

A Married Priest in the Diocese of Peoria

News is – Our diocese is going to have a married priest. Actually, we already have married priests. I was ordained with one, a widower with six children, his name is Father Gerald Meyers.

But the married man who is going to be ordained on May 24th is Doug Grandon, our Diocesan Director of Catechetics, who has a wife and children, all living. He is being ordained under a special provision granted by Pope John Paul II in 1980 for Anglican or Episcopalian clergy, to encourage reunion with the Catholic Church. Doug Grandon served as an Episcopal minister for a time in the Quad Cities and decided to convert and enter the Catholic Church.

This provision is not a precedent for future married priests. It is an extraordinary accommodation granted to clergy in the Protestant Episcopal and Anglican tradition, offered as an invitation to enter into communion with the Catholic Church. Many Episcopalians and Anglicans began soul-searching in light of their leadership's decision to ordain women some years ago, and even more today in light of the recent decision to consecrate a man as bishop who had divorced his wife and entered into an active homosexual relationship. These actions are causing division and shaking the faith of many since they are in obvious contradiction to Sacred Scripture and Church Tradition. They are asking, "Where can we turn?" The Catholic Church is inviting them and making a place for them through this provision so that they can have hope of living the fullness of faith.

The Anglican and Episcopal tradition began when Henry VIII of England broke with the Catholic Church in the 1530's. England went through a tumultuous period of religious allegiances and persecutions. In the late 1500's Queen Elizabeth I established a Protestant religious comprise which maintained separation from the Catholic Church and opposition and rejection of some of the Church's central doctrines, for example: the Sacrifice of the Mass, the priesthood, the primacy of the Pope, and a number of the Sacraments. The 39 Articles, usually found in the Anglican or Episcopalian Book of Common Prayer, define the central elements of their belief.

In the early 19th Century, a group of English clergy began the Oxford Movement. This represented a re-examination of the Anglican tradition in relation to the very origins of Christianity and the Catholic Church. Some Anglicans and Episcopalians began to adopt the outer trappings and rituals of Catholic worship. Their churches could look indistinguishable from a Catholic church, and they began to offer "Mass", to call their ministers "priests", and some began the practice of going to Confession. There were some who even began religious orders of monks and nuns. But it was the outer trappings without the true essence.

John Henry Newman was a leader and at the forefront of the movement. He began to write a series of tracts on the Church. He studied the Church Fathers, those bishops, priests, and writers of the first seven centuries of the Church. In the course of his

historical studies and tracts or articles, he began to see that the Anglican claim to be an independent branch of the Catholic Church was not true. The Protestant Reformation in England had broken with the Apostolic Tradition and the pope - and had rejected doctrines central to the Faith. Therefore, they did not have true orders or priests, nor were many of their Sacraments valid or true - and so there was not a true Eucharist. Cardinal Newman left the Anglicans, and his conversion to Catholicism and subsequent ordination to the priesthood was a great shock. Others followed based on what Cardinal Newman had discovered.

In our own time, Cardinal Newman's writings have still convinced others to enter the Catholic Church, Doug Grandon among them. Pope Leo XIII investigated Anglican and Episcopal claims to have valid orders (i.e. bishops and priests) and a valid Eucharist, but found that the rejection of central truths of the faith and invalid consecrations of clergy under Elizabeth's reign negated such claims.

Since over time the Anglican/Episcopalian tradition has moved toward the Catholic Church in its rituals and practices, and has dialogued with the Church, especially since the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II wanted to accommodate them as far as he could for the sake of reunion. This accommodation is not a call to having a married clergy throughout the Catholic Church. If a married minister does get ordained as a priest in the Catholic Church, he may not remarry if his spouse dies, nor may his sons be able to marry and then be ordained. This accommodation simply lasts as long as the minister who converts and is ordained is alive. So far, since 1980, there are nearly one hundred married ministers who have entered the Catholic Church and been ordained. (One of my seminary professors was a married Anglican minister who converted and has since been ordained to the Catholic priesthood.)

So we welcome Doug Grandon to the Church and now to service as a priest. May his ordination be a sign to those in the Anglican and Episcopal tradition that there is a place for them in the Catholic Church.

Doug Grandon fully agrees with the truth that celibacy is still the sign of total commitment to Christ and His Church. It is recommended by St. Paul for those who will serve the Church and her members wholeheartedly (I Corinthians 7:32-33) and it was practiced by the Apostles, the first Bishops and priests (Luke 18:28-30). It is gift and grace from God that a man is able to dedicate his life wholeheartedly in the priesthood to the service of Christ and the people in the life of the Church. Doug Grandon will be challenged in that dedication between the needs of family and the Church. May he be blessed in his service to God's family!