

THE ENQUIRER

Catholic traditions broken

Old gender roles led church founder to part

BY SCOTT WARTMAN | ENQUIRER STAFF WRITER

While Roman Catholic priests still can't get married or be women, some of the faithful believe they should.

Some Catholics have felt so strongly about that issue and others that, around the country, new independent Catholic churches have appeared.

One in Bellevue was founded last month.

Fort Mitchell resident Ed Kuhlman started Holy Family Church after a decadelong struggle involving some of his beliefs about church doctrine - namely the role of men and women. The church, part of the Ecumenical Catholic Church USA denomination, has Mass every Saturday at 4:30 p.m. in Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Bellevue.

Kuhlman has been a devout Catholic since childhood but always believed the priesthood should allow marriage and women.

"The inequality for ordination concerned me," Kuhlman said. "I didn't feel comfortable sitting in the pew. I can't explain it."

Then, four years ago, he learned of the Ecumenical Catholic Church USA. The church, started in New Jersey in 2001 by a former Roman Catholic priest who stopped his Roman Catholic ministry to get married, bears similarities to Roman Catholicism.

The Ecumenical Catholic Church USA has 150 members and six churches in the United States and Britain.

The largest, in Louisville, with 60 members, attracted Kuhlman four years ago. Kuhlman traveled at least monthly to the Louisville church and worked hard to become a deacon through the church's online seminary. Kuhlman, however, wanted a church that shared his Catholic beliefs closer to home. The idea slowly dawned on him to start his own church.

Now a deacon, Kuhlman expects to be ordained a priest soon by the church's seminary. He plans on juggling his fledgling church and his job as teacher at Gray Middle School in Boone County.

"I knew different things were happening in church in the world. If I wanted something to happen I was going to have to do it myself," Kuhlman said. "It seems kind of daunting when you think about it. If there was going to be change, it would have to start somewhere. It looked like people were waiting for someone to do something."

There are other independent Catholic churches in the country. The church's co-founder, Bishop Carl T. Swaringim, wanted one more closely related to Roman Catholicism.

Swaringim was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1963. He left to get married. He now ministers in St. Louis as a bishop in the church he helped found.

"I was looking for a church more traditional in a Roman sense," Swaringim said. "What I saw in the other church was more Anglican or even Baptist. I've always felt called to be a priest within the Catholic tradition."

Swaringim hopes to see the church grow, but isn't trying to woo people away from other faiths or forms of Christianity.

The first five services at Holy Family Church in Bellevue have ranged from five to 35 people. Mainly family, friends and friends of friends have filled the pews at Kuhlman's first services. Kuhlman remains undaunted by the church's sparse attendance in the first month.

Though Holy Family Church in Bellevue is the first Ecumenical Catholic Church USA in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, it is not the first alternative Catholic church in the area. A handful of other Catholic churches that range from conservative to liberal on church doctrine worship in the area. The Cathedral of Our Lady of Peace in Riverside off River Road in Ohio is part of the Orthodox Catholic Church faith. Both men and women, single or married, are allowed to serve as clergy. On the other end of the spectrum, St. Gertrude the Great Roman Catholic Church in West Chester retains much of the Catholic faith before the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s like Latin masses.

Some of the differences

The equality of men and women. Women should be allowed to serve in the same capacity as men, he said. The Ecumenical Catholic Church is more democratic than the Roman Catholic Church. The congregation votes on bishops and leaders and has equal footing with the priest and leadership. The sacraments are open to all Christians. You don't have to be a Catholic to receive the communion or other sacraments.



Kuhlman holds a Mass on Saturday for Holy Family Church in Bellevue.



Deacon Ed Kuhlman of Holy Family Church in Bellevue expects to be ordained a priest soon. He will also keep his job as a teacher at Gray Middle School in Boone County.