

GERARD WILLIAM



By the Grace of God and

the Favor of the Apostolic See

BISHOP OF LA CROSSE

**DECREE**  
**PROMULGATING NORMS FOR THE COMPENSATION OF THE CLERGY**  
**IN THE DIOCESE OF LA CROSSE**

Having received the positive recommendation of the Presbyteral Council at its July 25, 2024 meeting and of the Diocesan Finance Council, with this decree, therefore, I publish revised norms to govern the compensation of the clergy in the Diocese of La Crosse. For ease of reference, the norms which remain unchanged are included in this decree. These norms are to be promulgated by being published in the *Chancery Bulletin* and take effect September 1, 2024. These norms are to be incorporated into the budgets of diocesan parishes and institutions for the fiscal year beginning July 1 and ending June 30.

**1. BASE SALARY.** Each year effective July 1, a new schedule will be provided showing the base salary for priests per month based on the year of ordination. The base salary is paid from the funds of the parish(es) or institution(s) served by the priest. The current schedule will be released annually in the *Chancery Bulletin* and will be available on the diocesan website or from the Office for Temporalities. Each year, after hearing the Presbyteral Council, there will be a minimum 2% increase to the base salary.

**2. MASS OFFERINGS.** The suggested amount of the Mass offering (stipend), as determined by the bishops of the Milwaukee Province (cf. c. 952 §1), is twenty dollars (\$20). A priest may retain for himself one Mass offering per day on which he offers Mass, except on Christmas, when he may trinate and retain three Mass offerings. The offering given for a second or third Mass on a particular day is to be forwarded to the St. Joseph's Priest Fund, Inc. (cf. c. 951 §1). It is recommended earnestly to priests that they celebrate Mass for the intention of the Christian faithful, especially the needy, even if they have not received an offering (cf. c. 945 §2).

Pastors and parochial administrators are reminded of their strict obligation to celebrate the Mass for the people entrusted to their care, without an offering, on each Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation (Mass *pro populo*). Pastors who serve more than one parish are obliged to offer only one Mass for all the people entrusted to their care on those days (cf. c. 534 §§1–3). All priests are reminded that the discipline of the Universal Church strongly recommends the daily celebration of the Mass as “the act of Christ and the Church in which priests fulfill their principal function” (cf. c. 904). Deacons are earnestly invited to participate in the Mass daily to nourish their spiritual life from the two-fold table of sacred scripture and the Eucharist (cf. c. 276 §1, 2°)

Mass offerings are to be kept in a separate account called the Mass Offering Account (Stipend Account). Any interest realized on the monies in the account is to be placed in the Fund for Works of Charity. Offerings for Masses which cannot be celebrated within the time of one year are to be forwarded to the diocesan Mission Office, so that the Masses can be offered by priests who lack Mass offerings, whether in the diocese or in the missions (cf. cc. 953 and 956).

If a priest lacks Mass offerings because there are insufficient funds in the Mass Offering Account to provide a priest one Mass offering per day, and the priest has no offerings given to him directly from the faithful, the parish(es) or institution(s) to which the priest is assigned is to pay a Mass offering from its general funds to the priest. In such instances, one Mass per offering *must* be celebrated for the intentions of the parish(es) or institution(s).

All Mass offerings received are subject to Federal income tax and Social Security tax. The best practice for parishes is to reimburse the parish's general account from the Mass Offering Account and then add it to the priest's next payroll. Parishes should include Mass offerings on priests' Form W-2, boxes 1 and 16. For visiting priests, the Mass offering is paid directly to them from the Mass Offering Account. Any priest who receives Mass offerings directly and who does not turn them in to be added to his payroll must report them as earnings on Line 1 of Schedule C (Form 1040).

**3. OFFERINGS FOR SACRAMENTS AND SACRED RITES.** All offerings (stole fees) given on the occasion of the celebration of sacraments or sacred rites, apart from Mass offerings, are to be kept in the Fund for Works of Charity in the parish in which the sacrament or sacred rite is celebrated. The suggested amount of offering is governed by the limits set by the bishops of the Milwaukee Province (cf. c. 1264, 2<sup>o</sup>). As of July 1, 2024, the suggested amount of offering at various sacred occasions is: at the time of baptism, no suggested amount; at the time of the blessing of the fifteenth birthday (quinceañera), one-hundred dollars (\$100); at the time of marriage, one-hundred dollars (\$100); at the time of Christian burial, seventy-five dollars (\$75). Nevertheless, the faithful must never to be coerced into giving offerings at such occasions.

The parish or minister may not seek from the faithful more than the prescribed amount, without prejudice to the right to seek a just amount for peripheral expenses such as the use of the parish hall. Parishes or ministers are urged to accept smaller amounts or no offering at all, especially from the poor (cf. c. 848), to be attentive to the need for sound catechesis regarding these offerings, and to recall the serious scandal that can arise from even the appearance of trafficking, trading, or simony (cf. c. 947).

On the occasion of the celebration of a sacrament or sacred rite, if an individual voluntarily offers a sum larger than the suggested offering listed above, without clearly stating its destination, the priest or deacon may lawfully accept the offering. The priest or deacon may judge whether the intention of the donor is to give the amount beyond the suggested offering to the priest or deacon himself, or to the parish's Fund for Works of Charity. Offerings given beyond the suggested amounts that are kept by the priest or deacon represent earnings subject to Federal income tax and Social Security tax and must be reported as earnings on Line 1 of Schedule C (Form 1040) unless they are turned in to the parish/institution to be added to his payroll.

If a priest or deacon directly receives an honorarium on the occasion of the celebration of a sacrament or sacred rite, or for another ministerial function, such as a speaking engagement, the honorarium represents earnings subject to Federal income tax and Social Security tax. Such honoraria must be reported as earnings on Line 1 of Schedule C (Form 1040).

*Fund for Works of Charity.* Monies in this Fund for Works of Charity (formerly called the Custodial Fund) are to be used for the assistance of needy persons—for example, for food, clothing, utilities, lodging, or transportation for those temporarily in need; tuition assistance for children attending Catholic elementary and secondary schools, etc. It is requested that excess monies in the Fund for Works of Charity be given to the St. Joseph's Priest Fund at the end of the calendar year. The Fund for Works of Charity, because of its *exclusive* purpose, is to be kept in a separate checking account from the general checking account, and may not be commingled with other parish funds or with the Mass Offering Account. No check should be written to pay to the order of "Cash." Checks should be written out to the place of business or to the landlord or the person should be given a scrip or gift card to the place of business. All disbursements must include proper documentation (e.g., utilities or rent invoice). A sample disbursement log is available on the diocesan website or from the Office for Temporalities.

**4. TRANSPORTATION AND PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS EXPENSES.** Transportation expenses may be paid in one of two ways. At the beginning of an assignment, a priest must elect which option he would prefer. Once chosen, the priest may not change to the other option until January 1 of the following year unless transferred to a new parish or institution.

The *first option* is to receive a taxable allowance of four hundred and fifty dollars (\$450) per month, included with the priest's payroll, which is paid without required documentation. Such an allowance is subject to Federal income tax and Social Security tax. Parishes should include the transportation allowance which is paid without required documentation on priests' Form W-2, boxes 1 and 16.

The *second option* is to provide to the parish/institution, monthly or quarterly, a documented mileage log that meets IRS standards (see the diocesan website for a mileage log example). The documented mileage is to be reimbursed at a rate determined by the parish/institution that is not below the IRS standard charitable mileage rate and not above the IRS standard business mileage rate. These rates are available on the IRS website and will be published in the *Chancery Bulletin* whenever updated by the IRS. This rate applies to electric and hybrid-electric automobiles as well as gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles. Such mileage reimbursement is not taxable and should not be reported on priests' Form W-2.

Professional business expenses are not reimbursable by the parish and become personal expenses for income tax purposes. These expenses include vesture and clerical clothing (including their cost and cleaning), seminars, professional books and periodical subscriptions, and professional dues. As unreimbursed and non-deductible personal expenses, they can be used to reduce self-employment income.

**5. ROOM AND BOARD.** Room and board are provided by the parish(es) or institution(s) to which the priest is assigned by the diocesan bishop. A priest's letter of appointment lists the location of the assigned residence (room). Room is not subject to Federal income tax but is considered taxable for Social Security tax. The value is the fair market value of what a 'boarder' would pay, determined by all facts and circumstances based on the local market. Parishes should not include the value of housing on priests' Form W-2 as it is free from income tax. Priests, however, must include the value of room when completing Schedule SE (Form 1040).

Board has two options. The *first option* is to receive a taxable food allowance of four hundred and fifty dollars (\$450) per month, included with the priest's payroll, which is paid without required documentation. Such an allowance is subject to Federal income tax and Social Security tax.

Parishes should include the food allowance which is paid without required documentation on priests' Form W-2, boxes 1 and 16.

The *second option* is to turn in receipts to the parish or institution for up to four hundred and fifty dollars (\$450) per month for nontaxable reimbursement of actual expenses. In order for these receipts to be considered nontaxable, they must meet the following three requirements:

- The meals must be consumed on the premises of the parish.
- The meals are for the convenience of the parish.
- The meals are required as part of the priest's working conditions.

Such reimbursement is not taxable and should not be reported on priests' Form W-2.

Business hospitality (such as deanery clergy meetings or an all-staff Christmas dinner) must be included in the parish budget and approved by the parish Finance Council. Such expenses are not part of the priests' \$450 allowance or reimbursement. Personal hospitality, such as individual dinners with priests, parishioners, family or friends, if not covered by the \$450 allowance or reimbursement, must be paid from priests' other earnings.

**6. BENEFITS.** Benefits, such as health, dental, vision, and prescription drug, are provided for each priest in active ministry through the Diocese of La Crosse and are paid for entirely by the parish(es) or institution(s) to which he is assigned. The diocesan Office for Temporalities negotiates with providers for the cost of these benefits and the monthly premium is billed directly to the responsible parish or institution by St. Ambrose Financial Services, Inc. St. Joseph Priest Fund beneficiaries have such benefits paid by the St. Joseph Priest Fund, Inc. Personal property insurance and comprehensive personal liability insurance covering negligent personal acts (not including auto liability) are provided to priests who are *on assignment* at covered locations through the diocesan protected self-insurance program administered by Catholic Mutual Relief Society/Catholic Mutual Group. Priests should contact the diocesan Catholic Mutual Group representative for questions on coverage limits and coverage exclusions. Additional coverage is available on an individual basis. All benefits, health and otherwise, are subject to change.

**7. RETIREMENT OR DISABILITY.** Priests are strongly urged to save for retirement and are permitted and encouraged to voluntarily contribute to the diocesan-sponsored 403(b) thrift plan through payroll deduction for retirement savings.

The St. Joseph's Priest Fund, Inc., provides a monthly benefit to eligible priests incardinated in the Diocese of La Crosse who are granted, by the diocesan bishop, the status of either senior priest or disabled. Each parish or institution in the diocese which has the services of a priest contributes to the St. Joseph's Priest Fund in an amount determined by the board of directors of the St. Joseph's Priest Fund. Priests incardinated in the Diocese of La Crosse but working outside the diocese must make this contribution themselves if it is not made on their behalf by the parish(es) or institution(s) which they are serving. The amount of the monthly benefit for eligible priests is determined by the board of directors of the St. Joseph's Priest Fund.

For priests incardinated in another diocese or who are members of an institute of consecrated life or a society of the apostolic life, an amount equivalent to the assessment for the St. Joseph's Priest Fund will be transmitted to the retirement or pension fund of the priest's own diocese, institute, or society. The St. Joseph's Priest Fund is responsible for transmitting the amount of the assessment.

**8. CONTINUING EDUCATION.** Even after ordination to the priesthood, clerics are to pursue sacred studies and 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 (cf. c. 279 §1, §3). Therefore, all incardinated priests and all extern priests engaged in active ministry in the Diocese of La Crosse have a continuing education fund with the Office of the Vicar for Clergy with six hundred dollars (\$600) available to each priest annually.

Priests are encouraged to attend short-term conferences, seminars, and workshops which offer them the opportunity to acquire a fuller knowledge of the sacred sciences and pastoral methods (cf. c. 279 §2). The costs of these conferences are to be paid by the individual priest who then may apply to the Office of the Vicar for Clergy for reimbursement from the priest's continuing education fund.

All priests engaged in active ministry in the Diocese of La Crosse are expected to participate each year in Priest Unity Days and in the Fall Ministry Conference. Senior priests are welcome and encouraged to attend these conferences. The costs of these diocesan conferences are paid by the Office of the Vicar for Clergy. Other costs associated with these conferences (e.g., travel, lodging, other meals) are to be paid by the individual priest who then may apply to the Office of the Vicar for Clergy for reimbursement from the priest's continuing education fund.

For priests incardinated in the Diocese of La Crosse who are assigned to graduate studies by the diocesan bishop, the costs of tuition, room and board, travel, and the priest's base salary and benefits are paid entirely by the diocesan Office of the Vicar for Clergy.

For priests incardinated in the Diocese of La Crosse who, with the permission of the diocesan bishop, are on an approved sabbatical program, the costs of tuition, room and board, travel, and the priest's base salary and benefits are paid entirely by the diocesan Office of the Vicar for Clergy. Priests incardinated in the Diocese of La Crosse may request a sabbatical through the Vicar for Clergy, beginning on their twentieth anniversary of priestly ordination and every ten years thereafter, provided the request is made in advance, as only two priests per year will be approved to be on sabbatical.

**9. VACATION AND ANNUAL RETREAT.** All priests engaged in active ministry in the Diocese of La Crosse receive one paid day off per week and up to one month of paid vacation per year (cf. c. 283 §2). Priests who will be absent from their parish for three or more consecutive weekends must coordinate with the Vicar for Clergy so as to provide for adequate parish coverage (cf. c. 283 §1).

Each priest is to make a spiritual retreat each year (c. 276 §2, 4°). While all priests in the Diocese of La Crosse, active and senior, are encouraged to attend the annual diocesan-sponsored priest retreat, recently ordained priests are required to attend this retreat until their fifth anniversary of ordination. The cost of this retreat is covered by the Office of the Vicar for Clergy. Other costs associated with this retreat (e.g., travel) are to be paid by the individual priest who then may apply to the Office of the Vicar for Clergy for reimbursement from the priest's continuing education fund. If a priest does not attend the diocesan-sponsored retreat, the costs incurred in making the annual retreat may be reimbursed from funds left in the priest's continuing education fund and any balance is to be paid by the individual priest. The days in which the priest spends in spiritual retreat are not computed in the time of vacation.

**10. SUBSTITUTE OR HELP-OUT MINISTRY.** The remuneration (Mass fee) for help-out at Saturday anticipatory, Sunday, and Holy Day of Obligation Masses is fifty dollars (\$50) per Mass, not including the Mass offering. Remuneration for weekday help-out is thirty dollars (\$30) per Mass, not including the Mass offering. Travel reimbursement is also to be provided according to the IRS standard business mileage rate. All remuneration (Mass fees and Mass offerings) for substitute or help-out ministry (excluding travel reimbursement) are taxable and must be reported as earnings on Line 1 of Schedule C (Form 1040).

A priest or deacon who receives an offering (stole fee) without a clearly stated destination for administering a sacrament other than the Eucharist or for celebrating another sacred rite in a parish to which he is not assigned, is to give to the pastor the offering for the parish's Fund for Works of Charity. The pastor may permit the priest or deacon to retain this offering for himself which is considered taxable earnings. If a priest or deacon directly receives an honorarium on such an occasion, the honorarium also represents earnings subject to Federal income tax and Social Security tax and must be reported as earnings on Line 1 of Schedule C (Form 1040).

**11. ASSIGNMENT TO MORE THAN ONE PARISH OR INSTITUTION.** The compensation of a priest who is assigned by the diocesan bishop to more than one parish or institution is to be provided by all the parishes or institutions to which the priest is assigned, although one parish only will pay the entire compensation and the other parishes or institutions will be invoiced by the paying parish for their share

*Multiple Parishes.* For priests assigned by the diocesan bishop to multiple parishes, the parish Finance Councils of the involved parishes will consider the appropriate allocation of the compensation. Items to review include, but are not limited to, the number of registered households, income/expenses, and presence of a parish school. Once a decision or change has been made in consultation with the councils, the pastor is to notify the Vicar General, the diocesan Finance Officer, and the Vicar for Clergy of the decision. One parish will pay the priest's entire compensation and the other parish(es) will be invoiced by the paying parish for their share of the priest's compensation.

*Unified School System.* For priests assigned by the diocesan bishop to a parish or parishes and a unified school system, the parish Finance Council(s) of the involved parish(es) and the Finance Committee of the unified school system will consider the proper allocation of the compensation. Items to consider include, but are not limited to, the size of the school system and parish(es), teaching and/or campus ministry duties, and possible help-out ministry. Once a decision or change has been made in consultation with the Finance Council(s), Finance Committee, and with the approval of the vicar forane (dean), the pastor of the paying parish is to notify the Vicar General, the diocesan Finance Officer, and the Vicar for Clergy of the decision. One parish will pay the priest's entire compensation and the other parish(es) and unified school system will be invoiced by the paying parish for their share of the priest's compensation.

**12. PERMANENT DEACONS.** The compensation of permanent deacons is governed by the Code of Canon Law (cf. c. 281 §3), by the National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States (§§94–97), and by other diocesan norms. Particular compensation is determined annually in the "Agreement on Ministry" approved by the Director of Deacon Personnel.

In general, permanent deacons are to take care of their own and their family's needs using income derived from their full-time employment by the diocese, parish, or secular profession. Permanent

deacons in full-time employment by the diocese or parish are to receive remuneration commensurate with the salaries and benefits provided to the lay men and women on staff for that particular occupation. Permanent deacons in full-time secular employment, as well as those in part-time ministries, are to be reimbursed for legitimate expenses incurred in their ministry. To provide for their own upkeep, every permanent deacon is obliged to satisfy the legal requirements for Social Security benefits.

All deacons engaged in active ministry in the Diocese of La Crosse are expected to participate each year in the Fall Ministry Conference, Deacons' Day, and the Ongoing Deacon Formation Conference. Senior deacons are welcome and encouraged to attend these conferences. The costs of these diocesan conferences are paid by either the Office of the Vicar for Clergy or the Office for Ministries. Other costs associated with these conferences (e.g., travel, lodging, other meals) are to be paid by the individual deacon.

Given at La Crosse this thirtieth day of July in the year of Our Lord 2024.



Most Reverend Gerard W. Battersby  
Bishop of La Crosse

*SEAL*



Chancellor