

June 1, 2000

To: Friends and Supporters
From: Fr Frank Cordaro

Regarding: Recovery of priestly faculties

After months of prayer, discussion and discernment with Bishop Charron, my brother priests and close friends and supporters, I have decided to do what Bishop Charron is now asking me to do so I may return to a full and active priestly ministry in the Diocese of Des Moines.

After a complete review of my situation Bishop Charron has asked me to reaffirm and recommit myself to the Profession Of Faith and the Declaration Of Freedom And Knowledge that I signed before I was ordained Nov. 30, 1984.

In particular the Bishop has asked me to reaffirm and recommit myself to my promise to “both embrace and maintain each and every article which has been either asserted and declared by the ordinary magisterium of the Church, or defined by her solemn judgment, concerning the doctrine of faith and morals, just as she proposes them, especially those which concern the mystery of the holy Church of Christ, her Sacrament, the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff,” found in the Profession Of Faith

And to “comply obediently with all those things which my superiors prescribe, and the discipline of the Church demands,” found in the Declaration Of Freedom And Knowledge.

I have taken the time to reflect and pray about these promises and feel that I can reaffirm and recommit myself to them, especially in regards to the areas of concern that most troubles Bishop Charron. These concerns have to do with what Bishop Charron calls my history of public dissent of official church teachings found in my homilies, church bulletins, public writings and gatherings, especially regarding the ordination of women, birth control and church reform.

I realize I have at times taken a public confrontational approach to advocate for church reform. I will make ever effort not to do so in the future. Since it appears to me that so many of the peace and justice, war and militarism issues I speak of are connected with sexism and patriarchy, it will not be easy for me not to take a less public approach to what I believe are necessary reforms for our Church. But I am willing to make that effort.

Beyond this the Bishop and many of my brother priests have asked me to change my attitude toward the Church saying that I am too negative about the institutional Church. Together they have told me that I don't always appreciate the role of the diocesan priest whose primary work is the celebration of the Eucharist, preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. As a public representative of the Church, there are limits to what a priest can publicly say and do regarding the Church. The boundaries are set by the teachings of the Church and the leadership of the diocesan bishop.

Through out this process I have come to appreciate Bishop Charron's obligation in conscience to expect those who represent him and the Church in ordained ministry will uphold and teach what the Church teaches. Ultimately the Bishop is the one who must make the decisions in these matters. Bishop Charron must follow his conscience also. If I want to work as a priest in our diocese, I need to respect this obligation of conscience that Bishop Charron has assumed.

As reasonable and necessary as Bishop Charron's concerns might sound to some, I know for many of my friends and comrades in the Catholic Worker, Resistance and Call To Action movements, the promise to not publicly advocate for reforms in the Church amounts to a compromise. To these friends and comrades I must admit they are correct.

I must also admit I fully knew and was aware of these flawed and sexist faults in the Catholic Church when I got ordained. It was enough for me at that time to 'be able to openly and publicly advocate for the Church reforms, be ordained and live within the discipline of the institutional church.

Two things have changed since my 1985 ordination.

1) The Church has changed. In 1985, Catholics, both lay and clergy, were free to openly and publicly advocate for Church reform. This is not the case today.

The conditions Bishop Charron set for me to regain my priestly faculties are the same conditions any priest, religious or lay person must accept if they are to minister or work for the Catholic Church. These conditions may vary in degree from one diocese to the next, from one bishop to the next. Yet, for the vast majority of people ministering and working for the Catholic Church this condition of public silence in these areas is a reality. I have three lay brothers, who work in three different dioceses and it is the same for them. I'm not saying that this is a good thing for the Church. What I am saying is that this is a reality.

2) I have changed. In 1985 I only believed I was called to be a priest. Today, after 15 years of priestly ministry, I both believe and know I'm called to be a priest.

During this year's leave of absence, I reviewed and reassessed what my best role and position in the Catholic Church should be. I've come to a personal conclusion that I love being a priest. I love the work of a priest - celebrating the Eucharist, preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. And despite her human flaws, there is far more good about the Catholic Church than there is bad. The Catholic Church is the tradition and faith community that passed on the Faith to me. Its given me far more than I will ever be able to give back in return. And if the Church will have me, I will do everything in my power, short of violating my conscience, to remain a priest in her service.

Regarding Church reform, I know there are many good men and women working to see them become a reality. They are both inside and outside the Church. They are clergy, religious and lay. These are very important issues for many people in the Church. Like so many others, I will now need to find other ways, less public and confrontational, to further the concerns for Church reform.

In regard to my "law breaking", nonviolent resistance activities, it is my hope that in accepting any pastoral assignment, allowances and an understanding be made. With these allowances and understandings, I in turn must respect the fact that Bishop Charron has a say in these matters, that he needs the freedom to say "no, not at this time" to me if he and those with whom he consults would recommend against my participating in a given witness for the good of the diocese and my pastoral assignment.

To this end, the bishop and I will need to engage ourselves in open dialogue about any witness I may consider which would result in any significant jail time and affect my ability to fulfill my

assignment. This will involve a measure of give and take on both sides. I count it a big plus that both Bishop Charron and myself are willing to enter this open dialogue.

Does this now settle all the issues that led me to take this leave of absence year? Probably not. The diocese and I are going to need to live with this arrangement.

I'd like to thank all those in the past year who helped me along in my discernment, especially my brother priests. Without their help I don't believe we would be this far along. I especially want to thank Bishop Charron for going the extra mile with me in coming to this agreement. I ask you all for your prayers and support.