

Diocesan Policy on the Resignation from Office of Priests and Deacons



The Diocese of Lancaster

It is now the accepted practice of the Church that all in Holy Orders – bishops, priests and permanent deacons – on reaching their seventy-fifth birthday are requested to offer their resignation from parish or other ecclesiastical office to their superior who, after considering all the circumstances of person and place, is to decide whether to accept or defer it. (*cf. can. 538 §3 & 401§1*).

After consulting with the Vicars General, other diocesan priests and deacons, and with the practice of other Dioceses, I have decided that the following procedure will be followed in our Diocese with immediate effect:

1. All priests and deacons by their seventy-fifth birthday must submit a letter of resignation from office to the Bishop. Those who have not already done this must now do so.
2. There will be a presumption in our Diocese that the letter of resignation from parish or other ecclesiastical office will ordinarily be accepted by the Bishop¹. However, before a decision is made others may be consulted. The priest or deacon will be notified of the decision by the Bishop in writing².
3. The Bishop will ensure that notice of the resignation of the priest or deacon is published in *The Catholic Voice of Lancaster*, on the Diocesan Website and in the Bishop's *Ad Clerum*.
4. In the case of priests, the Bishop will make provision for their appropriate care, maintenance and residence.

The priest or deacon resigns from his assignment to a parish or other ecclesiastical office, not from the sacred ministry itself. By virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders and his permanent configuration to Christ, he continues to live the mystery of his order in the service of the Church. (*cf. Directory on the Canonical Status of the Clergy, 10.7*).

In this sense resignation from office is not the same as retirement from secular work, in that the priest or deacon retains his liturgical and sacramental faculties. The retired priest or deacon may still play a valuable role in the parish and the local Church – appropriate to their retired status.

Retired priests and deacons continue to be most welcome to attend the Deanery Clergy Conference, on-going formation days and retreats. They will also continue to be informed of all diocesan activities through the Bishop's *Ad Clerum* and communications from their Dean.

The wives of retired deacons will also be invited to continue their appropriate participation within the diaconate community.

+ *Michael Campbell OSA*

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Bishop of Lancaster

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¹ In exceptional circumstances, if health and fitness allow, the Bishop may consider allowing the priest or deacon to continue in office, on condition that the individual agrees to an annual review.

² The Bishop's letter will be copied, as relevant, to the Parish Priest and Dean