

Catholic Church, National Conference
of Catholic Bishops.
Norms for Priests --- ADU3975

NATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

NORMS FOR
PRIESTS
AND THEIR
THIRD
AGE

NOVEMBER 18, 1987



Introduction

The senior years of a priest's ordained ministry, especially the retirement years, are important for the proper completion and perfection of the priestly vocation. These norms, in accord with the *Code of Canon Law*, are intended to promote both the value and the dignity of the person as well as the ministry and mission of the Church. These norms, in accord with the *Code of Canon Law* suggest that retirement from a diocesan appointment does not imply an end to ministry. Rather they speak of an entry into a third age where the Spirit is calling us to reflect upon, to integrate, and to complete the ministry to which we were called.

-
- 1.** The bishop normally should allow any priest to retire when he has reached the age of seventy-five. The diocesan bishop, in consultation with the presbyteral council, can adopt a diocesan policy which allows priests, for pastoral or personal reasons, to retire from diocesan assignment at an earlier age. Pastors are asked to submit their letters of resignation by the age of seventy-five.

Canon 538, 3: When a pastor has completed his seventy-fifth year of age he is asked to submit his resignation from office

to the diocesan bishop, who, after considering all the circumstances of person and place, is to decide whether to accept or defer the resignation; the diocesan bishop, taking into account the norms determined by the conference of bishops, is to provide for the suitable support and housing of the resigned pastor. (*Code of Canon Law*: Washington, D.C., Canon Law Society of America, 1983)

2. Diocesan policy should specify the age when every priest will enter into a process of discernment with the diocesan bishop regarding when and how he will retire from diocesan appointment. Further, all dioceses should provide for those who, through disability, have to retire prior to the age determined by diocesan policy.

3. The diocesan bishop, in consultation with the presbyteral council, might wish to consider the naming of a retirement committee for the purpose of discerning with each given priest his proper time for resigning his diocesan appointment. While retaining to himself the right to make the final decision with

any given priest, the diocesan bishop will be assisted and guided by the report and the reflections which such a committee will offer him.

4.

Each diocese should maintain its own index of senior priests. Thus, retired from their own diocesan appointments, these men could indicate the kinds of ministry they want to continue to offer. The pastors of the diocese would thus be able to contact those priests easily in times of special need.

5.

Diocesan bishops should develop plans and programs to assist priests with preparation for their third age. This will enhance the value of this third age both for the individual priest and for the local church whose ministry will continue to be a central focus of his life.

6.

Diocesan bishops should appoint a priest whose duties include assisting senior priests with their third age planning as well as being an advocate for their concerns. The diocese also is encouraged to

provide options for third age ministry.

7. Diocesan bishops should strongly promote a program which encourages the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of all priests. Senior priests must be included in such programs; and, efforts to provide sufficient medical insurance for them is essential.

8. The diocese should provide various options for the housing of third age priests, according to diocesan policy. Normally, the retiring priest should be given a choice in regard to his retirement housing.

9. Diocesan bishops should provide as a norm special arrangements for those who are physically or emotionally in need of such care.

10. Each diocese should guarantee that priests be given adequate support through a long-range, fi-

nancially independent, and professionally managed pension fund. In addition, the priest should bear in mind responsible stewardship of his own resources. Participation in the social security system, as well as IRAs, or other forms of savings, is considered an essential element of this stewardship. He should also be mindful of the needs of the local church in his last will and testament.

11. The diocesan bishops should normally ensure that diocesan programs give specific consideration to the spiritual growth of third age priests. Thus the diocesan program of retreats, conferences, mentoring, spiritual direction, and support groups all should consider the senior priest.

12. Diocesan bishops and priests should develop a special sensitivity to the needs and the inclusion of the senior priests in diocesan life.

13. Dioceses, in their efforts to provide effective retirement policies and procedures, should

be aware of the resources and expertise provided by national organizations both within and outside the Church.

On November 18, 1987 at their Plenary Meeting, the members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the document *Norms for Priests and Their Third Age* prepared by the Bishops' Committee for Priestly Life and Ministry. In a letter dated January 19, 1988 (Prot. No. 5465/87/4) Archbishop Pio Laghi, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio, informed the Conference that the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy had asked him to tell the Conference that "this document has been carefully examined and that there is no objection to its publication." Accordingly, it is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

February 23, 1988

Monsignor Daniel F. Hoye
General Secretary
NCCB/USCC

ISBN 1-55586-207-1

Copyright © 1988
United States Catholic Conference, Inc.
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005-4105
All rights reserved.



Publication No. 207-1
Office of Publishing and Promotion Services
United States Catholic Conference
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D.C. 20005-4105

ISBN 1-55586-207-1