

Crisis in the Priesthood:

Conversations About Celibacy

Sponsored by Priest Support National Working Group



Model 1 Study Guide Prepared by

The Voice of Renewal/Lay Education National Working Group

Model 1: Discussion for All Presentations on DVD

This model involves the use of the entire DVD (*Conversations About Celibacy: Crisis in the Priesthood*) of talks by Revs. Richard McBrien and Don Cozzens and by Prof. David O'Brien.

Session Options

The Study Guide provides topics for each presentation separately, so that you may select the format best suited for your affiliate or parish group. For example, you may view each talk in single sessions of about 90 minutes each, over a period of three meetings. Or you may use the DVD for three sessions on a day-long retreat. Or you may select one session to present “now” and save other sessions for later, after reviewing other books or presentations on the topics mentioned in the presentations. Or you may simply mix and match sessions to meet the needs, interests, or time constraints of your affiliate.

Session 1: Fr. Richard McBrien

(Notre Dame University Professor, Author, and Speaker)

A. View the DVD section of Fr. McBrien's opening speech

B. Reflection/discussion of McBrien's talk

1. *Problem—the scandals of sex-abuse by priests and cover-up by bishops*

- What was your experience and reaction on learning of sexual abuse by priests and cover-up by bishops?
- What lessons did you learn?

Solutions

- Laity should be involved in decision-making in the Church. Would this have made any difference in the scandal? How and why?
- Do you think obligatory celibacy has had a negative impact on the priesthood?
- *Other solutions?*

Session 2: Fr. Don Cozzens

(John Carroll University, Professor, Author, and Speaker)

A. View the DVD section of Fr. Cozzens' talk

B. Reflection/discussion on Cozzens' talk

1. *Problem—sex-abuse by priests and cover-up by bishops*

The church is always in need of reform and renewal. The laity have the right and duty to examine Church policies in light of current needs and core values of our traditions. (*Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II Council)

Solution (proposed by Fr. Cozzens):

- Review of clerical culture that spawned the current crisis
- Ecclesial review of the policy of mandatory celibacy for priests
- *Other solutions?*

2. *Problem—not enough priests to serve the Catholic population*

- More priests have left than remain in active ministry; 25% of priests, retired or sick, are unavailable to serve; median age of active priests is 65.
- Many are tired and overworked, eager for retirement.

Factors:

- Catholic population is at 67 million and growing.
- Seminary enrollment is declining.
- One-third of those ordained in 2008 are foreign-born, and many may not understand American culture, in much the same way that American missionaries struggle with host cultures.
- Deeper issues of identity, integrity, intimacy, loneliness are sapping energy.
- Priests are locked into a feudal system that requires loyalty of vassal priests to the “Lord Bishop.” Unfortunately, many of them don’t complain.

Solutions: (proposed by some bishops):

- Pray and recruit harder.
- Close parishes and create larger merged parishes.
- Assign multiple parishes to a priest.
- Recruit foreign-born priests.
- Ride out the “storm.”
- *Other solutions?*

3. *Problem: Eucharist or mandatory celibacy?*

Because there are too few priests to serve the Catholic population, the crisis in the Church now includes decreasing access to the Eucharist. The question that arises is: Should the discipline of mandatory celibacy take precedence over the central sacrament of the Eucharist as well as the sacrament of matrimony?

Factors:

- Mandatory priestly celibacy functions as a management control system.
- A feudal economic system awards dioceses and parishes to bishops and priests as a benefice over which they have dominion.
- A class system of entitlement and privilege are marks of the clerical culture.
- Theological statements that seem to elevate mandatory celibacy (a discipline) above marriage, which is a sacrament of the Church.

Solutions?

4. *Question (for parents): Would you encourage your son to enter the priesthood today? Why or why not?*

SESSION 3: David O'Brien

(Holy Cross College, Professor, Author, Speaker)

A. View the DVD section of David O'Brien's talk

B. Reflection/discussion of O'Brien's talk

The Problem: Crisis in the priesthood and the Church requires a prayerful and political response. We must form coalitions of priests and laity to seek the needed reforms. Bishops avoid serious review of causes and consequences of clerical sex-abuse. They also have seriously weakened the USCCB so each bishop is on his own. Priests have few mechanisms for collaboration or collegiality in seeking reforms. FPC has been weakened. Ignored by bishops, priests often feel as much outsiders as the laity.

Solutions:

- Priests need to organize themselves – strengthen presbyteral councils, NFPC, independent groups.
- Laity need to form partnerships with priests and lay organizations.
- VOTF needs to work with other church groups.
- Some needed actions: monitor Review Boards; review diocesan groups; use media; communicate the seriousness of our work to reform; recognize that the role of diocesan priests will rise or fall on our commitment to pastoral ministry.

Other solutions?

For comments or questions about this guide, please contact Bill Murphy at jbzmurphy@rcn.com.