



Association of Pittsburgh Priests • Box 2106 • Pittsburgh, PA 15230

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A Call to Pope Benedict XVI during “The Year of the Priest”

As “The Year of the Priest” is drawing to a close in mid June, the Association of Pittsburgh Priests has issued a Call to Pope Benedict XVI asking him to take the lead in renewing the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church. The call is to renew the priesthood by making it available to all without regard to gender, marital status or sexual orientation. “We seek in this passing Year of the Priest to speak a prophetic voice for inclusion in order to build up and nurture the people of God for years to come,” explained Rev. Donald Fisher, one of the spokespersons for the Association of Pittsburgh Priests.

The text of the Call to Pope Benedict XVI is attached. For more information, call (412)481-1403 or (412)915-9435.

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Mission Statement: The Association of Pittsburgh Priests is a diocesan-wide organization of ordained and non-ordained women and men who act on our baptismal call to be priests and prophets. Our mission is to carry out a ministry of justice and renewal, rooted in the Gospel and Spirit of Vatican II, in ourselves, the Church and the world.



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June 2, 2010

A Call to Pope Benedict XVI

On the occasion of the Year of the Priest which ends in June 2010, we, The Association of Pittsburgh Priests, make a special call upon you to take the lead in renewing the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church.

Our cumulative experiences of priesthood throughout these years since Vatican II; our familiarity with countless and varied aspects of parish life; our collaborative efforts with the many religious communities of men and women; our long history of working with the Diocese of Pittsburgh Pennsylvania; and our being part of, and working with, many local, regional and national groups whose missions are renewal in the Church and justice and peace to our world gives us, we feel, a clear vantage point from which to offer our insights and to make this call.

The richness of our call to you is seen not only in the timing (i.e. The Year of the Priest) but in the specifics. Our call is to renew the priesthood by making it available to all without regard to gender, marital status or sexual orientation. Implicit in the term "all" is all who sense in their deepest selves this particular vocation, all who commit themselves to prescribed studies and other preparatory work and all who willingly submit themselves to acquiring the necessary certifications and approvals of those acting in the name of the Roman Catholic Church.

When we state that ordination to the priesthood be offered without regard to gender we are, of course, speaking about the ordination of women which is long overdue in the Catholic Church.

The scriptural support for banning women from ordination is no longer as compelling as it once was and justifying such with the use of the bible is impossible. This was not only stated clearly years ago by the Catholic Biblical Society, but by many reputable Church scholars since that time.

The traditional/historic argument for the ban on women has had so many notable pastoral exceptions throughout the history of the Church that "priesthood for men only" can no longer be seen as our constant unbroken tradition. Witness the plethora of research and writing suggesting that many of the leaders of our early "house churches" were women and, in some cases, priests. Witness, too, the testimonies that certain women saints may

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have been priests. Much of the power and grace of our Church during the time of its "underground experience" in Czechoslovakia during the Iron Curtain days was due to the charisms of women priests, one of whom was Vicar General of the Diocese in this unique pastoral experiment.

We have a deeper understanding now of the dignity and equality of women than when we first formed our ideas about priesthood. Indeed, in the United States women could not even vote until the early part of the twentieth century.

We also have a heightened appreciation of the many creative contributions of women to the Church and society which we love and of which we are a part. An exemplary list of the contributions by women religious to the history of our country from its very founding was entered into The Congressional Record by the House of Representatives in September, 2009.

We also believe that the priesthood should be offered without regard to marital status. Married priests who want to return to the active ministry should be invited back. We feel certain that an orderly process for their return could be devised, that the changes necessary for making them feel welcome could be made and that the experiences of their married lives would be gifts brought to the priesthood. Celibacy is a precious charism for those who are called to it. Marriage, too, is a precious charism. Both can serve the priesthood well.

The intrinsic linking of celibacy and priesthood on the one hand and the insistence that marriage be totally separated from the priesthood on the other has been, in both our experience and our view, more harmful than helpful to the vitality of our Church. We feel that a Church filled with married priests and single/celibate priests would go a long way toward restoring some of this vitality.

Even with respect to our Church's teaching it becomes increasingly more difficult to insist that celibate priesthood is the only way to be a priest given realities such as the long experience of married priesthood in Eastern Rite churches and the recent welcoming of Episcopal priests into the Roman Catholic Church.

In addition to women and married men, we believe that sexual orientation should no longer be seen as an impediment to priesthood, which in truth it has not been because of the Church's long-standing practice of "don't ask; don't tell."

In a certain sense, the growth and development of the human person can be described as a history of a gradual shedding of prejudices. This "shedding" is usually accompanied by a huge amount of personal and collective guilt when we finally see the great violence

caused by such prejudice and recognize how late we were in opening our eyes to our part in fostering and maintaining it. Then comes the personal and collective honoring of certain heroic pioneers who railed against and worked to root out the prejudice. Finally, the ever so slow plodding as we attempt to "blaze a new trail" filled with more understanding, tolerance and love.

In an effort to urge our Church to honestly face its prejudice toward gay people, to plead for her to open her eyes to the harm caused by this prejudice and to encourage her to be more daring and brave in "blazing the new trail," we of the Association of Pittsburgh Priests call upon you to recognize and celebrate the gifts which gay people bring to the Church, and to encourage them to continue to exercise these gifts. It is our hope that being gay will be viewed as an asset and not an impediment to priesthood.

In this, the Year of the Priest, we are as touched as anyone in the Church of Pittsburgh by the various devotional practices and invitations to prayer and worship that have characterized this special year. Yet we feel compelled to add our remarks about the priesthood -- to add "another piece" to the celebration, a piece which calls for deep structural change.

The priesthood as we have known it has been a source of many blessings in our lives. It has, in all its "give and take" brought much joy along with a healthy measure of unique struggles and problems. We rejoice in its abundant grace and in the gift that it is. We also see, however, that it is not only a "temple" but also a "vessel of clay," one whose beauty we do not want to see marred by the various forms of exclusion which we have heretofore mentioned.

Dear Pope Benedict, we hope you will receive this call which we make and these thoughts and feelings which we share in the same spirit in which they were forged: love for the priesthood, love for our Church and hope for the days ahead.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Priest,

The Association of Pittsburgh Priests