



Keeping the Vow: The Untold Story of Married Catholic Priests

D. Paul Sullins

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At one of the largest Catholic churches in America, hundreds of people make their way into the spacious, well-appointed sanctuary for an evening Mass. The congregation is several times larger than most Protestant megachurches. In addition to its twenty weekly services, eight choirs, and elementary and middle schools, the church also administers a long roster of Bible studies, home groups, community outreach, and specialized programs for every conceivable class and group of persons. The sermon is delivered by the pastor and celebrant priest who, at one point, refers to his struggle to relate to his teenage daughter. No one is surprised, for the long-time leader of this prominent Catholic Church, in a conservative suburb of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, is a married Catholic priest.

Following the Episcopal Church's 1976 decision to ordain women, Catholic leaders in America and Rome were approached by Episcopal clergy who opposed the decision and sought conversion as a result. The Catholics responded by establishing rules that would allow the Church to receive married convert priests as exceptions to the rule of celibacy-a decree known as the Pastoral Provision. In this fascinating book, D. Paul Sullins brings to light the untold stories of these curious creatures: married Catholic priests. Sullins explores their day-to-day lives, their journey to Catholicism, and their views on issues important to the Church. Surprisingly, he reveals, married Catholic priests are more conservative than their celibate colleagues on nearly every issue, including celibacy: they think that priests should, in general, not be allowed to marry.

Drawing on over 115 interviews with priests and their wives, as well as unprecedented access to the U.S. records of the Pastoral Provision, *Keeping the Vow* offers the first comprehensive look at these families and their unusual and difficult journey from Anglicanism to Catholicism. Looking to the future, Sullins speculates on what the experiences of these priests might tell us about the future of priestly celibacy.

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