

DIocese OF SAN BERNARDINO



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

July 10-11, 2021

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace and well-being to you and your families. I pray that you are experiencing rest and quality time with family and friends in these summer months.

I am writing to you in response to the news of Monsignor Howard Lincoln's recent decision to enter into a civil marriage. Many have been shocked and saddened by this turn of events because Monsignor Lincoln provided such dynamic and pastoral leadership to Sacred Heart parish for 20 years. You knew him as a wonderful priest who had taken lifetime vows to serve the people of God, providing for your spiritual and sacramental needs. Please know of my prayer and support for your parish community during this difficult moment.

As you know, once a priest is ordained, he can never marry. This allows the priest to give himself completely to the Church and the service of the people of God. There are specific circumstances under which the Church will ordain a priest who is already married, but never the reverse.

So, by entering into a civil marriage this month, Monsignor Lincoln has essentially separated himself from his priestly vocation in our Church. This brings great sadness to me as the new Bishop of the Diocese and a brother diocesan priest because it is always hoped and intended that this special relationship between the priest and his Church will last a lifetime.

Questions have arisen about whether the Diocese was aware of Monsignor Lincoln's intention to marry before he announced it publicly. It is true that in 2019 Msgr. Lincoln had privately expressed the idea of marrying after his retirement. Our immediate response as a Diocese was to offer support and resources to Monsignor Lincoln so that he might instead reaffirm his commitment to his vows and remain a priest in good standing for life. We did not passively accept the idea of him leaving the priesthood, we supported him in his struggle and remained hopeful that he would change his mind.

As we move forward, let us unite ourselves in support of your pastor, Father Elder, Father Tripp and the rest of the wonderful pastoral team at Sacred Heart. We also offer our prayers for Monsignor Lincoln as we know that he gave us many years of faithful priestly service and was a true voice for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Coachella Valley. He extended the hand of the Church to those most in need and was a driving force in Catholic education and the building of new churches. We give thanks to God for his work in these areas and others.

Again, please know that I am with you in prayer and spirit as you process this news. Let us together put our trust in God as you begin a new journey in parish leadership. And let us remember the words of our Diocesan Vision as we answer the call to impact family, neighborhood, and society with the Gospel, so that people's lives are filled with hope.

Yours in Christ's love,

+ Alberto Rojas

Most Reverend Alberto Rojas
Bishop of San Bernardino

A Letter to Sacred Heart Parish from our retired Pastor, Howard Lincoln

Dear Parishioners: As many of you know, I caused some commotion this past week by marrying Sandra, my secretary, on Friday, July 2nd. Fr. Elder has graciously given me this opportunity for a very brief explanation, which I feel, is owed.

Sandra and I have been discussing the possibility of being married for nearly three years. Please know that these were just discussions. There was absolutely no physical intimacy. Zero! However, the question became—when should our marriage take place. And, celebrating this civil ceremony a scant two days after my retirement seemed very premature.

The reasons primarily revolved around age, health and the timeline for laicization—which is the proper process for a priest to get married. Laicization involves removal from clerical state, and the priest becoming, in effect a “layperson”. While the Church still regards him as a “priest”, he is secularized and may not perform any priestly duties, such as mass and confession, etc. The problem for Sandra and I was that this process may take up to 1 or 2 years. I am 75 with heart issues and Sandra is 72. We love each other and want to care for each other for the rest of the years that God gives us. The indefinite laicization period coupled with the uncertainty of our health---mandated to us a very early marriage date and, we were offered an extraordinary location.

I loved being with you at Sacred Heart for these past 20 years! I am leaving you with two wonderful priests, Fr. Greg and Fr. Tyler, whom in many respects have talents and expertise that I do not possess. Our parish is very lucky to have them. The staff that supports them is extraordinary. Very probably one of the finest staffs in California! They combine years of experience with BIG knowledge and even BIGGER hearts.

So..... God bless all of you! And thank you for giving me the most wonderful 20 years of my life.

Howard Lincoln