

Some Statistical Data and Studies to Consider Regarding the Current Crisis

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Number of Diocesan Priests to Serve the Laity

- ❑ The U.S. Catholic Church had 35,925 diocesan priests in 1965, and we had 27,971 priests in 2007. That is a decrease of 22%. Source for information is the **Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate**.
- ❑ The highly respected sociologist Dean Hoge reports that in 1950 there were 652 laity per priest. In 1965 the number was 778 laity per priest. In 2001 that number was 1,453 per priest. Since the 1980s, the number of priests has dropped 10% to 12 % per decade, and there were signs of a continuing decline in the years ahead, according to Hoge. But the U.S. Catholic population is increasing 1%0 to 12% per decade. So the number of priests is declining while the number of laity is growing, leading to the prediction that there will be fewer and fewer priests per 1,000 Catholics in America in the future. Source for information is Dean Hoge's June 15, 2005, presentation at Boston College—*The Current State of the Priesthood: Sociological Survey*.

Number of Seminarians

- ❑ The U.S. had 8,325 graduate-level seminarians in 1965 but only 3,274 in 2007. That is a decrease of 44% in graduate-level seminary students in little more than 40 years. Source for information is the **Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate**.

Aging Clergy

- ❑ Regarding the issue of aging diocesan clergy, Dean Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wengerreport provided the following information from a 2001 survey: The mean age for clergy in this survey was 59 years. Those aged 70 years or older constituted 26%; ages 60-69 were 23% of the total; ages 50-59 equaled 26%; ages 40-49 were 16%; and ages 39 or younger numbered 10%. Therefore, priests age 50 or older make up 75% of the Catholic clergy. Source for this information is *Evolving Vision of the Priesthood* by Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger.

Problems Encountered by Diocesan Clergy

- ❑ The top 6 issues cited as “a great problem to me personally” for diocesan priests are: 1) the way authority is exercised in the Church: 23%; 2) too much work: 19%; 3) unrealistic

demands and expectations of lay people: 16%; 4) loneliness of priestly life: 14%; 5) being expected to represent church teaching I have difficulty with: 12%; 6) uncertainty about the future of the Church: 10% . Source for information is *Evolving Vision of the Priesthood* by Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger.

- ❑ However, Dean Hoge, in his talk at Boston College on June 15, 2005, says that “repeated laments about low priestly morale” have not been supported by research. He notes: “The level of happiness is fairly high. In 2001, 88 percent said that they would choose the priesthood again, and only 5 percent reported that they were thinking of leaving the priesthood. In a *Los Angeles Times* survey in 2002, 90 percent said that they would choose the priesthood again... Since 2001 it is probable that the sexual abuse crisis of 2002-2004 has depressed priestly morale, judging from reports I have heard. Nobody knows how much.” Source for information is from Dean Hoge’s June 15, 2005 presentation at Boston College—*The Current State of the Priesthood: Sociological Survey*.
- ❑ In addition to Dean Hoge’s report, sociologist and priest Andrew Greeley notes that priests “score higher on measures of satisfaction than do doctors, lawyers, faculty members, and Protestant ministers.” Greeley notes 92 percent said that they “would choose priesthood again.” Regarding those satisfied with the priesthood, 93 percent said they were satisfied. The stats are slightly different from what Dean Hoge notes, but not much. Source for information is from *Priests—A Calling in Crisis* by Andrew Greeley.
- ❑ A survey by the Rev. James Hamel that was published in a NFPC document in March 2000, reported the following: 75% of American priests do not believe the church is addressing their concerns; 49% dislike rectory living; 77% believe rectories should be done away with; 63% question mandatory celibacy; 56% are dissatisfied with their overall compensation and benefits; 69% believe they are underpaid; 58% favor a graduated pay scale (based on years of service, merit, etc.), 75% want a pay raise; 84% want greater input in choosing their pastoral assignments. Source for information is from *What Issues Affect the Morale in the Priesthood?* by James Hamel.

The impact of mandatory celibacy on priestly vocations and ministry looms large as an inescapable question. While honoring celibacy as a charism freely chosen, theologians and church historians offer convincing evidence that the roots of the Church’s policy of mandatory celibacy lay not in the apostolic tradition and practice but in the culture of pagan Rome and its cultic priesthood. This is a theological and historical issue that has been documented by Edward Schillebeeckx, Donald Cozzens and others.

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