

# JOB DESCRIPTION PRIEST

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**T**HE PRIESTHOOD IS no place to be if you've got an identity crisis. You have to know who you are as a person, otherwise you're going to get very fragmented. What I've thought I should do is buy about eight different hats. One hat for Fred Olds the spiritual guru. Then another hat for Fred Olds the sacramental dispensing machine. Then you have Fred Olds the administrator of a million-dollar complex—and let's face it, I make New York City look financially responsible. Then you have Fred Olds, personal family counsellor, educational consultant, taxi driver—sometimes I've got to pick people up—and so on. You have all these different hats and all these different functions as a parish priest.

It's not what you would describe as one of the most functional jobs in society. You don't really add anything to the GNP. At the end of the day you can't see what you've done. For that matter, it's very hard to see what you've done by the end of the year. A painter or a poet or a composer can see what he's done; there's something tangible.

In some ways the priesthood is a profession, in some ways it's a complete life. But it is a job, you can't get around it. I pay income tax, unemployment insurance, thing. We receive a full salary—about \$750 or \$775 a month. We're not overpaid and we're not underpaid; we're fairly paid, I'd say, although for the education we have and the hours we put in, you could say we're terribly paid. But obviously the last reason a person goes into the priesthood is for money.

By the legacies, all I have to do for the day is pray and offer sacrifice. Everything flows from that. In fact, that's the only really legal aspect of the priesthood. They have to be present in whatever we do or it's just empty formalism.

I suppose a priest, whether he wants to admit it or not, is



"People think priests are different," says Father Fred Olds of Winnipeg's Blessed Sacrament Church. "I don't know how a priest is supposed to look. I just try to be myself." Father Olds spoke with Doug Whiteway

a bridge between God and man. He's an *alter Christus*, another Christ, although I don't mean that in any special sense. When someone is reconciled to God, the priest is happiest.

The last thing I do is keep regular hours. I get up at different times and, to be quite honest, the way I'm constituted I hate mornings. That doesn't mean I get up at noon—I have two morning masses during the week and one on Sunday. But my head is not operating then. I can't figure out why we have masses in the mornings. It is a Last Supper, not a breakfast.

I do my lauds and my office

in the morning and, ideally, I do some other reading then. I'm not just talking about spiritual material—I could be reading a Jacqueline Susann novel or something like that. As much as with a doctor or a lawyer, reading is part of my job. Karl Barth said a priest has to have a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other, and that's very true. Being a bearer of good news you have to be abreast of what's happening in the world. If you haven't got any content when you get up to preach you can only utter platitudes.

However, when it comes to telling people what to do, I'm very reluctant. There is a

new kind of clericalism that makes people feel guilty. "Look what is happening to the Indian," say some priests, or, "Look what is happening in the Third World." You've got to do this, they say. You've got to do that. I say bullshit to that. You can't do that. As St. Augustine once said, "Love and do what you will."

My biggest frustration is people who feel they've got Christianity and aren't prepared to accept and celebrate other people's differences. The majority of people in this parish are very loving, concerned and enthusiastic. You always get vocal minorities in any group and, unfortu-

nately, as a leader you can be susceptible to him who shouts loudest.

I think a lot of people think priests are different. Just different. Priests are always supposed to be nice, gentlemanly people and radiate an ethereal atmosphere. You don't look like a priest, that's the no. 1 reaction I get. I don't know how a priest is supposed to look. Wear white socks besides the white collar? I don't know. I just try to be myself. I think God has set us apart, yes, but set us apart to do something different, not be something different. To the extent that you become a member of a clerical or caste system, you betray the basis of your mission.

**P**OVERTY, CHASTITY and obedience I don't see as contracts or legal obligations. They are considered gifts or *charisms* and are meant to aid or liberate the individual. Actually, I didn't take a vow of poverty—that's for a religious, not a diocesan, priest. I take a promise of obedience to the bishop who represents the rest of the diocese. I have the utmost faith in my bishop and our bishops in Canada, so obedience is never a question with me.

Celibacy? It doesn't mean a lack of intimacy in one's life. A priest used to be trained to be self-sufficient, independent, never show his feelings, which is unnatural, inhuman and has taken its toll on priests. The training is the opposite now. A priest is interdependent with other individuals. That notion is growing. People aren't expecting their priests to be Mr. Perfect anymore.

The priesthood is a calling. God says in Jeremiah: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee." I believe that very deeply, very sincerely. But I think that's true for all of life, not just the priesthood.