

REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS FOR A PRIEST

[Final Report of the Presbyteral Council Ad Hoc Committee, December 2010]

Although no one schedule can capture what a priest does or will need to do in a given time period, there are common expectations which can be shared with the people in a priest's pastoral setting. In that way both transparency on the priest's part and support on the pastoral setting's part may be more readily achieved.

The following items represent the final consensus from the presbyteral council ad hoc committee.

YEARLY

- ❖ Personal Care
 - Vacation: A priest is entitled to four weeks per year, which includes three weekends
 - Full medical/dental check-ups
 - Retreat: A priest is bound to take a yearly retreat of at least 5 days.
- ❖ Archdiocesan gatherings for priests
 - Bi-annual convocation
 - Priests' anniversary celebration
 - Presbyteral ordination
 - Chrism Mass
 - Priests' funerals, when possible
 - 2-3 other regular diocesan-wide or regional gatherings of priests
- ❖ 12-20 Continuing Education contact hours⁽¹⁾
- ❖ One-one meeting with regional moderator

MONTHLY

- ❖ Priestly fraternity
- ❖ Spiritual direction
- ❖ Monthly day of reflection⁽²⁾ or at least some of the seasonal days of prayer for priests
- ❖ Extra-parochial priest pastoral work⁽³⁾

WEEKLY/DAILY

- ❖ 45- 60 hours per week pastoral work spread over six days⁽⁴⁾
- ❖ Approximately 2/3 of those hours connected to Clearly scheduled availability for pastoral visits, appointments, funerals, anointings, the sacrament of Penance, etc.⁽⁵⁾
- ❖ Able to be contacted in case of an emergency
- ❖ Homily preparation
- ❖ A priest is entitled to a full day away per week⁽⁶⁾
- ❖ 3 Sunday Masses⁽⁷⁾
- ❖ Daily Mass⁽⁸⁾
- ❖ Daily Liturgy of the Hours
- ❖ Daily personal prayer
- ❖ Exercise, proper sleep, contact with family and/or friends⁽⁹⁾

⁽¹⁾ All other professions have some sort of continuing education requirement to stay certified/licensed. They are often listed as a certain minimum number of education contact hours over a two year period. Academic courses generally count as 15 contact hours per semester credit. Seminars, professional conferences and talks

are usually divided into a certain number of 50 minute equivalents, with each such equivalent counting as 1 contact hour. 20-25 per year is the typical range for many professional and ministerial groups. The accountability for such hours lies with the priest. It should be part of the annual conversation with his regional moderator.

⁽²⁾ See the *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, #85.

⁽³⁾ Diocesan, regional, vicariate, civic and ecumenical work would be examples of such extra-parochial time.

⁽⁴⁾ Although no "time sheet" should be kept, it is reasonable to expect a priest and his pastoral setting to have a sense of the number of hours directly connected to priestly pastoral ministry, so that a proper balance may be achieved. Preparing for and celebrating the Eucharist and other sacraments, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, priestly fraternity, homily preparation, involvement as a priest in extra-parochial settings, continuing education, theological and pastoral reading are all part of a priest's ministry time. Personal prayer is an expectation for all Christians and weekly exercise is an expectation for everyone, so these would be part of one's daily schedule apart from the ministry setting. Emergency calls are part of any pastoral week, and a priest should adjust his week accordingly, if these happen. Meals within the pastoral work setting would be part of those ministerial hours; meals apart from that setting ordinarily would not.

⁽⁵⁾ In order to encourage transparency within the pastoral setting and for the well-being of the priest, a certain number of pastoral "hours" are to be clearly scheduled in the work setting, apart from the obvious ones of Masses. It is highly recommended that the priest review the typical weekly schedule, especially of the Masses and evening meetings, and have a regular schedule of availability in the pastoral work setting. When not in the work setting, he should be able to be contacted in an emergency by another pastoral worker.

⁽⁶⁾ A full day away is understood as a stretch of approximately 34-36 continuous hours, not being on call and not expected in the pastoral setting during this time. Of course, emergencies can arise and a priest needs to be able to be contacted and then find a way to compensate that time. Both the priest and the pastoral setting should be committed to that time away. This can affect the scheduling of funerals, the availability of that particular priest for anointing of the sick, and so on. It is recommended that the pastoral setting not schedule communion services to "cover" the time away by a priest, whether the weekly day away or vacation. [A typical example would be: Thursday is the priest's usual 'day away'; when priestly responsibilities are completed on Wednesday evening, the priest begins the stretch of 34-36 hours; he is back in the pastoral setting Friday morning.]

⁽⁷⁾ This includes any Saturday evening Masses. There is always the reality of pastoral exceptions but the ordinary expectation is for no more than three Sunday Masses.

⁽⁸⁾ There is always the reality of a pastoral exceptions but the ordinary expectation is that a priest will celebrate one daily Mass. That means the regularly scheduled daily Mass might be affected, if a funeral or wedding Mass occurs on that day.

⁽⁹⁾ Although these expectations are not specific to a priest, they are included here to help a priest and the pastoral setting recognize that a proper balance in one's day/week includes time that is for care of self. Not all hours of the day are or should be considered pastoral work time.

ADDENDUM

We asked the following questions to elicit feedback for this document:

1. Is the time given to yearly vacations and retreat days sufficient? If not, what would you suggest? What happens if a priest is unable to find coverage for all the weekend Masses during a vacation?

Several expressed the difficulty of finding coverage for weekends away and whether we should explicitly state that this is a possibility and the rite for a "Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest" should then be the normally expected procedure. If so, then they said the Archbishop would have to clearly state that this is acceptable and offer a defined procedure to follow. Others thought that if we have four weeks off, then that should include four weekends not three. The final language of the document makes a distinction between what canon law lists as a right or entitlement (for example, to a yearly vacation and a day away per week) and what is an obligation or duty (for example, a yearly retreat).

2. Which diocesan-related gathering of priests, if any, should be an expectation for every priest?

Two priests had questions about making the bi-annual convocation an expectation; they didn't approve of some of the speakers. On the other hand, others said that if any gathering should be an expectation it is that one, where the archbishop asks his priests to gather together for time away. Some pointed out the vagueness about priests' funerals or "other priest gatherings" and preferred a number or a range. One encouraged the archbishop to personally gather the priests for fellowship after the Chrism Mass or another day.

3. Should there be a one-one meeting with the regional moderator yearly? What, non-internal forum topics should it cover?

Comments here were positive. Several suggested that this sheet of "reasonable expectations" be the exact topic of conversation, to review how a priest is handling them, offering support, encouragement, etc. A few pointed out that they have never had such a conversation and thought it would be good.

4. How many continuing education contact hours is a reasonable expectation for a priest each year and how should they be accounted for?

Several suggested that, although an important expectation, the number of expected yearly hours should be set more modestly, so as to not make it seem unattainable. Also, questions of how we build accountability into such an expectation. Should priests submit their CEU hours to the Office for Priestly Life, for example? Or, leave it as an expectation and let the priest's pastoral setting know about it and encourage it? On the other hand most other ministerial groups have clearly defined continuing education expectations and all professional groups make it part of their certification/licensing procedures. Should priests be exempt from such expectations? The Office for Priestly Life was encouraged to make seminars and programs known on a regular basis, maybe attaching the equivalent CEU for that experience.

5. Should there be an expectation that each priest try to commit a certain minimal amount of time to priestly work in extra-parochial settings?

Some wondered whether this should be an expectation, since not everyone has the desire/gifts. But the definition is very broad and, at the very least, to expect a priest to use some of his time and energy for the good of the wider vicariate and diocese does not seem unreasonable, whether or not involved in

civic or wider community or ecumenical work. Given the wide variety of ways such extra-parochial work can take shape it is difficult to put a range of hours on it. On the other hand, some felt a range should be given for all such expectations.

6. Given the understanding of what “counts” toward a ministerial work week, how many hours is reasonable? Is a six day week? The definition of a “full day away”?

This item received the most feedback. It is clear we need to have a range. Many thought 45 hours as too few and said they work many more than 50 or even 60 hours per week. On the other hand, given the description of what counts for ministerial hours, it is difficult to believe some of the higher numbers, since it would mean that they spend nearly every waking hour on priestly responsibilities. Or, if true, might reflect a lack of balance in a priest's life. The hours suggested need to be seen as an average over the whole year, including summer, not simply for the most intense weeks of the year. Sleep time, getting up in the morning or winding down at night, personal prayer, exercise, errands during the day, meals not in a ministry-related setting do not go toward the expected hours. Some of the different accounting of hours mentioned might simply reflect different settings. Take meal times. Those who work and live in their pastoral setting, or have meals prepared for them and eat with other priests, would naturally have a larger number of hours per day that reflect the definition of ministerial work than priests who have to shop for their own food, cook their own meals and live alone. The range given is meant to reflect a reasonable balance for all priests, averaged over the entire year.

The six day week was not commented upon except to concur with it.

The understanding of a day away received some comments, asking how is more than 24 hours not more than one day away? The added example under footnote 5 is an attempt to explain it.

7. How many hours of a priest's week should be clearly scheduled into the pastoral setting and how many remain more flexible?

It is difficult to give a range or percentage here as well, since situations vary greatly. Those who suggested a range suggested 2/3 or 3/4. To give an approximate range encourages transparency on the part of the priest and accountability to his pastoral setting.

8. Should daily Mass be cancelled if a funeral comes in? Should memorial services be fitted into already scheduled Mass times? Is it acceptable not to take on a funeral, anointing, or other priestly ministry if one is on a clearly scheduled day away? Should there be clearly defined coverage for funerals and anointing during the times a priest is away?

Footnotes #5 and #7 leave this somewhat vague but suggest that such things can be affected, without making it a policy. These questions received the second most feedback. Some feedback expressed concern that there always needs to be a priest available for an anointing or that funerals should take precedence over days away. Others expressed appreciation for recognizing that at times some pastoral responsibilities might be adjusted in such situations. A couple responses from larger parishes pointed out that it would not make sense for them to reschedule all the Mass intentions when a funeral came in at a regularly scheduled Mass since they have so many funerals, or, alternatively, that to move weekday Mass times to a time that could handle a funeral would mean losing some of the regular daily Mass participants. These believed it better to simply do the extra Masses rather than to suggest a priest's schedule might make it necessary to delay or adjust such funeral Masses. Comments were only positive about finding a way to limit memorial services that get scheduled many days in advance, especially if

the desired day is Saturday. Some currently do not allow a pre-scheduled memorial service on Saturday; some accept memorial services but only if attached to an already scheduled Mass.

9. What other expectations should be listed both for the priest's well-being and to be more transparent to the pastoral setting?

Clearly there are many differences in pastoral settings, which have to be appreciated in offering reasonable expectations. One priest pointed out that people are being stretched at their work places to do more or spend more time, whether compensated or not, so we need to be cautious in implying that priests are overworked. A few of the concerns expressed in the feedback seemed to take "reasonable expectations" to mean "I am now required to do only the following". That misunderstanding would need to be clarified in any use of this or a similar document. There was also some concern expressed that if one priest/parish in an area establishes guidelines such as "no memorial services except at already scheduled Masses" people would simply skip over that parish and find a priest who would do what they want, thereby undercutting that policy or making that priest look like they were "lazier" than the one who took the service. In other words, a concern that priest respect each other's decisions, if they fall within the bounds of reasonable expectations.