



Pastoral Recommendations Project  
By the baptized - For the baptized

## **Fostering Personal Growth and Community Health**

Our recent history with child sexual abuse by clergy has suggested to some that the systemic issues of clericalism, chauvinism and mandatory celibacy might be involved, in addition to the lack of psychological development in some priests. These issues point to our need for personal growth and community health.

The Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Church in the Modern World recommended that we, as a church, should welcome the contributions of science to our life as Christians:

In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith. (Church in the Modern World #62)

The Council also stated that "...the church has always the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel." (Church in the Modern World #4)

We all need to catch up to the Council by becoming competent adults in the modern world in light of scientific contributions of our time and the development of our consciences.

For a while after the Council personal growth and community health were given greater attention by the church. In recent years this seems to be less so.

Our recommendations include the following issues:

1. Equality of persons, ministers and ministries
2. A paradigm shift in our approach to sexuality
3. Inclusivity issues
4. Youth issues
5. Family and parenting issues
6. The establishment of offices to serve our increasing number of seniors
7. The issues of single persons.

## **1. EQUALITY**

Clericalism is the overestimation of the role of the clergy in relation to the laity. Chauvinism is the overestimation of the role of men in relation to women. Valuing one minority over another, one gender over another, one nationality over another all offend equality. In each of these cases an artificial power differential is created between one group and another which discourages genuine relationships, honest communication and real cooperation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Achieve as great an equality as possible in our church and ministry in each of the following area: one ministry to another, one life style to another, one gender to another.
- Achieve equality of resources, of voices, of status, and of power.
- Strive to value each person as equal to another.
- Legitimate differences can be appreciated, but discourage valuing one person, position, ministry, opinion over another.

## **2. SEXUALITY**

Value human sexuality positively. It is often warned against and treated as a moral challenge. Offer institutional support to sexuality as a natural and positive part of the human condition. Treasure the creativity which sexuality introduces into human relationships. We are in a stage of human development where a paradigm shift can take place with regard to our sexuality. This even in a time when sexuality is exploited. All human contact is sexual in a general sense. It is what brings us together. It makes us social.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Strive to value sexual education as a lifelong endeavor through childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
- Present sexuality as a creative gift, a just sharing, a positive value in life.
- Establish that asexuality, pornography, exploitation, and abuse degrade the gift of sexuality.
- Identify and value each person's sexual rights as a mark of the justice we owe to each other.
- Value celibacy if it is assumed voluntarily and as an optional life style.
- Celibacy is a foregoing of parenthood and marriage, not just of genital sexuality.  
Celibacy should not be valued over other life choices.
- See marriage as having two ends: love and procreation.

### **3. INCLUSIVITY**

The dignity of the human person and the wholesome welcome of each person into human community, especially the religious community, contribute to personal health and community growth.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Eliminate discrimination, prejudice, bullying, cliquishness, and other injustices, especially in the church community.
- Secure a designated pastoral ombudsperson in each community, especially in parishes and schools. Allow this person to be available to listen for and address concerns about violations of the human dignity of each member and of newcomers.
- Include gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the life of our communities.

### **4. YOUTH**

Youth is often a fragile time in each person's development. The passage from adolescence to adulthood is smooth for many, but hazardous for others. Protection of the very young, so often violated even in church communities, can have long lasting benefits for the young. Absent these protections, child abuse is devastating. Some clergy have violated the inner worlds of young victims.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS;

- The church's first concern in issues of abuse is the lives of children, not the status of the clergy or the diocese.
- Give genuine assistance to the advocacy of the rights and development of young people especially in schools and families.
- Small supportive communities for youth in parishes and schools are valuable.
- Support and value youth's choice of and contribution to the community.
- With the assistance of the medical community, address the sexual concerns of youth.

## **5. FAMILIES**

Family and parenting issues are a primary concern in the development of personal health and communal growth. Families are the natural building blocks of community and the surest educators of children as persons of maturity and faith.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Mental health services and support systems are essential in the normal course of family life and even more important when families are dealing with challenges such as autism and other disabilities.
- Family to family and parent to parent support must be seen as resources and encouraged.
- Be aware of and responsive to the varieties of expressions of family life in our culture, i.e. single, blended, gay, lesbian, and traditional.
- Develop ministry to address the concerns of those Catholics who think that the church's doctrine is no longer tenable, is outdated, and is psychologically harmful.

## **6. AGING**

The demographics of our aging population as a church and a nation cannot be ignored. As we live longer, our finances, our health and our relationships are under stress. Long term planning is needed but neglected. Future generations seem to be less well off financially than the preceding ones. Each has lower rates of homeownership and investing. Exercise is essential to personal health, but it is less likely that the aging will continue good habits of exercise with the passing years. Our mobile and global society tends to separate friends, neighbors and families. The Alzheimer's epidemic is expanding as we age. Smaller families allow fewer relationships to survive over the years and distances.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- As a church we need ministry to the aging in each parish and community.
- Encourage intergenerational activities.
- Encourage clubs for seniors
- Family, neighborhood, and friendship relationships need to be valued across distances, time and age.

## **7. SINGLES**

Single persons outnumber all other demographic groups, if we include: youth, religious, persons choosing a single life style and those who have lost their spouses. Yet more attention is given to family issues than to the concerns of single folks. This might be especially true in parish or diocesan circles where the emphasis on family life is so strong. Singles can feel left out of our church communities.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Foster ministry to singles as well as to families with resources and support systems.
- Ensure that singles are represented on our consultative bodies so their issues can be raised and addressed.
- Encourage singles clubs.

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