

ONGOING FORMATION OF PRIESTS

The document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops entitled *The Program of Continuing Education of Priests* states:

Every priest has a right and an obligation to continue his spiritual growth and education. He has a right to strong support from his superiors, peers, and the people he serves. He also has an obligation to his superiors and peers, but above all to his people, to grow in grace and knowledge.

The American Bishops see this right and obligation to ongoing formation in terms of conversion:

Any discussion of ongoing formation and education of priests needs to be grounded in understanding of conversion as an ongoing process both personal and communal. Though conversion takes place in the inner life of each person, it is never a private affair and conversion occurs in every facet of one's life – intellectual, affective, social, spiritual, moral, and ecclesial.

Of these areas of a person's life, spirituality is at the center of growth for priests. Priests, like other professionals, must engage in lifelong learning if their service is to be effective, if they are to grow in faith, and if they are to proclaim that faith clearly and convincingly to a rapidly changing world. In this endeavor, it is the individual who is primarily responsible for taking the initiative in continuing his personal and professional education, which the needs of the Church and the world demand of him. Besides the personal development of the priest, the faithful have a right to the best service the priest can offer.

Priestly ministry is a most effective witness to the Gospel when it addresses realistically the situation in which the faithful find themselves. Priests cannot be of service to others if they remain strangers to the life and conditions of others. In today's world, it is imperative that priests engage in personal and group study, which will improve their ministry. Ongoing formation is a lifelong endeavor.

The American Bishops define continuing formation as any learning after ordination, including growth both internal (spiritual, social, psychological) and external (cultural changes, theological disciplines, and pastoral skills).

THE COMMITTEE FOR ONGOING FORMATION OF PRIESTS (COFP)

The Committee for the Ongoing Formation of Priests falls under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop's Office. The director is selected by the Archbishop. The members are chosen either by appointment by the Archbishop or through election by the presbyterate. For those elected to the COFP, the term shall be three years with the possibility for renewal. The COFP will meet at least four times a year. The director will serve as chair of the meetings. The COFP shall aid the director in setting priorities and in developing and evaluating programs of ongoing formation.

CONVOCATIONS

Every two years, the Archdiocese offers a convocation for priests. It is important to set aside time for the presbyterate to reflect and to foster priestly fraternity. In order to emphasize the importance of this need, attendance at convocations is mandatory for all priests. If for any reason a priest is unable to attend the convocation, he must speak directly with the Archbishop.

RETREATS, DAYS OF REFLECTION, AND FRATERNITIES AND SUPPORT GROUPS

The Gospel attests to the fact that Jesus and his apostles took time for themselves; time to be in communion with the Father and with each other. The tradition attests to the need for time set apart for spiritual renewal and growth, both as an individual and as a minister of the diocesan church. As such, Canon Law requires that priests attend an annual retreat. The Archdiocese offers a priests' retreat every two years, alternating with convocations. It is the priest's responsibility to make time for a retreat in those years when one is not offered by the Archdiocese.

All priests are encouraged throughout the year to make "days of reflection." Such activities should also be encouraged on a deanery level. The COFP offers at least two days of reflection each year, occurring in Advent in Lent.

The Church highly recommends priestly fraternities and support groups. The COFP recognizes this need and would encourage membership in these groups.

ARCHDIOCESAN ONGOING FORMATION PROGRAMS

Priests should be continually encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities to continue their education through independent study, reading, seminars, workshops, and formal courses. The Archdiocese has the responsibility to support and encourage priests to participate in educational activities pertaining to ministry. Toward this end, each priest is provided with the following annual minimum opportunities.

Priests of the Archdiocese are encouraged to participate annually in educational opportunities, such as workshops and seminars, provided by the Archdiocese. These Archdiocesan sponsored programs should be given priority in ones' yearly educational plans. Funding for Archdiocesan programs is to be provided by the parish or ministry to which a priest is assigned, at a cost of up to \$800.00.

ANNUAL PASTORAL/ADMINISTRATIVE SEMINARS

All priests who are newly appointed pastors or parish administrators in the Archdiocese, as well as transferring pastors, are required to participate in a seminar on policies and procedures in the Archdiocese. New pastors are also encouraged to participate in an orientation program for new pastors. Information on these programs can be provided by the COFP upon request.

A workshop is offered each year for all priests who are newly ordained, new to the Archdiocese, or returning to ministry in the Archdiocese. Attendance at this workshop is mandatory.

ONGOING FORMATION PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE ARCHDIOCESE

In addition to these programs offered by the Archdiocese, each priest is permitted one week of study time per year away from his parish or ministry. However, this time must be used to pursue educational opportunities. Such study must relate directly to pastoral ministry. The priest must have prior approval from his supervisor for this absence and must make application to the director of the COFP. The procedures and policies for application and funding for programs outside the Archdiocese are outlined below.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES FOR ONGOING FORMATION

The application should be sent to the director of the COFP at least six (6) weeks in advance of the course of study. The request should include the topic of study, place, duration, cost (room and board, transportation, tuitions, books, etc.), and supervisor's approval. The director will decide the suitability of the program. The director may request additional information from the applicant, deferring a final recommendation until such information has been supplied. A written response will be forwarded to the applicant by the director.

FUNDING FOR ONGOING FORMATION

Currently, there is a limit of \$2,500 for Archdiocesan clergy, and a limit of \$1,875 for religious serving in the Archdiocese. The parish or ministry is responsible for one half of this sum. In parishes where funding is a hardship, special arrangements may be made. At least fifty (50) percent of the sum granted should be for the workshop or course and housing. Only a percentage of travel expenses will be covered. No funds will be approved or granted unless complete and timely application has been made. The application for funding can be found at the end of this document.

Funding from the Committee will not approved for the following requests: books for personal use (i.e. outside of assigned reading for programs and courses), retreats and convocations, and membership fees or dues. The parish or ministry to which the priest is assigned should be sure to budget for an annual retreat, whether hosted by the Archdiocese or elsewhere.

SABBATICAL POLICY

The entire Church community has the right to expect ministerial excellence from their spiritual leaders, and the entire Church community participates in supporting the endeavors that lead to this. In a special way, sabbaticals show the commitment of the priest, the Archdiocese, and the community to which the priest is assigned. Therefore, the Archdiocese will provide the opportunity and funding for sabbaticals for all eligible priests according to the following procedures and criteria.

A sabbatical is distinguished from vacation, sick leave, personal leave, and advanced studies. The typical length of a sabbatical is three to six months. Each diocesan priest will be eligible for a sabbatical after seven years of service in Archdiocese. The Archdiocese offers \$10,000.00 in funding for sabbaticals. Any costs which exceed this amount must be paid by the priest. Application for a sabbatical must be made to the director of the COFP.

MENTORING PROGRAM

An early ministry mentoring program is intended to offer structured and supportive assistance, both institutional and personal, to one fully engaged in presbyteral ministry for the first time. Its further purpose is to continue to aid in the development of pastoral skills and to address issues of spiritual, personal, and interpersonal growth and development. Through ongoing formation, this program is meant to support the mentee in the development of his attitudes of personal study, prayer, ministry, and leisure to promote a healthy life balance.

The mentoring program begins soon after ordination to the priesthood, though an initial meeting will take place prior to ordination. The mentor and newly ordained will meet every four to six weeks for at least three years. Time and place will be mutually agreed upon.