

SABBATICALS FOR DIOCESAN PRIESTS

As its name implies, the notion of a sabbatical has biblical roots. The Bible speaks of the weekly Sabbath and of the sabbatical year in which the routine, stresses, and tiredness resulting from work give way to the holiness of rest, re-creation and enrichment. Sabbaticals are not only advisable, but for most priests, a necessity.

A priest returns from a sabbatical to his pastoral ministry in a better frame of mind, better skilled, and more relaxed. A sabbatical makes a priest more effective, for when he returns refreshed, he will be more sensitive and more effective with his people, his brother priests, and his bishop. The entire Church can profit from priests' sabbaticals.

While a priest can opt to spend some vacation time during his sabbatical, a sabbatical should not be simply an extended vacation. A sabbatical is taken for spiritual, educational, pastoral, and personal areas of interest. Priests need sabbaticals for diverse reasons and their needs will differ from individual to individual. It is quite understandable that some priests may not know what their specific area of need or interest may be. In any case, sound advice, careful personal discernment, and evaluating one's needs and desires are essential. The bishop may recommend that an individual take a sabbatical.

A sabbatical can take many different forms. It could involve participation in programs for priests specifically designed for sabbaticals, such as those offered by Catholic universities and theological centers. A sabbatical could mean immersing oneself in another culture, learning another language, ministering in the missions, or serving in a different ministry. It could allow for an extended retreat, a period of research and/or writing, teaching, or a time to prepare for a life transition such as retirement.

Lengths of sabbaticals can vary. For the Diocese of Las Cruces, a sabbatical will ordinarily be from three to six months.

The availability of sabbaticals is to be contingent on the financial resources of the diocese. Each year the diocesan budget should, if possible, allow for a sabbatical to be taken by one diocesan priest. Sabbaticals need to be seen as a priority for the priests and, like other priorities; monies need to be set aside for this purpose. The diocese will pay the entire cost of the sabbatical, but the cost incurred by the diocese should be no more than \$5,000 for a three-month sabbatical or \$10,000 for a six-month sabbatical.

The Priestly Life and Ministry Committee, together with the Bishop, will assist the priest in planning a sabbatical and in identifying a priest substitute.

To apply for a sabbatical, a priest should plan well in advance. Applications to the Priestly Life and Ministry Committee should ordinarily be made at least two years before the planned sabbatical is to begin. He should do so in writing, state the reasons why he wants or needs a sabbatical, and how he plans to spend it. He should also present an itemized budget in order that the funding might be identified.

Requests for sabbaticals will be reviewed and approved by the Priestly Life and Ministry Committee. After the sabbatical the priest will be invited to share the results of his sabbatical with

the Priestly Life and Ministry Committee and, with the priest's permission, with the entire presbyterate. This sharing would serve not only as a means of accountability but also as an enhancement of future sabbatical programs.

A priest qualifies for a sabbatical leave after he has served as a priest in the diocese for seven years.