

What kind of free time do priests get?

In general a priest has a day off during the week. Most priests try to take the same day each week, because it allows them to plan their work and their leisure. Once masses are over, it is usually possible for a priest to have a good bit of free-time on Sunday also. The daily routine of a priest is somewhat unpredictable, and that can sometimes make free-time a bit unpredictable too. The annual holiday entitlement is "three Sundays," which is usually taken to mean four weeks less one day. There is a certain give and take. We don't clock in and out. In fact the biggest problem is priests not taking the time off that they should take, because there is always something to do. Rest and recreation are an important part of being ready to do a good day's work.

How are priests paid?

This varies quite a bit from one diocese to another. In Dublin, the first collection at every Sunday Mass is for the support of the priests. The income from this collection is put together with the Christmas and Easter offerings, and the offerings that are given on the occasion of weddings, baptisms, and funerals. The second collection (Share) is a solidarity fund, to enable the diocese to help developing parishes, or parishes which have major building projects going on. It has nothing to do with the income of the priests.

How long do you have to study to become a priest?

The normal course of preparation for the priesthood is six or seven years. It seems like a long time, but it passes quickly enough. This time is usually broken down into two or three years of philosophy (often as part of a B.A. degree), and four years of theology. It is not all academic study. Men preparing for priesthood are also given practical pastoral training, and helped to deepen their relationship with God. They are also helped to come to a better understanding of themselves, to value their gifts, and to accept their limitations. Many of those who opt to become priests these days already have some relevant third-level qualification. This is normally taken into account, and may slightly reduce the time of preparation. A more in-depth explanation of the formation process is available elsewhere on www.priest.ie.

Do diocesan priests take a vow of poverty?

Unlike members of religious orders, diocesan priests do not take a vow of poverty. We receive an income, and we are responsible for our own expenses. This allows us a certain freedom and discretion. It would generally be regarded as inappropriate for a diocesan priest to have a lavish life-style, or to be amassing possessions. Our whole ministry is about helping people to place the emphasis on spiritual rather than material wealth. If our life-style were to be very rooted in material things, it would be a contradiction in terms.

Do you have to be very holy to be a priest?

Technically the word *Holy* means set-apart, in the sense of being single-minded in our relationship with God. In practice that means that we nourish our relationship with God through prayer, and that we allow that relationship to influence the decisions we make. In that sense everyone is called to be holy. A priest is not necessarily holier than other people. On the other hand, we are supposed to serve people by helping them in their relationship with God. We can't expect to be much good at that if we don't look after our own. Relationship is not static; it either grows deeper and stronger, or it fades away. A person thinking about priesthood would need to have at least the beginnings of a mature relationship with God.

How many points do you need to get into the seminary?

The points system doesn't apply to seminary entrance. In order to be accepted into a seminary formation programme, an applicant is usually expected to have successfully completed the Leaving Cert. Previous exam results are a useful indicator of a person's academic ability, but the primary consideration is that the applicant would be able to follow the course of studies without undue difficulty. **If you don't have a leaving cert, you should not be put off from making an enquiry.** The ministry of a priest has a lot to do with communication, so a student for the priesthood would need to have a good standard of English. An interest in reading is a big help. If you do have the necessary points for university entrance, you will probably be asked to do an Arts degree as part of your formation programme.

Why are priests moved around?

There are probably two reasons why a bishop moves priests around. The most obvious one is that, when a vacancy arises in the diocese, the Archbishop has to consider what kind of person he needs to fill it. He will be trying to balance the gifts, the experience, and the age profile of the priests in a parish, or in an area. The other reason for moving a priest is that, after a certain time most priests have given what they have to give to a particular appointment. A change, while it can be difficult, is often good for the priest and for the parish. When someone is moved (or dies or retires) that sets off a kind of chain reaction. Trying to provide priests for all the different ministries in the diocese is quite demanding for a bishop. In Dublin the Archbishop has a team of priests who assists him in making these decisions.