

Code of Canon Law

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PARISHES, PASTORS, AND PAROCHIAL VICARS

Can. 515 §1. A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

§2. It is only for the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes. He is neither to erect, suppress, nor alter notably parishes, unless he has heard the presbyteral council.

§3. A legitimately erected parish possesses juridic personality by the law itself.

Can. 516 §1. Unless the law provides otherwise, a quasi-parish is equivalent to a parish; a quasi-parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful in a particular church, entrusted to a priest as its proper pastor but not yet erected as a parish because of particular circumstances.

§2. When certain communities cannot be erected as parishes or quasi-parishes, the diocesan bishop is to provide for their pastoral care in another way.

Can. 517 §1. When circumstances require it, the pastoral care of a parish or of different parishes together can be entrusted to several priests *in solidum*, with the requirement, however, that in exercising pastoral care one of them must be the moderator, namely, the one who is to direct the joint action and to answer for it to the bishop.

§2. If, because of a lack of priests, the diocesan bishop has decided that participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest who, provided with the powers and faculties of a pastor, is to direct the pastoral care.

Can. 518 As a general rule a parish is to be territorial, that is, one which includes all the Christian faithful of a certain territory. When it is expedient, however, personal parishes are to be established determined by reason of the rite, language, or nationality of the Christian faithful of some territory, or even for some other reason.

Can. 519 The pastor (*parochus*) is the proper pastor (*pastor*) of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, also with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law.

Can. 520 §1. A juridic person is not to be a pastor. With the consent of the competent superior, however, a diocesan bishop, but not a diocesan administrator, can entrust a parish to a clerical religious institute or clerical society of apostolic life, even by erecting it in a church of the institute or society, with the requirement, however, that one presbyter is to be the pastor of the parish or, if the pastoral care is entrusted to several in solidum, the moderator as mentioned in ⇒ can. 517, §1.

§2. The entrusting of a parish mentioned in §1 can be made either perpetually or for a specific, predetermined time. In either case it is to be made by means of a written agreement between the diocesan bishop and the competent superior of the institute or society, which expressly and accurately defines, among other things, the work to be accomplished, the persons to be assigned to the parish, and the Financial arrangements.

Can. 521 §1. To become a pastor validly, one must be in the sacred order of the presbyterate.

§2. Moreover, he is to be outstanding in sound doctrine and integrity of morals and endowed with zeal for souls and other virtues; he is also to possess those qualities which are required by universal or particular law to care for the parish in question.

§3. For the office of pastor to be conferred on someone, his suitability must be clearly evident by some means determined by the diocesan bishop, even by means of an examination.

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.

Can. 523 Without prejudice to the prescript of ⇒ can. 682, §1, the provision of the office of pastor belongs to the diocesan bishop, and indeed by free conferral, unless someone has the right of presentation or election.

Can. 524 A diocesan bishop is to entrust a vacant parish to the one whom he considers suited to fulfill its parochial care, after weighing all the circumstances and without any favoritism. To make a judgment about suitability, he is to hear the vicar forane and conduct appropriate investigations, having heard certain presbyters and lay members of the Christian faithful, if it is warranted.

Can. 525 When a see is vacant or impeded, it belongs to the diocesan administrator or another who governs the diocese temporarily:

1/ to install or confirm presbyters who have been legitimately presented or elected for a parish;

2/ to appoint pastors if the see has been vacant or impeded for a year.

Can. 526 §1. A pastor is to have the parochial care of only one parish; nevertheless, because of a lack of priests or other circumstances, the care of several neighboring parishes can be entrusted to the same pastor.

§2. In the same parish there is to be only one pastor or moderator in accord with the norm of ⇒ can. 517, §1; any contrary custom is reprobated and any contrary privilege whatsoever is revoked.

Can. 527 §1. The person who has been promoted to carry out the pastoral care of a parish obtains this care and is bound to exercise it from the moment of taking possession.

§2. The local ordinary or a priest delegated by him places the pastor in possession; he is to observe the method accepted by particular law or legitimate custom. The same ordinary, however, can dispense from that method for a just cause; in this case, the notification of the dispensation to the parish replaces the taking of possession.

§3. The local ordinary is to prescribe the time within which possession of a parish must be taken. When this has elapsed without action, he can declare the parish vacant unless there was a just impediment.

Can. 528 §1. A pastor is obliged to make provision so that the word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish; for this reason, he is to take care that the lay members of the Christian faithful are instructed in the truths of the faith, especially by giving a homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation and by offering catechetical instruction. He is to foster works through which the spirit of the gospel is promoted, even in what pertains to social justice. He is to have particular care for the Catholic education of children and youth. He is to make every effort, even with the collaboration of the Christian faithful, so that the message of the gospel comes also to those who have ceased the practice of their religion or do not profess the true faith.

§2. The pastor is to see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of the parish assembly of the faithful.

He is to work so that the Christian faithful are nourished through the devout celebration of the sacraments and, in a special way, that they frequently approach the sacraments of the Most Holy Eucharist and penance. He is also to endeavor that they are led to practice prayer even as families and take part consciously and actively in the sacred liturgy which, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, the pastor must direct in his own parish and is bound to watch over so that no abuses creep in.

Can. 529 §1. In order to fulfill his office diligently, a pastor is to strive to know the faithful entrusted to his care.

Therefore he is to visit families, sharing especially in the cares, anxieties, and griefs of the faithful, strengthening them in the Lord, and prudently correcting them if they are failing in certain areas. With generous love he is to help the sick, particularly those close to death, by refreshing them solicitously with the sacraments and commending their souls to God; with particular diligence he is to seek out the poor, the afflicted, the lonely, those exiled from their country, and similarly those weighed down by special difficulties. He is to work so that

spouses and parents are supported in fulfilling their proper duties and is to foster growth of Christian life in the family.

§2. A pastor is to recognize and promote the proper part which the lay members of the Christian faithful have in the mission of the Church, by fostering their associations for the purposes of religion. He is to cooperate with his own bishop and the presbyterium of the diocese, also working so that the faithful have concern for parochial communion, consider themselves members of the diocese and of the universal Church, and participate in and sustain efforts to promote this same communion.

Can. 530 The following functions are especially entrusted to a pastor:

1/ the administration of baptism;

2/ the administration of the sacrament of confirmation to those who are in danger of death, according to the norm of ⇒ can. 883, n. 3;

3/ the administration of Viaticum and of the anointing of the sick, without prejudice to the prescript of ⇒ can. 1003, §§2 and 3, and the imparting of the apostolic blessing;

4/ the assistance at marriages and the nuptial blessing;

5/ the performance of funeral rites;

6/ the blessing of the baptismal font at Easter time, the leading of processions outside the church, and solemn blessings outside the church;

7/ the more solemn eucharistic celebration on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

Can. 531 Although another person has performed a certain parochial function, that person is to put the offerings received from the Christian faithful on that occasion in the parochial account, unless in the case of voluntary offerings the contrary intention of the donor is certain. The diocesan bishop, after having heard the presbyteral council, is competent to establish precepts which provide for the allocation of these offerings and the remuneration of clerics fulfilling the same function.

Can. 532 In all juridic affairs the pastor represents the parish according to the norm of law. He is to take care that the goods of the parish are administered according to the norm of ⇒ cann. 1281-1288.

Can. 533 §1. A pastor is obliged to reside in a rectory near the church. Nevertheless, in particular cases and if there is a just cause, the local ordinary can permit him to reside elsewhere, especially in a house shared by several presbyters, provided that the performance of parochial functions is properly and suitably provided for.

§2. Unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, a pastor is permitted to be absent from the parish each year for vacation for at most one continuous or interrupted month; those days which the pastor spends once a year in spiritual retreat are not computed in the time of vacation. In order to be absent from the parish for more than a week, however, a pastor is bound to inform the local ordinary.

§3. It is for the diocesan bishop to establish norms which see to it that during the absence of the pastor, a priest endowed with the necessary faculties provides for the care of the parish.

Can. 534 §1. After a pastor has taken possession of his parish, he is obliged to apply a Mass for the people entrusted to him on each Sunday and holy day of obligation in his diocese. If he is legitimately impeded from this celebration, however, he is to apply it on the same days through another or on other days himself.

§2. A pastor who has the care of several parishes is bound to apply only one Mass for the entire people entrusted to him on the days mentioned in §1.

§3. A pastor who has not satisfied the obligation mentioned in §§1 and 2 is to apply as soon as possible as many Masses for the people as he has omitted.

Can. 535 §1. Each parish is to have parochial registers, that is, those of baptisms, marriages, deaths, and others as prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop. The pastor is to see to it that these registers are accurately inscribed and carefully preserved.

§2. In the baptismal register are also to be noted confirmation and those things which pertain to the canonical status of the Christian faithful by reason of marriage, without prejudice to the prescript of ⇒ can. 1133, of adoption, of the reception of sacred orders, of perpetual profession made in a religious institute, and of change of rite. These notations are always to be noted on a baptismal certificate.

§3. Each parish is to have its own seal. Documents regarding the canonical status of the Christian faithful and all acts which can have juridic importance are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and sealed with the parochial seal.

§4. In each parish there is to be a storage area, or archive, in which the parochial registers are protected along with letters of bishops and other documents which are to be preserved for reason of necessity or advantage. The pastor is to take care that all of these things, which are to be inspected by the diocesan bishop or his delegate at the time of visitation or at some other opportune time, do not come into the hands of outsiders.

§5. Older parochial registers are also to be carefully protected according to the prescripts of particular law.

Can. 536 §1. If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.

§2. A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop.

Can. 537 In each parish there is to be a finance council which is governed, in addition to universal law, by norms issued by the diocesan bishop and in which the Christian faithful, selected according to these same norms, are to assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to the prescript of ⇒ can. 532.

Can. 538 §1. A pastor ceases from office by removal or transfer carried out by the diocesan bishop according to the norm of law, by resignation made by the pastor himself for a just cause and accepted by the same bishop for validity, and by lapse of time if he had been appointed for a definite period according to the prescripts of particular law mentioned in ⇒ can. 522.

§2. A pastor who is a member of a religious institute or is incardinated in a society of apostolic life is removed according to the norm of ⇒ can. 682, §2.

§3. When a pastor has completed seventy-Five years of age, he is requested to submit his resignation from office to the diocesan bishop who is to decide to accept or defer it after he has considered all the circumstances of the person and place. Attentive to the norms established by the conference of bishops, the diocesan bishop must provide suitable support and housing for a retired pastor.

Can. 539 When a parish becomes vacant or when a pastor is prevented from exercising his pastoral function in the parish by reason of captivity, exile or banishment, incapacity or ill health, or some other cause, the diocesan bishop is to designate as soon as possible a parochial administrator, that is, a priest who takes the place of the pastor according to the norm of ⇒ can. 540.

Can. 540 §1. A parochial administrator is bound by the same duties and possesses the same rights as a pastor unless the diocesan bishop establishes otherwise.

§2. A parochial administrator is not permitted to do anything which prejudices the rights of the pastor or can harm parochial goods.

§3. After he has completed his function, a parochial administrator is to render an account to the pastor.

Can. 541 §1. When a parish becomes vacant or a pastor has been impeded from exercising his pastoral function and before the appointment of a parochial administrator, the parochial vicar is to assume the governance of the parish temporarily. If there are several vicars, the one who is senior in appointment or, if there are no vicars, a pastor determined by particular law assumes this governance.

§2. The one who has assumed the governance of a parish according to the norm of §1 is immediately to inform the local ordinary about the vacancy of the parish.

Can. 542 Priests to whom the pastoral care of some parish or of different parishes together is entrusted in solidum according to the norm of ⇒ can. 517, §1:

1/ must be endowed with the qualities mentioned in ⇒ can. 521;

2/ are to be appointed or installed according to the norm of the prescripts of cann. ⇒ 522 and ⇒ 524;

3/ obtain pastoral care only from the moment of taking possession; their moderator is placed in possession according to the norm of the prescripts of ⇒ can. 527, §2; for the other priests, however, a legitimately made profession of faith replaces taking possession.

Can. 543 §1. If the pastoral care of some parish or of different parishes together is entrusted to priests in solidum, each of them is obliged to perform the tasks and functions of pastor mentioned in cann. ⇒528, ⇒ 529, and ⇒ 530 according to the arrangement they establish. All of them have the faculty of assisting at marriages and all the powers to dispense granted to a pastor by law; these are to be exercised, however, under the direction of the moderator.

§2. All the priests who belong to the group:

1/ are bound by the obligation of residence;

2/ are to establish through common counsel an arrangement by which one of them is to celebrate a Mass for the people according to the norm of ⇒ can. 534;

3/ the moderator alone represents in juridic affairs the parish or parishes entrusted to the group.

Can. 544 When a priest from the group mentioned in ⇒ can. 517, §1 or its moderator ceases from office as well as when one of them becomes incapable of exercising his pastoral function, the parish or parishes whose care is entrusted to the group do not become vacant. It is for the diocesan bishop, however, to appoint another moderator; before someone is appointed by the bishop, the priest in the group who is senior in appointment is to fulfill this function.

Can. 545 §1. Whenever it is necessary or opportune in order to carry out the pastoral care of a parish fittingly, one or more parochial vicars can be associated with the pastor. As co-workers with the pastor and sharers in his solicitude, they are to offer service in the pastoral ministry by common counsel and effort with the pastor and under his authority.

§2. A parochial vicar can be assigned either to assist in exercising the entire pastoral ministry for the whole parish, a determined part of the parish, or a certain group of the Christian faithful of the parish, or even to assist in fulfilling a specific ministry in different parishes together.

Can. 546 To be appointed a parochial vicar validly, one must be in the sacred order of the presbyterate.

Can. 547 The diocesan bishop freely appoints a parochial vicar, after he has heard, if he has judged it opportune, the pastor or pastors of the parishes for which the parochial vicar is appointed and the vicar forane, without prejudice to the prescript of ⇒ can. 682, §1.

Can. 548 §1. The obligations and rights of a parochial vicar, besides being defined in the canons of this chapter, diocesan statutes, and the letter of the diocesan bishop, are more specifically determined in the mandate of the pastor.

§2. Unless the letter of the diocesan bishop expressly provides otherwise, a parochial vicar is obliged to assist the pastor in the entire parochial ministry by reason of office, except for the application of the Mass for the people, and to substitute for the pastor if the situation arises according to the norm of law.

§3. A parochial vicar is to report to the pastor regularly concerning proposed and existing pastoral endeavors in such a way that the pastor and the vicar or vicars, through common efforts, are able to provide for the pastoral care of the parish for which they are together responsible.

Can. 549 Unless the diocesan bishop has provided otherwise according to the norm of ⇒ can. 533, §3 and unless a parochial administrator has been appointed, the prescripts of ⇒ can. 541, §1 are to be observed when the pastor is absent. In this case, the vicar is also bound by all the obligations of the pastor, except the obligation of applying Mass for the people.

Can. 550 §1. A parochial vicar is obliged to reside in the parish or, if he has been appointed for different parishes jointly, in one of them. Nevertheless, for a just cause the local ordinary can allow him to reside elsewhere, especially in a house shared by several presbyters, provided that this is not detrimental to the performance of his pastoral functions.

§2. The local ordinary is to take care that some manner of common life in the rectory is fostered between the pastor and the vicars where this can be done.

§3. A parochial vicar possesses the same right as a pastor concerning the time of vacation.

Can. 551 The prescripts of ⇒ can. 531 are to be observed in regards to openings which the Christian faithful give to a vicar on the occasion of the performance of pastoral ministry.

Can. 552 The diocesan bishop or diocesan administrator can remove a parochial vicar for a just cause, without prejudice to the prescript of ⇒ can. 682, §2.