

Excommunicated African bishop says allowing married priests would make Catholicism a healthier institution

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — An excommunicated African bishop criticized the Vatican's stance on mandatory celibacy for priests and said allowing them to marry would make the Roman Catholic Church a healthier institution.

"The current priest shortage calls for emergency action," said Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo of Zambia.

On Tuesday, the Vatican announced Milingo's expulsion from the church because he presided over the unauthorized ordination of four married men as bishops Sunday during ceremonies at a Washington, D.C., church.

Speaking in both Italian and English at a news con-

ference Wednesday, Milingo said the Catholic Church should embrace more than 150,000 married priests worldwide in part to ease the ongoing clergy shortage and to elevate the sanctity of marriage.

"I believe that the Catholic Church as a mother cannot be indifferent to the situation of married priests who have much suffering and are abandoned," said Milingo, a 76-year-old Zambian prelate whose relationship with the Vatican has been strained for years.

In 2001, he was married to a South Korean acupuncturist chosen for him by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon of the Unification Church, in a group wedding ceremony in New York.

Catholic officials also have accused Milingo of promoting African indigenous beliefs by performing mass exorcisms and healing ceremonies.

Milingo pointed to sexual abuse allegations against celibate priests in the United States as an indication "that something is wrong."

He was joined Wednesday by the four bishops he ordained Sunday. They also have been excommunicated.

"We are well aware of the sexual misconduct within the Church. We believe that marriage is a way to heal the Church and to make it whole," said Rev. George Augustus Stallings, Jr., a former priest in the Archdiocese of Washington, who left the Roman Catholic Church in 1989 to found the

African American Catholic Congregation.

"Conscience demands that this seriously unjust law of celibacy be broken," said Rev. Patrick E. Trujillo, who is affiliated with the Old Roman Catholic Church in Newark, New Jersey.

The men support Milingo's so-called "Married Priests Now" association, which is calling for a married priesthood to become a normal part of the Catholic Church. They note that dozens of married priests who formerly were Luther-

an and Anglican have served as Roman Catholic priests over the past 30 years and some clergy in the Eastern Rites of the Roman Catholic Church are also married.

Milingo told reporters that since Sunday he has heard from supporters in India, Portugal and Canada. He also said he will not recognize his excommunication and will continue celebrating Mass and holding faith healing ceremonies.

Although Vatican authori-

ties, including the late Pope John Paul II, had tried for years to coax Milingo into mending his ways, Rome lost patience with him over the unauthorized ordinations, which threaten papal authority.

The Vatican issued a statement Tuesday indicating that Milingo and the four men effectively excommunicated themselves by participating in an ordination rite not authorized by the Vatican in violation of Church law.

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