

# Frequently asked questions

## **In parish restructuring, what happens with jobs, severance?**

When a parish closes, the severance package is a combination of the monthly salary and medical insurance for those carrying insurance through the diocesan plan. The severance is paid by the parish if there are sufficient funds to do so; otherwise it is paid by the diocese.

When parishes cluster or merge, ministries are reviewed and determination is made about what positions are needed. Job descriptions should be written to support each needed position. Applications are sought from within existing staff and beyond as needed. Interviews are conducted and positions are filled from the pool of candidates who have applied. If a further period of recruitment of potential candidates is necessary, the pastor/pastoral coordinator should proceed in that direction. If current employees will not be part of the staff of the new parish configuration, the pastor/pastoral co-ordinator should be in contact with the Diocese of Lansing Office of Legal Council.

## **What are "Temporary Administrators" and "Parish Administrators"?**

"Temporary administrator" and "parish administrator" are terms of convenience that refer to someone whom the bishop assigns to conduct certain routine administrative duties in a parish or other community of the faithful during the absence of its pastor. These duties normally include overseeing the finances, employees, and property of the community so that customary tasks of parish management are diligently fulfilled according to the norms of canon (church) law (**canons 1282-1289**), diocesan policy and **applicable** civil law. The precise duties and powers of the administrator in any given situation are specified by the bishop. Unlike the "parochial administrator" in canons 539-541, neither "temporary administrator" nor "parish administrator" are terms of canon law.

Those who fulfill the functions that the bishop designates are not required to be priests since they do not exercise full pastoral care over the community. However, in the case of a priest, the bishop may also add responsibility for some or all sacramental care of the community. Otherwise, he provides for it in another way. If the temporary administrator is a deacon, the bishop may designate responsibility for those acts of divine worship which a deacon is competent to administer.

(Sometimes parishes use the term "parish administrator" but with a different meaning (**e.g., business manager**) since no appointment by the bishop is involved).

## **What is a parochial administrator?**

The connection between the office of pastor and a stably constituted community of the faithful is a distinguishing element of the parish (canon 515 §1). Pastoral care for the parish is entrusted to a priest who is appointed as its proper pastor by the diocesan bishop and acts under his authority. A "quasi-parish" is similar in this regard and also has a proper pastor (canon 516 §1).

When a priest leaves the office of pastor because of a planned resignation or transfer, the bishop simply appoints another pastor (canons 523-524).

However, canons 539-541 provide for a "parochial administrator" to supply continued pastoral care in unforeseen or temporary circumstances. When the office becomes vacant or the pastor cannot exercise his function, then the bishop has the duty to designate another priest to provide this care until the vacancy is filled or the pastor returns to duty.

The provisional nature of the role is reflected in those canons. The appointment may be indefinite but never permanent. It ceases when the pastor returns or a new one is appointed to fill the vacancy. Then the parochial administrator must render an account of his financial and pastoral activities to the returning or new pastor.

In general, this parochial administrator has the duties and rights of a pastor but within the limits of Church law. The diocesan bishop can add other limits. As well, the parochial administrator cannot take action that would harm the rights of a pastor or the goods of the parish.

Sometimes, the terms "temporary administrator" and "parish administrator" are used as terms of convenience but they are not found in canon law and do not mean the same as "parochial administrator." They will be discussed in the future.

### **What is a canonical pastor?**

A pastor is a priest to whom the diocesan bishop entrusts the pastoral care of a parish. Under his authority, the pastor carries out three broad functions of this care: teaching, sanctifying and governing. Canons 519-534, as well as some others, present his duties, rights and other special functions in fuller detail.

The pastor is to provide this care either personally or through others. Other priests or deacons cooperate with him, and lay members of the Christian faithful assist him according to the norms of Church law.

Normally a priest pastors only one parish and resides there. Yet sometimes he must pastor more than one parish. The bishop may designate a deacon or lay person to assist him by participating in certain aspects of pastoral care in the other parish or parishes. The bishop defines the scope of that participation in light of Church law.

For convenience in such a case, we refer to the priest as the "canonical pastor" of the other parish and to the deacon or lay person as its "parish life coordinator." The priest remains its pastor, but the coordinator provides leadership and pastoral care according to the limits that the bishop has established.

### **What does "if and when necessary" mean?**

This phrase as used in *PLANNING TOMORROW'S CHURCHES* applies when it becomes necessary for the parish to undergo a change of status. The following is an illustrative but not exhaustive list of situations when this change of status can take place: the pastor belongs to a Religious Order that is no longer able to staff the parish:

- the pastor accepts another assignment in the diocese;
- the pastor has health issues and/or is given senior status;
- the pastor leaves to pursue higher education;
- the parish is no longer sustainable financially and in dialogue with the Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Council, a decision is reached to request a change of status;
- a personal parish no longer meets the criteria for which it was established.