

# Justice for Priests and Deacons

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June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 – Feasts of Saints Peter and Paul, apostles

My Dear Friends & Benefactors,

Mother Theresa of Calcutta was once asked by a reporter, "Are you discouraged that you cannot help all the people on the streets of Calcutta?" She responded, "No. I just help them one at a time." That response applies equally to the ministry of **Justice for Priests and Deacons**. We strive to defend the canonical rights of clergy, religious women, and laity who contact us. We work to bring comfort and direction to them regardless of the circumstances of their case.

Since 1997 when a group of canon lawyers decided to form our organization, we have helped over 800 priests and deacons from the United States and overseas. Almost daily we receive new inquiries. Thanks to a team of over 90 canonists and civil lawyers, we have informed and supported priests and deacons so that they will know their rights under canon law and civil law when they are required to defend themselves against injustice.

The compliments and testimonies we receive are many and varied. They give evidence to the effectiveness of our ministry. Here are just a few.

*"For me, the first and greatest gift Justice for Priests and Deacons gives to suffering priests is hope. This becomes a practical reality through the excellent website with its easy reference to relevant canons; very important as well is the help in finding a canonical advocate."* Rev. Robert Papi, Canada

*"Few priests understand their rights when bishops move against them. I found in Justice for Priests and Deacons the help I was looking for, a canon lawyer who understands my needs and who guided me with great clarity and kindness through the difficult process of appealing against a decision of my own bishop."* Rev. John Speekman, Australia

In the analogy of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost and wounded, our ministry is to seek justice for clergy, religious, or lay person who needs help:

- **We help** clergy removed from active duty and are bewildered by an avalanche of charges that beset them. Many have little support or advice from their bishops or provincials.
- **We help** those who are innocent and have to endure accusations and punishment which destroy their reputation and credibility. Usually they are presumed guilty until proven innocent. Who else corrects the damages that come from false accusations?
- **We help** some who are guilty of moral failures and indiscretions and have suffered excessive punishment from their superiors with little recourse of action. There usually is no one to argue on their behalf. *We need to correct the injustice in these cases according to the laws of our Church and our civil government.*

We personally keep in touch with almost forty priests who are incarcerated to bring them some hope and consolation. With one exception, they have received no financial support from their

bishops. In many cases, actions from their bishops have worsened their condition, made them more vulnerable, and put them in a much worse situation than is deserved. Thanks to your generosity we send them a donation several times a year.

I know that **Justice for Priests and Deacons** receives criticism from those who believe that the guilty should be punished and thrown out of the priesthood. Yes, there are those who are guilty and should no longer serve as priests and deacons. But these men also need compassion and assistance to rebuild their lives. Is that foreign to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? And who else does that in our Church today?

**Justice for Priests and Deacons** believes that innocent or guilty, our priests and deacons have a right to proper counsel and guidance at a very critical and devastating time in their lives. Some priests have ended up in the streets and in destitution because they were abandoned by their spiritual leaders. That is not right.

I come to you for assistance at this transition moment in our history. For all these years I have relied mostly upon volunteers and they do a great job for us. I do not take a salary and my expenses are kept at a minimum. But the volume of work is catching up to me. To go on any longer without a qualified office manager is not wise.

In consultation with our Business Board and Academic Board, I believe it is time for us to hire an administrative assistant who can oversee the office tasks and procedures that will best serve our ministry. This will give me more time to serve the pastoral needs of our clients spread across the country and overseas, while still fulfilling our mission to defend the canonical rights of priests, religious and laity. We cannot move in this direction unless there is a significant increase in the level of giving by our donors. We need your help, and you might also ask your friends to help.

There are some who can give a one-time gift of \$500 or more at this time, and I really thank you for your generosity. If many will make a donation of \$50 or more, then I will be able to hire the person we need. Please fill out the pledge card and return it with your gift in the enclosed envelope. Perhaps you would consider a monthly or quarterly pledge. Our website also makes it possible to make a donation by credit card ([www.justiceforpriests.org](http://www.justiceforpriests.org)). Whatever your gift, I thank you on behalf of all those we serve and those we will serve in the future.

Our beloved Mother Theresa gave us the keen insight that we should not be overwhelmed by the thousands of people who are hurting among us that we cannot help, but to **love them and help them one at a time**. At **Justice for Priests and Deacons** we strive to do just that. And you are a vital link to make this happen. May God bless you and may you enjoy the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with your family and friends. You are in my prayers.

In the Compassion of Jesus,

Rev. Dr. Michael Higgins, M.A. D.D. D.C.L.  
Executive Director

**“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** Acts 20:35.