



ARCHDIOCESE
OF PORTLAND IN
OREGON

Office of the Chancellor

TO: Pastors, Administrators and Archdiocesan Services

FROM: Sister Veronica Schueler, F.S.E.
Chancellor

DATE: October 21, 2019

RE: **TESTIMONIALS AND LETTERS OF SUITABILITY**

As you know, our policy requires that all Archdiocesan parishes, agencies, media outlets and organizations (anyone listed in the *Oregon Catholic Directory*) provide the Office of the Chancellor with a testimonial letter if a priest, deacon, or religious from outside the Archdiocese is going to engage in any in public ministry within the Archdiocese of Portland. This could include, but is not limited to, celebrating the Eucharist, providing sacramental ministry, giving missions or retreats or presenting lectures. All testimonials or letters of suitability should include information about where the person will be going, the dates of his or her stay and what he or she will be doing in the Archdiocese. The letters should also in some way reference that the subject of the letter has no history of inappropriate behavior with minors. The letters need to be submitted to the Office of the Chancellor at least two weeks before the intended visit in order to give our office time to review them and notify the parish or other location that the visit is approved.¹ **The letter must be sent directly to the Chancellor's Office from the sending diocese. Cell phone photos of documents and emails from parishes or private parties cannot be accepted.** Please also note that invitations issued to outside clergy by priests for parish coverage must first be cleared by the Office of the Vicar for Clergy.

Any priest or deacon who does not have Archdiocesan faculties must have the permission of his local ordinary to minister in the Archdiocese of Portland and must provide a testimonial or letter of suitability. The testimonial or letter of suitability must be obtained each time the priest or deacon applies to come to the Archdiocese. This is true whether or not the person is known here and whether or not he has been in a parish or facility before. The same policy applies to priests from religious communities; they must provide a testimonial or letter of suitability from their religious superiors for each visit. The Office of the Vicar for Clergy requires that even priests or religious who do not plan to celebrate Eucharist or the sacraments should provide a letter of good standing or testimonial letter. Bishops visiting the Archdiocese are subject to the same requirements as priests and in addition, should submit a courtesy letter advising the Archbishop that they will be in the territory.

¹ The previous Chancellor asked that parishes contact her office to request the testimonial letters for persons coming from outside the Archdiocese. We have too many visiting clergy to make this possible and ask you to seek the letter and have it sent to the Office of the Chancellor. Exceptions to this are the Archdiocese of Seattle and the Diocese of Baker which require that we ask for the testimonial.

Effective January 1, 2020, letters of good standing coming from outside the Archdiocese will need to contain the date of the individual's last background check and safe environment training. If these are more than three years old, the individual will need to have them redone before being granted permission to come to the Archdiocese. Any priest coming from outside the United States will be required to undergo an international background check. He must provide information about his U.S. immigration status and be advised that unless he has a work visa (i.e., R-1), he cannot be paid for any service performed in the Archdiocese and cannot fundraise.

Religious sisters and brothers who are giving missions, retreats, lectures or are in any way engaged in ministry also need a testimonial or letter of suitability from their major superior or provincial. This should be done even for members of communities already in the Archdiocese if the member is coming from outside the Archdiocese of Portland. An exception to this would be major superiors or provincials making visitations. Any religious community missioning new personnel into the Archdiocese should contact the Episcopal Delegate for Religious (vschueler@archdpdx.org).

Any layperson visiting our Archdiocese for the purposes of speaking, offering a workshop or retreat or participating in music ministry should follow the same procedure, submitting a letter of good standing from his or her diocese of residence for each occasion. If the person requesting to come to the Archdiocese is not known in his or her own diocese or cannot obtain a letter there, he or she can provide a letter of recommendation his/her pastor. We also ask that lay persons within the Archdiocese who wish to minister here in an Archdiocesan parish provide a letter of recommendation from their pastor. The reason for this is to provide some means of vetting speakers who do not go through the background screening process required of priests, deacons, religious and lay employees of the Archdiocese. We have reinstated the Archdiocesan Speakers' Bureau for those who are interested in regular speaking engagements. Please go to the website at <https://evangelization.archdpdx.org/looking-for-a-speaker>. All speakers for any event should first be cleared by the pastor.

Please note that no event sponsored by a parish or organization can be promoted in *The Catholic Sentinel* or on the Archdiocesan website until the speakers have submitted their letters of good standing or recommendation to the Office of the Chancellor. Likewise, speaker travel plans should not be confirmed until the letters have been submitted and approved.

Priests, deacons, religious and lay persons seeking to provide ministry outside the Archdiocese of Portland must request a testimonial letter from the Office of the Chancellor. Priests and deacons traveling outside the United States for ministry, pilgrimage or vacation should request a celebret. Please make these requests at least two weeks in advance so that we will have time to process them. We will always work with you to expedite matters in cases of genuine emergency.

Thank you for your help and cooperation in this area. If you need assistance with obtaining testimonials or letters of good standing, or have questions about specific situations, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of the Chancellor (vschueler@archdpdx.org).

Essentials for Testimonial Letters

(also known as Letters of Good Standing or Suitability)

1. When you are going to another (Arch)Diocese:
 - Contact the Chancellor's Office at least two weeks prior to your departure to request the letter (emergencies are a separate case).
 - Provide specific details about exactly where you are going, the dates you be there and what you will be doing.
 - Your background check and Safe Environment training must be up to date or the letter cannot be issued
 - A celebret will be issued for travel outside the U.S.
 - A letter must be requested even if you will not be doing public ministry (vacation, family visit) because you may wish to concelebrate and the ordinary of the receiving (Arch)Diocese should know you are in his territory
2. When you are inviting another priest to this Archdiocese
 - A letter should be submitted to the Chancellor's Office at least two weeks before the priest will be coming (genuine emergencies are a separate case and do not include failure to communicate with the Office of the Chancellor in a timely manner).
 - It should contain specific information about what the priest will be doing and when and where he will be doing it.
 - It should be submitted directly from the office of his chancellor or vicar general, or his superior, in the case of a religious priest.
 - **Effective January 1, 2020**, it will need to contain the dates of his last background check and safe environment training.
 - **Effective January 1, 2020**, any priest coming from outside the U.S. must provide information about his immigration status and be advised that unless he has a work visa (i.e., R-1), he cannot be paid for any service performed in the Archdiocese.
 - Any invitations to outside clergy for coverage while you are away from the parish must first be cleared with the Office of the Vicar for Clergy.
3. When inviting men or women religious to the Archdiocese:
 - Follow the procedure in #2, except that the communication will be from the individual's religious superior directly to the Chancellor's office.
4. When inviting a lay person to speak or provide a retreat:
 - Ideally, a letter should be submitted from the individual's (Arch)Diocese to the Chancellor's Office least two weeks before the event.
 - If the layperson is not known to their (Arch)Diocese, a recommendation letter should be sent to the Chancellor's Office from the individual's pastor.
 - The letter should contain specifics about the date(s), place and purpose of the person's visit.
 - If the lay person will be in contact with minors, he/she must provide proof of a recent background check and safe environment training.
 - Effective January 1, 2020, any lay person coming from outside the U.S. will need to provide immigration documentation and be advised that if he/she is here in visitor status, no payment is permitted.
5. No cell phone copies of documents will be accepted
6. No electronic copies sent from an email other than that of a diocesan authority will be accepted. All electronic copies must be followed up by a hard copy of the letter.