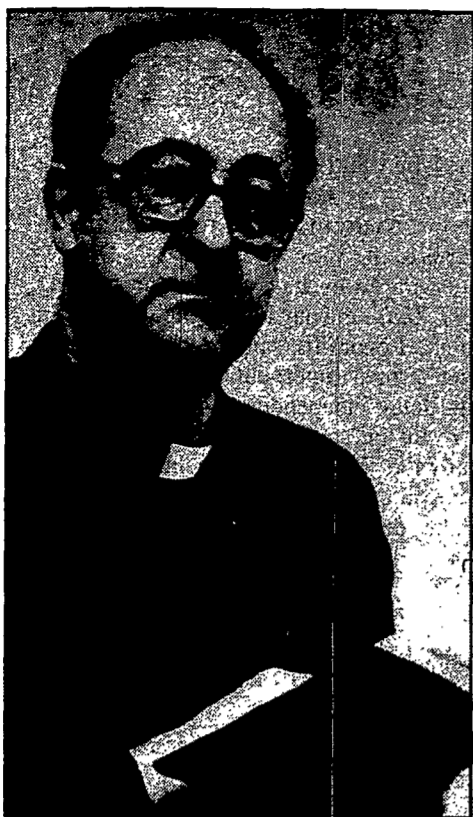


Prelate: Married priest one option



AP/Wide World Photos
Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee said Jan. 8 that he would consider seeking Vatican permission to ordain married men if they were the only candidates to serve vital parishes.

By Ethel Gintoft
Catholic News Service

MILWAUKEE — In a draft pastoral sent to his priests, Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee said that in order to meet the eucharistic needs of Catholics in areas running short of priests, he "would be willing" to consider ordaining a married man.

He stressed that he would seek papal clearance and would consider the possibility only for a priestless community of proven faith.

"I see at this moment no other way out of this very difficult situation. ... I see no other solution," the archbishop wrote.

He sent the 24-page draft document, entitled "Facing the Future with Hope," to all priests of the archdiocese Jan. 7. In a cover letter he asked them to submit their comments to the Archdiocesan Council of Priests.

Lay people are being consulted on the proposed pastoral through the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council.

In the draft statement, Archbishop Weakland proposed that if a priestless Catholic community met certain conditions of faith and vitality, "I would be willing to help the community surface a qualified

candidate for ordained priesthood — even if a married man."

"Without raising false expectations or unfounded hopes for him or the community," the archbishop added that he would "present such a candidate" to the pope for "light and guidance."

"In such a case we would have done all possible at the local level and could feel that we had been responsible stewards of God's goods and graces," he wrote.

Although his proposal to consider seriously the possibility of ordaining married men was only one point near the end of a document dealing with comprehensive planning for the changing needs of the Milwaukee archdiocese in the coming years, it was almost certain to draw the most attention and discussion.

Last fall Pope John Paul II strongly reaffirmed mandatory celibacy for priests of the Latin rite and said the issue was not open to debate at the world Synod of Bishops, which met last October to discuss priestly formation.

While the U.S. Catholic population has grown from 48 million to more than 57 million during the last 20 years, the number of priests has dropped from about 59,000 to 53,000.

If only active diocesan priests are counted, the ratio of U.S. Catholic parishioners to priests has risen from 750-1 in the mid-1960s to 2,000-1 today, and it is expected to reach more than 3,000-1 by the year 2005.

Archbishop Weakland said that as the priest shortage grows, "we are worried about two things: the vitality of our faith communities and the health of those priests who will have to serve larger numbers of faithful with fewer hands. ... There are essential elements of our life that cannot be present without the presence of the priesthood."

The archbishop noted that the current practice in parishes without priests is for deacons or lay people to preside over Sunday-Liturgies of the Word. This practice, he said, "is not traditional in the Catholic Church."

"If it were to last for many years — even a generation — I do not see how the Catholic identity could be maintained," he

wrote. "We would become a different kind of church that would not be based on gathering around the eucharistic sacrifice."

"We are a eucharistic church. ... We are a sacramental church," he said. "We are not true to our Catholic identity if we minimize the importance of word and sacrament, celebrated in common."

He set stringent criteria for considering the possibility of ordaining a married lay leader of a priestless community. Such a parish, he said, would be one that:

- "Remains faithful in assembling each Sunday for the Liturgy of the Word," despite its lack of a priest and a regular eucharistic liturgy.

- Retains "worship and a sacramental perspective that is a part of their theology and practice whenever possible, education at all levels, and outreach to the needy."

- Has "an active vocation program for the celibate priesthood."

- Is likely to remain priestless "for many years, perhaps into the next decade."

He stressed the need to plan and act "in union with the whole church and its universal pastor, Pope John Paul II."

He also emphasized the provisional nature of the draft text. "I want to feel free to change, deepen or abandon some of these ideas after further reflection and after consultation in the whole diocese," he said.

He told his priests the draft text would be published Jan. 10 in *The Catholic Herald*, Milwaukee archdiocesan newspaper.

Archbishop Weakland said he hopes to rewrite the document in about six months, after studying responses from his priests and people.

To help readers reflect on the issues he raised, he presented a series of questions at the end of each of the document's three sections.

Issues he dealt with included development of lay ministries and the role of deacons in parishes; criteria for making decisions about preserving, closing, merging or consolidating parishes; and changes in the role of priests when they are placed in charge of two or three parishes instead of just one.



AP/Wide World Photos
Two alleged Tonton Macoutes were killed Jan. 7 and their bodies burned and laid in the street next to the headquarters of coup leader Roger LaFontant in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. LaFontant attempt to take over the Haitian government was crushed by the army after 12 hours.

Haitian leader deploras violence against Vatican diplomat, church

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Haiti's president-elect, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, said he was saddened by the destruction of church property and the wounding of a Vatican diplomat by rioting crowds angered at a coup attempt by Duvalierists.

"It was a hideous spectacle," Father Aristide said in a taped message from his hiding place. The priest was expelled from the Salesian order for his political activity.

Father Aristide has been in hiding since Jan. 6 when a former interior minister, Roger Lafontant, tried to take the reins of government by force. Lafontant reportedly had sent a military unit to hunt the priest down.

The coup, which lasted 12 hours, was crushed by the army on Jan. 7, and Lafontant was imprisoned. But angry crowds destroyed Catholic Church buildings in Haiti's capital, humiliated the papal nuncio, reportedly inflicted serious wounds on his aide and sent the country's top churchman scurrying into hiding.

In his message on Haitian radio, Father Aristide said he felt "great sadness" about the incidents.

A Haitian human-rights activist said the attacks on church property and persons were directed against Archbishop Francois-Wolff Ligonde of Port-au-Prince, who

is seen by many Haitians as a collaborator with the Duvalier family dictatorship.

The violence "has to do with Ligonde personally," Fritz Longchamp of the Washington Office on Haiti said Jan. 9. The attacks were not aimed at the Catholic Church in general.

Longchamp said he believes the Vatican must remove Archbishop Ligonde from his see if it is to have "a standing in Haiti."


Longchamp added that only one of Haiti's bishops, Bishop Willy Romelus of Jeremie, has any credibility among average Haitians as a supporter of democracy.

In a series of attacks Jan. 7, Haitian crowds:

- burned the Vatican nunciature;
- forced the papal nuncio, Archbishop Giuseppe Leanza, into the street and stripped him to his undershorts;
- reportedly wounded Archbishop Leanza's secretary, Father Leon Badikebele Kalenga;
- and burned down the headquarters of the Haitian bishops' conference, Archbishop Ligonde's residence and a 387-year-old cathedral said to be the Caribbean's oldest.


Archbishop Leanza was said to be in hiding along with his secretary, Father

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by William Mastro Simone



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