

ONGOING FORMATION

INTRODUCTION: All priests and deacons are to take their ongoing formation as a personal responsibility for which they are accountable to the Bishop.

INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

The Committee for Ongoing Formation of Priests is advisory to the Bishop. While the primary focus is the ongoing formation of priests, there is collaboration in programs and activities with the ongoing formation of deacons. The Director of the Office of Ongoing Formation of Priests schedules events for priests and the Director of the Diaconate schedules events for deacons.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1. Sacramental Life

Clergy are to nourish their spiritual life at the twofold table of Sacred Scripture and the Eucharist; priests are therefore earnestly invited to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice daily. Clergy are to approach the sacrament of penance frequently (at least monthly is recommended).

2. Liturgy of the Hours

Both priests and transitional deacons are obliged to carry out the Liturgy of the Hours daily (Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, one of the Daytime Prayer hours, Evening Prayer and Compline). Serious illness excuses from reciting some or even all of the Liturgy of the Hours. Partial recitation should be focused on Morning and Evening Prayer. A priest who trinitates or who drives 500 miles or who concelebrates a Mass with the Bishop may omit the Office of Readings for that day.

Permanent deacons are obliged to recite Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer daily, and they are encouraged to pray the Office of Readings.

Failure to fulfill one's obligation of praying the Liturgy of the Hours on behalf of the universal church is considered grave matter.

3. Personal Prayer

Clerics are exhorted to engage regularly in mental prayer, prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, to honor the Virgin Mother of God with particular veneration (especially in the Holy Rosary), and to use other general and special means to holiness (cf. canon 279).

4. Retreats

Clergy are expected to participate in a retreat every year (canon 276 §2°).

The Diocese will sponsor mandatory group retreats for priests every odd numbered year. During the even numbered year the priest is to make either the retreat sponsored by the Diocese or another type as best suits his own needs, e.g. group, private, directed, etc. Each priest has a Retreat Allowance specified in the annual Salary and Benefits schedule for priests. This allowance is provided by the place of assignment. For our retired priests the diocese provides the allowance. Retired priests can submit receipts directly to the Office of Financial Affairs for reimbursement.

A retreat is sponsored by the Office of the Diaconate for deacons every other year. This retreat is subsidized by the Diocese and deacons are strongly encouraged to attend. The allowance for a deacon's annual retreat shall be the same amount regulated for priests (as found in the annual Salary and Benefits schedule for priests). The retreat allowance is intended for the deacon himself (not his wife). Retired deacons can submit receipts for their annual retreat to the Office of the Diaconate for reimbursement.

5. Prayer Days

Days of prayer and/or recollection are scheduled in accord with the needs of the presbyterate according to the judgment of the Bishop.

6. Spiritual Direction

All clergy are expected to seek spiritual direction. The frequency of meetings is determined in consultation between the director and directee taking into account the season of life of the directee and need.

7. Support Groups

Clergy are expected to belong to clergy fraternity support groups.

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

1. Ongoing Formation

Each priest and deacon of the Diocese is expected to annually attend workshops and seminars related to his ministry and is obligated to fulfill a minimum of twenty (20) hours in ongoing formation per year. Priority is given to those made mandatory by Bishop (Canon 279). To do this, each priest and permanent deacon is permitted one week of released time per year in addition to his vacation and annual retreat.

If a serious reason urges that a priest not attend mandatory days of formation, he must obtain a dispensation from the Bishop; Permanent Deacons must obtain a dispensation from the Director of the Diaconate, who may consult with the Bishop and/or Vicar for Clergy regarding the request.

2. Funding

In addition to the annual retreat allowance, each priest has an annual Ongoing Formation Allowance set by the Bishop for workshops, seminars, online courses, professional books and magazines, and other ongoing formation needs. The amount is specified in the annual Salary and Benefits schedule and is provided by the place of assignment. For our retired priests this allowance is provided by the diocese. Retired priests can submit receipts directly to the Office of Financial Affairs for reimbursement.

The annual allowance for a deacon's ongoing formation shall be equal to the amount allowed for a priest's annual retreat. This formula takes into consideration that a deacons' ministerial duties are part-time rather than full-time as is in the case of priests; therefore, the ongoing formation allowance of deacons is not equal to that for priests.

3. Studies

Clergy are encouraged to take advantage of a wide range of opportunities for Ongoing Formation, including lectures and online courses, or to enroll with local educational faculties (e.g. Aquinas Institute), while not neglecting their assigned responsibilities. Before enrolling in courses, parochial vicars and deacons should first seek his pastor's permission.

Further study arrangements for clergy are made by Bishop in consultation with the Director of the Office of Ongoing Formation.

SABBATICALS

1. Definition

Sabbaticals are times of professional study and personal prayer for priests. A sabbatical can be considered as a "Professional Updating and Renewal Program" or simply as an "Ongoing Formation Program."

Sabbaticals ordinarily range from one to four consecutive months in length. Sabbaticals are not leaves of absence for health or other rehabilitative reasons. They are not extended vacation, nor are they considered postgraduate studies. Retreats do not normally come under the heading of sabbaticals, though a retreat might constitute one element of a sabbatical.

2. Occurrence

Sabbaticals are a normal part of one's service after ordination and priests are able to petition the bishop for a sabbatical after every ten years of priestly service in the diocese.

One should expect to have been on at least one sabbatical ten years prior to retirement age. Every year efforts will be made for some priests to be on sabbatical. Preference will be given to seniority and need.

3. Procedure

Initiatives: Initiatives for a sabbatical will be taken either by the individual or by Bishop. When one wishes a sabbatical, a written request is to be made to Bishop. This request should state the nature and purpose of the sabbatical, its relationship to one's personal and spiritual growth, its value to one's ministry, and its cost, location, and length. If the priest desires, he may propose an alternative to a structured program.

Deadline: Because of budget-building schedules the deadline for a sabbatical application is January 1 for sabbaticals which will take place during the following fiscal year (July 1-June 30).

- i. The Bishop may refer all applications to the Director of the Office of Ongoing Formation, who will make recommendations to the Bishop by February 1.
- ii. The Bishop will notify the applicant of his decision by February 15 concerning the request.

Receipts: The priest on sabbatical is to maintain receipts for his program and lodging, and submit these to the Director of the Office of Ongoing Formation for reimbursement.

Notification: Once a sabbatical is approved, it is advisable to notify parishioners as early as possible. In this way pastoral questions can be received and addressed.

4. Criteria Governing Approval

- a. Incardination
- b. Years of service to the diocese
- c. Quality of the program
- d. Degree of usefulness to the pastoral ministry of the Diocese
- e. Date of application

5. Financing

Shared Cost: At the discretion of the Bishop, the cost of an approved future sabbatical will be shared by the diocese, the applicant, and the parish or institution of assignment. The diocese will cover 50% (with a maximum contribution of \$10,000) and the parish will cover 25% (with a maximum contribution of \$5,000). The priest himself would be personally responsible for all other sabbatical expenditures.

Some Examples:

- If the total cost is \$13,500, the parish will pay \$3,375 and the priest will also pay \$3,375; whereas the diocese will pay \$6,750.
- If the total cost is \$26,000, the parish will pay \$5,000, the priest will pay \$11,000, and the diocese will pay \$10,000. In this case the parish and the diocesan share were both maxed out, so the priest is personally responsible for paying the remainder.

Qualifications for Reimbursement: Shared costs include registration fees, tuition, room and board, travel, and meals (if not provided by a structured program). In order to receive the subsidy from the parish and/or diocese, receipts must be provided. Once the parish receives the receipts, a copy of this reimbursement should be sent to the Director of Ongoing Formation so that he can coordinate the diocesan portion of the subsidy (i.e. reimbursement).

In addition to the \$5,000 maximum subsidy from the parish, a priest on sabbatical is entitled to the value of the monthly housing allowance found in the annual Salary and Benefits Schedule (currently \$500) for the cost of his groceries/meals not included in the tuition of his sabbatical program. This amount will be the responsibility of the parish and therefore itemized receipts for these groceries/meals should be maintained for the parish bookkeeper.

Vacation: If a pastor takes annual vacation days during the sabbatical, the costs associated with the vacation period(s) including groceries/meals are considered a personal expense.

Budgeting: The pastor should budget for the following: (1) the parish portion of the sabbatical program (\$5,000 maximum), (2) the monthly housing allowance for groceries/meals (not included in the tuition of the program), (3) the priest's continued salary and benefits while on sabbatical, and (4) the payment of substitute clergy throughout the sabbatical.

Changing Assignments Post Sabbatical: The parish or institution to which the priest was assigned prior to the sabbatical is responsible for the financial portion of the sabbatical.

6. Replacements during Sabbatical

The priest going on sabbatical will be responsible for finding replacement clergy for both regularly scheduled Masses as well as lining up replacements for weddings, funerals, and sick calls.

The parish is responsible for the payment of substitute clergy. The substitute priest must be eligible for ministry in the Diocese and legal to work in the United States.

If there are difficulties in finding coverage, the priest can speak with the Dean and Director of Ongoing Formation. It is hoped that the priests of each deanery will make every effort to enable their fellow priests to go on sabbatical.

With prior written permission of the Bishop, daily Masses in smaller parishes may be suspended during the sabbatical. In order for Bishop to make this determination he will need to be advised by the Pastor on the ease of parishioners finding nearby Masses.

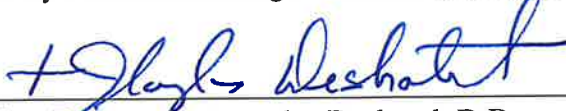
For priests assigned as Pastor, a Temporary Administrator will usually be appointed by Bishop. The Administrator's role will be primarily one of troubleshooting unexpected difficulties. The priest seeking sabbatical may suggest a possible Temporary Administrator who must be a priest. This does not preclude that daily, administrative duties may be assumed by the Associate Pastor, Deacon or a Business Manager.

7. Accountability


When a priest returns from a sabbatical, he must provide a brief written report to the Bishop which shall include his personal evaluation of his sabbatical, listing its strengths and weaknesses, and whether and how he profited personally (human formation), spiritually, and professionally (pastoral and academic formation) from the experience.

His report will assist Bishop and the Director of the Office of Ongoing Formation in their recommendations to other applicants.

This policy is effective immediately and will abrogate and replace in its entirety the former policy titled Continuing Formation (Policy 202) dated August 15, 2006.


Most Reverend J. Douglas Deshotel, D.D.
Bishop of Lafayette

Dated: January 10, 2025


Mrs. Maureen K. Fontenot, PHR, SHRM-CP
Chancellor/Notary

