

The Goal Two Working Group addresses these remarks to the members of the National Representative Council on the eve of the start of the polling process on our proposal .

This polling process will determine whether or not Voice of the Faithful will join its voice to that of many others, nationally and internationally, including laity, priests, and members of the hierarchy, in calling for an ecclesial review of mandatory celibacy as a condition of ordination to the diocesan priesthood in the Latin rite.

We extend our thanks for the overall manner in which the Representative Council has “processed” our proposal, which we understand is the first time a proposal has been vetted with the national membership. It has been a learning experience for all of us in that regard, and we hope the organization will be better because of this effort.

Below is our revised proposal statement, and attached are responses to concerns arising from the field distribution that seem to some to remain inadequately answered. But before moving to that document, we would like to say a few things about ourselves as the newly formed Working Group for Priest Support.

The majority of us are affiliate leaders from across the country. We accepted the invitation to become members of the Priest Support Working Group to build on the good work done by its founding members, and to collectively establish a more national focus on this important goal of Voice of the Faithful.

The main point we wish to make right now with you, as you prepare to vote on this proposal, is this.

The last thing many of us expected when we came together as a Working Group was to find ourselves believing, six months later, that issues affecting the priesthood, especially the issue of mandatory celibacy, would be central to the core mission of Voice of the Faithful and to essential reforms needed in the church. Mandatory celibacy, we now believe, affects not only ordained priests, for whom it is often a struggle, but inhibits many qualified persons from embracing the priesthood. It contributes to the culture of secrecy and elitism in church leadership, with consequent negative impacts on the faith community, not to mention the failure of leadership to provide a pastoral response to our survivor community.

Its effects are now being felt by faith communities in the United States : priest shortages, parish closings, Communion services in lieu of Mass, overworked and burned-out clergy, recruitment of clergy from foreign cultures, lack of consultation with laity, etc. The list goes on.

We believe strongly that it is critical that Voice of the Faithful, which positions itself as an international reform movement, go on record calling for an ecclesial review of mandatory celibacy, for the reasons cited above. It is the right thing to do, regardless of the likelihood that this call will not be heeded in the near future.

As a Working Group, we are committed to raising greater awareness of this issue and its effects within our faith community at large. We will do so in the context of conducting a nationwide exploration of the State of the Priesthood and its Ability to Meet the Needs of the Faith Community . We look forward to working with the Structural Change and Voice of Renewal Working Groups, who have offered to collaborate in this endeavor.

We are also committed to forming alliances with mainstream Catholic groups and associations, including priest associations at the diocesan and national levels. For example, Our Working Group will be managing the VOTF booth at the upcoming National Federation of Priests' Council conference on April 22-26 in St. Petersburg , FL.

As members of the Representative Council know, we have made revisions in our proposal based on feedback from the Mission and Goals Committee, the national officers, and the Structural Change Working Group. We believe this feedback was of value and established a more common ground for the approval of our proposal.

The following revision of our proposal statement is based upon feedback coming from the field distribution of the proposal, and the suggestions from some members of the NRC Steering Committee, again, to bring all of us to a more common ground for approval of this proposal.

REVISED PROPOSAL STATEMENT

The international organization of Catholic laity, Voice of the Faithful, calls upon the Holy See to conduct a serious, extensive, unbiased, ecclesial review, utilizing the insights of history, modern psychology, sociology, and pastoral practice, of the discipline of mandatory celibacy for diocesan priests of the Latin Rite. This call for a review would coincide with a nationwide educational effort, planned and implemented by the Priest Support Working Group, on the Current State of the Priesthood and its Ability to Meet the Needs of the Faith Community. The effort would include such topics as workload, morale, financial security, the impacts of mandated celibacy, justice for priests, pastoral practices, and the decline in vocations to the priesthood.

We understand this resolution to mean Voice of the Faithful will go on record calling for a review, inviting other groups and individuals to join us, and endorsing an educational effort (undertaken by our WG) to bring other groups and individuals to join us in this call.. When it is determined that we have established a substantial base of support outside our organization, Voice of the Faithful will submit a formal petition to Rome calling for such a review.

We re-iterate that this effort will be undertaken without allocation of national financial resources, and without disrupting or compromising current national initiatives addressing matters of financial and bishop accountability.

PROPOSAL SPONSORS

National Working Group for Priest Support

Svea Fraser	Boston , MA	Founding Chairperson
Clare Keane	Boston , MA	Charter Member
Jim Morrissey	Boston , MA	Charter Member
John Ryan	Bloomington , IL	Chairperson
Joan Bedosky	Long Island , NY	
Ann Gribbins	Long Island , NY	
John Dearie	Atlanta , GA	
Bill Farnon	Philadelphia , PA	
Bob Stewart	Washington , DC	
Suzanne Lynch	Tampa Bay, FL	
Dick Okenfuss	Cincinnati , OH	
Frances Hofmeister	Cincinnati , OH	
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Vince Taliercio	Denver, CO	
Bob Rowden	San Raphael , CA	
Ed Gleason,	San Francisco , CA	