

Transferring the Priest

It is common for people to say: This priest is ordained for the church of a certain village. The 6th law of the fourth Ecumenical Council (451) has clarified that a priest is appointed for an ecclesiastic service in a city, a village, a memorial place for a martyr, or a monastery. The name of the city or village was mentioned in public during the ordination by saying: "The divine grace ordines (the priest's name) to the service of priesthood in (the name of the church) in (the name of city or village)". This means that a clergy is not ordained in a general way, and this was the wish of the council to forbid priests from moving easily from a place to another and violate the law.

Sometimes, if a church had a few number of people, a priest might be appointed for this church and another one at the same time. It was common for us, and is still applied, that a priest stays in his village until he dies or becomes healthily unable unless a disciplinary decision was taken against him or he started a schism or problems in the parish, then he must be transferred to another place. Facts showed that if he didn't succeed in this church, he might succeed in another one.

Sometimes, a priest might want, for personal reasons, to move into another archdiocese so he takes the permission of his elder to do that. In this case he will be appointed for a different church from the one he was ordained to originally. In addition to that, pastoral experience taught us that transferring a priest that showed maturity and piety from a very small parish to a big one could be beneficial for the parish. Eventually, the bishop is the responsible pastor for everyone and knows the situations of the archdiocese and knows where each priest might be beneficial. In other words, he knows whether a priest could manage a smooth parish or a parish that has some difficulties.

The archdiocese is one church and has one administration that works through consultation between everyone especially between the priests and bishop. This is based on the faith that the bishop is the father of everyone because he has no earthly benefits and his only wish is for Christ to become the head of the community, and in this context the priest is left in his place or transferred to another one.

During war, our priests were either displaced or became sick or died and in some cases they filled empty churches. All of this imposed changes between people. But now, and after things returned to their normal state, it was necessary to organize things again in order to decrease the number of churches that have the same priest. Limiting several parishes under one pastor will make him unable to pay good attention to all churches. This is beyond man's energy. This will make pastoral care a nominal thing. The situation could barely develop to become ritual

through doing the Divine Liturgy and some prayers. But does anyone ask about families and teach and take care of children? A part of this will surely become weak.

This is the basis: When the size of the parish becomes smaller, pastoral care will become greater as we move from quantity to quality. We need a high quality of care and a constant presence of the priest in a specific community, in a certain village of this Mount.

Moreover, we have a big number of theology students and the bishop of Mount Lebanon must put each one of them in a place. It is not possible to give two or three churches for one priest and throw this student after his graduation on the street especially if he was a lover of Christ and an active discerning young man.

My policy is to narrow broad regions and increase the number of servants of the temple so that the word of truth becomes heard in all places and we embrace our children and build new temples. More than one new church awaits us. We already have the piece of land for some of these churches (for example "Hadath") or we have bought the land (for example "Naccach") and in other places we will buy because hundreds of families don't have a pastor. Remember God's words: "I will strike the shepherd (or cancel the shepherd), and the sheep will be scattered". God will sustain the priest if his region became smaller and his soul will become greater because his brother took his place seriously.

In addition to that, we face today the issue of aging priests that need a colleague to help them. We don't want anyone to leave his church unless he became physically unable to serve. However, another priest or a deacon must help him and he must accept this with love.

Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon