesan board of “total Catholic education.” In 1989, he initiated a new program, Parish Life Coordinators--lay or religious pastoral ministers (a nun or a brother appointed by the bishop), mentored by a pastor, to serve a parish or group of parishes. They would run the twenty-six parishes and seventeen missions that did not have resident pastors.²⁰³ In 1990 it was the turn of an archdiocesan pastoral council: Made up of a man and a woman from each of the eleven deaneries, two priests, one of whom served as chair, two nuns, two monks, the president of the board of education, the moderator of the curia, and up to six additional persons appointed by the bishop, it first convened in Nashville, Indiana, in September 1990. O'Meara's offered it as proof of his commitment to collegiality--“I do believe in collaboration and sharing responsibility.”²⁰⁴

Since neither parish life coordinators nor any other imaginable group could solve the priest shortage so long as male celibacy was sacrosanct, calls for change from influentials within the archdiocese and beyond continued to appear in the Criterion. In 1982, when Msgr. Joseph Brokhage left the post of personnel director of priests, he predicted that the Church would have to look at celibacy and at using resigned priests and women priests. Unfortunately, he believed “Rome is more concerned about who administers the sacraments than those to whom sacraments are administered.”²⁰⁵ After all, a sacramental church required an ordained clergy numerous enough to provide the faithful with the

²⁰¹ Criterion, 7 October 1983, 11.

²⁰² Criterion, 4 March 1983, 4. While O'Meara had agreed to clustering, Fr. Jeff Godecker in his 1992 report stated it was not implemented. Criterion, 21 February 1992, 1.

²⁰³ Criterion, 26 May 1989, 2.

²⁰⁴ O'Meara notes file; Criterion, 17 August 1990, 1. The full complement would be 33.

²⁰⁵ Criterion, 16 July 1982, 4.

sacraments. This was the reason England's Cardinal Basil Hume gave in 1985 in favor of ordaining married men and other mature men in those communities where the lack was greatest.²⁰⁶ Three years later, the American Canon Law Society established a task force to draw up a petition for a married clergy for consideration at their 1990 convention.²⁰⁷ It was just as obvious to Widner's replacement as Criterion editor that "We're in danger of losing the Eucharist." Noting that Protestants who ordain women and have a married clergy have trouble finding places for them, Fink wanted to know "Which is more important," a celibate male priesthood or the sacrament of communion? Polls, he noted, showed a large majority of Catholics favored married clergy and just below 50 percent favored women's ordination. The danger of losing the "real presence" and Sunday Mass was real.²⁰⁸

A few months on, Fr. Bernard Head, twenty years earlier the elected president of the first archdiocesan senate, wanted celibacy made optional. Secular priests, wrote Fr. Head, were not really called to practice poverty, chastity, and obedience; these "evangelical counsels" were designed for an evil world—a world to be avoided--and to make living in religious community possible. Now "we don't regard the world as evil" and secular clergy do not live communally; rather, they live in the world and minister to those who do likewise. Efforts to make secular clergy live under the evangelical counsels having failed in the fourth and fifth centuries, he hoped the coming bishops' synod would accept married clergy rather than see the number of clergy further reduced. Celibacy, he was sure, was the problem.²⁰⁹

In the Criterion the syndicated columnist, Fr. John Catoir ("Light One Candle"), weighed in by favoring the offer of the Corps of Resigned Priests, United States (CORPUS) and its thousand plus married members willing to function as priests once again.²¹⁰ In January 1991 Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert Weakland went further: In a draft pastoral to his priests he would have parishes nominate married priests and as archbishop he would present them to the pope. While such a proposal had no chance of acceptance (Weakland's purpose was to keep the issue alive), his trial balloon won praise from Criterion editor John Fink. Fr. Head also saw Weakland as a "prophetic voice." Publicly, the Vatican limited its comment on the Milwaukee archbishop's demarche to stating that his suggestion was "out of

²⁰⁶ Criterion, 21 June 1985, 24.

²⁰⁷ Criterion, 28 Oct 1988, 23.

²⁰⁸ Criterion, 15 June 1990, 2.

²⁰⁹ Criterion, 21 Sept 1990, 5. Disappointing to Fr. Head, in October the American bishops supported celibacy down the line.

²¹⁰ Criterion, 5 Oct 1990, 5.

place.”²¹¹ Agitation to drop mandatory celibacy continued into the early 1990s; for instance, 62,000 Europeans petitioned the Vatican for an end to the practice.²¹² The Vatican remained unmoved.

Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara died 10 January 1992 of respiratory disease (possibly a victim of his many travels for the Propagation of the Faith to third world countries). Under John Paul II the *sine qua non* for appointment to bishop was an alert willingness to demonstrate soundness in doctrinal and policy matters. Attracting favorable notice from those already in the episcopacy was another. As rector of St. Meinrad Seminary, Daniel Buechlein, O.S.B., came to the attention of his future colleagues during the annual November bishops’ meeting by hosting a dinner for those ordinaries with seminarians enrolled at St. Meinrad. He evidenced his soundness when, as bishop of Memphis, Tennessee (1986-1991), he and two co-authors produced a 39-page pamphlet, “Celibacy for the Kingdom, Theological Reflections and Practical Perspectives.”²¹³ Aimed at ending the “deafening silence” on the positive role of celibacy, the customary theological and spiritual arguments in its favor were repeated. Reminding readers that celibacy was also for the married, it was both discipline and charism of the Church, one with long centuries to recommend it. As archbishop of Indianapolis, his appeals for vocations to the religious life and the priesthood in his Criterion columns were constant: The Church does not “give up the ideal of priests living the celibate way of life as Jesus did. Celibacy is not the issue. Nor is marriage the solution.” Believing this generation as generous as others, and there is always God’s grace,²¹⁴ priests, by “our way of life of pastoral love . . . signal a kingdom that is not of this world. That’s the fundamental reason Christ lived a celibate life. And we celibates are freer to love others.”²¹⁵

If fine words could close the gap between the number of priests needed and the number available, these might have done it. Where the 1983’s statement read--“Celibacy generally is held in high esteem,” Buechlein’s first Quinquennial report, 1993, dropped “high.” It noted, however,

²¹¹ Criterion, 18 January 1991, 19; 25 January 1991, 2; 15 November 1991, 24. Fink cited Weakland’s courage and his role in the 1986 economic pastoral. At the 1988 Synod in Rome, Weakland had been blunt in criticizing sexism in the Church. In retaliation, in 1990, Rome had acted to have an honorary degree for Weakland from the Swiss University of Freiburg withdrawn. While opposed to abortion, the Milwaukee archbishop had also criticized the Church’s position as too simplistic “an answer to a complicated and emotional question.” Criterion, 16 November 1990, 17. Sadly, Weakland was later caught up in sexual scandal himself, having paid a man some \$400,000 for his silence.

²¹² Criterion, 10 July 1992, 29.

²¹³ His co-authors were the executive director of vocations for the NCCB and the president-rector of St. Mary’s Seminary, Baltimore, Md.

²¹⁴ Buechlein papers, 11 January 1992, column file.

²¹⁵ Undated mss. of a , recorded interview with John Fink, Buechlein papers.

that between 1988 and 1992 there had been seventeen ordinations, twenty-three deaths, three resignations without dispensations, and ten retirements, for a net loss of nineteen. Putting the best face on the situation, it added, "There is open and frank discussion which is strengthening in its effects on the practice of celibacy."²¹⁶ Four years later the Criterion reported that between 1993 and 1997 there were ten ordinations, but gave no word on resignations, deaths, or retirements.²¹⁷ In 2000, in response to a question at a West Deanery meeting of the priests, the archbishop stated that in his eight years as Indianapolis archbishop he had ordained twenty-three (not all stayed) and buried thirty-three.²¹⁸ Again, there was no word on resignations or retirements. Under Buechlein, transparency suffered as bad news was to be avoided.

Laymen and laywomen could replace priests and nuns in the schools, parish coordinators could stand in for pastors, ecclesiastical ministers could do the readings and distribute communion at Mass and to shut-ins at home, but if priesthood was to remain the preserve of celibate male clergy something more was needed. Among other important matters, in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*), the Council fathers sought to deal with the worldwide clergy shortage by restoring the diaconate. In the early Church and long thereafter, deacons had a permanent role and did not go on to ordination--St Francis of Assisi, for instance, remained a deacon all his life. Later, the diaconate became a transitional stage on the path to ordination. Given the priest shortage and the needs in mission lands, the council saw that lay male deacons--married and single (if single, vowed to permanent celibacy), could perform vital roles: Although they cannot consecrate the Eucharist, serve as celebrant at Mass, anoint the sick or hear confessions, they can baptize, distribute communion, perform marriages, provide the viaticum to the dying, preside at funerals, proclaim the Gospel, preach at Mass, and minister in the parishes, hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons. The manifest benefits overcame the objections of council traditionalists worried that a permanent diaconate open to married men would hurt vocations to the celibate life.²¹⁹

Following the council's close in 1965, some dioceses quickly embraced the newly permitted permanent diaconate; Indianapolis did not. In August 1972, an apostolic letter, *Ad Pascendum*, set the norms for the new office. For more than twenty years, however, Indianapolis remained one of two of the five dioceses in Indiana that did not embrace this grant of clerical status to married males. Discussed in

²¹⁶ Buechlein papers.

²¹⁷ Criterion, 25 July 1997, 16, 17. Under Buechlein, especially after John Fink retired as editor, the Criterion, more and more, lacked both information and transparency. Candor about problems would jeopardize "unity," which was Buechlein's watchword.

²¹⁸ Fr. Francis Bryan, conversation, 2007. There would also have been retirements.

²¹⁹ Tracy, American Bishop at Vatican II, 115.

the archdiocese for over a decade, the consensus held that it would be better to develop a broader sense of service among the laity. By 1982, however, Criterion editor Widner and nine other priests of the archdiocese supported it, citing the need and the large number of permanent deacons of Chicago as evidence of its success.²²⁰ Officers of the priests' council, however, demurred. Opposition came from both sides of the spectrum: archdiocesan conservatives, like their counterparts at the Second Vatican Council, feared undermining the celibate priesthood, opening the way for a married clergy; liberals--men and women--were put off by its reservation to males, seeing that as an insult to laywomen and the religious sisters. In November 1986 the Archdiocesan Council of Priests, following a presentation by a representative from the Chicago archdiocese, formed an ad hoc committee to examine the question. In letters to the Criterion, a Providence nun and a laywoman asked for deaconesses.²²¹ Promising to listen to all views, Archbishop O'Meara would make the decision. As debated in the pages of the Criterion, the majority of letter writers favored the diaconate in that it would provide ordained leadership, free priests to minister, promote vocations, enrich marriage preparation, encourage greater participation of women in the church, and expand existing ministries. Some argued it would be especially good for blacks and Hispanics.²²² Already by 1988, fifty-four religious (42 nuns, two brothers) and laity (six men, four women) filled jobs usually done by priests in fifty-three parishes of the archdiocese.²²³

As part of the fact-gathering of the ad hoc committee, a deacon of twelve years standing in the Louisville, Kentucky diocese was asked about his experiences; they turned out to have been mixed: on the plus side, he provided real help to overburdened priests, giving three or four homilies a year, leading devotions at Lent and Advent, and much else. On the other hand, there was the problem of acceptance; at first some would not take communion from him.²²⁴ At a West Deanery meeting in April 1988, most of the women saw the male diaconate as simply more discrimination: It alienated nuns, was costly, and merely added another ministry.²²⁵ One letter writer, summing up most of the arguments against, objected that the diaconate was theologically and practically unnecessary. A short-term solution to a long-term problem, the issue was celibacy and life-long commitment. It was not a spiritual problem, the reader argued, as research had shown.²²⁶

²²⁰ Criterion, 6 August 1982, 4.

²²¹ Criterion, 10, 17 April 1987, 5; 5, 12, 26 June 1987, 5.

²²² Criterion, 12, 22, 29 January 1988; 5 February 1988; 19 February 1988, 5.

²²³ Criterion, 19 Feb 1988, 1.

²²⁴ Criterion, 5 Feb 1988, 1.

²²⁵ At the meeting held at Ritter High School, the pro and con were equally divided. Criterion, 29 April 1988, 1.

²²⁶ Criterion, 29 January 1988, 1, 25.

To help decide the matter the advisory group of the archbishop--the priests' council-- polled the archdiocese. In summer 1988, 1,100 laity, 200 priests, and members of 30 special interest groups were mailed surveys; Criterion readers could also participate by mail by filling out the survey published in the paper. In all, 485 clergy, religious, and laity responded.²²⁷ Overall, 56 percent favored permanent male deacons, 33 percent opposed, with 11 percent no answer. Of the laity, 67 percent approved and only 15 percent disapproved. Of the 183 newspaper responses, the laity went 57 percent to 38 percent in favor. It had always been understood that whatever the laity and the religious nuns thought, the priests would have to support it; and they did not. Of 132 clergy responses, a plurality (46 to 42 percent) were opposed and in September the priests' council recommended against, 12 to 7. Accepting the council's view O'Meara, said "no" to the permanent diaconate "at this time."²²⁸ Finally, ten years later, summer 2008, after four years of training, 25 men lay prostrate before Archbishop Buechlein at Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral and were ordained permanent deacons for the archdiocese.²²⁹

In the meantime, celibate vocations having somehow to be found, a number of stratagems were pursued: a "Call by Name" program was adopted in July 1987. If young men would not sign up for the seminary, then friends, relatives, and fellow parishioners would "draft" them. A campaign of prayers, homilies, and ads in the Criterion invited the laity to nominate young men they believed had the makings of a good priest. The scheme's attraction was that it would encourage those who had considered a vocation to think anew and for those who had not, plant the seed. In all, more than a thousand received invitations to attend information sessions held in New Albany, Batesville, and Indianapolis.²³⁰ Whatever success "Call by Name" might have had, little has been heard of it since. In the mid-1990s the archdiocesan Serra Club began giving "religious aptitude" tests to over 2,100 seventh and eleventh graders: of 1,381 seventh graders 446 (32%) showed an aptitude for service (236 for lay ministry, 210 for religious life or the priesthood). Of 749 eleventh graders, 98 (13%, 55 females, 43 males) showed an aptitude for service (44 for lay ministry and 54 as nuns or priests). Invited to dine with Archbishop Buechlein, contact with them was maintained by the vocation office.²³¹ In the late 1990s CARA, the research arm of the American

²²⁷ Criterion, 3 June 1988, 3. The return of 14.9 percent of mailed surveys was seen as very good.

²²⁸ Criterion, 30 September 1988, 1; 13 January 1989, 1.

²²⁹ Criterion, 19 December 2008, 2. The next class, of eighteen, is scheduled to be ordained in 2012.

²³⁰ Criterion, 17 July 1987, 1; 9 October 1987, 1; 30 October 1987, 1.

²³¹ "Ministry Potential Discerner," a test developed by Serra International. Criterion, 27 October 1995, 2; 15 March 1996, 1.

bishops, conducted a study of the young men and women of southern Indiana regarding vocations for the area's Benedictine monks and religious. The 482 who responded cited as the primary reason for hesitation in choosing religious life was the sense of being called to follow other careers and the desire to marry.²³²

Deaconate or no, in the absence of priests the laity had to help make up the shortage: One way was as Eucharistic ministers distributing communion at Mass and to shut-ins. Nationally, by 2007, of 6,200 lay ecclesial ministers only one in five were men, about the number of priests lost to resignation, retirement or death between 1994 and 2005. The number of lay ecclesial ministers in 1990, 22,000 (again, the great majority women), reached 31,000 in 2007, surpassing the 29,000 diocesan priests.²³³ In 1993 at the first diocesan-wide "Ministry Day," the Indianapolis archdiocese counted 350 paid lay ministers--parish life coordinators, pastoral associates, youth leaders, liturgical planners, religious educators, and archdiocesan officers.²³⁴

Perhaps the last word on priestly celibacy should be left to the long-time Criterion editor, Msgr. Raymond T. Bosler. Ordained in the late 1930s, like most priests of his generation in the 1960s Bosler supported priestly celibacy, albeit with increasing ambivalence over time. In 1967, he declared that the sacrifice of the right to marry, freely given, was justified because the dignity of the priest, being "considerably greater" than that of a nun or brother, was adequate compensation.²³⁵ Two years later, turning from psychic rewards to the mundane, Bosler thought the money for the greater expense of a married clergy could be found. Protestants and the Orthodox manage to do so and after all, most priests in the early church were married. But he still wanted celibacy kept because it was the example of celibate monasticism, he believed, that "little by little" had "led the Western Church to recognize the advantages of celibacy for priests." Circumstances might force a change to optional celibacy, but he hoped not.²³⁶ Five years on, in 1974, in answering a question on deacons, Bosler noted that the Church insisted on celibacy

²³² CARA Report, vol. 5, no 1, 5.

²³³ National Catholic Reporter, 17 August 2007, 17.

²³⁴ Criterion, 26 February 1993, 4. For the importance of women Eucharistic ministers, one only has to check their presence at the altar at Mass.

²³⁵ Criterion, Question Box, 16 June 1967, 4. What justified the sacrifice made by nuns and brothers Bosler did not say.

²³⁶ Criterion, 6 June 1969, 5.

because priests “preside at the Eucharistic Sacrifice.” This is surprising because nowhere else (as far as this writer is aware), did Bosler ever suggest that licit sex was in any way defiling. As for costs, while a married clergy might be financed, he believed that Catholic schools would have to close if nuns and brothers disappeared and lay teachers replaced them. In 1979, no longer editor, Bosler was finally ready to end celibacy in the Latin tradition, just as the Eastern Church united to Rome already had. Priests’ vows were not as binding as marriage vows, he argued--the latter is with God, the former a church-imposed discipline.²³⁷ He agreed with the reader who held that without celibacy the priesthood would be more attractive to young men. Even so, he still hedged: “Whether our Church should go in that direction is a subject I leave to others for discussion. I get into enough trouble just answering direct questions.”²³⁸

In his 1992 memoir, two years before his death, Msgr. Bosler admitted that there were times when he wished he had “a wife and children and grandchildren.” And he could “still be excited by the bouncing breasts of women” he passed on the street. If he were a young man now would he become a priest? “I do not know.” Marriage and family life were “good things” he had given up because he felt that his “fulfillment was to be in the celibate priesthood. I still feel that way.”²³⁹ Friendships with Protestant ministers, however, had shown him that it was possible to be fulfilled in marriage and priesthood at the same time. Bosler interpreted Vatican II’s shift on marriage from a license to have intercourse for procreation and to “allay lust” to a sacrament establishing a community of life best expressed through the marital act, as marking an advance in the Church’s understanding. Marriage was not simply a contract, but rather a covenant, a promise, a mutual giving. Priests and laity—all—were called to seek perfection. Bosler had come to see this as the principal reason for separating priesthood from mandatory celibacy.²⁴⁰

A few years after Bosler’s death, in preparation for the Roman Synod of 1997 and in view of the fact that many Catholics had no opportunity for Mass and Eucharist on Sunday, the bishops of North and South America requested a study of the situation. The idea was dropped and no study made, “lest it look like an opening for married priests.”²⁴¹ In 2014 and for the foreseeable future, that seems likely to be the last word.

²³⁷ Criterion, 9 March 1979, 4.

²³⁸ Criterion, 21 September 1979, 6.

²³⁹ New Wine, 15, 16.

²⁴⁰ Bosler, New Wine, 14-16.

²⁴¹ Thomas J. Reese, “The Synod Points Out Needs,” America (3 January 1998), 5.