

This applies doubly to how you talk about your priest, especially in front of your children. Gently confront parishioners who spread rumors, and make it clear that criticizing a priest behind his back never solves a problem. If there is a legitimate complaint, offer to go with them to talk with the priest.



THE CROSIERS

When difficulties arise, do your priest the courtesy of making an appointment so you can talk about it with him in person, one-on-one. (It's never wise to try to engage a priest in a serious discussion in the vestibule after Mass or in a place where other people are listening.) Be honest in conveying your feelings, but also be respectful. Pray that the Lord will guide you. If you can't come to some resolution, you may need a mediator or a higher authority. In some cases, you may reach a point where you simply agree to disagree.

5. Show Your Appreciation.

Everyone needs affirmation. The encouragement of a few parishioners helped one young priest to give better homilies. Another priest admitted that the affirmation of parishioners helped him recognize his musical abilities and learn how to use those gifts in his ministry.

Thank your priest for giving his life to you and to the Lord. Recognize how much work goes into making the parish run well. Tell your priest when you like something that he did or the way in which he handled a situation.

You may want to drop him an encouraging note or leave a positive message on his voice mail. Remember his birthday, his anniversary of ordination, and other



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special days. It's not necessary to send a gift — just the recognition of the event is an expression of appreciation and encouragement.

While you're thinking of ways to appreciate your priest, it doesn't hurt to ask *him* what would be most helpful! Some priests like being invited to the homes of parishioners for dinners or parties. Others appreciate having home-cooked meals or healthy treats dropped off at the rectory. So don't be shy about asking your priest for ideas on how you can make his life a little easier or more enjoyable. You might be surprised to learn that some gesture you consider "small" means the world to a man who spends so much time and energy seeing to others' needs.

A final thought...

Jesus makes himself present to us in a special way through his priests — so whatever you do for your parish priest, you also do for the Lord. And whatever you do for the Lord helps to build the Kingdom of God right here on earth.

"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

— John 13:35

How You Can Help Increase Priestly Vocations

- Pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood.
- Offer your time and financial support to strengthen youth ministries in your parish.
- Teach your children and grandchildren how to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
- Ask your children and grandchildren if they ever thought about becoming a priest.
- If you know someone who has the qualities of a good priest, point it out to him.
- Pray for young men discerning priesthood.
- Find ways to support and encourage seminarians in your diocese.

A Prayer for Priests

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests.

Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments.

Help our priests to be strong in their vocation.

Set their souls on fire with love for your people.

Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength

they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom.

Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel.

Allow them to experience joy in their ministry.

Help them to become instruments of your divine grace.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest. Amen.

Our Sunday Visitor's Web page for the Year for Priests:
www.osv.com/priestyear

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Five Ways to Support My Parish Priest

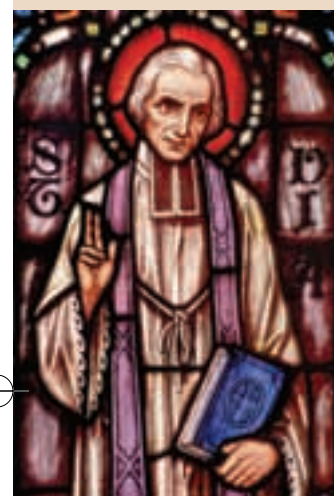


Year for Priests
June 2009 – June 2010

Year for Priests

Pope Benedict XVI has declared June 2009 to June 2010 as the Year for Priests. The theme for the priestly year is “Faithfulness of Christ, Faithfulness of Priests.” Its purpose is to encourage what the Pope calls “the yearning for spiritual perfection” in priests.

But the Year for Priests also gives lay people a special opportunity to learn more about priesthood, to recognize and honor priests, and to encourage priestly vocations.



The Year for Priests coincides with the 150th anniversary of the death of St. John Vianney, a nineteenth-century parish priest who transformed the lives of villagers in France through his example of holiness, his celebration of the Mass, his teachings, and his ability to touch people’s souls in the Sacrament of Penance.

St. John Vianney described priesthood in this way: “The priest is not a priest for himself; he does not give himself absolution; he does not administer the

Sacraments to himself. He is not for himself, he is for you. . . . The priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus.”

In the Footsteps of Jesus

There’s an old story about Jesus meeting a man who was crying at the side of the road. When Jesus asked what was wrong, the man replied that he could not see. So Jesus cured him. After awhile, Jesus met another man who was crying. “I cannot walk,” the man explained. So Jesus cured him. Then, Jesus met a third man who was crying. “I am a priest,” the man said. So Jesus sat down and wept with him.

Why would Jesus weep?

Pope Benedict XVI tells us that a priest “faces his Master’s same fate.” Like Jesus, a priest experiences the world’s “incomprehension” of God, “indifference” toward God, and “rejection” of God.

But the Pope goes on to explain that a priest also “experiences Christ’s joys.” Priests are consecrated in Christ so they can speak and act in Jesus’ name, celebrate sacraments, minister to those in need, and lead the faith community. Like Jesus, priests lay down their lives for those entrusted to them by the Father, following in the footsteps of the Lord.

- Priests find security in a prayer relationship with God the Father.
- Priests see their trials in relationship to the suffering of Jesus.
- Priests allow Jesus to weep with them when they experience disappointments in themselves or in the people to whom they minister.
- Priests know that the Holy Spirit will energize them, inspire them, and instill in them the joy that comes through serving God’s people.

The priesthood is not an institution that exists alongside the laity or above it. The priesthood of bishops and priests, as well as the ministry of deacons, is for the laity, and precisely for this reason it possesses a ministerial character, that is to say, one of service.

— Pope John Paul II, Letter to Priests (Holy Thursday, 1990)

Only God can fully sustain a priest in his vocation, but Catholics can also provide everyday support and encouragement. Here are five things you can do to help your parish priest.

1. Pray For Your Priest.

Encourage others to do the same. You might consider designating a daily chore or activity as a sacrificial offering for your priest. Or you might say a particular prayer every day for him.

Let your priest know that you are praying for him. He will appreciate your spiritual support. During difficult moments, he will know that your prayers are helping to sustain him.



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2. Participate and Be Active.

The best thing you can do for your priest is to come to Mass every weekend and get involved in your parish. Use your gifts and talents to help the parish grow. Volunteer to help with whatever needs to be done. Attend parish events and support your parish financially.

By all means, if God has touched you or your family in some way because of something your priest has said or done, let him know what happened. When priests see how God is working through them, it reaffirms their calling and goes a long way toward encouraging them!



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Keep your priest informed if you hear about a parishioner who is sick, injured, or going through some difficulty in life. Priests are often the last to hear about these things, and they can’t be everywhere at once. This will help your priest be where he needs to be to care for his parishioners most effectively.

Above all, keep your relationship with Jesus your top priority. Priests will come and go in your parish, and they will touch your life in many ways, but your faith must always be grounded in the Lord.

3. Watch Your Expectations.

Sometimes, people have unrealistic expectations of what a priest “should be” or “should do.” They want Father to be present at every parish function, every community event, and every time someone has a question, concern, or special need.

It’s important to remember that priests are people, too, with the same normal

human limits. Just as you need a day or two off every week, so does your priest. In fact, studies have shown that time off is important for priests, to help them maintain both their spiritual focus and their energy levels. One priest recognized that after concerned parishioners insisted that he take a day off each week, he was actually able to accomplish *more*. We can all forget to take care of ourselves now and then; it doesn’t hurt to remind your priest to do so.



WITTMAN

Accept your priest for the unique person he is. Priests come in all shapes, sizes, ages, and personality styles: introverts and extroverts; mild-mannered and quick-tempered; serious and witty. Each priest has his own preferences and peculiarities as well, so let him be himself, with his own gifts and talents. Each priest will minister in his own way. Trust God to work through your priest to meet the needs of the parish, and let him know that you support him. If you have the ability to make your priest laugh — do it! A good laugh goes a long way toward relieving any stress he may be feeling.

4. Be Prepared to Believe the Best.

A lot of what you hear on the parish grapevine is either untrue or is, at best, greatly exaggerated. Most people really want their priest to succeed in his ministry. But a few negative people can do a lot of damage — not just to the priest but to the entire parish.

Sometimes, negativity stems from misunderstandings. Often, people will make assumptions about something they hear a priest say, or see him do, that have no basis in reality. Keep in mind that Father might not be able to fully explain something he may have done because he is bound by confidentiality. Or he might appear to be distracted or distant, when he’s actually worried about something in the parish or exhausted after being up all night with a dying parishioner. Until you have all the facts, it’s best to give him the benefit of the doubt.