



Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee

**Particular Law for the Life and Ministry of
Priests**

February 2026

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GENERAL DECREE

A diocesan bishop cannot effectively fulfill his duty to teach, govern, and sanctify the People of God without the faithful assistance of his priests. These men, entrusted with the mission and endowed with the capacity to act in the person of Christ the Head of the Church (cf. c. 1009, §3), minister under the diocesan bishop's authority as faithful workers in the vineyard of the Lord. Endowed with great grace by the laying on of hands, it is the duty of the bishop to encourage them to fan into flame the grace of God which they have received (cf. 2 Timothy 1:6) by adherence to the Church's magisterium and by obedience to the law of the Church. By faithful obedience, they guard their priestly dignity and conduct themselves in a way that makes them more effective witnesses to the Gospel of Christ.

The rights and duties of the clerical state are set forth in the *Code of Canon Law*, yet the canons often indicate the need to apply these rights and duties by means of particular law. Attentive to the need to more precisely determine the methods to be observed in applying the law and, at the same time, desiring to urge the observance of the law (cf. c. 31, §1), I have determined that it is time to issue new norms that take into account changed times and circumstances. These norms have been formulated with the assistance of members of the diocesan Curia and the Presbyteral Council, to whom I am grateful for their dedicated and persevering work.

THEREFORE, I hereby revoke the *Policies for Priestly Life*, issued by my Predecessor on the 12th of May 2011, and decree the following *Particular Law for the Life and Ministry of Priests* for the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee.

These norms are to be published on the diocesan website.

All contrary diocesan laws and customs are hereby revoked.

Given at the Chancery in Memphis on the 19th of February 2026


Most Rev. David P. Talley, M.S.W., J.C.D.
Bishop of Memphis in Tennessee


Very Rev. James M. Clark, J.C.D., Ph.D., J.V.
Chancellor

PARTICULAR LAW FOR THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF PRIESTS

Article 1. Explanatory Norms

- §1. In these norms, references to a pastor apply equally to a parochial administrator.
- §2. Unless the nature of the matter indicates otherwise, these norms apply also to transitional deacons.

Article 2. Priest's Residence

- §1. The place of residence for a priest is determined by universal law and the decree of the priest's ordinary.
- §2. A pastor and a parochial vicar are to reside in their assigned parish (cc. 533, §1; 550, §1).
- §3. Further specification of the place of residence is determined by the priest's ordinary, usually in the decree of appointment.
- §4. For priests assigned to non-parochial ministry, the place of residence is determined by decree of the diocesan bishop.
- §5. Priests who are members of institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life are to reside in the place to which they have been assigned by their ordinary, without prejudice to cc. 533, §1 and 550, §1.

Article 3. Rectory Accommodations

- §1. A rectory shall have the following:
 - 1° a private bedroom, bathroom, and sitting room for each priest resident,
 - 2° essential furniture for the common areas and the priests' living quarters,
 - 3° a fully furnished kitchen,
 - 4° laundry facilities,
 - 5° household furnishings and supplies (other than personal toiletries), and
 - 6° off-street parking.

§2. The parish is responsible for maintenance and repairs to the rectory.

§3. The parish must provide, and is responsible for, the following expenses:

- 1° utilities (i.e., electricity, heating, air conditioning, water, natural gas, propane, sewage, garbage/waste removal);
- 2° internet service (including necessary network hardware);
- 3° basic (non-premium) cable/satellite TV service with local channels, or an equivalent combination of streaming services at equal or comparable rate; and

4° telephone service.

§4. The parish shall provide housekeeping service for the rectory at least once a month.

Article 4. Additional Services at Priest's Expense

Priests wishing to have cellular services, cable/satellite or streaming services beyond basic service are responsible for the cost of the additional service.

Article 5. Care for the Rectory

§1. The pastor should inspect the rectory on a regular basis to evaluate the need for maintenance and repairs.

§2. The local ordinary and the dean have the right to inspect the rectory to verify that it is properly furnished and maintained.

Article 6. Parochial Property

§1. All furniture and other temporal goods belonging to the parish, such as rectory furniture and furnishings, are not the personal property of the priest; therefore, they are not to be taken by the priest when he is transferred to another residence.

§2. Unless the item has artistic or historical value, having heard the parochial finance council, a pastor may dispose of the temporal goods in the rectory when he determines that they are no longer useful and cannot be used elsewhere in the parish.

§3. If an item belonging to the parish is valued at \$1,000 or more, a pastor cannot purchase or lease the item without the prior permission of the local ordinary or the dean (c. 1298).

§4. Pastors are not to sell or donate parochial goods to others without first ascertaining whether they have artistic or historical value. Consult the Office of the Chancellor for assistance.

Article 7. Priest's Office Space

§1. Each priest assigned to a parish as pastor or parochial vicar (and a transitional deacon assigned to the parish) is to have his own office space in the parish office.

§2. A priest's office is to be furnished with, at least, the following items:

- 1° a desk;
- 2° an office chair;
- 3° a telephone;

- 4º a computer/laptop, with internet access;
- 5º a bookshelf; and
- 6º guest chairs.

Article 8. Damage to Parochial Property

- §1. If a priest damages any parochial property deliberately or through culpable negligence, he is to pay for it from his own money.
- §2. Damage caused to the rectory by a priest occupant or his pet is to be repaired at the priest's expense.
- §3. Normal wear and tear to parochial goods are to be repaired at the expense of the parish.

Article 9. Personal Property

If a priest wishes to use his own furniture or appliances rather than those provided by the parish, the parish items that the priest chooses not to use are not to be sold or given away. In such a circumstance, fees for off-site storage are the responsibility of the priest.

Article 10. Inventories

When a pastor is assigned to a parish, he is to conduct an inventory of all parochial property (see c. 1283, 2º). If any parochial property is missing, he should contact the former pastor to see if anything was inadvertently taken by him. If so, the property is to be returned promptly to the parish.

Article 11. Common Life in the Rectory

- §1. Priests who live in the same rectory are to make efforts to foster a common life, under the direction of the pastor.
- §2. Priests who live in the same rectory or at the same parish are to have a common meal and common prayer time once every month and, if possible, once every week.
- §3. If the pastor will be absent from the rectory overnight, he is to notify the other priest residents in advance. If another priest will be absent from the rectory overnight, he is to inform the pastor in advance. In the event of an unforeseen circumstance, he is to notify the pastor as soon as possible. As a courtesy, other priest residents should be notified about overnight absences as well.

Article 12. Use of Technology

Priests are not to download or install on their electronic devices (whether personal devices or devices owned by a parish or the diocese) anything that would give scandal to the faithful.

Article 13. Daytime Guests

- §1. Ordinarily, visitors to a rectory are restricted to the public areas of the house, e.g., parlor, dining rooms, kitchen, etc.
- §2. Anyone under the age of eighteen is forbidden to enter a rectory unless a parent or guardian is with them at all times or with the express permission of the parent/guardian (and the Pastor).

Article 14. Overnight Guests—Visiting Clergy and Seminarians

- §1. No visiting cleric may engage in public ministry unless the chancery has received a letter of suitability from his proper ordinary.
- §2. Visiting clergy and seminarians may stay at a rectory for up to one week with the permission of the Pastor.
- §3. If a cleric or seminarian wishes to stay at a rectory for more than one week, the permission of the local ordinary is required.

Article 15. Overnight Guests—Non Clerics

- §1. No one under the age of eighteen may stay overnight in a rectory.
- §2. Adult male relatives may be allowed to stay overnight in a rectory, provided that none of the residents objects.
- §3. Adult female relatives may stay in the rectory overnight if there is only one priest residing in the rectory.
- §4. If an adult guest who is not a cleric or seminarian wishes to stay in a rectory for more than three nights, the permission of the local ordinary is required.

Article 16. No Other Rectory Residents

No one may reside in a rectory other than a cleric or a seminarian, unless the local ordinary grants permission.

Article 17. Food

- §1. Food, in an amount sufficient for three daily meals, is to be provided for all priests, whether living in a rectory or in some other assigned residence. The

expenses for food for a priest-in-residence are the responsibility of the parish or the diocese, as determined by the local ordinary.

- §2. Food provided to rectory guests is at the discretion of the pastor.
- §3. When a priest is away from his assignment, he is responsible for the expense of his own food, unless his travel is related to his assignment.
- §4. Priests may select foods according to their own tastes, provided that the expense is reasonable. Disputes about such matters are resolved by the decision of the dean.
- §5. The deans are to review parish food expenses during their visitations.
- §6. In determining what foods should be acquired or provided, priests are to take into consideration:
 - 1° health needs,
 - 2° priestly simplicity,
 - 3° the ability of the parish to pay, and
 - 4° the necessity of avoiding scandal to the faithful.

Article 18. The Priest's Vehicle

- §1. All priests are to have a valid driver's license and a personal vehicle.
- §2. Expenses for the purchase/lease, maintenance, and insurance of a priest's vehicle are his own responsibility and are not to be paid by his parish or the diocese.
- §3. In choosing a vehicle, a priest should consider his call to a simplicity of life, and the diocesan bishop may command a priest to sell or otherwise dispose of a vehicle that, in his estimation, is contrary to this.
- §4. Ordinarily, fuel for a priest's personal vehicle is not to be charged to the parish or the diocese.
- §5. If a priest owns/uses an electric vehicle, he is responsible for the purchase of charging equipment and for charging expenses.

Article 19. Transportation and Travel Expenses

- §1. If a priest is traveling on an assignment from the local ordinary or to an event that is part of his assigned work (e.g., to a conference, to school, etc.) mileage may be charged to the appropriate diocesan department or the parish.
- §2. Travel for a priest's personal vacation is never to be charged to the parish or the diocese.

Article 20. Personal Expenses

- §1. Expenses associated with personal hobbies and non-ministerial activities are the responsibility of the priest and may never be charged to the parish or the diocese.
- §2. Expenses related to personal hobbies or activities that require the use of large amounts of electricity, water, or some other parochial/diocesan resource are to be reimbursed to the parish/diocese.

Article 21. Moving Expenses

- §1. When a priest is transferred to a new parish/assignment, the transportation and moving costs for the priest's personal belongings are to be paid by the parish to which he is being assigned or, in the event of a non-parochial assignment, by the ministry or department to which he is being assigned.
- §2. A priest should make every reasonable effort to keep moving expenses to a minimum so as to avoid excessive burdens to his new parish/assignment. The priest is encouraged to seek the help of family, friends, etc., to reduce the financial burden.
- §3. A priest who is granted retirement and will be residing in a parish or a diocesan retirement facility (e.g., Villa Vianney) may request the financial assistance of the local ordinary for moving expenses.

Article 22. Alcohol and Tobacco

- §1. Priests are to use prudence in their use/consumption of alcohol and tobacco products, not only for the good of their own health, but also to avoid scandal to the faithful.
- §2. The parish/diocese is not responsible for expenses related to a priest's personal consumption of alcohol or tobacco.
- §3. Occasionally, alcoholic beverages may be charged to the parish/diocese for special meals at the discretion of the Pastor.
- §4. A priest may not smoke in a rectory. Smoking is permitted in outside areas.
- §5. A priest must pay all expenses for any cleaning or repairs necessitated by his use of tobacco products.

Article 23. Drugs

- §1. Priests are absolutely forbidden to use or possess illegal drugs or drug paraphernalia.
- §2. Prescription medications are to be used only as directed by the priest's physician.

Article 24. Pets

- §1. A priest who lives alone may have pets. If more than two pets, the permission of the local ordinary must be obtained.
- §2. A priest who lives with other priests may have one (1) pet only if he has received the prior consent of the pastor who is responsible for the rectory. The pastor may place restrictions on the size or type of pet that is allowed.
- §3. A pastor is not to allow a priest to have a pet in the rectory if another priest resident has an allergy or a medical condition that would be impacted by the presence of a pet.
- §4. At all times, care for pets and related expenses (including the proper waste removal) are solely the responsibility of the pet owner. Other priests and parish staff are not responsible for the care of pets.
- §5. Damage done to a residence or church property by a pet are to be promptly repaired at the pet owner's expense.
- §6. Priests who have pets are to observe all civil laws regarding pet ownership, including vaccinations.

Article 25. Vacation

- §1. Vacation is understood to be time away from the parish or one's assigned ministry. If a priest is physically present at his parish or place of assignment but deliberately refrains from engaging in any ministerial activities (i.e., "staycation"), this is considered vacation time.
- §2. Days away from parish ministry due to illness or spiritual retreat are not deducted from one's allotted time for vacation.
- §3. Pastors and parochial vicars are allowed to be away from their assigned parish for "at most one continuous or interrupted month" (c. 533, §1; see also c. 550, §3). Priests who are assigned to other ministries/offices are allowed the same amount of time for vacation.
- §4. The calculation of vacation time is measured according to the fiscal year (from July 1st-June 30th) and may not include more than four weekends.
- §5. If a pastor will be away from his parish for more than one week for any reason, he must notify the local ordinary (c. 533, §2). This notification may be done by sending an email to one's dean, who will forward the information to the local ordinary.
- §6. When a parochial vicar will be away on vacation, he will assist the pastor in finding a replacement if the pastor so desires. The remuneration of the visiting priest is the responsibility of the parish.
- §7. Priests who are on call for AHERT, must notify AHERT if they are going to be away from their parish.

§8. Vacation days that are not utilized by the end of the fiscal year do not carry over to the following year.

Article 26. Time Away from One's Assignment

§1. If a priest has a sufficiently serious reason to be away from his parish for more than the thirty days allowed for vacation during a given fiscal year, he must request the permission of the local ordinary and is responsible for compensating the parish/assigned ministry for any related expense.

§2. Priests are permitted to serve as leaders and chaplains on pilgrimages to foreign religious destinations. If, however, a priest participates in such a pilgrimage more than once every two years, the time is deducted from his vacation time. All expenses are the responsibility of the priest and/or the group that organizes the pilgrimage.

§3. If a priest will be away from his assignment he should leave emergency contact information with his parish/ministry.

Article 27. Days Off

§1. Outside of vacation, a priest is entitled to one day off per week.

§2. The day off lasts from midnight to midnight.

§3. A day off that is not utilized in the course of a week does not transfer to a subsequent week.

§4. A priest may never refuse to do a funeral or make an emergency sick call solely because it is his day off.

Article 28. Retreat

§1. Priests are obliged to take time for a spiritual retreat every year (c. 276, §2, 4^o).

§2. Priests are allowed up to five days for retreat each year, which shall not be deducted from his vacation time. If the priest desires a longer period of time for retreat, he must obtain the permission of the local ordinary or else deduct the additional days from his vacation time.

§3. The cost of the retreat and travel to and from the retreat venue are to be paid (or reimbursed) from the parish/assigned ministry. For priests assigned to further studies, the cost is paid by the diocese. The limit for retreat expenses to be paid or reimbursed is \$750 per year.

§4. Priests may request permission for a thirty-day retreat from the local ordinary once every ten years. Permission is at the sole discretion of the local ordinary, who may require that the priest forgo a portion of his vacation time for that year.

Article 29. Continuing Education of Priests

- §1. Continuing education is a requirement for every cleric (see c. 279).
- §2. Priests are encouraged to attend lectures, theological meetings, and conferences to gain greater knowledge of the sacred sciences and other areas of learning that are beneficial to pastoral ministry. Up to \$750 per year in continuing education fees may be charged to the assigned parish or ministry.
- §3. An extended study program requires the permission of the local ordinary and one's pastor, if applicable.
- §4. If a priest is interested in pursuing an advanced degree, he is invited to inform the diocesan bishop of this interest; nevertheless, the diocesan bishop freely decides whether or not to assign a priest to further studies.

Article 30. Diocesan Study Days

- §1. Study days for priests are scheduled about once a quarter on various topics related to theology and pastoral ministry.
- §2. Attendance at these study days is obligatory for all priests in active ministry.

Article 31. Annual Convocation

- §1. Each year a multi-day convocation is held for all priests in active ministry.
- §2. Attendance at the convocation, including all of its lectures/presentations, is obligatory for all priests in active ministry. Absence from the convocation, in whole or in part, requires the prior consent of the local ordinary.
- §3. The parish or ministry to which the priest is assigned is responsible for the cost of the convocation. The costs for retired priests will be covered by the diocese.
- §4. Pastors should make efforts to provide for the sacramental needs of their people during the convocation.

Article 32. Weekend Absence for Other Assignments

- §1. If a priest assigned to parochial ministry is to be away from his parish on a weekend due to some other assignment that he has received from the local ordinary, the priest must inform his pastor in advance and, if necessary, assist in finding a substitute.
- §2. In such circumstances, financial responsibility for the replacement falls to the ministry in which the absent priest is participating (e.g., Cursillo, Office of Youth Ministry, Office of Vocations, etc.).

Article 33. Sabbaticals

§1. A priest may request a sabbatical of up to six months after every ten years of service. Permission for the sabbatical is at the sole discretion of the diocesan bishop and based on various factors, which may include the priest's seniority, previous sabbaticals, the needs of the diocese, and the needs of the assigned parish.

§2. For a full six-month sabbatical, at least three months must be spent in some kind of continuing education. The remaining time is spent as outlined by the diocesan bishop.

§3. A request for a sabbatical is to be made in writing to the diocesan bishop at least one year prior to the proposed start date.

§4. The parish will continue to pay the salary and benefits of the priest while also paying the salary and benefits of the priest whom the diocesan bishop assigns to take his place.

§5. All expenses related to tuition, educational fees, room-and-board, transportation, and educational materials should be covered by a grant or scholarship obtained by the priest. If not, the expenses are divided between the priest, the parish, and the diocese.

Article 34. Legal Documents for Emergencies and End of Life

Every priest is required to submit to the Office of the Chancellor the following documents:

- 1° a list of emergency contacts (e.g., family members to be contacted in the event of an emergency),
- 2° a copy of his current last will and testament (which should include directions on who is to inherit the priest's personal liturgical items)
- 3° a power of attorney for health care,
- 4° a funeral liturgy plan, and
- 5° burial instructions (e.g., type of casket, vestment in which you wish to be buried, etc.).