

Crisis in the Priesthood:

Conversations About Celibacy

Sponsored by Priest Support National Working Group



Model 2 Study Guide Prepared by

The Voice of Renewal/Lay Education National Working Group

Model 2: Impact of Mandated Celibacy on Laity and Parishes

This model for discussing the DVD *Conversations About Celibacy: Crisis in the Priesthood* includes two sessions of 1.5 hours each. The first session focuses on the presentation by Fr. Don Cozzens from the DVD. The second considers the issue from the angle of the laity and what we need for thriving parish communities.

Goal of Model 2

To encourage conversation/discussion around the needs of the laity for a vibrant community (parish) life, including the Eucharist, and how the discipline of mandated celibacy for diocesan priests might impact this both now and in the future. As people come in, the participants should be given HANDOUT # 1 and encouraged to read it before the workshop begins.

Session 1

Format for Session

Moderator opens session with a prayer, plays a segment of the DVD, and then oversees “breakout sessions” where participants discuss the ideas generated by the DVD viewing.

Introduction and Prayer

Keep the Focus on Ourselves—What do we need to have thriving parishes? What are the connections between ourselves, our thriving faith, both personal and communal, and parish priesthood as we know it?

Moderator: Let us begin with a prayer from St. Theresa

*May today there be peace within.
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received,
And pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones
And allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.
It is there for each and every one of us.*

Moderator (continue the introduction):

We have a problem. We, the Christian community—laity, priests and hierarchy—have a problem. We are primarily Eucharistic communities/parishes. We need priests to be the celebrants of Eucharist and leaders of the community (ultimate power and authority in all facets of the community lie in his hands). A priest must be male and celibate for life (at least in the Roman Rite). The demographics of priesthood and parish life under this model indicate that we are in the midst of a crisis—there is a lack of priests. Let's take a look at a presentation by Fr. Donald Cozzens, where he lays out some of the parameters of the unfolding crisis.

Play the DVD segment (about 15 minutes) featuring Fr. Donald Cozzens

Discussion Theme

After showing the DVD segment, the Moderator sets the theme:

Keep the Focus on Ourselves—What do we need to have a thriving parish community? Do you have a thriving parish community now? And what role does the priest play in that process? Whether great or small, we believe it is too simplistic to say that all we need are married priests and the crisis will go away. The long and the short of it is this: There is no scriptural or theological basis for celibacy being mandatory or essential to the Eucharistic leader of a Christian community/parish.

We have provided you with HANDOUT #1 which we will discuss this evening. It will help us begin to understand how celibacy came to be mandatory for priesthood.

Although the call to change the discipline of mandatory celibacy rests with the hierarchy, it is our responsibility as baptized Catholics to better understand this aspect of Church life and how it impacts our faith communities and sacramental lives.

DISCUSSION OF HANDOUT # 1 in small groups (30 minutes)

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION & QUESTIONS (20 minutes)

Moderator can conclude the Large Group Discussion with a prayer and with a reminder about any follow-on sessions or studies planned for this topic.

Session 2

Format for Session

Moderator opens session with a prayer, describes the focus for the discussion, and then oversees “breakout sessions” and the large group discussion for the participants.

Introduction and Prayer

Keep the Focus on Ourselves: What do we need to have thriving parishes? If we take a totally different tack from Session 1, focusing not on the priest, but on ourselves and what we need as the Body of Christ, as God’s priestly people, we may discover some new insights into the question and maybe some new solutions

Moderator: Let us begin with a prayer from St. Theresa

*May today there be peace within.
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received,
And pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones
And allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.
It is there for each and every one of us.*

Moderator (continue the introduction for the small group session): In your small group discussion, which will last about 40 minutes total, take the first 10 minutes privately and individually to consider the following questions and to write your responses down, if you are so inclined. Then discuss the questions for 20 minutes and choose a person to transcribe your ideas to give a brief report to the large group at the end.

These are the questions to consider:

1. What do you need to have a “thriving” parish community? (Think of the parish in which you have felt most spiritually alive and what were the factors both inside yourself and outside which made this possible)?
2. Can you list and describe the roles, functions, and qualities that foster a thriving parish?
3. Where does Eucharist fit in?
4. Is celebrating the Eucharist the most important function of your parish priest? If so, why; if not, why not?

Small Group Discussion (20 minutes)

Large Group Feedback (10 minutes)

Discussion of Parish Models

Moderator: Distribute Handout #2 and allow 25 minutes to review and discuss the models. Use the following Introduction for this section:

We are influenced by the models we have in our minds about how parishes are organized. Usually these models are based on our own experiences as to what is or is not possible. Handout #2 lists nine parish models currently in place in the U.S. [*Briefly describe the nine models in the handout.*] I'd like each of you to look at the parish-models listed and then discuss the following two questions:

1. Which of these models (or combination thereof) would best facilitate your “thriving” parish community (the one you just discussed)? How and why?
2. Can you think of a model different from the nine in the handout? How and why would the different model work better?

DISCUSSION OF HANDOUT #2 IN SMALL GROUPS (25 minutes)

CONCLUSION (5 minutes): Wrap up with comments based on answers small groups gave to the two questions.

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