

DOCUMENTATION

Instruction: On the sending abroad and sojourn of Diocesan Priests from Mission Territories

Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

1. The universal mission of priests “*to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1,8) has been enthusiastically renewed by the Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium of the Church (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Priesthood *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 10: *AAS* 58 (1966) 1007; John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, nn. 67-68: *AAS* 83 (1991) 315-326). In the Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, the Conciliar Fathers exhorted priests to be “*profoundly aware of the fact that their very life is consecrated to the service of the missions*” (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, n. 39: *AAS* 58 (1966) 986-987).

It is above all a missionary spirit that gives life, to this priestly service in the various situations of the world today and, in particular, among those people and in those socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and His Gospel are still unknown (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 33: *AAS* 83 (1991) 278-279).

Thus, the prophetic insight of Pius XII’s Encyclical *Fidei Donum* that the Conciliar Fathers wanted to foster and to make known was authoritatively underlined by Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* which “*encouraged Bishops to offer some of their priests for temporary service in the Churches of Africa, and gave his approval to projects already existing for that purpose*” (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 68; cf. Congregation for the Clergy, Directive *Postquam apostoli*, 23 July 1980, nn 23-31 - *AAS*. 72 (1990) 360-363;_John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 15 March 1992, n. 18: *AAS* 84 (1992) 684-686).

2. As a consequence, this particular form of missionary cooperation between the Churches, that is, of *fidei donum* priests, which has been in place since the middle of last century, remains valid even today. It is particularly so in the case of the established Churches whose focus is on those specific Churches not only in Africa but also in other continents—such as Asia, Latin America and Oceania—where evangelization was needed and is still required today with new enthusiasm and zeal due to the low living standards and limited personnel.

The exchange of diocesan clergy between the Churches of the mission territories, whether it is in the same country whose regions and zones are less evangelized, or in other countries of the same continent in need of apostolic personnel, or even to other continents of missionary territories, has been made possible by this missionary gift. In view of the diminished number of life-time missionaries that are now available from the already established Churches, this exchange ought to be fostered and promoted (cf. Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Instruction *Cooperatio missionalis*, 1 October 1998, nn. 16-17).

3. This exchange among the Churches, the fruit of universal communion, must preserve a strong missionary thrust to counteract the prevalent trend of a certain number of diocesan priests who, incardinated in their particular Churches in mission territories, want to leave their own country and reside in Europe or North America, often with the intention of further studies or for other reasons that are not actually missionary.

Often their motives are based on the higher living conditions which these countries offer and the need for young priests in some of the established Churches. These priests are then convinced by such reasoning not to return to their own country, sometimes with the tacit permission of their own Bishop, or at other times in opposition to his request that they return home. A certain permanency is then given to such irregular situations by virtue of the vast distances and poor communication.

4. With this *Instruction*, therefore, the Missionary Dicastery wishes to provide norms to govern the sojourn of diocesan priests from mission territories who are living abroad. Such reasoning is

warranted so that the young missionary Churches which are already short of personnel, and in particular of priests, are not deprived of ample apostolic strength that is absolutely indispensable for their Christian life and the ongoing development of evangelization among those people who for the most part are not yet baptized (cf. Instruction *Cooperatio missionalis*, n. 20).

5. First of all, this *Instruction is intended for diocesan Bishops* or their equivalent in law (cf. *C.I.C.*, can. 381 §2) whose ecclesiastical circumscriptions are dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Thus, they must adhere to the enclosed norms, applying them immediately so as to resolve any irregular situations.

This *Instruction* is also being sent, in agreement with the Congregation for Bishops, to the Episcopal Conferences of Western Europe, North America and Australia, to inform them of the existence of this phenomenon and to ensure that adequate provisions are made so that a proper exchange based on a true missionary spirit may be reestablished between the Churches. Furthermore, this *Instruction* also pertains to other countries, not cited above, where this same problem occurs.

6. *The formation of seminarians in mission territories.* The seminary's educational program must ensure that seminarians are well trained in a true and proper manner concerning the nature and duties of a pastor, adapting themselves to the pastoral needs of their own particular Church where they will be incardinated from the moment of their diaconate ordination. It is also necessary that they are taught to broaden the horizons of their mind and heart to the specifically missionary and universal dimension of the life of the Church (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 58: *AAS* 84 (1992) 759-761).

In the mission territories one needs to be particularly attentive during the seminarian's formation not to allow an attitude that clamors for the supposed right to pursue further studies after ordination nor that the bishop has the obligation to send him abroad.

Moreover, it is important to promote the *ongoing formation of priests* involving the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral

dimensions, be it at a diocesan, provincial or national level (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 72: AAS 84 (1992) 783-787).

7. *Reasons for staying abroad.* One of the principal reasons why diocesan priests from missionary territories are sent abroad by their Ordinary is to further their studies in a field that is unavailable in their own region, with the aim of providing a specific ecclesial service upon their return.

The intellectual formation of priests, whether it is in the theological disciplines or in other fields, should always be clearly useful for the particular Church. Such was the opinion of the Second Vatican Council in the Decree *Optatam totius*: “It is the bishop’s responsibility to send young men of suitable character, virtue and ability to special institutes, faculties or universities, so that the various needs of the apostolate may be met by priests trained to a higher scientific standard in the sacred sciences and in other appropriate subjects” (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the training of priests *Optatam totius*, n. 18: AAS 58 (1966) 725).

So every Bishop, together with his collaborators should make a careful selection from among his priests of those who are truly gifted and capable of further studies. This decision should be based on the needs of the Diocese, such as teaching roles at the major and minor seminaries, the permanent formation of clergy, curial officials and particular departments of the diocesan chancery, or even at a provincial or national level - in which case it would be in agreement with the Episcopal Conference.

One is strongly advised not to send abroad for further studies those priests who have personal problems, in the vain hope that they may find a remedy—instead they should be helped in more appropriate and specific ways.

The Bishop who receives priests of mission territories into his own Diocese for academic reasons must take care of their spiritual formation, a practice that has already borne much fruit in many countries. It would be advantageous if the Episcopal Conference set down certain norms concerning the stay of such priests who are overseas for academic reasons. (In this regard one can note the directives issued by the Italian, German and U.S.A. Episcopal Conferences.)

8. Pastoral assistance to emigrants of one's own country is another reason why a diocesan priest may be sent abroad for a certain period.

The phenomenon of human mobility is finding new expressions and truly warrants our pastoral attention. Where it is necessary, Bishops of missionary countries may choose to send priests to precise locations abroad. Skilled priests filled with a true missionary spirit are to follow and gather those men and women of their own country who have emigrated overseas to assist them spiritually and preserve some link with their country of origin, since these emigrants and refugees now reside in countries which are largely non-Christian. Obviously this must come about with the explicit agreement of the Bishops and then later with the Episcopal Conferences where the emigrants reside (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Bishops *Christus Dominus*, n. 18: *AAS* 58 (1966) 682; Paul VI, *Motu proprio Pastoralis migratorum cura*, 15 August 1969: *AAS* 61 (1969) 601-603; Commission for the Pastoral Assistance of Migrants and Tourism, Letter *Nella sua sollecitudine*, 26 May 1978: *AAS* 70 (1978) 357-378; *C.I.C.*, can. 568; Congregation for Catholic Education and the Pontifical Commission for Pastoral Assistance of Migrants and Tourists, Letter on *Human Mobility and the formation of future priests*, 25 January 1986).

9. One final reason, that one may encounter in exceptional cases, concerns those situations where *priests are forced to leave their own country* for reasons of persecution, war or other serious motives. Even if such situations cannot be foreseen, as often happens, it is still necessary to clarify the situation and the concerns of each case while bearing in mind the legal requirements of individual nations that accept refugees.

Norms

First of all, as a general rule, what is sanctioned by *C.I.C.*, can. 283 §1 is reiterated: "*Clerics, even if they do not have a residential office, are not to be absent from their Diocese for a considerable time, to be determined by particular law, without at least the presumed permission of their Ordinary.*"

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples requires that all Bishops and diocesan priests strictly observe the above canon, in addition to those situations indicated in article 3 of this *Instruction*.

A. Norms for the sending abroad of ordained priests for further studies.

art. 1 - The diocesan Bishop of Mission Countries, after having ascertained the actual diocesan needs and sought the counsel of his collaborators, should choose the most able priest, after having asked his consent, to pursue further studies. He is to designate the field of study in which the priest must specialize, the Faculty in which he must enrol and the date of his definitive return.

art. 2 - Agreement is then sought in writing with the diocesan Bishop and with the proposed Institute where he has decided to send the priest, including the question of his financial support.

art. 3 - Some arrangement is then made with this Bishop concerning the pastoral work which shall be undertaken by the priest only, however, for the duration of his course and in such a fashion that it is not too burdensome so as to prevent him from completing his studies in the allotted time span, nor that he be required to assume an office or position as laid down by law (as, for example, the position of parish priest, according to *C.I.C.*, can. 522).

art. 4 - The diocesan Bishop who receives a priest student from mission territories into his own Diocese should make sure that a precise agreement has been reached, as specified above, with the Bishop who is sending the priest for further studies.

art. 5 - The Bishop who is accepting priest students into his Diocese is obliged to provide spiritual assistance for them by inserting them into the diocesan pastoral plan, ensuring that they participate in the life of the Presbyterate and accompanying them with fatherly care.

art. 6 - In the eventuality of grave problems, this same Ordinary, after having discussed them with the Bishop of the said priest, must take adequate measures that may even result in the termination of permission to remain in that Diocese (cf. *C.I.C.*, can. 271 §3).

art. 7 - Any priest who, after having been warned as prescribed by law, (cf. *C.I.C.*, can. 1347 §1) obstinately refuses to abide by his Bishop's decision and return to his Diocese, will be punished with

an appropriate penalty as decreed by law (cf. *C.I.C.*, can. 273 and can. 1371 §2).

B. Norms for staying abroad to provide pastoral assistance to migrants.

art. 8 - Apart from the norms already noted, either of universal or particular law, and before appointing a priest of a mission territory as a chaplain to migrants, the two Bishops involved should come to some understanding, confirmed in a written agreement, concerning the type and duration of pastoral work required. Such a priest should be introduced into the pastoral activities of the Diocese and participate in the life of the Presbyterate.

art. 9 - In the event of numerous emigrant groups, some agreement can also be made with the respective Episcopal Conferences.

C. Norms for refugee priests who have fled from their country for grave reasons.

art. 10 - Any Bishop who welcomes a refugee priest from a mission territory into his Diocese, that is, someone who has had to leave his home for grave reasons, must consult with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples prior to giving him a pastoral office.

The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, during the course of the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal on the 24 April 2001, approved the present Instruction and ordered its publication. Rome, from the Office of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, 25 April 2001, Feast of St Mark, the Evangelist.

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