



DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

**Diocesan procedures for  
SUPPLY PRIESTS & VISITING CLERGY  
from outside England and Wales**  
*(as at 1.1.2007)*

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 These procedures are based on the *National Policy on Supply Priests and Testimonials of Suitability* dated 1<sup>st</sup> June 2004. It is a revised version of the guidelines presented by the Bishops' Conference Committee for Overseas Mission in 2000.
- 1.2 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 supply priests or visiting priests and deacons from outside of England and Wales require explicit permission (from the Bishop, Provincial or Abbot as explained below) to engage in public ministry of any kind in East Anglia. This includes all priests and deacons who are or will be engaging in any form of active ministry (including the public celebration of Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, other religious services) while within the diocese of East Anglia.
- 2.2 This includes priests or deacons seeking permission to exercise ministry in one of our parishes or communities served by members of Religious Congregations, or in one of our convents.
- 2.3 Permission to minister 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 or Provincial.

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.'

The standard commendatory letter required in England and Wales is now the Testimonial of Suitability for Ministry.

- 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. However, for a priest or deacon regularly coming to the diocese during the course of a year, a Testimonial can be given by his Bishop or Provincial for up to a year. This will need to be renewed at the end of each year.
- 2.5 A priest who simply wishes to concelebrate is welcome to do 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.
- 2.6 A deacon 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.

### **3. Diocesan and Religious Clergy**

3.1 The process for gaining permission for any priest or deacon to engage in active ministry of any kind in East Anglia varies slightly for diocesan and religious clergy.

#### **Diocesan clergy**

3.1.1 All diocesan clergy from dioceses outside of England and Wales seeking to engage in active ministry in East Anglia for any period of time require the prior permission of the Bishop of East Anglia to undertake such ministry. Such permission will only be granted if the Bishop of East Anglia obtains satisfactory written confirmation from the priest or deacon's own bishop that he is in good standing. This requires signature by his Bishop of the Testimonial of Suitability for Ministry.

#### **Religious clergy**

3.1.2 Any priest or deacon belonging to (or applied/seconded to) a Province of a Religious Congregation which includes all or part of England and Wales and seeking to engage in active ministry in East Anglia, may do so only with the written permission of his Abbot or Provincial including confirmation that he is in good standing. A copy of this Testimonial of Suitability for Ministry should be sent by the Abbot or Provincial directly to the local Bishop.

3.1.3 Any priest or deacon not belonging to (or applied/seconded to) a Province of a Religious Congregation which includes all or part of England and Wales and seeking to engage in active ministry in East Anglia, requires the permission of the Bishop of East Anglia to undertake that ministry. This will only be granted once written confirmation is received from the local Provincial with jurisdiction in England and Wales that the priest or deacon is in good standing; it is that Provincial's responsibility to obtain written confirmation from the individual's own Provincial as to his suitability for ministry. A copy of the Testimonial for Suitability for Ministry is then sent to the Bishop of East Anglia for his decision.

### **4. Diocesan Procedures**

4.1 The Diocesan Coordinator 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 to engage in any kind of public ministry in East Anglia for any period (including a day or weekend supply, although see 4.3.7 below), permission must be sought with as much advanced notice as possible, and the following procedures must be followed:

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 public ministry.

4.3.3 In the case of 3.1.1 and 3.1.3 above, 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. In the case of 3.1.2 above, the Coordinator will seek the permission of the religious priest or deacon's Provincial or Abbot for him to minister, and obtain a copy of the Testimonial of Suitability for Ministry.

4.3.4 If necessary for priests and deacons from overseas, the Coordinator will arrange with the Bishop of East Anglia or his or Vicar General to provide the priest or deacon with the necessary letter of invitation required for his visa application, guaranteeing that the diocese (through the parish) will be responsible for his board and maintenance during his visit, and ensure that he returns home after the visit.

- 4.3.5 In liaison with the Diocesan Financial Administrator and the local Parish Priest, the Coordinator will ensure compliance with the Inland Revenue's *Tax Guidelines for Priests*.
- 4.3.6 Once the necessary documents are returned to the Bishop's House and permission is given, the Coordinator will inform the parish priest that all is in order for the priest or deacon to exercise public ministry. A letter of permission from the Bishop or Coordinator will be sent.
- 4.3.7 In the case of a priest or deacon from outside the Diocese of East Anglia who supplies or visits on a regular basis (more than once a year), a Testimonial will be sought which lasts up to a year. The parish priest must still inform the Coordinator that the priest is supplying or visiting, 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 to be sought.

## 5. Longer Periods of Ministry

- 5.1 If any priest or deacon is to spend over two weeks in public ministry, the previous procedure is to be followed, but 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*. This applies to all those priests who write to the diocese from overseas seeking a time of ministry in the diocese.
- 5.2 Long-term or permanent assignments also require the granting of diocesan faculties.
- 5.3 A Criminal Records Bureau check will also be necessary for those staying for a longer period. For priests coming from abroad, the CRB overseas service will be used to establish if an equivalent check is available in the country of origin. When no equivalent of the CRB disclosure is available, the Testimonial of Suitability will be obtained, and in addition the completion by the entrant of the Identity Verification and Confidential Declaration Forms will be required.

## 6. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years by the Bishop in consultation with the Council of Priests.