

## GRADUATE STUDIES POLICY FOR PRIESTS

Priests of the diocese of Spokane are encouraged to pursue ongoing studies. In particular, the diocese is committed to assisting capable and eager priests to undertake such studies which lead to advanced post-graduate degrees (masters, licentiates, and doctorates) whenever such degrees would provide demonstrable pastoral benefits to the Bishop, other priests, and the people of God in the diocese.

- I. Normally, the priest who seeks to pursue an advanced degree should submit (at least six months before the starting date of studies) a written petition to the diocesan director of continuing education for the clergy (even if the Bishop himself takes the initiative in urging a priest to consider advance studies). The proposal should include:
  - 1) The academic degree sought.
  - 2) A general case statement outlining the qualifications of the priest for pursuing the advanced degree and benefits the degree will provide for both the priest and the people of the diocese.
  - 3) Specific initiatives planned over a five year period which the priest will commit himself to providing for the good of the people of God in the Diocese of Spokane upon completion of the degree (e.g., retreats, seminars, classes, Inland Register and other media contributions, compilation of sourcebooks, other creative enterprises). If practical to do so, similar specific initiatives can even be commendably offered by the priest during the course of his studies.
  - 4) The preferred university or other accredited institution(s) offering the degree program.
  - 5) The realistic time frame needed to complete all requirements for the advanced degree.
  - 6) The ideal starting date for beginning the program of studies and completing current diocesan assignment, with consideration of the effects of delaying the starting date for one, two, and three years.
  - 7) Foreseeable diocesan ministry assignment options upon completion of studies.
  - 8) Availability of the priest for diocesan ministry during the summer and other recesses between academic sessions.
  - 9) Tuition and other anticipated expenses over the course of the degree studies including which portion of the costs the priest will pay.
- II. Upon receiving a proposal for advanced studies, the diocesan director of continuing education for the clergy may elect to discuss the proposal confidentially with members of his advisory committee before submitting the proposal to the Bishop with pertinent annotations about timing and feasibility. With or without consultation, the diocesan director of continuing education for the clergy is to submit the proposal to the Bishop without undue delay, *viz.*, within one month of receiving it himself. The director also has the responsibility of periodically informing the petitioning priest about the status of his proposal.
- III. The Bishop will then consider the proposal in light of the needs and resources of the diocese. Normally, the Priests' Personnel Board will be consulted at its next meeting. After a decision to accept, modify, postpone, or reject the proposal has been made, the Bishop will inform the petitioning priest of the decision and rationale.
- IV. If the decision is to accept the proposal, the Bishop will commit to providing the petitioning priest with the diocesan benefits of active ministry (cf. Diocesan Policies BOOK II, Section 2, #3) during the time frame stipulated in point #5 of the proposal. In the event that the degree is not completed by that time, the Bishop will discuss the situation and any options directly with the petitioning priest.

In addition, the diocese will pay salary, the cost of board, room, tuition and course books. The priest will be responsible for travel, car allowance and personal expenses. Upon approval, the priest's proposal (with any modifications clearly incorporated in a written copy) becomes the written basis of agreement. Copies of the finalized agreement are to be provided to the petitioning priest and the diocesan director of continuing education for the clergy.
- V. If the decision is to postpone the proposal, the reasons for the delay are to be communicated by the Bishop to the petitioning priest, as well as a tentative time frame for re-consideration of the proposal. All things being equal, a re-submitted postponed proposal will have priority over proposals by other priests at later dates.

- VI. If the decision is to reject the proposal, the reasons are to be candidly communicated by the Bishop to the petitioning priest.
- VII. Upon approval to begin work on an advanced degree, the diocesan director of continuing education for the clergy will make himself available for assistance to the petitioning priest throughout the time of his degree work.
- VIII. The assignment to advanced studies is to be publicized in the Inland Register according to diocesan policy for announcing assignments.
- IX. During the course of his studies, the petitioning priest is to provide brief written progress reports to the diocesan director of continuing education for the clergy at least twice a year.
- X. Six months before the end of studies the priest is to meet with the diocesan director of continuing education for the clergy for assistance in the transition from the degree program, and to discuss plans for implementing the initiatives listed in point #3 of his petition.
- XI. The completion of the advanced degree and the priest's new diocesan assignment is to be publicized in the Inland Register according to diocesan policy for announcing assignments.

(Policy reviewed by Presbyteral Council September 10, 2004 and accepted by Bishop Skylstad)