



GLOSSARY OF CATHOLIC TERMS RELATING TO MINISTRY

This glossary is provided to help readers understand Church language.

The Catholic Church uses many terms to describe the status of a priest or deacon with regard to his permission to minister. Over many years, the Diocese of Pittsburgh has changed some terminology for the status of priests who are removed from ministry due to an allegation of serious misconduct. Changes may reflect pursuit of best practices, new Vatican policy or the circumstances of certain cases.

Whatever the terminology, these men were barred from active ministry, forbidden to dress as a priest, lead religious activities, call themselves “Father” or “Deacon,” or otherwise identify themselves as a priest or deacon in good standing. Some canonical designations changed over time, but their ban from ministry remained the same.

Administrative Leave

The term “administrative leave” is not found in canon law. The Diocese of Pittsburgh adopted it in the 1990s for the status of a priest or deacon who had been removed from ministry due to an allegation of misconduct. It is used for a priest or deacon who has been removed from his assignment and specifies that he is accorded his canonical rights while a canonical crime is investigated.

Canon Law

The term used to describe the law of the Catholic Church.

Clerical State

The clerical state refers to those who have been ordained as a bishop, priest or deacon and their status as a member of the clergy. If a man loses the clerical state he is no longer a member of the clergy (see *Dismissal from the Clerical State; Dispensation from the Clerical State*).

Credible Allegation

An allegation that is not manifestly false or frivolous and bears a semblance of truth.

Defrock

The Catholic Church does not use this term.

Dismissal from the Clerical State

Dismissal from the clerical state means a bishop, priest or deacon has involuntarily lost all rights and obligations associated with ordination. Dismissal occurs after a canonical trial and is a penalty for committing some canonical crime.

Dispensation from the Clerical State - or - Laicization (voluntary)

A voluntary return to the lay state, commonly termed "laicization." A "dispensation from the clerical state," is a papal declaration that a man has lost all rights and obligations associated with the priesthood, including that of celibacy. This is something that the man petitions the Holy Father to grant, in most cases because the man wishes to marry in the Church.

Health Leave

This term refers to a priest or deacon who has a medical condition that limits his ability to function. It was sometimes used for priests who were removed after an allegation of sexual abuse because they were receiving therapy. Today, the Diocese of Pittsburgh only uses this category for those suffering from a medical illness.

Personal Leave

Personal leave is when a priest or deacon takes time away from ministry. The reasons can range from a need to care for ailing parents to a crisis over whether he wants to remain in the clerical state. Usually it is at the cleric's request, but a bishop can ask him to take a leave if he cannot properly fulfill his ministry.

Removal of Faculties/Restriction of Faculties

Faculties are a cleric's authorization to celebrate the sacraments and act on behalf of the Church. A bishop can restrict or revoke a priest's or deacon's faculties to minister in the Church. A cleric who has no faculties cannot carry out any liturgical, sacramental or administrative action on behalf of the Church. A cleric can also have restricted faculties, which strictly limits his ministry to a certain place or in a particular instance. Depending on the situation, some priests whose faculties have been restricted may be able to dress in clerical garb and identify themselves as priests.

Substantiated Allegation

An allegation that is supported by sufficient evidence establishing reasonable grounds to believe that the abuse occurred.

Withdrawn from Ministry/Resigned from Ministry

This term refers to a priest or deacon who gives up most of his canonical rights, including the right to an assignment. He is *de facto* removed from active ministry. Prior to 1996, it was nearly impossible for a bishop to permanently remove a priest or deacon from ministry against his will. Consequently, the Diocese of Pittsburgh encouraged priests and deacons with substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse to resign or withdraw from active ministry.