

The Church, Communities and Ministries

After almost 40 years of a shared journey (7 International congresses, 7 Latin American congresses and many others at the national level) **The International Movement of Married Priests** in its current configuration, that is the *Latin American Federation and the European Federation*, after having come together at a congress in Guadarrama (Madrid, Spain) on the theme of priests in adult communities, decided to publish this communication.

To All The People of God

We have just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the closure of Vatican 11. The hopes and promises sown by that historic event have inspired us to offer one more time our experience and our reflection in as much as we are an ecclesial movement and members of the universal community of believers in Jesus of Nazareth.

Originally our concern was to reclaim optional celibacy for the priests of the Western Catholic Church – a freedom which ought to be recognised and respected not only because it is a human right but even more because the choice (and not the imposition) is more faithful to the liberating message of Jesus and the thousand year practice of the churches, and in this fashion to be related to the right of the communities to have ministers in line with their needs, a right which is insufficiently satisfied today.

However, our journey as a group has enlarged that initial perspective – focussed around the question of celibacy – to aspire to and advance towards a model of priesthood which is non clerical and a type of church not rigidly established on a priesthood which is exclusively male, celibate and clerical.

Throughout these long years, which today arrive at this declaration, we have in simplicity and fidelity been integrated with and committed to many community groups, searching to give a Christian meaning to our lives and to help those we encountered on the way to discover their dignity as human beings and as children of our Father/Mother God.

Based on these commitments we venture to declare the following.

1. We are convinced – and in this we are in agreement with other communities and movements in the church, whether parish communities or others – that the principal dominating model of the church is obsolete. Also that, instead of helping the realisation of the kingdom of God and its justice, it is frequently an obstacle to living out gospel values. **A new type of church community is urgently required** in order to be able to make a sound contribution when confronted with the challenges that humanity faces today.

2. The axis of this new model of church ought to be the community, the community life of those believing in Jesus. Without these living groups who share their life and their faith, who attempt to discover the kingdom of God and to live it out there is no church. Moreover we cannot ignore the fact that parish structures in a great percentage of cases are dispensers of religious and cultic services rather than living communities.
3. For the renewal of the church and the communities of believers in the direction of an actively communitarian model of the people of God there is required structural change – merely personal efforts are not sufficient. There is the inertia of centuries (The Vatican State, the Curia, laws, traditions....) which acts like a dead weight and impedes any progressive reform.
4. Our journey has allowed us to experience and understand that the driving force of this transformation is to be found in the interior of these same communities – only adult, mature communities can bring to success this necessary and urgent structural transformation. The actual structures – above all centred on the parish and the cult – can do no more than perpetuate immobility and adopt formal changes without getting down to fundamentals.
5. Moreover, we have understood and learned by experience that the priests – celibate or not because that is not the question here - cannot go on concentrating everything in their own persons and taking on all the tasks and responsibilities. Their very identity and the quality of their service demand an evolution towards greater participation and towards a plurality of models in terms of and in dependence on actual communities.
6. These adult communities already exist. They are sometimes ignored or persecuted – they must be encouraged. They are small groups of no great size whose members know each other face to face, who share, who live out the concept of equality, co-responsibility, brotherhood and sisterhood. We must keep striving for this style of community, perfectly acceptable in the context of a variety of church models.
7. Their mature and adult status allows them to adapt to the cultural needs of our changing world, to live and formulate the faith in a comprehensible language and form and to organise themselves internally according to what they require. These communities are free to exercise the freedom of the children of God. They do not live anchored in the past. Their reference point is not obedience but rather the creativity coming from their faith. As a result they find understanding in our societies.
8. From the same perspective one can draw conclusions more and more about the contradictory and unjust situation of the women – the majority group in the life of the church but traditionally kept out of the tasks of study, responsibility and government. There does not exist any foundation for maintaining this discrimination which, moreover, takes for granted the loss of an irreplaceable human potential.

One could at the same time reasonably hope that their presence would change the leadership and governing structures for the better – more just and more balanced.

9. Finally it is necessary to acknowledge the right of these communities to choose and entrust the tasks, services and ministries to the people they consider to be better prepared and adequate for each task without distinction of sex or status. May they in this form continue to be open and inclusive communities as a result of their plurality and mutual respect.

We have encountered and participated in communities of this type. They are not an illusion but a reality in spite of their deficiencies and difficulties. We are determined to continue striving that each day they may be more numerous and authentic. This enterprise is not easy. We are conscious of the problematic nature of our enterprise: at times it borders on the illegal – however, not out of a whim nor in an arbitrary fashion. We know that frequently life goes far beyond the legal norm and that the Spirit is not subject to the law.

We believe that present day challenges oblige us to open up path ways in this little explored domain, to be creative, to recognise and encourage the central role of the communities and thus to realise the intuitions of Vatican II (fraternal and sisterly life, solidarity, ecumenical, committed to peace and justice with all men and women of good will.....) intuitions which awakened so much hope, which then were rejected as dangerous and which now, with the arrival of Pope Francis, have recovered their place and found their relevance in our church.

We invite all believers in Jesus Christ to show courage and enter these pathways of creativity, adulthood and liberty in order each day to make more real the Gospel of mercy and of responsibility for human beings and our mother, the earth.

6th January 2016