

# United in Spirit: *OFE Newsletter*

*Abbey of Saint Mary Theotokos, Inc.  
Order of Franciscans Ecumenical (OFE)  
Order of Franciscans Culdee (OFC)  
Order of Franciscans Ecumenical Secular (OFES)  
Sanctification of Families Union of Saint Francis*

Dear OFE Family and Friends,  
Welcome to the fifth issue of *United in Spirit*.

The OFE has experienced many changes in recent times:

- Reverend Father W.W. Augustus Dikushan Fernando became a professed Franciscan Friar and Brother of the Order of Franciscans Ecumenical.
- The Very Reverend Father Archdeacon John F. Demeis, OFES, was awarded the Staten Island Council of Churches Service Award at their annual awards dinner in Staten Island, New York, USA.
- Reverend Father Rouville M. Fisher, III, became a professed Franciscan Friar and Brother of the Order of Franciscans Ecumenical.
- Reverend Father Terence M. McDonough became a professed Franciscan Friar and Brother of the Order of Franciscans Ecumenical. He is the founder and Abbot of Our Lady of Knock Abbey. The OFE has formed an ecclesiastical affiliation with the Abbey.
- Abbot Bill T. Sullivan, OSM, accepted a position on the Advisory Board as spiritual guide to the Order of Franciscans Culdee (OFC).
- OFE has established the Theotokos Association of Catholic Priests (TACP) for ordained and non-ordained men and women who advocate for married Roman Catholic

priesthood with prayer, time, talent, wisdom, encouragement, and treasure.

- There is now a third ecclesiastic affiliation (charter); it is with the Hermitage of Saint Tekakwitha in Virginia, USA. The hermitage is under the administration of Hermits of Divine Mercy. Abbot Father Michael Cuozzo+, OFE, is the Guardian of the Hermits of Divine Mercy.
- There is now a fourth ecclesiastic affiliation (charter); it is with Our Lady of Knock Abbey in Massachusetts, USA.

I appreciate all who have provided the articles included herein. I hope you enjoy this and upcoming issues of *United in Spirit*.

Wishing you our Lord's peace, love, and blessings,  
Abbot Father Michael Cuozzo+, OFE, OFC

## In This OFE Newsletter:

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## RULE OF LIFE

### *Order of Franciscans Ecumenical*

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:36-40)

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

To live a life of commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ and to serve him faithfully.

To acclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the study of the Scriptures.

To keep the Eucharist and the Gospel at the center of our lives.

To acquire knowledge and inspiration of the Franciscan spirituality of our patron Saint Francis of Assisi.

To infuse our daily life with compassion, service, community, simplicity, reverence for creation, dignity of human persons, peacemaking, prayer, and support of family unity.

To welcome celibate and married Roman Catholic priests and laity.

To be respectful to the Pope, Patriarchs, Bishops, Abbot General, Minister General, and members of our Order.



## MISSIONARY NEWS

### *Holy Apostle Monastery*

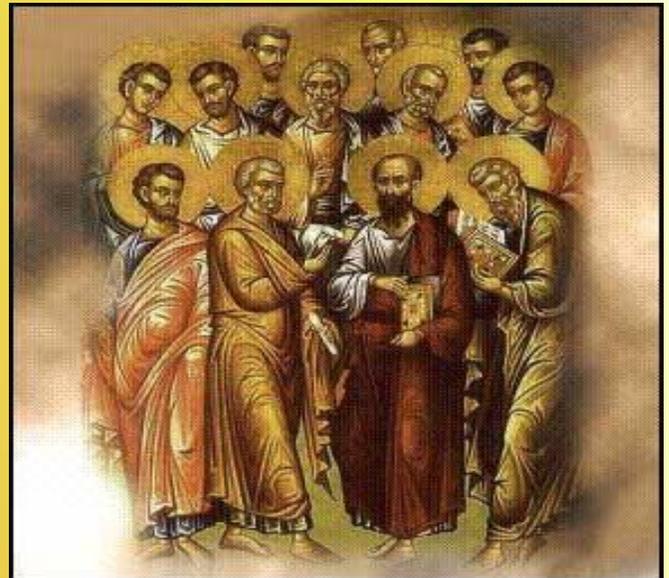
The Divine Mercy Brothers of Our Lady of Perpetual Help now have four brothers, five professed Roman Catholic priests, five seminarians at its Monastery.

Holy Apostles Monastery has had other notable events since the January, 2017, edition of our Newsletter:

- During the month of July, the Holy Apostles Monastery had to move to a new location. Its present site will be demolished for an intercity highway.
- The Divine Mercy Children’s Orphanage have three additional children with a total of twenty-one children.
- The Divine Mercy Brother of Our Lady of Perpetual Help had a chapter meeting to approve the names of its prayer houses, sub-parish, cemetery, and hospital. A vote was taken. Prayer House names are: Blessed Sister Irene Stefani Nyaatha; Venerable Edel Quinn; Saint Josephine Bakhita; Saint Charles Lwanga; Saint Frances Cabrini; Saint Mary Magdalene; Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton; Saint

Angela Merici; Saint Anne; and Saint Martin de Porres. Sub-Parish name is: Saint Paphnutius. Cemetery name is: The Garden of Resurrection Cemetery. Hospital name is: Mercy Hospital.

- Father Michael Cuozzo Foundation Center for Love and Hope building is completed and a dedication of it is planned.





## Scripture *verse*

“For a bishop as God’s steward must be blameless, not arrogant, not irritable, not a drunkard, not aggressive, not greedy for sordid gain.” (Titus 1:7)

### Married Priesthood By Superior General Paul Ochieng-Ogada+, DMB

Saint Peter was married, Saint Paul celibate, and the early church flourished. Both married and celibate priests were common until 12th century when celibacy became mandatory, both married priesthood are gifts to the church.

In 2006, an international study I published with the Society of Jesus, Ak Hern of Kenly Foundation found wide-spread support among Catholic laity for married priests: in Spain 80%, USA 82%, Italy 67%, Poland 60%. The same study found significant support (68-80%) for ordaining women.

The Catholic church is the only Christian denomination in the United States that has a shortage of clergy. We already have married priests and women deacons in the Catholic church. Eastern rites of Catholicism permit priests to marry. In the US, there are over 300 married priests. It’s felt that God is calling our original tradition. It’s time the church granted women equality for pastoral service. In fact, many married priests and their wives minister as couples. History fully supports a married priesthood. For the first 1200 years of the church existence, priests, bishops, and 39 Popes were married. Celibacy existed in the first century among hermits and monks, but it was considered an optional alternative lifestyle. In 1993 Pope John Paul II publicly said that celibacy is not essential to the priesthood. Married priests and their wives were the first pastors, the first bishops, first missionaries. They carried the message of Jesus across cultures and protected it. Life was met by joyful expectations, Jesus said he would return, and the first Christians believed that it would be soon. Led by married priests, they met at each other’s homes to celebrate the Mass. Strangers were invited to share bread and wine, no one was excluded from receiving Communion, they soon became friends, joined the church and brought others to hear the good news of Jesus. Presently, in the US there are over 250 former Lutheran and Episcopal ministers serving as married priests

after converting to Catholicism. Presently the Armenian Church has at least four women deacons. Pope Paul VI and John Paul II signed documents recognizing the apostolic succession and validity of Armenian Catholic sacraments. The steadily worsening priest shortage and some of the worst sexual conduct of present priests requires us to look at other options for preserving Eucharistic heritage.

The laity have a canonical right and obligation to speak about optional celibacy and women’s roles. Authority is vested in us through our baptism and confirmation; we have the duty to explore different ways to ensure the church remains healthy. Canon 212 tells us we have the right and obligation to make our views known on matters which concern the good of the church. We need to return to the early church custom of having women deacons. We look forward at Holy Apostles Monastery to our full reinstatement when the man-made law of celibacy is rescinded. God is calling us back to original tradition, open your hearts and eyes to God’s voice.



Father John Lipscomb and his wife, Marcie

## Petition: Save My Church and Restore Married Priesthood / Optional Celibacy Back into the Roman Catholic Church

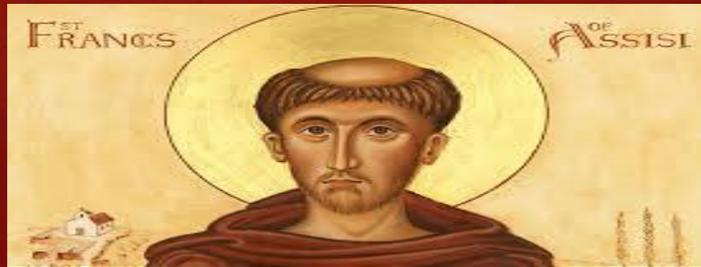
The Church is suffering within its own ranks. On the grassroots level, we meet priests who live in grief and sometimes in poverty. We welcome Pope Francis acknowledging in *Amoris Laetitia* that “we could draw from the experience of the broad oriental tradition of a married clergy.”

The mission of the Order of Franciscans Ecumenical (OFE) is to minister to married Roman Catholic priests by offering them a welcoming home, support, acceptance, affirmation of their marriages, and validation of their lives and ministries. It also supports efforts to restore married priesthood to the Roman Catholic Church. Canon Laws 212 §2 and §3 tell us that we have the duty to express our views about the Church’s “matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful.” Men who have left the priesthood to marry are made to feel that they failed merely because they wanted the fulfillment of wives and families of their own. Sadly, they have become disheartened by the Church’s abandonment.

All of us have seen how many good priests have been dismissed because they chose to love a woman and have a family. Most of them have to find other work to support their families. Those who could not find work often have been pushed into poverty and suffered emotionally because of the treatment they have received from the Church.

Countless people in the pews have let it be known that they want a priest – married or celibate, it matters little – who will be compassionate about their life issues. Many would welcome a move of the Church to allow married priests back into active priesthood. If the Church is willing to welcome married Episcopal priests into our Church, surely you should be open to accepting former and now married Roman Catholic priests.

If you are interested in signing the petition, please click on or copy the following OFE petition link: <https://www.change.org/p/ofe-save-my-church-and-restore-married-priesthood-back-into-the-roman-catholic-church>



### What are petition signers saying about married priesthood / optional celibacy?

Additional comments can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeNuA6q280t3C8c90JhOEhA/videos>

“I’m all for remembering where we’ve come from, and cultural and religious values, but it’s the time for the Roman Catholic Church to enter the 21st century... particularly if it is to remain visible in years to come. Growing up as a Catholic, I’ve always found it ironic that the Church teaches about the importance of family, but excludes that right from those leading the Church. It’s long overdue for Roman Catholic Priests to marry, just as it is for Roman Catholic Priests to be male or female.” Simon Stones, Manchester, United Kingdom

“In an age of severe shortage, it is remarkable that the Church would rather protect priests who have caused serious harm to our children and betrayed the Church rather than employ honest and devoted men who dare to love women.

I’ve seen many priests who would likely have been able to show more love to their parishioners if they themselves felt human love. Too many bishops obviously feel that marriage is a “lesser” state than celibacy. How strange that misogyny rules.” Patricia Cuzzo, Corona, California, USA

“It is a matter of justice, love, integrity and practical common sense for there to be married priests, (and similarly for there to be women priests) and for those married priests who have had to leave, to be recognised and brought back into ministry. It should not be a pragmatic decision because of the shortage of priests, again similarly for the admission of women to the priesthood. Until the Catholic church acknowledges this injustice and brings all the gifts of those now excluded from the priesthood, its teaching remains invalid for many.” Jenny Fielder, East Grinstead, UK

“I am signing because I support married priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. Certainly, this will augment the vocation to priesthood in the RC Church. As there is shortage for priesthood and since total celibacy in the RC priesthood discourages priestly vocation in the present modern society and also the existing priests go through untold emotional and psychological and sexual pressures, it is better priests are married and render service to the people of God.” Fr. J. Arokia Nathan, India

“Humans work best in partnerships, allowing priests to marry and remain priests will help add a huge dimension to their lives and to the spirit and experience they can bring to their parishes.” Robert Hills, Perth, Australia

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