



News and Current Events :: Married, father of six to be ordained Catholic priest

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A married father of six is being allowed to become a Roman Catholic priest.

The Diocese of Rochester says the 49-year-old former protestant minister is getting a "special exception" to the celibacy rule from Pope Benedict.

The diocese says this has never happened here before but News 10NBC has learned it has and not that long ago.

The Catholic faithful is told that celibacy is required by the church of its priests in what's called the Latin Rite. It's the main reason the church gives for not allowing priests to marry -- as people continue to see the number of priests shrink each year. Only a priest can celebrate the mass and consecrate the Eucharist.

Scott Caton is a former Baptist minister. He came a Catholic 12 years ago and this has been a 10-year journey.

Caton's request for ordination as a priest was approved by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and then by the Pope. The church says this permission reflects a still rare -- but allowable -- exception to the celibacy rule.

Caton said, "I'm not going to be the poster boy for a married clergy. And that's not the intent of my heart of why I'm doing this. So people will take this in different directions, and I just have to be focused and say -- what has the Lord called me to do -- without making any kind of political statement about that."

Michael Macaluso, principal of Arch Angel School in Irondequoit, thinks it will be difficult for Caton to survive as a Catholic priest. He doesn't think he can serve God and a family at the same time.

Christ the King parishioner Arnold Eckert remembers Father Mel Walczak -- a married priest for the Polish National Church -- St. Casimir's. He got permission to be a married priest and did serve the Catholic diocese.

Walczak also became a Catholic chaplain at Rochester General Hospital but he has since left the church.

Caton has been serving at St. Joseph's in Penfield prior to his ordination as a transitional deacon June 5. As a deacon, he will serve at Blessed Sacrament Church until his planned ordination to the priesthood in 2011.

Under Vatican guidelines, the exception to the celibacy rule is sometimes used for Protestant ministers who enter the Church as Catholics and wish to be ordained. They must first study in such areas as moral and sacramental theology, the Church's canon law and related areas.

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