

**Guidelines on the Second General Shuffling
of Parish Assignments
Circular 2013-08**

My Dear Brother Priests,

Greetings!

Our Second General Shuffling now continues a tradition, we started when we implemented the transfer of assignments simultaneously in 2007. The consensus among the Clergy through the evaluation conducted two years after the implementation was that, in spite of the initial problems that ensued and the difficulties that were encountered, this diocesan policy was seen as positive, and thus confidently prepared us for the present implementation. I trust that, having processed our experiences, the Diocesan Clergy has embraced this system with all its concomitant successes and also the inherent challenges it poses.

I thank you for your cooperation and patience in this process of General Shuffling of Assignments of Parish Priests. I myself have gone through many stages coming up with the decision on your assignments, keeping in my mind the desire to be fair for everyone, as to guarantee your welfare, and in my heart that I may be father to you first, than a bishop. I entrust to Jesus the Good Shepherd these assignments of yours, with a prayer that all of us may have a heart like Him, who never leaves His flock untended. After the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday, in spite of the challenges and difficulties of making choices, we announced the assignments in the presence of all parish priests in the Diocese. I would like to assume that everyone is ready and eager to take on the new posts assigned to each one.

There is need, however, for updates to the Guidelines issued during the First General Shuffling of Assignments due to emergence of new of questions that have to be answered and new concerns that need to be addressed. The present one is an adaptation based on policies and agreements after the Meeting of the Clergy last 28 March 2013. On top of this, our experiences have enriched our understanding of the issues that have arisen, and have made us capable of responding to them. The change of assignments in June 2013 concerns not just the transfer of parish priests, but also the security of tenure of regular parish workers, the requirements dealing with turnover of finances and financial matters in general, the cooperation of pastoral councils, the continuity of pastoral programs which continue even beyond the term of the pastor and finally some important post-transfer decorum. With these presents, I wish to promulgate new Guidelines to ensure a smooth and proper transition of parish assignments.

Before the Transfer:

1. The new assignments of Parish Priests shall be announced in the gathering of the clergy right after the Chrism Mass (Holy Thursday), a fitting reminder that the shuffling of assignments is done in the spirit of Presbyterium or brotherhood of priests.
2. The outgoing and incoming parish priests may begin informal talks and sharing about the areas of concern of the parish, notwithstanding the formal turnover meeting scheduled weeks before the transfer. This will, in no way, replace the formalities in the said turnover session.
3. In the formal turnover meeting, both incoming parish priest and outgoing parish priest along with his parish secretaries, the bookkeepers, the Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council shall be present in the meeting. In the presence of the Bishop and his delegates the formal turnover will take place.
4. The outgoing parish priests will bring the necessary documents in the turnover meeting. These will be the matter that will be discussed. The list of documents will be provided in the Circular that is forthcoming.
5. In the turnover meeting, the outgoing parish priest should specify the *Plantilla* of the personnel that will remain in the parish. They constitute the regular workers who may not be removed without due process. On the other hand, the outgoing parish priest will also specify the personnel who will transfer. Upon the agreement of both, the personnel transferring and staying will be properly determined.
 - a. It is understood that the Parish Secretaries, Bookkeepers and Sacristan Mayores are Regular Parish Employees
 - b. It is understood that Drivers, Cooks and Personal Assistants are, although salaried by the parish, working for the parish priests and as such may be co-terminus with him, without prejudice to existing civil laws regarding this matter.
6. The outgoing parish priest will advise the incoming parish priest about the separation payments to be given to personnel who shall terminate their work at the end of the term of the outgoing parish priest. This should be done in the spirit of ecclesial justice, without prejudice to civil law. It is expected that this would be resolved in the turnover meeting.
7. If opportunity presents itself, it is for the benefit of both the priests and the faithful that the incoming parish priest be invited on some occasions, where the outgoing parish priest may properly introduced him to the community. The Mass or an assembly attended by the leaders of the Parish Pastoral Council and the parishioners may serve this occasion.
8. Until the end of his term, however, the outgoing parish priest remains the proper pastor to which the parish is entrusted. It is dictated by prudence and

decency that the incoming parish priest, even if the turnover meeting has been done, should not intervene in the exercise of the pastoral duties of the incoming parish priest.

9. The outgoing parish priest shall accomplish the duties and obligations entrusted to him by general law or diocesan statutes, namely:
 - a. To complete all entries in the Canonical Books (Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage and Funeral) and sign them accordingly.
 - b. To file all the necessary documents during his tenure and keep them in an archive. Among these documents are:
 - i. Book of Circulars
 - ii. Book of Financial Reports (Financial Records)
 - iii. Book of Mass Intentions
 - iv. Book of Announcements
 - v. Book of Inventories
 - vi. Other necessary documents that deal with the Parish and the Office of the Parish Priests
 - c. To see to it that proper account of the administration of the temporal goods of the parish is drawn up and is ready for turnover.
 - d. To remit to the Chancery collections intended for contributions to CBCP, the Bination and Trination of Masses, etc.
 - e. To pay debts and arrears of the parish, unless it is provided that their payments extend beyond the term of the outgoing parish priest.
10. In deference to the incoming parish priest and as resolved in the Presbyteral Council Meeting, the outgoing parish priest should not hire new employees, engage in new enterprise, apply for loans, construct major parish projects except when expressly granted permission by the Bishop.
11. The Parish Pastoral Council shall help the outgoing parish priest in preparation for the transition of parish priests. It will see to it that the outgoing parish priest is properly sent off and the incoming one fittingly welcomed. Both deep gratitude and hospitable welcome are to be considered by the Council.
12. If opportunity presents itself, the *despedida* and the welcome party can be done on the same occasion so as to make this the best opportunity to formally witness the transition. On that occasion, the outgoing parish priest will introduce the incoming parish priest.

During the Transfer:

1. The outgoing and incoming parish priests shall agree on and designate the date and time of transfer. The Parish Pastoral Council shall be informed about this and be present on that occasion.
2. If possible, before the outgoing parish priest leaves the parish, he must see to it that the incoming one is formally received. If so desired, both the outgoing and incoming parish priests may first both enter the church to say prayers. (This is like the taking possession of a diocese where the bishop enters the

Church and offers prayer.) It may be a good opportunity for the faithful to see that their priests are united in prayer.

3. Aside from those matters handed on during the turnover meeting, the outgoing parish priest will formally endorse and show where to find the following:
 - a. Parish Documents
 - b. Parochial books
 - c. Financial Documents (e.g. Approved Budget Proposal for the Year)
 - d. Receipts (Current and Unused)
 - e. Check Voucher (Current and Unused)
 - f. Check Book (Current and Unused)
 - g. Cash on Hand and Undeposited Collections
 - h. Petty Cash Box and Petty Cash Vouchers
 - i. Keys (Tabernacle, Church, Convent and Parish Hall)
 - j. Parish Seal
4. On the day of the actual possession of the incoming parish priest (either June 4 or 5), pastoral responsibility for the parish is properly entrusted to him. It is only then that he can lawfully sign documents, e.g baptismal certificates, checks, etc., and may validly act as a parish priest. The outgoing parish priest loses his rights and obligations and assumes new ones in his new parish.
5. Proper introductions may be made, in favor of the incoming parish priests, of the personnel, office staff, parish leaders and members of the community. This may be done by the outgoing parish priest himself and the Parish Pastoral Council officers.
6. Those things, which the outgoing parish priest may deem proper in welcoming the incoming parish priest, shall also be effected as opportune.

After the Transfer:

1. The so-called transition period runs for about six months (from June to December). During this break-in period adjustments are being made, certain decorum must be observed and decisions personal withheld, while upholding the decisions of one's predecessor. It may be described as the period of the "status quo," unless grave cause necessitates otherwise. It is a period of introducing the new parish priest to the community, the time for knowing the members of the community and, if opportune, months for visiting homes of parishioners. It also can turn into something critical if some things were not observed. The new parish priest should be mindful to act prudently during this period.
2. While the former parish priest will remain loved and respected by his former parishioners, it is prudent and well-advised that he refrains from visiting the parish immediately after the transfer in deference to the new parish priest, and distance himself for some reasonable time or during the transition period.

3. On the one hand, the new parish priest must refrain from making negative remarks of his predecessor as prudence dictates. In the spirit of charity, he must, however, deal with possible issues and problems that may come up, criticisms against his predecessor, unresolved issues and the like with a healthy sense of undue haste until he investigates and makes a reasonable judgment. He may consult his predecessor on matters that he needs to be enlightened.
4. As resolved and provided in the Guidelines for Pastoral Council, the new parish priest shall not replace the members of the Parish Pastoral Council before the six-month transition period (June to December), unless he is impelled by grave cause and upon the expressed approval of the bishop. Therefore, it is not proper that he demands for their courtesy resignation. On the other hand, it is the task of the Parish Pastoral Council to help the new parish priest during the period of transition. Only after the prescribed time may selection of new leaders take place. It is highly encouraged that both parish priest and his Council work together as provided in the Guidelines for Pastoral Council.
5. The Parish Pastoral Council shall avoid undue comparison between the new parish priest and his predecessor. As everyone is endowed with different gifts and *charisms* by the one Holy Spirit, each priest is unique and is able to offer what is best for the parish. Mindful always that the Holy Spirit will provide for the Church the right priest and the right time, the Pastoral Council should also encourage other members of the community to throw their support and vote of confidence to their new parish priest.
6. Major constructions should be avoided during the transition period, unless by reason of need these could not be anymore withheld. It is, however, necessary that the approval of the bishop be sought, even only verbally, so as to guarantee that nothing that is out of the usual may be changed or altered. It is presumed that, unless grave necessity demands it, during the transition period the parish observes a moratorium for major-high cost construction projects.
7. Within the transition period, the new parish priest shall convene a General Assembly of the parish leaders (Parish Pastoral Council and Members), and draw up a General Pastoral Plan for his six (6) year tenure. The General Plan is like a map for the parish priest term that will guide the course of his service in the parish. If for a just reason the General Pastoral Plan may not be completed, it is enough that the Bishop shall be properly informed about it and the prescribed time for its completion.
8. Any concerns or difficulties with regards to the transition period that may arise are addressed and solved by the principle of subsidiarity. The new parish priest and his predecessor can competently resolve them. However, if matters go out of hand and the principle cannot operate anymore, I welcome any arbitration that requires my intervention. But I trust that since nothing of this happened, it will not be necessary.

I wish that all those concerned persons, follow these aforementioned Guidelines and refer to them at all times. Also, what is provided for parish priests also apply to administrators, unless expressly provided otherwise by the diocesan bishop. Likewise, it may be a great help to our parishioners, especially the Parish Pastoral Council, to read the Guidelines and discuss them during the Pastoral Council Meeting in May, or even on a special meeting convened for this purpose.

Needless to say, this new Guidelines abrogate the previous one, as most of the items therein are contained in the present form, by way of clarifying which document should be followed and consulted.

I pray to Our Lady, on whose protection we entrust our Diocese, to help us find the courage of her Son in assuming our new pastoral assignments. It is she who had the courage to stand beneath the Cross and who was gifted anew with the joy of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Given at the Chancery, 2nd Floor, Good Shepherd Center, Regalado Avenue, this 15th day of April 2013.

Most Rev. Antonio R. Tobias, DD
Bishop

Attested by:

Rev. Fr. Jerome U. Rosalinda
Chancellor