

His story has, unsurprisingly, gone viral, with coverage in [Vatican News](#), [Vatican Insider](#), and other news outlets around the world. The information they provide would make for a great movie script.

Vaccarini was born in Italy in 1919. Like many young men of his generation, he was sent to fight in World War II, serving in a campaign in Russia; unlike many, he lived to return to his home and start a career. One day, he ran into a friend and fellow war veteran, who was “handsome and had everything” but was “always sad ... always distressed,” he recounts in an interview on Italian Catholic television station [TV2000it](#). “This time, he was “happy, changed!” Vaccarini asked him what had happened, and his friend told him he had gone to confession with Padre Pio.

He took his friend’s advice and went to meet Padre Pio himself, who became his confessor. During one of Vaccarini’s visits, Padre Pio told him to get married and have a “big and holy family.” He answered, “Big is easy, but holy ...?” Vaccarini’s tone in the interview is as if to say, “Easier said than done!” He went back to see Padre Pio again a while later, still single, and the saint told him, “Get a move on!”

Anna Maria Vannucci caught Vaccarini’s attention when he saw her regularly at Mass and around town. They married, and set about fulfilling Padre Pio’s advice about their family being big. They had 7 children—4 boys and 3 girls—and Vaccarini says, “It wasn’t by chance; I wanted all of them!” Sadly, his wife died in 1970, after only 18 years of marriage.

Nonetheless, Vaccarini continued to fulfill the second part of Padre Pio’s advice: making sure his family was holy. All four of his sons entered the priesthood: the first was ordained in 1979, and the last and youngest more than 20 years later (after his father). One of his daughters also entered the lay consecrated life.

In the meantime, Vaccarini himself became a permanent deacon. Assigned to a parish (San Martino in Venti), he was happy to carry out his duties, but “the problem was always finding some priest to come celebrate Mass,” he told his local diocesan newspaper, [Il Ponte](#). It was then that during a Mass at San Giovanni Rotondo he heard Padre Pio’s voice in his heart telling him, “You’ll become a priest.” Sure enough, in 1988, at the age of 69, he was ordained to the priesthood. He’s celebrated Mass every day since.

This has created a unique relationship between Fr. Vaccarini and his family. In the TV2000it interview, one of his sons explains how Fr. Vaccarini has been, in a way, his father, his son, and his brother: his biological father, by birth; his spiritual son, when (not yet a priest) he went to his own son for confession; and then his brother in the priesthood, when he was also ordained a priest. “In the faith, there are no limits,” his son says.

Fr. Giuseppe, one of his sons, told [Il Ponte](#) that even today as a priest, his father always refers back to his wife, saying, “My wife used to tell me ...” which, his son says, may have made people who don’t know him yet “give him strange looks.”

Despite his age and many accomplishments—besides what we’ve already mentioned, he’s published more than 15 books, including an autobiography in Italian titled *Husband, Widower, Priest*—Fr. Vaccarini hasn’t retired. He’s the oldest active priest in the diocese, and possibly in all of Italy, but he says he still feels “like a newly ordained priest.”

“Day by day, I’m waiting for the Lord to take me,” he said during the 2013 TV2000it interview. “I’ve had a wife, I’ve had children, and spiritual children too ... Now, I’m waiting for the Lord to call me.”