

**A Wellness Document:**  
The Health and Well-being of Priests  
In the Diocese of Davenport

This new document, *A Wellness Document: The Health and Well-being of Priests in the Diocese of Davenport*, follows upon *The Welfare of Priests Document*, issued in 2004. Much of what is contained in that document remains unchanged but 12 years later it is being promulgated with some updates.

St. John Paul II issued an Apostolic Exhortation *I Will Give You Shepherds (Pastores Dabo Vobis, 1992)*. In 2001, the U.S. Catholic Bishops issued a complement to it, *The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests*. These two documents offer reflections on the life of priests. This document explores priestly life and ministry in four areas: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral which are presented in *The Basic Plan*.

Each priest is different in many ways—temperament, life situations, needs, interest, age and health to name just a few. Therefore, it is challenging to have a “one-fits-all” document. The purpose of this document is to help parish councils, parishioners, staff and especially the priest himself to look closely at these four areas and to ensure a well-balanced and healthy life in each area. Some of the points are mandated either by Canon Law or diocesan policy. Others are recommendations and guidelines. But, it is my hope that these areas will be taken very seriously and that each priest will reflect on them and incorporate them into his life and ministry.

This update is the result of consultation on a number of levels including the Presbyteral Council, Diocesan Pastoral Council, Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, Deaneries and my own thoughts.

This document should be shared and discussed with Parish Directors, Staff and Parish Council in the hope of finding ways to assist and support their priests to good health and well-being. Priest support groups might reflect on this document annually.

### **Intellectual Well-being**

Intellectual Well-being aims to deepen the understanding of faith. It seeks to link theoretical knowledge with practical wisdom so that priests can serve their people more effectively. Emphasis is placed on life-long learning.

- Priests are required to continue their formation by attendance at the Chrism Mass and Convocation, the June Institute and the Fall Clergy Overnighter.

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- Each newly ordained priest (first five years of ordination), with the assistance of the Vocation Director, will have a priest mentor and meet with him regularly to reflect upon his experience of ministry.
- Attendance at conferences, lectures, webinars and personal reading should be a part of every priest's continued life-long learning.
- Diocesan Sabbatical programs are available.
- New Pastor workshops are highly recommended.

### **Spiritual Well-being**

Spiritual Well-being is a life-long task that priests share with other followers of Jesus Christ. Its aim is for priests to become better missionary-disciples of Jesus Christ and more transparent sacramental signs of Him in whose person and name they act.

- Each priest should meet with a spiritual director on a regular basis.
- By Canon Law, every priest is to make an annual retreat and is reminded to notify the Bishop's office that such has been done.
- The celebration of the Eucharist, praying the Liturgy of the Hours and personal daily prayer are essential to the spiritual life of priests.
- Regular celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is also necessary.
- Priests are encouraged to belong to a support group.

### **Human Well-being**

Human Well-being has as its aim the fuller development of a priest's humanity both for his own well-being and to better communicate Jesus Christ to men and women today. "Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a 'man of communion.'" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* #43)

- Priests are expected to have a yearly physical. Preventative medicine protects, promotes, and maintains health and well-being to prevent disease, disability and even death.
- Priests are reminded to exercise regularly and to practice good nutrition.
- Harmful addictions need to be addressed in fraternal charity.

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- Priests are allowed and encouraged to take one continuous or an interrupted month of vacation per year, this includes four weekends. (CIC 533 #2)
- For good mental health, priests should schedule a day away from the work environment on a weekly basis. Apart from funerals and emergencies on a designated day off care should be taken not to routinely schedule events at which his presence is expected on these days.
- Some rectories accommodate personal living space away from the work space. Others do not when the offices and personal space are mingled. Personal living space away from the work environment is healthy and in some cases a priest is better served by living away from the offices. Lay Directors should be sure rectory and/or living space is in good repair, especially before a new priest moves in.
- Simplicity in life-style should be a goal.
- Expense for mileage for extra sacramental help should not be a deterrent to taking a vacation, retreat, etc.
- Priests need to maintain healthy relationships with others, both male and female, in order to maintain good emotional health.
  
- Expectations of priests by parishioners, staff, as well as by the priest himself should be realistic. With the assistance of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Lay Directors job descriptions and daily schedules should be reviewed annually.

### **Pastoral Well-being**

Pastoral Well-being entails the development of skills and competencies that enable priests to serve their people well. Pastoral formation is not divorced from intellectual or theological education. Competencies and skills by their very nature are acquired and developed through instruction, application and practice.

- There should be continued growth in such areas as preaching and proclaiming the word, pastoral counseling, personnel management, and effective leadership.
- The number of regularly scheduled Masses a priest may celebrate:
  - CIC 905 #1 says a priest is not permitted to celebrate the Eucharist more than once a day except where the law permits.

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- CIC 905 #2 allows an exception: where there is a shortage of priests and for pastoral need, the local ordinary can permit a priest to celebrate twice a day and even three times on Sundays and holy days of obligation.
- The ideal to strive for is one Mass Monday-Friday with a Vigil on Saturday evening and two Sunday Masses.
  - A priest could say two Vigil Masses on Saturday and two Masses on Sunday.
  - A priest could celebrate a Vigil Mass on Saturday and three Masses on Sunday.
  - A priest could celebrate two Masses on Saturday (one Mass being a Vigil) and three on Sunday. This is certainly not the ideal and should be employed sparingly.
  - The ideal should be sought.
- In addition to parish Masses, regularly scheduled Masses to be considered include school Masses, nursing home Masses, as well as attention to the number of funerals and weddings at a particular parish. Masses of “convenience” or where attendance is low (especially on Sunday) should be examined.
- Masses should be scheduled with sufficient time between Masses.
- Capable laity should be discerned, called forth and trained for ministry especially in the six areas of Church Life, Faith Formation, Family Life, Finance and Administration, Liturgy and Social Action.
- All staff and volunteers should have clearly-written job descriptions leading to collaboration with other ministries. This is especially true where parishes are clustered and share some staff.
- Sufficient time should be allotted for the preparation of homilies.
- Pastors who plan on being absent from the parish for a period beyond a week are to notify the Bishop’s office (CIC 533).

**Retired Priests: An addendum**

*The crown of old men is wide experience  
Their glory, the fear of the Lord (Sirach 25/6)*

Some questions for reflection on retirement:

"How will I live out the remaining years of my life?"

"What is the best way to age well so that I can be a model for others?"

"How can I share the wisdom I have gained from my accumulated experience?"

1. Much of what has been said in the previous pages applies as well to priests in their retirement.
2. Retired priests are called to continue to grow intellectually, spiritually and humanly. They are willing to share the insights from a lifetime of ministry.
3. Priests are encouraged to plan ahead for retirement. This involves financial planning and living arrangements, as well as social, financial, liturgical, spiritual and intellectual needs.
4. Clergy workshops on how to retire well will benefit all our priests and should be offered.
5. A survey of retired priests should be conducted to more comprehensively determine their needs, and what they can offer. For example:
  - Those who have retired have a continuing desire to encourage and enhance the ministries of preaching and presiding in the diocese. Some are interested in helping with more than sacramental needs.
  - Some retired priests are willing and able to serve as "mentors" for newly ordained priests or newly assigned pastors.

Revised and Promulgated:  
September 14, 2016  
Feast of the Exultation of the Cross