

**INSTITUTE FOR PRIESTS AND PRESBYTERATES**

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SERVING PRIESTS IN EVERY SEASON OF LIFE

# MAKING WELCOME

## PREPARING TO RECEIVE

## AN INTERNATIONAL PRIEST

*Practical Considerations for Diocese and Parish*

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## PREPARING TO RECEIVE AN INTERNATIONAL PRIEST

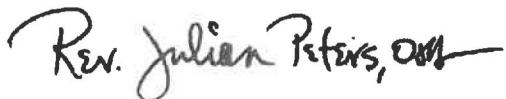
*Practical Considerations for Diocese and Parish*

The Bishops of the United States have published a very comprehensive document, *Guidelines for Receiving Pastoral Ministers in the United States*. Now in its third edition, it covers many theological, pastoral, canonical and legal considerations. It is a “general instruction” of sorts, written for bishops and diocesan officials.

For over 15 years, the Institute for Priests and Presbyterates at Saint Meinrad has been working with international priests to help equip and support them for ministry in the United States through workshops for language and accent, ministry and culture. In the course of those workshops, we’ve heard many accounts of international priests’ transitions – what’s been good and helpful as well as what’s been difficult, unsuccessful or even overlooked.

MAKING WELCOME seeks to bring some of the broad principles of the USCCB’s *Guidelines* into the realm of the concrete and practical. By no means definitive or exhaustive, the following pages take into consideration the lived experience of a good number of international priests and those who have worked with them. This guide also looks to ways in which a greater part of the parish can be involved in welcoming an international priest, rather than leaving it all to the pastor and the parish staff.

Just because a parish community has had an international priest before does not mean it was a good experience for everyone involved. In preparing to receive an international priest (who may or may not have been in this country for very long), there are opportunities to learn from what has been good and to identify areas of conflict or confusion – all for the sake of creating a positive experience for the priest as well as the parish.



Rev. Julian Peters, OSB  
Director of Institute for Priests and Presbyterates

## GETTING CLARITY

While diocesan administration has handled the initial agreements with the priest's home diocese/community, his visa, and related legal issues, there is sometimes a lack of clarity as to who is responsible for helping the international priest with ongoing matters once he arrives.

These are a few areas where there can be lack of clarity:

### Legalities

- Who will be the point person to assist the priest with ongoing immigration and visa issues if/when they surface?
- Who will assist the priest in setting up a personal banking account, credit card, etc.?
- Who will explain income taxes and/or refer the priest to an accountant who is familiar with working with priests?
- Does the priest know how to drive? Does he have a license? If not, who will help him get these things accomplished?
- If the priest needs an automobile, will the diocese or parish provide it (purchase or lease), or is he expected to purchase/lease on his own?
- Are there diocesan specifications for levels of insurance coverage? Who will explain and assist with these things?

### Health and Wellness

- Who is the best person to help the priest identify specific health needs/conditions and connect with the appropriate caregivers – including vision and dental?
- Who is the best person to explain the diocesan health insurance, identifying what is covered and what is not?

### Priestly Fraternity

- Are there other priests from the same diocese/region nearby for fraternity?
- Is there a support group the priest can ask to join?
- Who could offer suggestions concerning a spiritual director and/or confessor?

### Inculturation

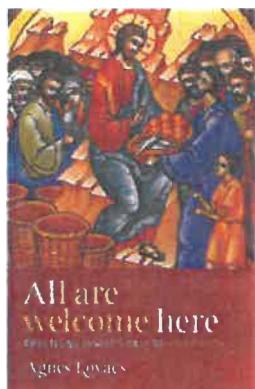
- Determine if accent work will be needed and make the necessary referrals.
- Set aside time and funding for the priest to participate.
- One option is Saint Meinrad's World Priest Program. For more information, visit: [www.saintmeinrad.edu/priests-ongoing-formation/international-priests/world-priest/](http://www.saintmeinrad.edu/priests-ongoing-formation/international-priests/world-priest/)

Refer to Appendix I: Checklist for Basic Responsibilities

## IN THE PARISH

Preparing to receive an international priest provides an opportunity to consider the broad topic of hospitality in the life of the parish. The Parish Council as well as other committees (Youth and Young Adult Ministry, etc.) may do well to have some discussion about these types of things:

- What is the culture of hospitality in the parish?
- How are new parishioners recognized and/or introduced?
- What happens after the newcomers are registered at the Parish Office? Is there any personal outreach from committees and organizations within the parish?
- What about the occasional visitor/guest? Do they just anonymously slip into the assembly? When someone is looking lost or unsure, does anyone offer a kind word?
- There is an old proverb: “When the guest comes, Christ comes.” Is that a lived reality in the parish?
- The question of “Do I feel welcome here?” isn’t just for newcomers and visitors. How would long-standing parishioners respond?



*All are welcome here: Practicing Christ's call to hospitality* by Agnes Kovacs is a very good reflection on hospitality in the life of the parish. A little booklet of modest price, it could easily be made available to everyone who serves on committees and organizations in the parish.

*Published in 2020 by Twenty-Third Publications, 24 pages. Available at online retailers.*

The graces for the receiving Churches are many.

- Receiving international pastoral ministers contributes to the formation of more hospitable local communities that learn the ways of welcome and receptivity.
- The arrival of international pastoral ministers gives local communities exposure to new and different forms of dedication and generosity, which are evident in the ministries and lives of their newly arrived ministers. (*Introduction, A-3*)

There are many graces that come to those who courageously leave their homelands and generously offer their service in a foreign land.

- International pastoral ministers have an expanded experience of the catholicity of the Catholic Church.
- Because of the new set of circumstances, international pastoral ministers can expand and deepen their ministerial or pastoral skills. They can later share these enhancements with others when they return to their own land. (*Introduction, A-4*)

*Excerpts from: USCCB's Guidelines for Receiving Pastoral Ministers in the United States*

## PREPARING A PLACE

Before the priest arrives, make sure his personal living space and office are equipped with the essentials for immediate move-in. Here are a few things to consider:

- Bedroom and office painted, cleaned, with name on the office door
- Check the mattress and replace if needed, new pillow, bedside table, alarm clock, comfortable chair, lamps (with new bulbs!)
- Bed linens, extra blankets (regardless of the season/time of year), towels
- Basic travel-size toiletries in bathrooms
- Desk, chair, lamp, phone, computer, basic office supplies
- A set of liturgical books – particularly the Ordo, Roman Missal, Lectionary, Baptism and Funeral Rituals, Book of Blessings (study editions may be sufficient)

### Welcome Folder

Prepare a folder of basic information, gathered in one place, for quick and easy reference:

- Full names, email addresses and cell phone numbers for principal contacts:
  - Pastor
  - Other priests in residence
  - Office Manager
  - Other parish staff – secretaries, maintenance
  - Person to assist with legalities (driver's license, Social Security, bank account, etc.)
  - Person to assist with shopping, especially groceries (specialty markets)
  - Someone in the parish who is fluent in the priest's first language
- Recent and current parish bulletins (especially those announcing his appointment/arrival)
- Parish Directory
- Map of parish plant
- Web addresses for parish and diocesan sites
- List of any social media sites the parish oversees
- List of local services/stores: grocery, barber, gas stations, pharmacy, coffee shop, etc.

Refer to Appendix II: Checklist for Preparing a Place

## SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER, CONSIDER AND COMMUNICATE

- Americans benefit from being educated about the realities of other countries. Africa is not just one big country. It is comprised of specific countries, cultures, tribes and languages. India has many distinct regions. There can be significant differences (and sensitivity to them) among Asian cultures.
- “You speak English so well” can come across as patronizing. Many international priests have spoken English all their lives – just not American English!
- Generally, Americans speak twice as loudly as internationals.
- Engagement with persons from other cultures requires patience; relationships develop slowly over time.
- Accent issues go both ways: Americans have trouble understanding others, and others have trouble understanding Americans. English is not the same everywhere – in this country or around the world!
- “Accent is an accident” means that accent is an important but not central concern – building relationships, especially in a community of faith, is the more important concern.
- An observation from an international priest: “If you ask me to open up and I share myself, and then you offer no follow-up, you are essentially telling me that you weren’t interested in hearing from me to begin with. Be prepared to do something with the answers I give to your questions.”

### **Getting people involved:**

- Have the school children, youth group or religious ed groups gather information about the country of origin and the culture of the arriving priest.
- RCIA or adult ed groups might gather information specifically about the Church and family life in the priest’s native place.
- Prepare displays for the gathering space of the church or other convenient locations.
- Such projects can provide information for the parish at large and also showcase the creativity of the children (and others) involved.

### **For the parish bulletin, newsletter or website:**

- Appendix III - What is Culture? – An Introduction
- Appendix IV - Making Sense of Cultural Differences

### **Other Resources:**

- Diocesan Office for Intercultural Ministry
- Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology  
Presenters on intercultural competency:
  - Dr. Kevin Spence, 812-357-6412, [kspence@saintmeinrad.edu](mailto:kspence@saintmeinrad.edu)
  - Agnes Kovacs, 812-357-6087, [akovacs@saintmeinrad.edu](mailto:akovacs@saintmeinrad.edu)

## THE FIRST DAY

It is important to remember that the international priest isn't simply a functionary being hired for a job. He is a priest coming to engage in people's lives in very privileged ways. His first impressions are important, and they can significantly affect his ability to get settled and be effective in ministry. Seeing that people are *trying to help* speaks volumes.

How will the new priest get to the parish for the first time? Met at the airport? Driving on his own? Driven by someone from the diocese?

Insofar as possible, the pastor needs to be on site when the international priest arrives, especially for the sake of welcoming him into the residence. There is a difference between giving someone a room and living with someone. The pastor should be prepared to handle these items:

- Keys to residence, church, office, school, all labeled
- A tour of the residence
- The new priest's personal space
- Other priests' personal spaces
- Common rooms
- Location of common-use items such as trash bags, toilet paper, vacuum
- Parking, specifically where the priest will park if he has a car or when he gets a car
- Brief tour of the parish church, noting sacristy, confessionals, restrooms.

## FOR DISCUSSION WITH PASTOR AND OTHER PRIESTS IN RESIDENCE *(within the first week on site)*

If there are other priests in residence, the arrival of an international priest can be an opportunity for “making sure everyone is on the same page” concerning norms of the house, especially if such an exchange hasn’t happened in the past. This might be accomplished following a welcome dinner when all are together at table.

Some of the topics of the discussion might be:

- Common spaces, private spaces, needs for privacy
- Interpreting “the closed door”
- Personal hygiene and common living
- Housekeeping – housekeeper vs. personal responsibilities
- Laundry – housekeeper or personal responsibility – and if personal responsibility, make sure he knows how to operate the machines, use detergents, etc.
- Meals – expectations for common meals
- Groceries – what is supplied by the House, what is purchased individually
- Alcohol – what is supplied by the House, what is purchased individually
- Where are international markets/stores?
- What to do about maintenance issues/needs for personal spaces
- Guest room and policies
- Common prayer for the priests in the residence
- Determine sacramental duties
- Expectations for presence and/or assistance at Sunday Masses, particularly greeting parishioners before/after Masses
- Establish ministry hours/days and weekly day off
- Vacation and/or retreat days (especially extended time for home country visits)
- Dress code – expectations for wearing clerics in the office or chancery.

## FOR DISCUSSION WITH OFFICE/BUSINESS MANAGER OF THE PARISH *(within the first week on duty)*

Topics for the Office/Business Manager to cover:

- Reimbursement policy for priests' expenses – importance of keeping receipts
- Salary and benefits
- Stipend policy
- Safe Environment policies and practices
- Computer, landline phone, mobile phone
- Lines of communication, authority, competency
- Confidentiality of information
- Personnel: staff, volunteers
- Staff meetings – time and place
- Receiving and leaving messages; place for messages
- Personal phone line, mobile phones
- How to use the parish email and calendar programs.

## FOR DISCUSSION WITH PASTORAL STAFF - PARISH LIFE

*(within the first two weeks on duty)*

- Which committees/commissions/councils the priest will be a member of and/or attend
- Communications – letter in weekly bulletin, social media – opportunities for the priest to make presentations and/or have conversations on his country and customs to the parish outside of Mass
- Safe Environment policies and practices
- Parish Structures
  - Parish Council
  - Finance Committee
  - Commissions
  - Committees
  - Organizations
  - How are responsibilities determined?

## FOR THE PRIEST HIMSELF

There are a lot of things related to the personal care and support of the international priest that will need to be figured out and tended to individually, some of which may need to be addressed rather delicately.

### Food

- He has a knowledge of food. Let him share who he is, his experiences and preferences.
- Provide simple dishes, plain rice. Help him find the familiar staples. Get him what he needs to feel at home.

### Health and Wellness

- Resources for exercise (facilities, programs, etc.)

### Social Interaction

- Get in touch with other people from the same culture to help.
- Are there families in the parish/nearby that are from the same diocese? How to connect?
- Affirm the effort of trying the language. Encourage him to try to keep doing it well. Speak slowly, which helps him to understand American accents better.

### Socializing with Parishioners

- Best practices for accepting/refusing dinner invitations to private homes
- Other types of invitations, such as sporting events, theater, etc.
- Gracious accepting of gifts
- Unacceptability of soliciting gifts

### Ongoing Formation

- Determine if accent work will be needed and make necessary referrals.
- Know when Saint Meinrad's World Priest workshops are offered and set aside time and funding for the priest to participate.
- Schedule weekly meetings with the pastor – or monthly meetings with the dean if the priest is on his own – to help guide conversations for healthy ministry.

Refer to Appendix V: Cultural Customary

## FOR DISCUSSION WITH BISHOP, PRESBYTERATE AND DIOCESAN OFFICIALS

- Make sure there is an introduction of the priest at the chancery offices – who is available to help. *Include the bishop*, especially if they have not yet met.
- A common perception is that the bishop is only interested in having international priests because he *needs* them, not because he *wants* them.
- Feedback needs to come from the bishop. The tone needs to be set by the bishop. This is a critical factor that cannot be overstated.
- There can be considerable internal resistance within the presbyterate. Bishops can be focused more on keeping native priests happy than welcoming new international priests.
- Consider an extended period of orientation before an actual assignment.
- Some dioceses have no specific welcome extended to international priests.
- Presbyteral assembly: really listen to those from other cultures. Must have an open, honest and healthy exchange. Many, if not all, international priests find it difficult to fit into the presbyterate.
- Everyone must be prepared and open to following up on the sharing of other cultures' experiences. "If you ask me to open up and I share myself, and then you offer no follow-up, you are essentially telling me that you weren't interested in hearing from me to begin with. Be prepared to do something with the answers I give to your questions."
- Membership on diocesan committees, organizations
- Vicariate/deanery responsibilities
- Local ecumenical associations

## APPENDIX I: CHECKLIST FOR BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Make a copy of this checklist to ensure the responsibilities of orienting the international priest are covered.

**Diocesan Administration** refers to the bishop himself or the person(s) he delegates to manage these concerns.

**Receiving Parish** refers to the local pastor and those he chooses to assist him with these concerns.

	<b>Diocesan Administration</b>	<b>Receiving Parish</b>
Ongoing immigration and visa issues		
Driver's License		
Automobile and Insurance		
Assistance with personal banking (credit/debit cards)		
Explanation of diocesan health insurance and benefits		
Introduction to primary care physicians and medical services		
Explain income tax and/or refer to a tax accountant		
Networking with other international priests		
Connection with available spiritual directors/confessors		
Resources and opportunities for ongoing formation, especially language		
Orientation to diocesan offices and services		

## APPENDIX II: CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING A PLACE

Make a copy of this checklist to make sure things are ready before the international priest arrives.

Task	Person(s) Responsible
Bedroom and bathroom furniture and furnishings	
Office furniture, equipment and supplies	
Assembling the welcome folder	
Keys and door codes	
Basic food supplies	

## APPENDIX III: WHAT IS CULTURE? – AN INTRODUCTION

### What is Culture? – An Introduction

*Agnes M. Kovacs*

Were you to ask a roomful of people how they understand culture, most likely you'd receive a variety of answers. Some might think of culture in the context of family, language group, or geographical region. Some might envision culture to be the appreciation and engagement with art and artistic expressions. For others, culture is made explicit in value systems, what is considered the norms to which we adhere, or how we behave in any given situation.

Still others might point to customs, traditions, and celebrations as cultural markers. They might highlight that we can talk about workplace culture and institutional/organizational culture or that we can categorize it by historical periods, that is, as classical, modern, and post-modern. And all of them would be partly correct because each of these represents an aspect of culture.

A helpful approach to describing culture is recognizing that *culture has both visible and invisible components*. Using the image of an iceberg, we can identify the smaller, visible portion of culture as everything we can perceive with our senses, can be taught, that is explicit and conscious. The larger, under-the-water-line part is out of sight and awareness: it is non-observable, implicit, more caught than taught, and subconscious.

*What we can perceive are elements of culture that include materials, objects, behaviors, and actions:* food, dress, music, visual arts, drama, literature, language, celebrations, games, how we furnish our living space, and so on. What do we eat daily? What are special meals for special occasions? (Think of the foods that you only prepare at Thanksgiving or Christmas, for birthdays, etc.) What kind of seating do we use? What kind of postures and gestures are appropriate when we greet someone?

All these are *shaped by components of the invisible part of culture* that include beliefs about God, values, social roles (related to age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, etc.), concept of time, nonverbal communication, the written and unwritten rules of being with others, power dynamics, ... the list goes on. To probe the invisible part of our culture, we might ponder questions like:

How do our Christian beliefs shape our daily living? How do we show hospitality? When does a meeting start – when people have gathered or when the clock strikes the designated time? What does it mean to be “on time”? Looking someone in the eye can be perceived as a sign of respect or aggression, depending on the cultural context. How are elders treated? What are the ideals of childrearing? What is the value of education?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops gave a simple definition of culture in *National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry* (1987): “Culture primarily expresses how people live and perceive the world, one another, and God. Culture is a set of values by which people judge, accept, and live what is considered important in the community.”

## APPENDIX III: WHAT IS CULTURE? – AN INTRODUCTION

To borrow the words of Cary Dabney, “culture is the set of attitudes toward life, beliefs about reality, and assumptions about the world shared by a community.”<sup>1</sup> Culture is the set of meanings and values that inform people’s way of life. Thus, we cannot escape “culture” – we are both partaker and imparter of culture.

We are both formed by culture and contribute to it. A given family culture might clash with what we call the wider culture: the values ingrained in the family might not be reflected as values in society, and vice versa. Hence our need to clarify what is our own culture and be familiar with other cultures that have an impact on our life.

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<sup>1</sup> *Race in the Catholic Imagination* by Cary Dabney, September 1, 2022, Church Life Journal.

## APPENDIX IV: MAKING SENSE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

### Making Sense of Cultural Differences

*Agnes M. Kovacs*

Globalization is a reality of our age. It means more than just the ability to reach other parts of the world. It points to our interconnectedness in the social, economic, cultural, religious, and other spheres of our lives. It suffuses our reality with images and stories from places far and wide and introduces us to ways of living that are vastly different from our own. We become aware that cultural difference exists. We often encounter these differences from a safe distance provided by screens. *But how do we deal with differences when physical bodies show up in our communities?*

As Catholics, we understand that the Universal Church exists in particular places that developed in particular times, in particular circumstances. Church history reminds us that uniformity has never existed in the Church. Jesus prayed for unity – that all may be one (John 17:21) – not for uniformity.

The Gospel message found fertile soil in the hearts of people shaped by different cultural influences. Thus, its power to transform lives manifested and continues to manifest itself in many and varied ways. That is the beauty of God's infinite creativity. We human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, are a testament to God's creative power that overflows into a diversity of peoples and species.

Thus, our response to God's call to be in relationship will reflect our own cultural circumstances. Being a follower of Christ in a place where religious freedom abounds will be a different experience from living in fear of discovery and persecution.

*But how do we deal with differences when physical bodies show up in our communities?* First and foremost, we deal with differences from a stance of respect:

- Respect for the person, stemming from our belief that all are created in the image and likeness of God, are endowed with dignity, and entrusted with free will;
- Respect for the values embedded in cultures not of our own;
- Respect for the reality that God's Holy Spirit is at work even before we show up.

However, it is hard to respect whom/what we do not know. Getting to know the person and the cultural values that shaped the person ought to be the initial step. But when it comes to cultural differences, *we need to understand first how our own culture is manifested in our thinking, acting, and being.* It might seem a trivial undertaking, but it is an essential and more difficult process than we might anticipate. Much of what we take for granted is hidden from our view.

We can start by asking questions like: What is important to me, to our community? Why is it important? How does it express who we are? What messages does it convey about us, our relationships with one another and with God? This latter question might be phrased as Jesus' question to the disciples: Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am? (Mark 8:27-29, Luke 9:18-20)

## APPENDIX IV: MAKING SENSE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When we are aware of our cultural conditioning, we are able to recognize the same process in different cultures and situations. We can become culturally sensitive.

To become familiar with other cultures requires curiosity, an openness to engage with people who bring varied cultural experiences, and deep listening. *The goal of engagement is understanding and appreciating the values ingrained in a culture not of our own and finding ways in which they can enrich our common experience.* We might ask the same questions listed above and “listen with the ear of our hearts,” as St. Benedict advises in the quest for building relationships: What is important to you? Why is it important? How does it express who you are?

Pope Francis calls us to create a culture of encounter. An encounter offers reciprocity, a change in both/all who are part of it. When we are willing to accept that, at this time and in this place, we are called to a partnership, to pray, work, and live together for the sake of God’s reign, then we are creating a culture of encounter.

Let us approach each other with charity and a desire to connect, so cultural differences might become less of a hindrance than a reflection of God’s infinite creativity manifested in us.