

# VETERAN PRIEST OFFERS COGENT ADVICE

by Msgr. Desmond P. Dillon

*Editor's note: The following article offers many sensible recommendations from a priest who has witnessed many changes in the Church.*

On reaching my 91st birthday January 31, 2006 and my 65th year of priesthood this coming May 22, 2006, I must say that these are in a way the happiest days of my life. As I watch my sunset, I know it won't be long, but I anticipate being happy now and happy also in eternity.

Having been in social work for a number of years, trying to make things better for people, my mind turns to the Church that has seen many improvements through the years, especially with Vatican II. I also would like to see things become better in the Church. I think of Pope John XXIII's statement of Vatican II, *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda*—the Church is always to be reformed.

These are some of the improvements I would like to see in our Church:

- The national leadership in education needs to be strengthened by the USCCB with guidelines and criteria of religious education. These should be established for our schools and religious education programs.
- All parishes as far as possible should establish a daily kindergarten class with use of the Montessori Good Shepherd program. With this program, little children will grow up with a solid foundation of faith, enabling them to be good and keep the faith.

- Parents and families also need more religious support for their children.
- Our private schools need their own guidelines. Catholic schools should stand for faith and academic values. Christmas is not just a holiday. Spring break, which is now a debauch, should return to Easter break. Religion courses should be more substantial.
- Catholic schools must serve the poor better. Schools should be supported by parish stewardship with little or no tuition for the poor. Tuition to religious and private schools should be tax exempt and actively supported to get rid of double taxation.
- The definition of the Church as the people of God needs clarification. Our relations and ecumenism with other churches depend on our own understanding of church. What is meant by “the Church is the people of God”?
- The nation-wide clergy sex scandal has brought upon the Church all levels of injustices.
- The well-intentioned Dallas protocols should be revisited and amended.

Although the purging of the Church by the Dallas protocol has done much good, I believe it has also caused much hurt and uncharitableness.

- Transparency of church discipline allowed a hostile press to identify sex abuse against the backdrop of Catholic pro-life teaching.
- About 1% of living clergy have been accused. Other churches, institutions, and schools have higher percentages. From my calculations in social service, I believe that more than 10% of the population transgresses sexual abuse, including incest.
- The breach of confidentiality of clergy-Ordinary

relationship has seriously violated a sacred trust.

- Clergy have been punished by so-called administrative leave or suspension without trial, some unjustly, some waiting for years for decisions. Clergy and laity alike have a right to a trial and be heard.

- The evident financial liability fueled the publicity and scandal. Settling problems out of court had good reasons, but the \$5.5 billion in suits against dioceses indicate that the payoff has become legal blackmail. Many of these suits were against long deceased clergy who could not defend themselves. This means that finances of the Church are not protected. No other church has been sued in such large amounts. It was and is morally very wrong.

- Since the severity of judgments by the dioceses has been financially driven, dioceses should protect finances from liability. Corporation Sole, the legal form in many dioceses, is an open pocket of church money. This legal form once served the Church well against contentious trusteeism. Now it is the *bete noir* of Church scandal. Parishes should be incorporated individually so that some sense of local ownership would be had.

- The faithful of the Church desire very much to see the clergy in clerical garb, especially as they come to liturgical functions. They would also like to see religious women in at least an updated habit rather than civilian attire.

- The practice of retirement for celibate clergy without some ongoing ministry or community seems an awful waste in the priest-shortage society and a denial of their youthful intent and purpose when they were first ordained to serve their whole lives.

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