

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS
CLERGY BULLETIN

April 10, 2011

Volume XI, Number 4, Revised

TERM LIMITS FOR PASTORS

Reverend and dear Fathers,

As you are aware, with the promulgation of the revised *Code of Canon Law* in 1983, legislation was introduced which allowed diocesan bishops to appoint pastors for a specific period of time as determined by the conference of bishops.

Can. 522 A pastor must possess stability and therefore is to be appointed for an indefinite period of time. The diocesan bishop can appoint him only for a specific period if the conference of bishops has permitted this by a decree.

The guiding principle for this legislation is the good of souls (*Christus Dominus* 31). It is considered better for the life of the parish community if there is stability in the office of the pastor. At the same time, the revised *Code* acknowledges that the good of souls, both of the pastor and the faithful, may require at times that a transfer or removal take place.

Consequently, on November 14, 1983, the Latin Rite members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) approved complementary legislation for canon 522 for the dioceses of the United States. This complementary legislation was modified and then received the required *recognitio* from the Holy See on September 24, 1984.

Final Decree: Individual ordinaries may appoint pastors to a six year term of office. The possibility of renewing this term is left

to the discretion of the diocesan bishop. The primary provision of canon 522 that pastors may be appointed for an indefinite period of time remains in force.

My predecessor, the Most Reverend John R. Roach, modified this provision slightly, establishing a policy in 1985 that the normal term of office for pastors would be six years, twice renewable for three years. His successor, the Most Reverend Harry J. Flynn, informally modified the policy again, so that most pastor assignments in recent memory have been for a period 'not to extend beyond twelve years'. These policies provided stability for pastors and parishes and therefore were beneficial to the people of God.

It is my intention, going forward, to bring our practice in harmony with the provisions of law as well as with the most common practices within this province. Therefore, after consulting with the Presbyteral Council, I have decided that, effective May 1, 2011, pastors will be assigned for a period of six years, renewable for an additional six years at the discretion of the Archbishop.

I believe that assigning pastors for six year terms will be beneficial to both priests and to members of the faithful, as it provides adequate stability to a parish and promotes the development of pastoral relationships, but at the same time offers priests opportunity for growth and a variety of service opportunities and provides the Archbishop with the flexibility necessary to provide for the needs of the entire Archdiocese. Needless to say, this policy must retain a certain flexibility, to allow for special circumstances that may warrant a priest leaving his assignment before a six-year term is complete, or remaining as pastor beyond the prescribed term limit¹. Pastors are encouraged to be responsive to the legitimate requests of the Archbishop, should he request that they accept a transfer or new assignment prior to the completion of their term of office.

Appointments to offices other than pastor, such as chaplain, parochial administrator, assistant priest, or institutional assignments, will be made either for a set period of years or *ad nutum episcopi*.

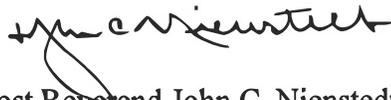
When a priest is approaching the final year of his term in office, he can anticipate receiving a letter inquiring as to his interest in a new assignment. The intention is for these letters to go out in the Fall, so that the priest and the Archbishop can reach a mutual decision as to his continuation in his present ministry by December. This will allow for

¹ Can. 186 Loss of an office by the lapse of a predetermined time or by the reaching of a certain age takes effect only from the moment when the competent authority communicates it in writing. Therefore, a pastor whose term has expired continues to hold the office of pastor until notified by the Archbishop, although the pastor does not have the protection of the term.

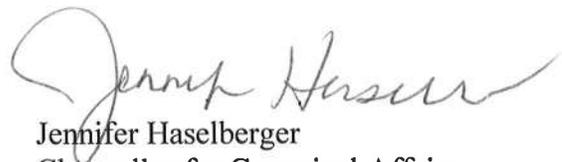
any openings to be listed and applications to be received in preparation for a change of assignment in May or June.

Pastors who reach seventy-five years of age while in office are reminded of their obligation to submit their resignation to the Archbishop, who will decide to accept it or defer it after due consideration of the circumstances of the parish and the desires of the priest (canon 538, §3).

Given at Saint Paul, Minnesota, this 10th day of April, in the year of Our Lord 2011. All things to the contrary notwithstanding.



The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis



Jennifer Haselberger
Chancellor for Canonical Affairs