



October 16, 2008

Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, OFM Cap
Chair: Bishops' Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations
2121 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02135-3193

Dear Cardinal Sean,

Thank you for your acknowledgment of our recent letter requesting that you pursue the prospects of conducting an ecclesial review of mandatory celibacy for diocesan priests. We appreciate your deep commitment, as Chair of the USCCB Bishops' Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, to ensure there will be sufficient numbers of young men who have a calling to the priesthood to respond positively to that call.

We are encouraged to hear there has been a significant increase in your Boston seminary enrollment over the past two years. We too pray that more men will generously respond to the Lord's call to service as priests. Yet your response leaves us still with some questions.

Against the backdrop of a rapidly growing Catholic population (12 percent increase per year), and knowing that some dioceses have not had an ordination for years, we question if what is happening in the Archdiocese of Boston is being replicated across the 180 dioceses of the U.S.

We also wonder if the Archdiocese of Boston's projections on the number of diocesan priests who will be in service in 5, 10, and 15 years will be sufficient to address the sacramental and ministerial needs of the faith community.

We are encouraged by the emergence of a genuine lay ministry, as was in full evidence at the National Ministry summit in Orlando, FL this past April. We were privileged to observe some of the best and the brightest of our laity, and dedicated religious, who have come forward to assist in addressing the sacramental and ministerial needs of the faith community in these most challenging of times.

Our concern, however, is that these good people are being asked to address a need that may be well beyond their capacity to address. We continue to be concerned that the overall strategy adopted by the bishops is one of scaling back rather than building up the church's ability to meet the needs of a growing faith community.

We simply do not see how parish closures, substituting communion services for the Eucharistic celebration, asking an aging priesthood to take on the challenges of pastoring

multiple parishes, recruiting non-native priests (who now account for up to 25 percent of all diocesan priests and one-third of our seminarians), and a hoped for significant increase in seminary enrollments, is the answer.

We are saddened that you did not address specifically our request for a review of mandatory celibacy. In view of increasing evidence that mandatory celibacy is a key reason for the decline in vocations to the priesthood (see attached), we are perplexed by the unwillingness of our own church leadership to consider calling for a review of this 800-year-old church discipline.

We stand to be enlightened on these matters, and look forward to your response.

Respectfully,



Dan Bartley, President, Voice of the Faithful



John Ryan, Chair, National Working Group for Priest Support, Voice of the Faithful

cc: CCLV Committee Members