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Listen to those who love their church

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?These are not ?protest people.? They are people of faith. They are raising their voices. They hope their bishops are listening,? said Fr. John Dekimpe, one of four Flemish priests who thought Advent was a good time to issue a call for reform and renewal in the church (See story [1]).

If they aren?t protest people, then who are they? They are priests, educators, academics and professional Catholics. They are engaged in the church. They haven?t left it. They don?t want to leave it. They love the church.

They sound very much like Jennifer Zickel, whose parish priest, with the consent of his bishop, has barred girls from serving at Mass (See story [2]). Zickel wants the policy changed, but she?s not out to destroy the church.

?We are Catholics who want to go to Mass on Sunday,? Zickel told NCR. She was an active volunteer. She knows the value of raising her children in the church: ?We really like to instill in these children a sense of virtue.? It seeps into the community and schools, she said.

Isn?t that the ?New Evangelization? the bishops talk on and on about? What parish in the country would not want a dozen Zickels?

Zickel is not ?protest people? either -- well, OK, she did organize and lead a demonstration, but what recourse did she have? Bishop Paul Loverde won?t meet with her. Why?

Zickel?s frustration is echoed repeatedly through the Belgian manifesto, ?Believers Speak Out.? Here is the full text:

Parishes without a priest, Eucharist at inappropriate hours, worship without Communion: that really should not be! What is delaying the needed church reform? We, Flemish believers, ask our bishops to the break the impasse in which we are locked. We do this in solidarity with fellow believers in Austria, Ireland and many other countries, with all who insist on vital church reform.

We simply do not understand why the leadership in our local communities (e.g., parishes) is not entrusted to men or women, married or unmarried, professionals or volunteers, who already have the necessary training. We need dedicated pastors!

We do not understand why these our fellow believers cannot preside at Sunday liturgical celebrations. In every active community we need liturgical ministers!

We do not understand why, in communities where no priest is available, a Word service cannot also include a Communion service.

We do not understand why skilled laypeople and well-formed religious educators cannot preach. We need the

word of God!

We do not understand why those believers who, with very good will, have remarried after a divorce must be denied Communion. They should be welcomed as worthy believers. Fortunately, there are some places where this is happening.

We also demand that, as quickly as possible, both married men and women be admitted to the priesthood. We, people of faith, desperately need them now!

The Belgians have yet to hear from their bishops. All who cry out for a renewed church -- with the patience of St. Luke?s persistent widow -- will continue demanding a healthy, inclusive, embracing spiritual community.

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Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/node/27869
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/17884