



DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

**Diocesan procedures for
SUPPLY PRIESTS & VISITING CLERGY
from inside England and Wales**
(as from 31.1.2008)

1. Introduction

1.1 These procedures are intended to be in keeping with any agreed national policies of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and will be revised as and when required.

1.2 It is intended also that this policy be in keeping with the Code of Canon Law. Canon 903 states:

A priest is to be permitted to celebrate the Eucharist, even if he is not known to the rector of the church, provided either that he presents commendatory letters, not more than a year old, from his own Ordinary or Superior, or that it can be prudently judged that he is not debarred from celebrating.

1.3 This document needs to be read in conjunction with our diocesan policy on *Welcoming priests from overseas, or from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, for any period of ministry, including with a view to eventual incardination*. That policy includes specific requirements for any priest seeking to spend over two weeks ministering in any way in this diocese, particularly the need for the priest and his Bishop/Abbot/Provincial to sign the formal declaration which is part of the policy.

2. Permission required

2.1 All priests and deacons from outside of the Diocese of East Anglia require permission from the Bishop to engage in active ministry of any kind in East Anglia, since they minister in his name. Active ministry includes the public celebration of Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and other religious services. (See 3.4 and 3.5 re priestly concelebration and diaconal assisting at Mass).

2.2 This also includes priests or deacons seeking to exercise ministry in one of our parishes or communities served by members of Religious Congregations, or in one of our convents.

2.3 In most cases (for exceptions see Section 3 below), permission for any form of active ministry for any length of time (including a day or a weekend supply) in East Anglia can only be given once satisfactory written confirmation has been received that the priest or deacon is in good standing from his Bishop/Abbot/Provincial.

The standard commendatory letter required in England and Wales is the "Testimonial of Suitability for Ministry." The process to be followed is outlined in Section 4.

2.4 Such permission is given only for a specified period of ministry in the diocese, and needs to be sought afresh each time the priest or deacon comes to a parish in the diocese. If, however a deacon or priest is intending to come to the diocese on a regular basis throughout the year a Testimonial can be given by his Bishop or Provincial for up to a year. This will need to be renewed annually.

3. Exceptions

3.1 If any priest or deacon is to spend over two weeks in public ministry, the procedure outlined in Section 4 below is to be followed. It is also diocesan policy that both the priest or deacon and his Bishop, Abbot or Provincial sign the diocesan declaration contained in our diocesan policy on

Welcoming priests from overseas, or from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, for any period of ministry, including with a view to eventual incardination..

- 3.2 Long-term or permanent assignments also require the granting of diocesan faculties.
- 3.3 Where a priest from another diocese or religious congregation in England and Wales wishes to engage in active ministry for a period of less than 2 weeks and is both known personally by the parish priest or equivalent and is listed in his own current diocesan directory/year book (or the current National Catholic Directory) as a parish priest, assistant priest or otherwise in good standing, then the parish priest or equivalent should simply inform the Diocesan Co-ordinator. This should give the dates when that visiting priest is intending to be ministering in the diocese and be in good time to allow for any necessary checks to be made.
- 3.4 A priest from England or Wales who simply wishes to concelebrate is welcome to do so when he presents a *Celebret* or equivalent no more than a year old, or when the parish priest or equivalent can prudently judge that the priest is not debarred from celebrating.
- 3.5 A deacon from England or Wales who wishes simply to assist at Mass may do so provided he presents a letter of commendation from his Bishop or Provincial no more than a year old, or when the parish priest or equivalent can prudently judge that the deacon is not debarred from ministering.

The Bishop should always be aware who is ministering in the diocese at any time.

4. Diocesan Procedures for 2.3 and 3.1 above

- 4.1 The Diocesan Co-ordinator for Supply & Visiting Priests is the Bishop's Secretary.
- 4.2 Centralising the process in this way inevitably introduces a level of formality into what has often been a very informal and relaxed agreement, but it also removes from the parish priest the extra burdens of having to arrange for what are now essential procedures to be followed.
- 4.3 When a priest or deacon is not covered by Section 3.3 above and is to engage in any kind of public ministry in East Anglia, permission must be sought with as much advanced notice as possible, adhering to the following procedures:
- 4.3.1 It should be made clear to the priest or deacon seeking to engage in public ministry that any agreement is provisional and depends on the completion of the necessary procedures.
- 4.3.2 The name and full address of the priest or deacon, along with the diocese or congregation to which he belongs, and the address of his Bishop, Abbot or Provincial, should be sent to the Bishop's Secretary at the White House, along with the date or dates when it is proposed the priest or deacon is to engage in active ministry.
- 4.3.3 The Coordinator will seek a Testimonial of Suitability from the priest's or deacon's Bishop or local Provincial, and then seek the permission of the Bishop of East Anglia for the priest or deacon to minister.
- 4.3.4 Once the necessary documents are returned to the Bishop's House and permission is given, the Co-ordinator will inform the parish priest that all is in order for the priest or deacon to exercise active ministry. A letter of permission from the Bishop or Co-ordinator will be sent.
- 4.3.5 In the case of a priest or deacon from outside the Diocese of East Anglia who ministers on a regular basis (more than once a year), a Testimonial will be sought which lasts up to a year. The parish priest should still inform the Co-ordinator that the priest or deacon is ministering, but it will not be necessary to acquire a fresh Testimonial during that year (this replicates the situation with the traditional *Celebret*). At the end of the year, a fresh Testimonial will need sought.

5. Review

This policy will be reviewed firstly after one year (in January 2009), and then every three years by the Bishop in consultation with the Council of Priests.