

SOME MAJOR INSIGHTS ON PRIESTS AND PRESBYTERATES FROM CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Christus Dominus

Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI October 28, 1965

#28

- All priests, both diocesan and religious, participate in and exercise with the bishop the one priesthood of Christ and are thereby meant to be prudent cooperators of the episcopal order...pastoring a single portion of the Lord's flock.
 - In order to distribute the sacred ministries more equitably and properly among his priests, the bishop should possess a necessary freedom in assigning offices and benefices. Therefore, the right or privileges, which in any way limit this freedom, are to be suppressed.
 - The harmony of the will of the priests with that of the bishop will render their pastoral activity more fruitful... thereby (helping priests) develop a pressing concern for the spiritual welfare of the whole diocese.
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Presbyterorum Ordinis

Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI December 7, 1965

#7

No priest can in isolation or single handedly accomplish his mission in a satisfactory way. He can do so only by joining forces with other priests under the direction of Church authorities.

#7 footnote 87

In stating that priests are "necessary helpers and counselors," the Decree wants to make clear that such priestly help and counsel are not a kind of intrinsic luxury at the whim of the bishop to use or not, nor can this priestly help and counsel be substituted by any other.

#8

All priests are united among themselves in an intimate sacramental brotherhood. In a special way they form one presbytery in a diocese to whose service they are committed under their own bishop.

Optatam Totius
Decree on Priestly Training
Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI
October 28, 1965

#2

Let (priests) attract the hearts of young people to the priesthood by his own humble and energetic life, joyfully pursued, and by love for his fellow priests and brotherly collaboration with them.

Pastores Dabo Vobis
Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy
and Faithful on the Formation of Priests in the Modern Day
by His Holiness Pope John Paul II
March 25, 1992

#17

- Ordained ministry has a radical communitarian form and can only be carried out as collective work.
- The ministry of priests is above all communion with the bishop's ministry, in concern for the universal Church and for the individual particular churches, for whose service they form with the bishop a single presbyterate.
- The ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful, which differ essentially and not only in degree, are ordered one to another – for each in its own way derives from the one priesthood of Christ.
- The ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful.
- Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood, which it has received.

#18

Because the priest is a man of communion, in his relations with all people he must be a man of mission and dialogue.

#21

The spiritual life of the ministers of the New Testament should be marked by a fundamental attitude of service to the People of God freed from all presumption or desire of "lording it over" those in their charge.

#23

Within the Church community the priest's pastoral charity impels and demands in particular and specific ways his personal relationship with the presbyterate, united in and with the bishop.

#26

- The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God. For this reason, the priest himself ought to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. Only if he "abides" in the word will the priest become a perfect disciple of the Lord. The priest ought to be the first "believer" in the word, while being fully aware that the words of his ministry are not "his," but those of the One who sent him. Precisely because he can and does evangelize, the priest ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized. In order that he is transmitting the Gospel in its fullness, the priest is called to develop a special sensitivity, love and docility to the living tradition of the Church and her *magisterium*, which serve [the word's] proper interpretation and preserve its authentic meaning.
- It is above all in the celebration of the sacraments and in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours that the priest is called to live and witness to the deep unity between the exercise of his ministry and his spiritual life. From the various sacraments the priest's spiritual life is built up and molded by the different characteristics and demands of each of the sacraments as he celebrates and experiences them.
- A priest is called to express in his life the authority and service of Christ by gathering together and leading the Church. This involves the ability to coordinate all the gifts and charisms in the community, to discern them and to put them to good use for the upbuilding of the Church in constant union with the bishops. This ministry demands of the priest an intense spiritual life, filled with those qualities and virtues typical of a person who "presides over" and "leads" a community.

#28

- Among the virtues most necessary for the priestly ministry must be named that disposition by which priests are always ready to seek not their own will, but the will of him who sent them.
- Obedience is first of all "apostolic" in the sense that it recognizes, loves and serves the Church in her hierarchical structure because there can be no genuine priestly ministry except in communion with the supreme pontiff and the episcopal college, especially with one's own diocesan bishop to whom the priest promised "filial respect and obedience" during the rite of ordination.
- Only the person who knows how to obey in Christ is really able to require obedience from others in his ministry.
- Priestly obedience has a "community dimension." It is not the obedience of an individual who alone relates to authority, but rather an obedience which is deeply a part of the unity of the presbyterate.
- Priestly obedience demands a marked spirit of asceticism in the sense of not being too bound up in one's own preferences or points of view.
- Priestly obedience demands a marked spirit of asceticism in the sense of giving brother priests the opportunity to make good use of their talents and abilities, setting aside all forms of jealousy, envy and rivalry.
- Priestly obedience should be one of solidarity, based on belonging to a single presbyterate. Within the presbyterate, this obedience is expressed in co-responsibility regarding direction to be taken and choices to be made.

#28 (continued)

- Priestly obedience has a particular "pastoral" character when it is lived in an atmosphere of constant readiness to allow oneself to be taken up, as it were "consumed," by the needs and demands of the flock.

#29

Celibacy is a precious gift given by God to his Church as a sign of the kingdom, which is not of this world – a sign of God's love for this world and of an undivided love of the priest for God and for God's people. It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. In as much as it is a law, it expresses the Church's will, even before the will of the subject expressed his readiness.

#31

All (priests) are required to make a sincere effort to live in mutual esteem, to respect others, and to hold in esteem all the positive and legitimate diversities present in the presbyterate. This too constitutes part of the priest's spiritual life and his continual practice of asceticism.

#43

Of special importance is the capacity (of the priest) to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be a "man of communion." This demands that a priest not be arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console.

#69

All formation, priestly formation included, is ultimately a self-formation.

#70

Ongoing formation is an intrinsic requirement of the gift and sacramental ministry received; and it proves necessary in every age. It is particularly urgent today because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions of individuals and people among whom priestly ministry is exercised.

#74

- The priest is called in particular to grow, thanks to his ongoing formation, in and with his own presbyterate in union with the bishop.
- Unity among priests with the bishop and among themselves is not something added from the outside to the nature of their service, but expresses its essence inasmuch as it...makes priests witnesses of Jesus Christ, who prayed "that they may all be one."
- Priestly unity excludes no one. This fraternity takes special care of the young priests, maintains a kind and fraternal dialogue with those of the middle and older age groups, and with those for whatever reasons are facing difficulties; as for those priests who have given up this way of life or are not following it at this time, this brotherhood does not forget them but follows them all the more with fraternal solicitude.

#74 (continued)

- Religious clergy who live and work in a particular church also belong to the one presbyterate. Their presence is a source of enrichment for all priests. For their part, religious will be concerned to ensure a spirit of true ecclesial communion, a genuine participation in the progress of the diocese and the pastoral decisions of the bishop, generously putting their own charism at the service of building up everyone in charity.

#79

In a certain sense, it is the priest himself, the individual priest, who is the person primarily responsible in the Church for his ongoing formation.

The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests
PART III – THE ONGOING FORMATION OF AN ENTIRE PRESBYTERATE
A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops © 2001

Section A - Introduction

Priests are not priests simply one by one, but they are priests and serve the mission of the church in a presbyterate with the bishop (p. 93).

To pursue the ongoing formation not simply of (individual) priests, but of a presbyterate as a whole, brings us to new territory. The corporate sense of priestly identity and mission, although not fully developed even in official documents, is clearly emerging as an important direction for the future (p. 93).

Far from being closed in on itself, a truly unified presbyterate dynamically redirects itself outward in pastoral charity. The formation of a presbyterate in its unity and fraternity aims, ultimately, to promote a more intense pastoral charity ... and makes it a more transparent sacramental sign...of God's plan of unity for the Church and for all humanity (p. 94).

Section B – Facing Divisions and Their Consequences

Divisions in presbyterates lead to diminished effectiveness, undermine the resources needed to address pressing problems, constitute an anti-sign for the community of the faith, discourage those who might feel called to the priesthood and shift the focus from a wide-ranging diocesan perspective to parochialism and congregationalism (pp. 97-98).

Section D – Practical Possibilities for the Formation of a Presbyterate

The formation of the presbyterate in its unity is the responsibility of all its members (p. 102).

The fraternal bonds of a presbyterate are forged and deepened not only in the context of prayer and work done together but also through the informal contact that priests in a presbyterate have with one another. These become occasions of mutual recognition and support and, on occasion, of healthy challenge. Given the pace of parish life and time demands that are made on priests, a kind of planned spontaneity may be the only way that such informal contact can be made (p. 101).

The examination of divisions in presbyterates leads to a practical conclusion about the necessity of deliberately linking priests across different categories. It is important to link priests across generational lines, theological persuasions, ethnicity, and differences in places of origin. It will not happen spontaneously. It needs explicit commitment on the part of the priests and some creative and deliberate mechanisms of implementation (p. 101).

1983 Code of Canon Law

#245.2

Seminary students are to be so formed that they are prepared for fraternal union with the diocesan presbyterate whose partners they will be in service of the Church.

#529.2

A pastor is to cooperate with his own bishop and the presbyterate of the diocese, also working so that the faithful have a concern for parochial communion, consider themselves members of the diocese and of the universal Church, and participate in and sustain efforts to promote this same communion.



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