



**DIOCESE  
OF ERIE**

# **PRIEST PERSONNEL POLICY**

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## INTRODUCTION

This *Priest Personnel Policy* is promulgated for the Diocese of Erie and reflects universal principles as applied to local needs. It is written to foster order without establishing undue structure. The provisions are intended to promote clarity and equal application of the norms for the priests of this Diocese as well as other priests engaged here in pastoral work.

This *Policy* draws upon and integrates a wide variety of diocesan legislation previously promulgated. The reader is referred to the source legislation cited in the Endnotes.

## I. DIOCESAN STRUCTURES

### A. Priest Personnel Board

1. The Priest Personnel Board is a consultative body established by the Diocesan Bishop to assist him in the assignment and transfer of priests, approving leaves of absence and petitions for retirement, as well as to assess the needs of various diocesan ministries and to recommend courses of preparation and priestly formation.
2. The Board's membership shall consist of the Diocesan Bishop, the Vicar General, the Director of Priest Personnel and priests according to the following number of years since ordination: one priest between 0 and 10 years, one priest between 11 and 20 years, one priest between 21 and 30 years, and two priests with 31 or more years and still in active ministry. Members are elected by all priests of the Diocese of Erie in good standing. The Diocesan Bishop, Vicar General and Director of Priest Personnel are *ex officio* members of the Board.
3. The offices, structure and functioning of the Priest Personnel Board are described in detail in the *Constitution of the Priest Personnel Board* as revised and approved on May 30, 2014 and any subsequent revisions.

### B. Priest Personnel Office

#### 1. Purpose of the Office

- a. The Priest Personnel Office is charged with the responsibility of recruitment, education and placement of priests; the affirmation and evaluation of priests in their ministries; the determination of needs and preferences of each priest and the maintenance of personnel files and records relating to the Office.
- b. The Director of Priest Personnel is appointed by the Diocesan Bishop. He has the task of implementing the responsibilities outlined above as well as any other responsibilities assigned to him by the Diocesan Bishop. He has particular responsibility for the administration and implementation of these policies.
- c. The goal of all ministerial appointments is to serve well the People of God. To achieve that goal, the particular needs of the parish or special ministry must be considered to identify

the best qualified person. While seniority is a consideration for pastoral appointments, it is not the decisive factor.

## **2. Procedures of the Office**

- a. Personnel files are maintained by the Priest Personnel Office. Access to files is strictly limited to personnel who specifically require access.
- b. These files normally contain the priest's sacramental records, academic history and medical reports when appropriate, (on approval of the priest), appointment letters, summary of pastoral evaluations, commendation letters and other appropriate information.
- c. Each priest has access to his own personnel file. Inspection of the file may be arranged by appointment with the Director of Priest Personnel. While a priest may not remove anything from his file, he may add any explanation or clarification he deems appropriate or helpful.
- d. A priest may at any time submit documentation of awards, continuing education, achievements in ministry, modified vitae/resumes and any other materials he feels relevant to an accurate and up-to-date profile. A priest may also submit a letter indicating preference for future assignment.
- e. Any commendations of a priest for his ministry will be placed in his file. Letters of concern will also be filed at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop.
- f. A complaint against a priest submitted to a diocesan office will be forwarded to the Director of Priest Personnel for determination of the nature of the complaint.
  - i. Complaints alleging criminal behavior, civil and/or canonical, will result in the Director of Priest Personnel informing the Diocesan Bishop, the Promoter of Justice and, in the case of crimes in the civil forum, the appropriate law enforcement authorities.
  - ii Non-criminal complaints will be handled under the principle of subsidiarity in which the immediate supervisor of the priest (Pastor, Dean or Regional Vicar) investigates the matter and attempts, if possible, an acceptable resolution with the particular priest.
- g. A priest has the right to utilize procedures as established in the *Code of Canon Law* (c. 220) and applicable diocesan norms and policies to protect his good reputation.

## **II. DIOCESAN ASSIGNMENTS**

### **A. Pastor/Pastoral Administrator**

#### **1. Vacancy Announcement**

- a. A pastorate becomes vacant in several ways, among which are retirement, expiration of term, resignation, transfer, removal for cause or death. When the vacancy occurs, the outgoing pastor or Dean in the case of the death or removal of a pastor, will meet with the parish staff, and pastoral and finance councils to prepare a Parish Profile that will be sent to the Director of Priest Personnel.
- b. A vacancy announcement will be made available to all priests by e-mail. Those interested in

applying can request the updated Parish Profile from the Priest Personnel Office. Those wishing to be considered are to submit a letter to the Diocesan Bishop, with a copy to the Director of Priest Personnel in the time specified in the announcement.

## **2. Procedure**

- a. The members of the Priest Personnel Board will review all applications and recommend a candidate(s) for the position. It is expected that the Diocesan Bishop and/or the Director of Priest Personnel will meet with the candidate(s) considered to be best qualified. The purpose of the meeting is to better assess the interest and qualifications of the applicant(s) as well as any personal issues (family, health, obligations) which may demand special consideration. The Diocesan Bishop will personally notify the applicant chosen and then by a formal appointment letter.
- b. The Diocesan Bishop can make a direct appointment or request that the Priest Personnel Board recommend other names for his consideration. The Diocesan Bishop reserves the right to fill a vacancy without prior consultation.
- c. Priests who have applied but are not selected will be notified by the Director of Priest Personnel.

## **3. Term of Office**

- a. Pastors will normally be appointed for a term of six years. Reappointment for an additional six-year term is at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop. The Diocesan Bishop may transfer a priest for the good of the Church. [Endnote 1](#)
- b. At the end of any term, the pastor may either request reappointment or reassignment to another position. A pastor may also request consideration for another assignment before the end of his term of office. [Endnote 2](#)

## **4. Installation**

- a. Each new pastor, whether a diocesan or religious order priest, is to be formally installed. In accord with the decree from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the *Profession of Faith* and *Oath of Fidelity* will be administered to the new pastor by the Diocesan Bishop.
- b. The Dean will assist the Diocesan Bishop with the installation ceremony.

## **5. New Pastor's Program**

All those assigned to their first pastorate are obliged to attend a *New Pastor's Program* as specified by the Diocesan Bishop. The Priest Personnel Office will provide the new pastors with information regarding the specifics of the program. All costs are covered by the Diocese.

## **6. Pastoral Evaluation**

- a. During the fifth year of a six-year term, the Director of Priest Personnel will arrange for the pastor to participate in a pastoral evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation is to assist the pastor in becoming a more effective minister and to define his accountability to his parishioners and the Diocese. As a service to the priest, he may request the evaluation process at any time.

- b. The evaluative instrument is prepared by the Priest Personnel Board and distributed to the following: clergy and lay parish staff members; pastoral and finance council members; religious education leader and school principal, if applicable; a cross section of parishioners, five selected by the pastor and five randomly chosen by the Priest Personnel Office. The directors of the diocesan Finance, Catholic Schools and Religious Education Offices will also be consulted.
- c. Results of the completed forms are summarized and shared with the priest by the appropriate Episcopal Vicar. The evaluation report will be retained in the priest's personnel file.
- d. Pastors who are members of religious congregations are expected to participate in the evaluative process. Results of the evaluation report will be provided to their religious superior.

## **7. Transfer**

- a. When a pastor is to be transferred to another assignment, he will be given sufficient time to effect such a move.
- b. Any pastor who requests a transfer may also request a personal interview with the Diocesan Bishop or the Director of Priest Personnel.

## **8. Parochial (Pastoral) Administrators**

- a. Rationale for Appointment
  - i. When the duly appointed pastor is unable to function in his ministerial role for an extended period of time, the Diocesan Bishop may appoint a Parochial Administrator to substitute for him until he is able to return to pastoral ministry. Endnote 3
  - ii. Parochial Administrators may be appointed to limited terms as a means of providing a supervised internship to evaluate their pastoral skills.
  - iii. Parochial Administrators may be appointed to small parochial communities while serving as pastor of a neighboring parish.
  - iv. Parochial Administrators may be appointed while the status of a particular parish is under review.
- b. Appointment of a Parochial Administrator should not normally extend beyond one year. The Diocesan Bishop may renew the appointment if circumstances require.
- c. The regional Episcopal Vicar and area Dean will provide pastoral guidance for the Parochial Administrator.

## **B. Parochial Vicar**

### **1. Term of Office**

- a. Parochial vicars are normally appointed for a term of three years, renewable once, in accord with the tenure policy of the Diocese.
- b. All appointments shall be made by the Diocesan Bishop after consultation with the Priest

Personnel Board.

## **2. Pastoral Evaluation**

- a. Each parochial vicar will participate in an evaluation several months prior to the end of his term. The evaluation is to assist the priest in becoming a more effective minister and to define his accountability to his parishioners and the Diocese. Should he choose, he may request the evaluation process at any time.
- b. The evaluative instrument is prepared by the Priest Personnel Board and will be distributed to the following: pastor and lay parish staff members; a cross section of parishioners, five selected by the parochial vicar and five randomly chosen by the Priest Personnel Office.
- c. Results of the completed forms are summarized and shared with the priest by the Director of Priest Personnel. The evaluation report will be retained in the priest's personnel file.
- d. Parochial Vicars who are members of religious congregations are expected to participate in the evaluative process. Results of the evaluation report will be provided to their religious superior.

## **3. Transfer**

- a. When a parochial vicar is to be transferred to another assignment, he will be given sufficient time to effect such a move. A parochial vicar who requests a transfer may request a personal interview with the Diocesan Bishop or the Director of Priest Personnel.
- b. In requesting the transfer of the parochial vicar, a pastor must contact the Diocesan Bishop or the Director of Priest Personnel. The pastor must also inform the parochial vicar of the request before the Priest Personnel Board will act upon it. The same procedure applies for the parochial vicar when requesting a transfer.

## **4. Vacancy**

When a vacancy occurs because of the transfer of the parochial vicar, the needs of the parish will be considered regarding a replacement following consultation with the Priest Personnel Board.

## **5. Alternate Staffing of Parishes (Canon 517.2)**

- a. When a priest is not available to serve as pastor or parochial administrator of a parish or mission, a properly trained and competent person shall be appointed as Parish Pastoral Care Coordinator. The Parish Pastoral Care Coordinator will be supervised by a priest who will also provide sacramental care for the parish/mission.
- b. Academic requirements for a Parish Pastoral Care Coordinator will normally include a Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology or its equivalent.
- c. The duration of the appointment of a Parish Pastoral Care Coordinator is at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop. Remuneration will be consistent with the requirements of the *Code of Canon Law* (c.231, §2 and 281, §2).

## **C. Senior Associate**

1. Senior Associate is a ministerial designation for priests nearing retirement or who are otherwise prevented from assuming responsibility for parochial administrative duties. The guiding principle

of this designation is the encouragement of priests who have been pastors, teachers or engaged in other special ministries to remain active in ministry. Senior Associates are canonically equivalent to a parochial vicar.

2. A priest may apply for Senior Associate status at the age of 65 by petitioning the Diocesan Bishop. He may apply earlier if a chronic health problem significantly impedes his ability to function in an administrative role. After the approval of the Diocesan Bishop and following consultation with the Priest Personnel Board, another assignment will be identified.
3. The priest and the Director of Priest Personnel will contact a pastor for the purpose of entering into a mutually agreeable arrangement including compensation. A ministry profile will be developed by the Pastor, the priest and the Director of Priest Personnel. The length of the assignment will also be specified.
4. A Senior Associate past the age of 70 and retired is compensated through the diocesan retirement plan, social security and stipends. His room and board are provided by the parish. Any additional compensation is negotiated by the Senior Associate, the Pastor and the Director of Priest Personnel. His ministry profile is reviewed annually by the pastor and the Director of Priest Personnel.
5. If the Senior Associate becomes incapacitated, the Director of Priest Personnel will arrange for a new residence for the priest where he can receive proper attention and health care.
6. A senior priest serving in specialized ministry may request to be relieved of his administrative duties and remain active in that ministry. The specifics of his ministry will be determined by the appropriate department head and Director of Priest Personnel, including matters pertaining to salary and benefits.

#### **D. Priests in Specialized Ministry**

1. A priest in specialized ministry is one who is officially assigned by the Diocesan Bishop for service in non-parochial setting, for example, diocesan administration, chaplaincy and educational ministries or ministry outside the diocese.
2. Primary consideration for special ministry will be given to those who possess the appropriate training and/or educational qualifications. Those wishing to apply for specialized ministry must be willing to pursue the appropriate academic or ecclesiastical degree or professional certification process. Years of service in the diocese and past ministerial performance will also be considered.
3. Priests assigned to a special ministry are expected to fulfill those duties outlined in their letter of appointment and the applicable ministry profile. They are also expected to be available for weekday and weekend celebration of the Eucharist in the parish or institution where they reside. The usual provision for a twenty-four hour day off per week applies to these priests as well.
4. Priests assigned to secondary education provide an important ministry in the Diocese. In most cases, they are assigned to teach theology, provide campus ministry and/or serve in administration. Other responsibilities (e.g., teaching other disciplines, coaching athletics) are undertaken by special arrangement. Priests serving in schools do not sign contacts; rather, they serve by virtue of the Diocesan Bishop's appointment articulated in the appointment letter. They may be asked to assume other duties outside of the school, typically parish responsibilities. In these cases, it is essential for the high school and the parish to clearly establish mutually acceptable expectations regarding the celebration of daily Mass, an equitable sharing of priest's salary and benefits, the provision for a weekly day off, obligations regarding the school's in-service days and diocesan

study days and other concerns. It is presumed that the priest will follow the school's expectations of all faculty, unless they clearly do not apply or if other arrangements have been made in consultation with the priest, school administration and diocesan officials. The Director of Priest Personnel and/or the Vicar for Education should be consulted to help resolve questions.

5. The priest's primary appointment is normally responsible for his compensation. In addition, this assignment will provide for his health insurance, retreat costs, annual Emmaus Convocation and Continuing Education and Formation fees.
6. The Diocese will consider the priest's availability for pastoral assistance in the parish when considering compensation to the parish for his room and board. When the priest is unavailable to provide pastoral assistance, the Diocese will provide the parish the full stipend for his room and board. Mass stipends are provided by the Chancery Office to priests in specialized ministry if unavailable from their place of residence.
7. Those in special ministries are ultimately responsible to the Diocesan Bishop for the performance of their duties even though they minister under the direction of their immediate superiors.
8. The term of office given to those in special ministries is defined in the letter of appointment. An extension of that term may be requested. Normally the retirement policy of the institution will be honored.
9. Diocesan policy requires a priest in special ministry to participate in the diocesan evaluation process toward the end of their tenure. Evaluators will be determined by the individual priest and the Director of Priest Personnel. Members of religious congregations are also expected to participate in the process. A summary of the evaluation will be shared with the priest and retained in his personnel file and, if a religious order priest, sent to his superior.

## **E. Ministry at Gannon University**

1. When an opening occurs and the Diocesan Bishop and University President determine that it could be filled by a diocesan priest, the Director of the Priest Personnel Office will notify the priests of the diocese of the opening.
2. When a position is advertised, priests interested in applying will contact the Director of Priest Personnel to discuss his qualifications which will then be shared with the Diocesan Bishop and members of the Priest Personnel Board. With the approval of the Diocesan Bishop, the process will continue.
3. The Diocesan Bishop will share the name of the applicant and his qualifications with the University President who will then begin the screening process.
4. If the applicant successfully completes the screening process, the Diocesan Bishop will formally appoint the priest. The initial appointment will be for a three-year term, renewable pending the Diocesan Bishop's approval and a positive review of University officials.
5. Any priest teaching theology, Scripture or other sacred sciences at Gannon University or the diocesan seminary must request and receive the *mandatum*. Once given, the *mandatum* is for an indefinite period of time but may be removed by the Diocesan Bishop for just cause. The loss of the *mandatum* precludes the priest's ability to teach the sacred sciences at the University and seminary.

## F. Priests Serving Outside the Diocese

1. This category applies to priests incardinated in the Diocese of Erie but in priestly ministry such as military chaplains, appointments to the Catholic University of America or in ecclesiastical institutions outside the Diocese.
2. Permission for ministry outside the diocese is given for a specific period of time. Priests should not assume new ministries, renew contracts or make new initiatives without first receiving permission from the Diocesan Bishop. Periodic evaluations are expected to take place and summaries forwarded to the Director of Priest Personnel.

## G. Incardination/Excarnation

### 1. Incardination

- a. Should a priest wish to become incardinated in the Diocese of Erie, he must first receive the written permission of his Diocesan Bishop. He is then free to present a written request to the Diocesan Bishop of Erie. A copy of his letter should also be sent to the Director of Priest Personnel.
- b. The Director of Priest Personnel will schedule an interview with the priest. All appropriate background checks must be presented as well as permission to review the priest's personnel file. A recent physical examination and psychological assessment is required, all of which must be accompanied by letters of recommendation from his Diocesan Bishop. The Diocesan Bishop will consult with the Priest Personnel Board before final approval.
- c. The Diocesan Bishop may, if he wishes, accept a candidate for incardination immediately on reception of his application. Normally, however, the applicant will be received *ad experimentum* for a period of three to five years. During this period, he will be monitored by the Director of Priest Personnel, at the end of which time a pastoral evaluation will be conducted. An additional *ad experimentum* period may be imposed at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop.
- d. A request for incardination must be considered and responded to within a period of four months from the date of receipt of the letter requesting incardination. [Endnote 4](#)
- e. The same process described above applies to a member of religious institute or society of apostolic life requesting release for incardination as a secular priest. The Superior must grant permission to allow the priest sufficient time to discern his call to diocesan ministry. Completion of all necessary canonical procedures is the responsibility of the religious Superior.
- f. Following five years of ministry after his incardination, the priest's seniority will be calculated from the date of his ordination.

### 2. Excarnation

- a. A priest requesting excarnation from the Diocese of Erie must obtain the written permission of the Diocesan Bishop. No agreements can be entered into without his permission.
- b. In most dioceses, a probationary period is required before incardination. Presuming a favorable evaluation and recommendation, permission for excarnation may be granted provided the Diocesan Bishop *ad quem* indicates in writing his willingness to incardinate the priest.

## H. Membership in a Religious Community

Written permission from the Diocesan Bishop is required before a priest of the Diocese of Erie applies for membership in a religious community. Release is contingent upon the approval of the Diocesan Bishop and the religious Community and completion of any canonical requirements.

## III. Retirement [Endnote 5](#)

### A. Age of Retirement

1. A priest of the diocese who has served for thirty (30) years and has reached seventy (70) years of age may submit a letter of resignation to the Diocesan Bishop. The priest must discuss his intentions with the Diocesan Bishop and Director Priest Personnel one year in advance of his desired date of retirement. Retirement becomes effective only when accepted by the Bishop.
2. Resignation from full-time active ministry must be submitted before one's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Director of Priest Personnel will contact the priest about his retirement plans as he nears his 74<sup>th</sup> birthday. [Endnote 6](#)

### B. Priest Retirement Board

1. To coordinate issues of retirement, the Chairperson of the Presbyteral Council will serve *ex officio* on the Priest Retirement Board. Two retired priests will be appointed to Board membership and will serve as the Bishop's delegates for senior priests. Among their responsibilities is to meet yearly with each retired priest.
2. The Priest Personnel Office will maintain a list of retired priests interested in continuing limited ministry.

### C. Retirement and Continuing Education

1. Retired priests are welcomed but not obligated to participate in the various diocesan activities and events for priests. They are strongly encouraged to attend continuing education opportunities, days of reflection and priest retreats.
2. In cooperation with the Continuing Education and Formation Committee and the Priest Retirement Board, the Director of Priest Personnel will schedule a pre-retirement seminar every three years for priests nearing retirement. Attendance is mandatory for those sixty (60) years of age and older.

### D. Income

1. Premiums for health coverage will be paid by the diocese. The Finance Office will assist retirees in completing the necessary paperwork once their petition for retirement has been approved by the Diocesan Bishop.
2. A retired priest continuing to serve as a Pastor or Parochial Administrator after reaching the age of 75 is eligible to receive both his pension benefit and a full pastor's salary. [Endnote 7](#)

3. Retired priests serving in parishes are entitled to be reimbursed for mileage-related ministry. [Endnote 8](#)
4. It is not the purpose or intent of the Priest Retirement Plan to meet all the needs of a retired priest. Each priest must plan prudently and carefully for his retirement years through such means as Social Security, IRA's, annuities or other savings/investment plans.

## **E. Miscellaneous Concerns**

1. A retired priest should not reside in the rectory of the parish where he last served. A pastor, however, is free to welcome a retired pastor to live with him in his rectory. Retired priests are encouraged to consider residence at the + Bishop Michael J. Murphy Residence for Retired Priest or the Blessed Sacrament Residence.
2. Fraternal care and solicitude demand that when a priest's ministry or well-being become seriously impaired, the Diocesan Bishop, Director of Priest Personnel and regional Vicar should be immediately notified.
3. Each priest is urged to keep a sealed copy of his last Will and Testament and Living Will on file in the Priest Personnel Office. These documents will be opened only at the time of death by either the Diocesan Bishop, Director of Priest Personnel or Vicar General. Care should be taken to up-date the Will as necessary.
4. All retired priests are obliged to comply with the requirements of the diocesan *Policy for the Protection of Children* and the *Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests and Deacons Policy*. [Endnote 9](#)

# IV. PRIESTLY MINISTRY

## **A. Faculties** [Endnote 10](#)

1. Following ordination (or incardination), faculties are given to each diocesan priest. These faculties remain in force unless withdrawn in accord with the universal law of the Church.
2. Diocesan priests who enjoy the faculties of another diocese also enjoy the faculties to preach and celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation in the Diocese of Erie unless those faculties have been revoked.
3. Ordained members of Religious Congregations obtain the faculties of the Diocese of Erie by reason of their appointment to ministry within the diocese. Other religious priests may request faculties provided they have written permission and a *Suitability for Ministry Document* from their Superior. A copy of the written permission and the *Suitability for Ministry Document* should be submitted to the Chancery with the request for faculties.
4. Requests for faculties are directed to the Chancellor; records of the request and permission are kept in the Priest Personnel Office.

## **B. Celebret** [Endnote 11](#)

1. Those responsible for the pastoral care of souls are not to permit a priest or deacon from outside the Diocese to celebrate the sacraments or to preach until that priest or deacon first presents a testimonial letter of good standing, a celebret, issued by his own diocese or religious order within

the previous six months. A copy of the testimonial letter of good standing, celebret, along with a brief letter outlining the purpose and dates of the cleric's service, is to be mailed or faxed to the Erie Chancery before the cleric's visit. A copy of the testimonial letter or celebret must be kept on file in the parish, school or retreat house where the priest or deacon will minister.

2. Any cleric functioning in the Diocese of Erie on behalf of the Erie Diocesan Missionary Cooperative will already have letters of good standing received by the Erie Office of Foreign Missions and the Chancery. Any other priest or deacon from outside the Diocese representing other ecclesiastical organizations must present a letter of good standing to the pastor or others providing for the care of souls.
3. This requirement applies to concelebrants as well as principal celebrants. It also applies to the celebration of weddings, funerals, Sunday or weekday Masses, parish missions, parish retreats, school and religious education retreats, confessions, baptisms, and any act of ministerial function. Care should be taken whenever possible to communicate this requirement beforehand to visiting clergy.
4. This expectation is already widespread throughout the United States. Consequently, clergy from the Diocese of Erie who plan to travel and who wish to join in the presbyteral or diaconal celebration of the sacraments outside of the Diocese should contact the Chancery for a testimonial letter of good standing, a celebret.

## **V. PRIESTLY LIFE**

### **A. Residence**

1. Each priest of the Diocese of Erie is to live in a residence assigned or approved by the Diocesan Bishop. Permission for residence outside a parish or institution may be granted in extraordinary cases. In the matter of housing, there may be times when circumstances and personality issues may make alternate housing arrangements necessary.
2. In deciding the suitability of alternate housing, the following criteria should be followed:
  - a. The agreement of all priests concerned should be secured.
  - b. The approval of the Priest Personnel Board must be received before a recommendation is made to the Diocesan Bishop. In difficult cases, the mediation of the Priest Personnel Board might be requested.
  - c. The arrangement should be accepted by the people of the parishes/institutions involved.
3. The parish rectory is the home of the priests assigned there. Permission must be obtained from the Bishop for a priest to reside in the rectory. Only single priest rectories will be considered for this permission. [Endnote 12](#)

### **B. Working Conditions in the Parish Office**

1. Each priest should have access to an office for counseling, studying and instructional purposes. This office must be distinct from the living quarters. Private and common living quarters are never a suitable place for counseling or spiritual direction.

2. Each priest in the rectory should have access to the basic parish files, record books and equipment.
3. Confidentiality, especially in regard to counseling as well as church records, should be safeguarded at all times.
4. Specific areas of responsibility of all members of the parish staff (housekeepers, secretaries, maintenance personnel) should be clearly defined and understood by all the priests in the rectory.
5. Parish offices are to make provision that an emergency number is available twenty-four (24) hours a day.

### **C. Attire**

In the daily exercise of their ministry, priests are to wear customary clerical attire and to dress in a manner appropriate to their office when serving the people of God.

### **D. Days Off**

1. Each priest of the Diocese is entitled to a day off each week (twenty-four hour day which may include an overnight).
2. The parish daily Mass schedule should be arranged to afford this opportunity.

### **E. Vacation**

1. Each priest is entitled to have four weeks of vacation each year (cc. 533 and 550), excluding times of retreat, continuing formation, programs of spiritual renewal and the Emmaus Convocation. Four weeks should be understood to include three weekends. Vacation days must be taken within the calendar year and not carried into the following year.
2. Transitional deacons are entitled to two weeks of vacation during their diaconal ministry. Where there is more than one priest in a particular parish, prudence and practicality ought to guide the determination of vacation schedules so there is suitable coverage to meet the pastoral needs of parishioners. The parish is responsible for remuneration for those who substitute for priests while on vacation.
3. In one-priest parishes, arrangements should be made to offer approved options for liturgical services to ensure the prayer life of the community continues. The Office of Worship can provide assistance in this regard.

### **F. Health Care**

1. Each priest is to maintain his optimal level of health and wellness. When necessary, appropriate care will be provided by the Diocese for those priests who are experiencing a temporary or permanent change in their level of wellness and are in need of intervention.
2. Each priest is encouraged to have an annual health screening examination appropriate to his age. Payment should be made from our diocesan health insurance coverage.
3. A priest who is in need of intensive or long term rehabilitative services for physical, psychological or emotional reasons should meet with the Vicar General.

4. It is the policy of the Diocese of Erie to encourage and assist a priest who is in need of psychological counseling or therapy. The priest should obtain an appointment with a credentialed professional therapist.
  - a. The cost of counseling services should be covered first by the health insurance plan and other applicable sources such as Medicare. When such assistance is not available, priests should contact the Director of Priest Personnel. The Diocese will provide some assistance with the fees.
  - b. The priest should sign a release of information form so that the Diocesan Bishop or his delegate can receive, every three months, a report from the counselor regarding the progress of the therapy/counseling and the usefulness of its continuance, with due regard for the confidentiality of the information.

## **G. Spiritual Development**

### **1. Liturgy of the Hours** Endnote 13

Given the pressures of pastoral ministry and the difficulty at times of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, priests are granted the faculty to commute the obligation of the Liturgy of the Hours to Morning and Evening Prayer in the following instances:

*(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n.97; Canon 87, §1):*

- i. When attending and/or concelebrating the ordination of a deacon or a priest, the funeral of a priest, deacon or religious and the Chrism Mass.
- ii. When attending study days, diocesan workshops or days of recollection.
- iii. When making a holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved or exposed, providing one full hour is spent in prayer.
- iv. When traveling for weekend parish assistance for more than one full hour.
- v. When giving a day of recollection or day of reflection.
- vi. When out of pastoral necessity one binates or tricates on a Sunday, holy day or weekday.
- vii. When hearing confessions for several hours (Christmas or Easter).

### **2. Priest Retreats and Gatherings**

- a. Priest retreats are mandatory. Every priest is expected to make a yearly retreat and are encouraged to participate in diocesan priest retreats every other year. Priests making a private retreat are to indicate where and by whom in a note to the Director of Priest Personnel.
- b. Days of Recollection are scheduled by the Clergy Continuing Education Committee. These Days of Recollection are mandatory for all priests in all ministries of this diocese.
- c. The Emmaus Convocation is meant to build fellowship among the priests and is the most important priest gathering of the year.

## **H. Continuing Education** Endnote 14

1. All priests actively engaged in pastoral ministry are entitled to spend a minimum of one week (40 hours) of released time annually for continuing education and formation. This is in addition to retreat and vacation time to which all priests are also entitled but includes time spent in programs enhancing professional competence.
2. Every priest is required to undertake a minimum of twenty hours annually in some form of formal study. Ten of the twenty hours should come from diocesan sponsored programs.
3. All priests actively engaged in pastoral ministry within the Diocese of Erie are entitled to an annual subsidy for continuing education and formation. This subsidy is the responsibility of the parish/institution to which the priest is assigned full time as of January 1st. This subsidy is to be given directly to or held in reserve for the priest by January 30th. A priest can request that the subsidy be held in abeyance in order to accumulate a sufficient amount to provide for a specific program prior his participation; however, this does not release the priest from his continuing education responsibility each year.
4. Part of the annual subsidy is to be given to the Diocese by the parish/institution to support the Continuing Education and Formation Fund. This fund will be used to finance all programs sponsored by the Continuing Education and Formation Committee.
5. Those priests who are military chaplains or chaplains in private institutions are exempt from the diocesan plan as they are normally covered by continuing education plans within their respective institutions. Retired priests are not bound by the expected forty hours although they are encouraged to participate in continuing education opportunities. They may also apply for continuing education assistance as a supplement to the continuing education programs offered by the Diocese.
6. Sabbatical leave in order to undertake further study and formation is available to the priests of the Diocese. Those ordained or incardinated for ten or more years are invited to participate in the sabbatical program. Leave is based on the following formula: ten years incardinated/ordained = one month, 15 years = two months, 20 years = four months. Cumulative leave is not to exceed six months. Costs associated with a sabbatical program and amounts allocated by the diocese, parish or institution of assignment and the priest will be determined and reviewed periodically by the Presbyteral Council.

## **I. Leaves of Absence**

### **1. Authorized Leave**

- a.* Authorized leave is defined as time off from official assignments granted by permission of the Diocesan Bishop and without loss of seniority. Application for an authorized leave must be made directly to the Diocesan Bishop who reserves the right to approve each request. Without his approval, a priest on leave will not receive a salary or enjoy diocesan faculties. Suitable financial arrangements for a leave of absence will be determined at the time of approval by the Diocesan Bishop.
- b.* Requests for service in the military, extended educational leave or other forms of service outside the Diocese shall normally be made at least two (2) years in advance of the proposed effective date.

## **2. Military Leave**

- a.* Requests must be made to the Diocesan Bishop who, in consultation with the Priest Personnel Board, reserves the right to approve such requests.
- b.* Release for military service is for a specified period of time.

## **3. Retreat Leave**

All priests of the diocese are entitled to five days annual retreat.

## **4. Sick Leave**

- a.* In consultation with the Diocesan Bishop and the Director of Priest Personnel, having received the recommendation of a personal physician, psychiatrist or psychologist, sick leave may be granted for a period of up to six months. Sick leave does not affect a priest's seniority. During this period, the priest will continue to receive a salary and benefits from the parish or institution to which he is assigned. While a priest is on sick leave, diocesan contact is to be maintained through the Priest Personnel Office.
- b.* When the period of sick leave expires, continued sick leave is subject to the following conditions:
  - i.* Up-dated written recommendation from the attending physician, psychiatrist or psychologist;
  - ii.* Periodic report of progress to the Diocesan Bishop or Director of Priest Personnel by the attending physician;
  - iii.* Salary and benefits will continue to be received from the parish or institution of assignment unless another arrangement has been made by the Diocesan Bishop;
  - iv.* The priest is not declared permanently disabled. In such cases, the disability policies stated in the Diocesan Pension Plan apply.

## **5. Personal Leave**

- a.* Priests occasionally request a leave of absence from active ministry for personal reasons. When a personal leave is granted, the Diocesan Bishop and the priest should draw up a written agreement specifying the length of the leave, what support, if any, the priest will receive from the Diocese, what ministerial functions the priest may or may not perform and any particular obligations the priest is to observe during the course of the leave.
- b.* A leave for a definite period of time is the norm. To that end, the agreement should specify a date at which they will review the reasons for the leave.

## **6. Unauthorized Leave**

- a.* A priest is considered on an unauthorized leave when he (a) leaves his assignment without permission of the Diocesan Bishop, (b) refuses to report to his assignment given by the Diocesan Bishop, (c) fails to fulfill the conditions and terms of his personal leave or (d) is absent without the permission of the Diocesan Bishop.
- b.* When the priest is absent without authorization, the Director of Priest Personnel or his

delegate will conduct an investigation to determine whether the priest's absence constitutes a withdrawal from ministry. Before any action is taken, the Director of Priest Personnel should make a reasonable effort to contact him and encourage his return. When these efforts fail, the priest should be warned that his financial support, including health insurance, will be terminated by a specified date. At the specified date, salary and contributions to the pension plan will be discontinued and participation in the group health insurance plan and all other benefits will cease. However, if the priest is vested in the pension plan, his right to those benefits is secure.

- c. Unauthorized absence may constitute sufficient reason for the initiation of a penal process leading toward the suspension of the priest. If the faculties of a priest are revoked, the decree of revocation should state precisely what functions are proscribed.
- d. Information about a priest's status should be made known to those who have the need to know. The presbyterate should be made aware of restrictions placed on the priest's ministry. The same should be made available to the Diocesan Bishop in whose diocese the priest is residing.

## **J. Release from Diocesan Assignment**

### **1. Release for Studies**

- a. The Diocesan Bishop occasionally assigns diocesan priests to obtain specialized academic degrees or professional credentials to serve the needs of the diocese. Release for studies may be initiated at the request of the priest or Diocesan Bishop. Unless the Diocesan Bishop approves the release for studies in writing, it is not considered granted. With the Diocesan Bishop's approval, the priest's salary and benefits will be provided by the diocese along with a monthly stipend for food and basic living expenses. Priests assigned to Gannon University for post-graduate studies are subsidized according to University policy.
- b. Any Erie diocesan priest assigned to service at Gannon University or designated to be assigned to Gannon in the future who wishes to pursue an advanced degree must receive permission in advance from both the Diocesan Bishop and the President of the University. The priest, Diocesan Bishop and University President are to agree on a particular plan of studies including the institution, the academic program/degree, the time frame and the financial arrangements.
- c. The Diocese agrees that the priest will be assigned to Gannon for a minimum of at least five years after receiving the advanced degree.
- d. The priest who begins an academic program for an advanced degree is expected to complete it in a reasonable amount of time as agreed upon by the priest, Diocesan Bishop and University officials. To facilitate this, the priest is expected to submit an annual report to the Diocesan Bishop and the appropriate University official. If the priest's progress is unacceptable, the Diocesan Bishop or his delegate and the appropriate University official are to meet with the priest to determine whether the program of studies should continue.
- e. If the priest leaves active ministry prior to the completion of the degree, the Diocese of Erie and Gannon University will immediately cease any further payment of costs of any type incurred by the priest in pursuit of the degree.
- f. A written agreement between the priest, the Diocese and Gannon University will be developed in each instance. In the event of discrepancies, the particular provisions of the

agreement shall take precedent over the provisions of this policy. The provisions of this policy shall apply to situations not covered by the written agreement.

## **2. Release to Service Elsewhere**

- a. Release in this instance is understood to be a leave to serve as a priest in a non-diocesan assignment. This does not include military service but includes the following: (a) teaching (b) counseling (c) research and (d) service in another diocese.
- b. Request for this release necessitates the approval of the Diocesan Bishop and is granted under the following conditions:
  - i. Assignment and salary are discontinued; remuneration and benefits will be the responsibility of the non-diocesan assignment.
  - ii. Contributions to the pension and group health insurance plans become the responsibility of the individual priest.

## **K. The Funeral of a Priest**

1. As soon as possible after a priest's death, the Office of the Bishop should be contacted. In the absence of the Diocesan Bishop, the Vicar General, Chancellor or Director of Priest Personnel, hereafter referred to as the *Bishop's representative* is to be called. The day and time of the funeral liturgy are to be set only after contacting the Diocesan Bishop's representative.
2. Every effort will be made to follow the written instructions or requests of the deceased priest. Those responsible for planning, however, may find it necessary to make certain changes to conform with liturgical norms, diocesan custom and/or particular circumstances. Priests must have permission from the Diocesan Bishop to be cremated. Cremation must take place after the funeral Mass.
3. Our Catholic tradition recognizes a special relationship between the Diocesan Bishop and his presbyterate. For this reason, it is appropriate to have the Diocesan Bishop serve as the main celebrant of the liturgy. A close priest friend may preach the homily and other priests may be invited to participate as designated concelebrants. The homilist and special concelebrants will be determined by the Diocesan Bishop's representative in consultation with family members and the local priest coordinator.
4. Family members and relatives are sometimes unfamiliar with Church protocol or traditions of the clergy, parish communities or institution where the priest served. To avoid any confusion, the Diocesan Bishop or his representative will review and finalize the proposed liturgical arrangements.
5. Since the priest is a public person and under the jurisdiction of the Diocesan Bishop and since his obituary is a public record and memorial of his life and works, any newspaper article or obituary is to be reviewed with the diocesan representative before publication. The aim is to ensure accurate information that reflects fittingly the life and ministry of the deceased priest. The funeral director, in concert with family members, should submit a draft of the proposed obituary for review to the Diocesan Bishop's representative before publication in the newspaper.
6. It is Diocesan policy that every priest has an updated will and funeral instructions on file in the Priest Personnel Office. This is meant to help ensure that the decedent's desires regarding his funeral are followed. The will and burial instructions are to be placed in separate sealed

envelopes with the name, address and telephone number of the executor printed on the outside of the will.

7. It is also necessary that each priest have on file in the Priest Personnel Office a legally binding Living Will document (which is in accord with teachings of the Catholic Church) specifying his wishes regarding end of life medical care and designating a health care proxy who can make decisions regarding his care should the priest himself be unable or incompetent to do so.

## VI. CLERICAL MISCONDUCT

### A. Child Abuse [Endnote 15](#)

All priests are subject to the Diocese of Erie *Policy for the Protection of Children* and the *Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests and Deacons Policy*.

### B. Substance Abuse

1. Any priest whose repeated and continued use of alcohol or other drugs/chemical substances which interfere with his performance of his assignment, reduces his dependability, impairs his interpersonal relationships, affects his health or reflects discredit to his office will be considered chemically dependent and in need of treatment.
2. The diagnosis and treatment plan for the priest is held in strict confidence. During his time of treatment, the cost of care and the priest's salary will be provided by the Diocese.
3. On discharge, the Director of Priest Personnel will meet with the priest to discuss matters pertaining to his return to ministry.
4. The goal of the Diocese of Erie with regard to alcohol and other chemical dependencies is the restoration of the priest's health and dignity and his return to productive and spiritually rewarding ministry.

## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops with ratification by the Congregation for Bishops (P.N. 3517/84/6) as referenced in Decree promulgated July 16, 1985
- <sup>2</sup> Decree promulgated November 26, 2002 regarding Term of Office for Pastors
- <sup>3</sup> Code of Canon Law, c. 539 and 540
- <sup>4</sup> Code of Canon Law, c. 268
- <sup>5</sup> Constitution, Priest Personnel Board, Article IX
- <sup>6</sup> Canon 538 mandates that pastors submit their resignation by their 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. This policy extends the requirement to all priests in active ministry in the Diocese of Erie.
- <sup>7</sup> Policy on pension benefits and continuing pastoral administration, as contained in a letter to the priests of the Diocese of Erie dated May 6, 2005 and effective as of July 1, 2005
- <sup>8</sup> Decree Concerning Mileage Reimbursement promulgated January 1, 2010
- <sup>9</sup> Refer to current diocesan policies for the *Protection of Children and the Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests and Deacons*.
- <sup>10</sup> Diocesan Faculties for Priests
- <sup>11</sup> Policy on Celebrets as promulgated on September 24, 2008, amended on April 4, 2011
- <sup>12</sup> Policy for Parents of Priests Living in a Rectory as promulgated on May 19, 2014
- <sup>13</sup> Policy regarding the commutation of the Liturgy of the Hours per letter to the clergy dated July 11, 2002
- <sup>14</sup> Continuing Education and Formation Guidelines promulgated on May 1, 1990
- <sup>15</sup> Refer to current diocesan policies for the *Protection of Children and Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests and Deacons*.