

Rights and Obligations

Deacons, priest and bishops are all clerics who have rights and obligations which apply to them because they are clerics. All the rights and obligations that apply to priests apply to transitional and permanent deacons (apart from specific exemptions in can 288 which are highlighted in the text below). Deacons are exempted from the obligations listed in can 288 unless particular law (that is the law of the diocese or institute into which he is incardinated) says otherwise.

The fundamental point is that permanent deacons are clerics of the diocese or religious institute into which they are incardinated as stated in the canons:

Can. 266 §1. Through the reception of the diaconate, a person becomes a cleric and is incardinated in the particular church or personal prelature for whose service he has been advanced.

Therefore when in doubt whatever applies to priests applies to deacons.

The rights and obligations of clerics are found in Chapter III of the [Code of Canon Law](#) for the Latin Catholic Church (CIC), the [Directory for the Life and Ministry of Deacons](#) (Directory), [Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem](#) and elaborated in other documents as relevant.

It is hoped that in time we can incorporate commentary on the [Code of Canons for Eastern Catholic Churches](#) (CCEO) and another documents as relevant.

There are other obligations placed on clerics which are not listed in CIC Chapter III that will be considered elsewhere. These and other obligations are not covered in this article which deals only with their status as clerics and the rights and obligations attached.

The relevant section of CIC is set out below using the English translation provided on the [website](#) of the Holy See.

CIC CHAPTER III

THE OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS OF CLERICS

Can. 273 Clerics are bound by a special obligation to show reverence and obedience to the Supreme Pontiff and their own ordinary.

Can. 274 §1. Only clerics can obtain offices for whose exercise the power of orders or the power of ecclesiastical governance is required.

§2. Unless a legitimate impediment excuses them, clerics are bound to undertake and fulfil faithfully a function which their ordinary has entrusted to them.

Can. 275 §1. Since clerics all work for the same purpose, namely, the building up of the Body of Christ, they are to be united among themselves by a bond of brotherhood and prayer and are to strive for cooperation among themselves according to the precepts of particular law.

§2. Clerics are to acknowledge and promote the mission which the laity, each for his or her

part, exercise in the Church and in the world.

Can. 276 §1. In leading their lives, clerics are bound in a special way to pursue holiness since, having been consecrated to God by a new title in the reception of orders, they are dispensers of the mysteries of God in the service of His people.

§2. In order to be able to pursue this perfection:

1/ they are first of all to fulfil faithfully and tirelessly the duties of the pastoral ministry;

2/ they are to nourish their spiritual life from the two-fold table of sacred scripture and the Eucharist; therefore, priests are earnestly invited to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice daily and deacons to participate in its offering daily;

3/ priests and deacons aspiring to the presbyterate are obliged to carry out the liturgy of the hours daily according to the proper and approved liturgical books; permanent deacons, however, are to carry out the same to the extent defined by the conference of bishops;

4/ they are equally bound to make time for spiritual retreats according to the precepts of particular law;

5/ they are urged to engage in mental prayer regularly, to approach the sacrament of penance frequently, to honour the Virgin Mother of God with particular veneration, and to use other common and particular means of sanctification.

Can. 277 §1. Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and therefore are bound to celibacy which is a special gift of God by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and are able to dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and humanity.

§2. Clerics are to behave with due prudence towards persons whose company can endanger their obligation to observe continence or give rise to scandal among the faithful.

§3. The diocesan bishop is competent to establish more specific norms concerning this matter and to pass judgment in particular cases concerning the observance of this obligation.

Can. 278 §1. Secular clerics have the right to associate with others to pursue purposes in keeping with the clerical state.

§2. Secular clerics are to hold in esteem especially those associations which, having statutes recognized by competent authority, foster their holiness in the exercise of the ministry through a suitable and properly approved rule of life and through fraternal assistance and which promote the unity of clerics among themselves and with their own bishop.

§3. Clerics are to refrain from establishing or participating in associations whose purpose or activity cannot be reconciled with the obligations proper to the clerical state or can prevent the diligent fulfilment of the function entrusted to them by competent ecclesiastical authority.

Can. 279 §1. Even after ordination to the priesthood, clerics are to pursue sacred studies and are to strive after that solid doctrine founded in sacred scripture, handed on by their predecessors, and commonly accepted by the Church, as set out especially in the

documents of councils and of the Roman Pontiffs. They are to avoid profane novelties and pseudo-science.

§2. According to the prescripts of particular law, priests are to attend pastoral lectures held after priestly ordination and, at times established by the same law, are also to attend other lectures, theological meetings, and conferences which offer them the opportunity to acquire a fuller knowledge of the sacred sciences and pastoral methods.

§3. They are also to acquire knowledge of other sciences, especially of those which are connected with the sacred sciences, particularly insofar as such knowledge contributes to the exercise of pastoral ministry.

Can. 280 Some practice of common life is highly recommended to clerics; where it exists, it must be preserved as far as possible.

Can. 281 §1. Since clerics dedicate themselves to ecclesiastical ministry, they deserve remuneration which is consistent with their condition, taking into account the nature of their function and the conditions of places and times, and by which they can provide for the necessities of their life as well as for the equitable payment of those whose services they need.

§2. Provision must also be made so that they possess that social assistance which provides for their needs suitably if they suffer from illness, incapacity, or old age.

§3. Married deacons who devote themselves completely to ecclesiastical ministry deserve remuneration by which they are able to provide for the support of themselves and their families. Those who receive remuneration by reason of a civil profession which they exercise or have exercised, however, are to take care of the needs of themselves and their families from the income derived from it.

Can. 282 §1. Clerics are to foster simplicity of life and are to refrain from all things that have a semblance of vanity.

§2. They are to wish to use for the good of the Church and works of charity those goods which have come to them on the occasion of the exercise of ecclesiastical office and which are left over after provision has been made for their decent support and for the fulfilment of all the duties of their own state.

Can. 283 §1. Even if clerics do not have a residential office, they nevertheless are not to be absent from their diocese for a notable period of time, to be determined by particular law, without at least the presumed permission of their proper ordinary.

§2. They are entitled, however, to a fitting and sufficient time of vacation each year as determined by universal or particular law.

Can. 284 Clerics are to wear suitable ecclesiastical garb according to the norms issued by the conference of bishops and according to legitimate local customs.

Can. 285 §1. Clerics are to refrain completely from all those things which are unbecoming to their state, according to the prescripts of particular law.

§2. Clerics are to avoid those things which, although not unbecoming, are nevertheless foreign to the clerical state.

§3. Clerics are forbidden to assume public offices which entail a participation in the exercise of civil power.

§4. Without the permission of their ordinary, they are not to take on the management of goods belonging to lay persons or secular offices which entail an obligation of rendering accounts. They are prohibited from giving surety even with their own goods without consultation with their proper ordinary. They also are to refrain from signing promissory notes, namely, those through which they assume an obligation to make payment on demand.

Can. 286 Clerics are prohibited from conducting business or trade personally or through others, for their own advantage or that of others, except with the permission of legitimate ecclesiastical authority.

Can. 287 §1. Most especially, clerics are always to foster the peace and harmony based on justice which are to be observed among people.

§2. They are not to have an active part in political parties and in governing labour unions unless, in the judgment of competent ecclesiastical authority, the protection of the rights of the Church or the promotion of the common good requires it.

Can. 288 The prescripts of cann. ⇒ 284, ⇒ 285, §§3 and 4, ⇒ 286, and ⇒ 287, §2 do not bind permanent deacons unless particular law establishes otherwise.

Can. 289 §1. Since military service is hardly in keeping with the clerical state, clerics and candidates for sacred orders are not to volunteer for military service except with the permission of their ordinary.

§2. Clerics are to use exemptions from exercising functions and public civil offices foreign to the clerical state which laws and agreements or customs grant in their favour unless their proper ordinary has decided otherwise in particular cases.

Source: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2010*

GENERAL DIRECTORY FOR THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF PERMANENT DEACONS

The Directory was issued in 1998 by the Congregation for Clergy jointly with the *Ratio* or *Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* by Congregation for Catholic Education. The documents complete the work done by both congregations on the Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests.

A key element of the Directories for priests and deacons is that both provide authoritative interpretations of canon law. The joint introduction to the *Ratio* and Directory states:

The Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, as in the case of the Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, has, together with its hortative character, juridically binding force where its norms “recall disciplinary norms of the Code of Canon Law” or “determine with regard to the manner of applying universal laws of the Church, explicitate their doctrinal basis and inculcate or solicit their faithful observance”.(1) In these specific cases, it is to be regarded as a formal, general, executory Decree (cf. canon 32).

CIC defines a formal general executory decree as

Can. 32 General executory decrees oblige those who are bound by the laws whose methods of application the same decrees determine or whose observance they urge.

The Directory simply restates the basic principle that as clerics deacons have rights and obligations:

#7. The Diaconate brings with it a series of rights and duties as foreseen by canons 273-283 of the Code of Canon Law with regard to clerics in general and deacons in particular.

These rights are elaborated in the Directory and will be considered in other articles in this section.