

Hello,

My name is Louise Ouellet and I am from Canada. I would like to tell you a little bit about my story and what I am trying to do about mandatory celibacy.

It was during the fall of 1995. In the fall of 1995 along with my twin children of three years old and my husband whose life has been shortened by the HIV virus, I was walking toward my new church in this huge metropolis where we started a new life.

As I entered this magnificent building with breathtaking frescoed architecture, I never would have thought that a man wearing the Roman collar, someone who is married to the Church, was going to upset my little imperfect but quiet world.

As I was watching him walking back and forth to get things ready for mass, I got hit with a huge wave of what instantly submerged to my very soul into a pool of pure overwhelming love.

He walked at a brisk pace in the large corridor that ran along the rows of carved wooden benches. As he approached the row where I sat, our eyes met - it was love at first sight. I felt as if I had always known him, but at that point, I did not even know his name. The only details I had were his exceptional height, blue eyes and a smile that lit up his whole beautiful face.

Despite this new indescribable feeling that came over me, I felt much guilt as I thought about my husband. The service ended, and I returned home with my family, determined to forget this incident and dismiss this new feeling.

From one Sunday to the next this uncontrollable love got the better of my reason. I wanted to know more about this man that stirred my soul and my heart. So, I decided to let events flow to open the door to friendship. I wanted to discover, without it being obvious, whether what I felt was mutual.

During this time, my husband's health deteriorated quickly, and I felt overwhelmed. Since he did not take the drugs needed to stabilize the disease, we found ourselves faced with evidence that he had only months to live - now he had contracted full-blown AIDS.

I asked the support of the man of my heart, in his position as a priest, to accompany us on this painful journey. He nodded reassuringly and gave us all the support we needed during the illness, death, and funeral of my husband.

Now a widow, the relationship became increasingly close between us. Not two days would go by before we would call or meet each other. As insignificant as it could be, any excuse was good enough to see each other. The desire to kiss and to say how much we were in love was evident but neither of us dared to confess it.

Months had passed without anything physical happening between us, I felt his prudence and especially his fear despite his desire. One day, after having hinted that he contemplated marriage, I began to see my dream coming true. He seemed ready to take the step. There was now no barrier between us - my happiness was at its peak.

One day, his superiors realized that something was wrong. They saw that the morale of my beloved priest had been low in the recent months. He had confided to his spiritual director, revealing that he suffered from loneliness. With the help of a pretentious friend of ours, they quickly found the culprit for an inconvenient truth, for them, and could see that we were in love.

They decided to separate us by imposing on him severe restrictions, of which I had no right to know the details. As for me, I was pushed aside without explanation nor support. I could quickly see that no one cared about the excruciating pain I felt.

The only thing I knew is that he was forbidden to talk to me or to my children and he was obligated to give them all my personal letters and emails, after which they would read; violating my privacy. One of them took me to his office and tried to intimidate me and mocked me about my letters. I felt so humiliated.

To keep me away from the man I loved, they began to destroy my reputation, to intimidate me and to spread rumors of 'scandal' among some parishioners, who were quick to judge and harass me. Meanwhile, my priest wept as much as I did, which added to my pain. I tried to fix things, but the more I tried, the worse the situation became embittered.

After twelve years of harassment and suffering, my health deteriorated due to stress and traumas that I was enduring for so long. I couldn't beat the depression, so I decided to move far away, leaving behind the man of my life for whom I could do nothing. We never had the chance to kiss or to hold hands. We never made love.

After much therapy, I managed to go through mourning. I could forgive his superiors and some parishioners and make peace with the situation. It's been 19 years since he was forced into silence, but the love is still in our hearts and the hope is still alive for the Church to exchange mandatory celibacy for the freedom of choice-optional celibacy. Even if this change was to come too late for my beloved priest and myself, at least it will be for the benefit of future generations.

Even if I terribly miss my beloved, I am presently in a good place in my life. I have learned with time to love myself enough to let go and appreciate life as it is. The love that I feel has grown to be an unconditional love; I believe that God, the Great I Am, is love... therefore, there is no barriers, no laws, no distance and time to stop us from loving each other. The day that I was awakened and embraced this fact, I was free from the pain. Now, I take time for myself and I share the wisdom that I salvaged from this traumatic experience in a comforting form of support for others.

One of my ways to give my support was by writing a book to share my story and bring awareness about the consequences of mandatory celibacy. It was released this summer and it is called *Forbidden to Love-Pure Hearts Crushed Under the Law of Celibacy*.

Also, 3 years ago, I created a website (<http://forbidden-to-love.com>) to give my support to the others who are going through the same thing as I did. There is so many of us, women, children and priests with heart-wrenching stories... My heart is broken for every single story that I read. It gives me the courage to keep on trying to make a difference even if sometimes it is only a word of encouragement.

In this present moment, I launched a petition to request the abolition of mandatory celibacy and to have the right to vote during the Synod.

If you wish to sign and share it in your social media and in your community, you can follow this link:

<https://www.change.org/p/pope-francis-vatican-help-us-abolish-the-mandatory-celibacy-law-in-the-catholic-church>

Thank you for taking the time to read my story.

Louise

