

OBLIGATION AND CONSECRATION: A CLERIC'S OBLIGATION TO PRAY THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

INTRODUCTION

This paper will describe the history of the obligation of clergy to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and some current issues with regard to this duty. The focus will mostly be on secular clergy and the Latin Code, although the history part will also describe religious life and the Eastern traditions. Canon 276 § 2 3° of the 1983 code states that “priests and deacons aspiring to the presbyterate are obliged to carry out the Liturgy of the Hours daily according to the proper and approved liturgical books; permanent deacons, however, are to carry out the same to the extent defined by the conference of bishops.”¹ Canon 1174 §1 restates these requirement, with paragraph two encouraging other members of the Christian faithful to pray the Liturgy of the Hours as well. Canon 1175 adds the requirement that “the true time is to be observed insofar as possible.”² Part I of this paper will outline the history of this obligation, from the early Church to the reforms called for by the Vatican II Council and subsequent developments leading to the 1983 Code. Part II will discuss several current issues with regard to this duty, including the its scope, gravity, and purpose, reasons why the obligation may be waived, and the call to pray the Liturgy of the Hours at times in common and with the public. The paper will then conclude with an observation about how the *ius vigens* of this obligation attempts makes the duty less burdensome, not to reduce its importance, but rather to revive its original purposes.

¹ *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. promulgatus* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983) c. 276 §2 3°: “[O]bligazione tenetur sacerdotes necnon diaconi ad presbyterum aspirantes cotidie liturgiam horarum persolvendi secundum proprios et probatos liturgicos libros; diaconi autem permanentes eandem persolvant pro parte ab Episcoporum conferential definita”; English translation from the *Code of Canon Law. Latin-English Edition: New English Translation* (Washington, DC: CLSA, 2012). All subsequent translations from the code will be from this source. Similarly, canon 663 §2 requires members of religious orders to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours according to their own constitution.

² CIC c. 1175: “In liturgia horarum persolvenda, quantum fieri potest, verum tempus servetur unius cuiusque horae.”

I. THE HISTORY OF THE OBLIGATION TO PRAY THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

The history of the obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours can be considered in five parts: (1) the early centuries of the Church; (2) the developments of the Middle Ages; (3) reforms of the modern era up to the Vatican II Council; and (4) era of the Vatican II Council and related developments up to the 1983 Code. As will be described, the requirements changed over time, but the themes of consecrating the day and praying with and for the whole Church have been enduring themes.

A. The Early Centuries of the Church

Even before there was a formal Liturgy of the Hours, many of the Church fathers, such as St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and St. Cyprian of Carthage, called for Christians to be at prayer at fixed hours (e.g., third, sixth and ninth hours, and often when rising and when retiring at night.)³ These prayers were varied, although there were some definite themes, such as the call for scheduled prayer and the use of early rubrics, often guided by the local bishop.⁴ Then, with the legalization of Christianity in 312-313, the beginnings of liturgical prayers similar to what is now the Liturgy of the Hours became more universal. This liturgical prayer, usually prayed in common, developed in three contexts: (1) among the monks, especially in Egypt; (2) around the bishops in their churches; and (3) a combination of the two approaches, with monks leading the prayers in the cathedral.⁵

Starting in Egypt and Jerusalem, monks began developing a fixed practice of praying a divine office together in a way that also involved time for contemplation on the prayers.⁶ Monks also often

³ See Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours: East and West* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993) 13-27 (hereafter *The Liturgy of the Hours*)

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-29; Pierre Salmon, O.S.B., *The Breviary Through the Centuries* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1962) 2 (hereafter *The Breviary Throughout the Centuries*).

⁵ Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 32-33.

⁶ See Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 59-73.

prayed the office at local churches, and the secular clergy present were expected to join them; the laity also often attended.⁷ In the East, the Greater Rule of St. Basil generally set the standard for the order of psalms that monks would offer in different hours each day. In the West, the Rule of Saint Benedict accomplished a similar purpose.⁸ It was generally understood that these offices were to be prayed in common; but when monks could not join the community, they were to pray the office in private.⁹

In the cathedrals that were arising, bishops began offering similar daily liturgical prayers. Religious monks often led the prayers, but here as well the secular clerics generally joined them.¹⁰ This practice first spread throughout the East in the first half of the fourth century.¹¹ But in the West as well, during the late fourth through early seventh centuries, cathedrals likewise developed a variety of ways of offering regular liturgical prayer, and especially psalms, at definite times during the day, especially in the morning and evening.¹² In the early centuries, some councils required secular clergy to join in the cathedral offices, but the requirements varied from place to place.¹³

B. Developments of the Middle Ages

In the late classical times, bishops generally had their clergy with them, and so the divine office could more easily be prayed in common. However, with the rise of chapels and eventually parishes separate from the cathedral, with their own clergy to serve them, it was more difficult to gather the clergy together in a common offering of what had become a regular divine office. And so the practice developed of clergy praying the divine office in their own churches and sometimes in private.¹⁴ In addition, there was still no consistency regarding what prayers clergy were to pray, for practices varied

⁷ Salmon, *The Breviary Throughout the Centuries*, 2 – 3.

⁸ Vincent Bertrand, “The Canonical Status of the Liturgy of the Hours from 1917 to the Present” (JCL Thesis, Catholic University of America, 1996) 6 (hereafter “Canonical Status”).

⁹ Martin Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office in the Latin and Oriental Churches* (Doctoral Dissertation, Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America, 1967) 5 (hereafter *The Obligation of the Divine Office*.)

¹⁰ Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 90-91, 93-94; Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 5-7.

¹¹ Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 33-34

¹² See *ibid.*, 141-163.

¹³ Sample, *The Obligation the Divine Office*, 6-7, 9.

¹⁴ Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 297-299; Salmon, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 8-13.

widely. Starting with Saint Boniface in the 8th century, the Western Church began requiring all clerics to pray the divine office as it was prayed in the Roman basilicas and monasteries, with the standard set by the Rule of Saint Benedict. This principle gradually expanded throughout the Germanic regions, to England, and then to other countries as well.¹⁵ By the end of the reign of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085), this Roman Liturgy of the Hours was generally required for all areas of the Latin Church, although some churches and religious communities had their own practices. Over the course of time, there were also many additions to the divine office, such as new offices for the saints, votive offices and offices for the dead.¹⁶

Until the High Middle Ages, the obligation of secular clerics was generally thought of as an obligation to join in the Liturgy of the Hours that were prayed as public liturgies, not to offer the prayers in private.¹⁷ But the custom then arose that all priests were to recite the Divine Office, ideally publically, but privately if not.¹⁸ For example, Gratian said that a presbyter should fulfill the obligation to pray the liturgy of the hours, if he can publically, but in any case either by himself or with a group.¹⁹ More expansively, St. Thomas Aquinas said that the obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours applies to “priests and other clerics constituted in sacred orders, whether they hold a benefice or not, and all those ordained in any order who receive an ecclesiastical stipend.”²⁰ Although a public or at least common liturgy was preferred, the private prayer of the breviary became more the norm for secular clergy, except for canons of cathedrals, who would still pray the divine office in public.²¹

¹⁵ Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 10-15.

¹⁶ Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 307-308.

¹⁷ Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 14-15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 16-21.

¹⁹ Gratian, *Decretum* c.2 D. XCI.

²⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusculum LVIII, De Officio Sacerdotis*, in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici, Opera omnia*, ed. by Vernon Bourke (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1950) XVII: 322: “*Ad has septem horas tenetur sacerdos et alii clerici constitute in sacris ordinibus, sive habeant beneficium sive non, et omnes illi qui percipient ecclesiastica stipendia in quocumque ordine sint*” (my translation). Fr. Sample describes how this view came to be the general rule. Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 32-33.

²¹ Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 32-33; Salmon, *The Breviary Through the Centuries*, 17-19; Taft, *The Divine Office*, 300-301.

C. The Modern Era Up to the Vatican II Council

In order to simplify praying the breviary in private, Pope Clement VII (1523-1534) asked Cardinal Francisco de Quinones to draft a revised version that was more like that of the ancient church, without the many additional prayers that had been added over the years. This project was completed in 1535, and the resulting “Quinones breviary” became very popular. However, there was a reaction against the simplification from some traditionalists. And, in 1558, Pope Pius IV forbade its use.²² But then, in his 1568 bull *Quod a nobis*, Pope Pius V promulgated a reformed breviary, which accomplished part of these same goals by returning more to the ancient breviary and simplifying the prayers.²³ This breviary remained in force until the 20th century. During that time, the private offering of the Liturgy of the Hours was dominant among secular clergy, and also adopted by many of the newer apostolic orders and societies such as the Jesuits and the Vincentians.²⁴

In his 1911 bull *Divino afflatu*, Pope Pius X instituted a reform of the breviary to accomplish the goal of restoring the prayers proper to the seasons for most days, rather than having other offices (e.g., for saints) dominate.²⁵ Soon after, the 1917 Code plainly stated the obligation of three groups to pray the Liturgy of the Hours: clerics in major orders, solemnly professed religious, and clerics in minor orders who held benefices.²⁶ Except for religious brothers and sisters who were in houses of at least four members, that code had no explicit expectation that the Liturgy of the Hours would be prayed in common., nor any call for prayers with the laity.²⁷ Some commentators, however, did say that clerics must pronounce the words, at least quietly, to avoid the tendency to rush through them.²⁸

²² Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 37-39; Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 311.

²³ Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 40-41; Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 31.

²⁴ Sample, 48-49.

²⁵ Pius XI, *Divino afflatu*, Nov. 1, 1911: AAS3 (1911) 635; see Sample, *The Obligation of the Divine Office*, 52; Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 312-313.

²⁶ *Codex Iuris Canonici Pii X Pontificis Maximi iussu digestus Benedicti Papae XV auctoritate promulgatus* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1917) canons 135, 610, 1475.

²⁷ 1917 Code c. 610 §1.

²⁸ Edward Quigley, *The Divine Office: A Study of the Roman Breviary* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1920) 86-87 (hereafter *A Study of the Roman Breviary*); see Jeffrey Cabral, “A Means for Diocesan Priests to Pursue Holiness: The Clerical Obligation to Pray the Liturgy of the Hours” (STL Thesis, Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 2010)

And it was generally considered a grave sin not to pray the entire office without a good cause.²⁹ Unfortunately, sometimes there was a tendency to treat the Liturgy of the Hours as simply an obligation, and to rush through the prayers rather than being enriched by them.³⁰ Pope Pius XII tried to elevate the level of this prayer in his apostolic exhortation *Menti nostrae*, in which he said that the Liturgy of the Hours should be “above all a matter of elevating the mind and heart to God, in unison with the blessed spirits, who eternally sing the praise of God.”³¹

D. The Era of the Vatican II Council, the New Breviary, and the 1983 Code

Even before the Vatican II Council, Pope Pius XII instituted a commission to consider reforms of the Liturgy of the Hours. And, in 1961, Pope John XXIII issued new rubrics for the Divine Office, which simplified the rules so that it could be prayed more easily and more reverently.³² Some commentators were also encouraging priests to invite the laity to join in this prayer as they had done in earlier days of the Church.³³ In chapter 4 of Constitution on the Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the Vatican II Council took up these calls for a reform of the Liturgy of the Hours “in order that the divine office may be better and more perfectly prayed in existing circumstances.”³⁴ The Council promoted several reforms, including: (1) distributing the psalms over the course of a longer period than one week (article 91); (2) use of a broader range of Scriptural readings and more accurate accounts of saints (article 92); (3) encouragement of praying the Liturgy of the Hours in churches and with the laity

(hereafter “A Means to Pursue Holiness”); Brendan Daly, “Steering Wheel or Spare Tyre? The Obligation of the Priest to Pray” *Australian Catholic Record*, in *The Australian Catholic Record* 93 (2016) 292, 297 (hereafter “Steering Wheel or Spare Tyre?”)

²⁹ Quigley, *A Study of the Roman Breviary*, 75, 78; John Abbo and Jerome Hannah, *The Sacred Canons* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1951) 1:193; Daly, “Steering Wheel or Spare Tyre?”, 296.

³⁰ Stanslaus Woywod, *A Practical Commentary to the Code of Canon Law*, rev. ed. (New York; Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1952) 67; John Huels, “The Liturgy of the Hours in Parishes,” in *More Disputed Questions in the Liturgy*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996) 91 (hereafter “The Liturgy of the Hours in Parishes”).

³¹ Pope Pius XII, apostolic exhortation *Menti nostrae*, September 23, 1950: *AAS* 42 (195); (translation from Cabral, “A Means to Pursue Holiness”, 20.

³² Frederick McManus, *Handbook for the New Rubrics* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961) 84.

³³ *Ibid.* 14.

³⁴ Second Vatican Council, constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* 87, December 4, 1963: *AAS* (1964) 121; English translation in *The Documents of Vatican II: Vatican Translation*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Staten Island: St. Pauls, 2009) (hereafter *The Documents of Vatican II*.)

(article 100); and (4) permission for use of approved vernacular translations, with the ordinary's permission, for clergy who had difficulty with Latin and for prayer with the public (article 101.) In articles 96 and 99, the Council also reiterated the obligation of clerics to pray the entire Liturgy of the Hours and encouraged clergy who were not obligated to offer these prayers in choir still to pray them in common at least some of the time.³⁵ Fulfilling these calls to reform, Pope Paul VI promulgated the current version of Liturgy of the Hours with his apostolic constitution *Laudis canticum*.³⁶ A year later, the Congregation of Sacred Liturgy promulgated the instructions for the Liturgy of the Hours.³⁷ The 1983 code then reiterated the obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours for clerics and religious, placing in in the context of canon 276 and its call for priests "in a special way to pursue holiness."³⁸

II. CURRENT ISSUES AND THE CALL TO PRAY THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

This part will discuss five issues regarding the obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours: (1) the scope of the obligation; (2) the purpose of this obligation; (3) the gravity of the obligation; (4) exceptions to the obligation; and (5) the call to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in common and in public at least sometimes. Because liturgical norms retained their force after the promulgation of the 1983 Code, unless they were contrary to it, the prescriptions of the Vatican II Council, Popes and other Church documents regarding the Liturgy of the Hours that predate the Code are still in effect.³⁹

A. The Scope of the Obligation to Pray the Liturgy of the Hours

Canon 276 §2 3^o states that all priests and deacons aspiring to the presbyterate are required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily and in accordance with the proper and approved liturgical books.

³⁵ *Vatican Translation*, 111-113.

³⁶ Paul VI, *Laudis canticum*, Nov. 1, 1970: AAS 63 (1971) 527-539.

³⁷ Cabral, "A Means to Pursue Holiness", 33.

³⁸ "[A]d sanctitatem persequendam peculiari ratione." 1983 Code c. 276 §1. The obligation is reiterated in canon 1173 in the context of the importance of the Liturgy of the Hours in the Church's life.

³⁹ 1983 code §2; Cabral, "A Means to Pursue Holiness", 46

Permanent deacons are required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours to the extent determined by their episcopal conference. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has determined that permanent deacons are required to pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.⁴⁰ Canon 1175 does expand on the 1917 code by expressly calling on such clerics to pray the Liturgy of the Hours at the time proper to them. Building on a reform from the Vatican II Council, canon 276 2 3° allows the use of any proper and approved liturgical books, which includes translations of the Liturgy of the Hours into the vernacular that have received approval by the applicable episcopal conference.⁴¹

Although canons 276 and 1174 do not address seminarians, canon 246 §2 does require that they are “to be formed on the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.”⁴² Following up on this call, the Congregation on the Clergy’s 2019 *Ratio Fundamentalis* for priestly formation states that “The Liturgy of the Hours cannot be lacking in the prayer life of a priest, and it is a true ‘school of prayer’ for seminarians too.”⁴³ In the United States, this provision takes specific form in the requirement that: (1) all seminaries have a daily celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Morning and Evening Prayer; and (2) seminarians are to be instructed to incorporate progressively the Liturgy of the Hours, and the full liturgy is to be a regular part of their prayer at least a year before diaconate ordination.⁴⁴

B. The Goals of the Obligation to Pray the Liturgy of the Hours

Recent documents have tried to present the obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in a positive light, not as a burden, but rather in the context of enabling clerics and religious to be both zealous in ministry and contemplative in prayer., as well as the overall goal of liturgy to give praise to

⁴⁰ Bishop’s Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Permanent Deacons in the United States: Guidelines on Their Formation and Ministry*, 1984 edition 97 (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1985).

⁴¹ John E. Lynch, C.S.P., “The Obligations and Rights of Clerics” in *The New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, ed. John Beal et al. (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000) (hereafter “The Obligations and Rights of Clerics”) 343, 355.

⁴² CIC c. 246 §2: “*Efformentur ad celebrationem liturgiae horarum.*”

⁴³ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocations: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* 105, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/index_en_pres_docuff.htm.

⁴⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program for Priestly Formation*, 5th ed. (Washington, D.C. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006) 117, 119.

God and salvation to His people.⁴⁵ Thus, in calling for clerics to use a variety of means of sanctification, including the Liturgy of the Hours, canon 276 emphasizes the connection between internal holiness and the service of the Church. On the one hand, canon 276 describes the obligation for the Liturgy of the Hour, along with the obligation to make retreats and the encouragement of other devotion, in the context of a cleric's call to pursue holiness in a particular way. But then it describes this special call to holiness as based upon their ministry: "having been consecrated to God by a new title in the reception of orders, they are dispensers of the mysteries of God in the service of the people."⁴⁶ This connection between the twin purposes of the Liturgy of the Hours, namely a guide to increasing in holiness and a support of ministry, reflects a similar emphasis in the earlier General Instructions to the Liturgy of the Hours. Section 18 of the instructions describes the connection between "hidden but fruitful apostolate of the Liturgy of the Hours" and the ability "to bring the good news of Christ to those outside." Section 28 applies this principle to clerics in particular.⁴⁷

Regarding the specific ways in which the Liturgy of the Hours both increases holiness and makes pastoral ministry more fruitful, canon 1173 adds that those praying the Liturgy of the Hours are meant, on behalf of the Church: (1) to hear the voice of God; (2) to recall the mystery of salvation; (3) to praise God unceasingly in song and prayer; and (4) to intercede for the Church. The General Instructions to the Liturgy of the Hours describe similar goals. Articles 14 and 15 describe how that the Liturgy of the Hours brings the prayers of Christ to His Church and manifests the Church's dialogue with God. Article 16 adds that, with this liturgical prayer, we join the celestial hosts who praise God in heaven. And in describing the intercessory role of the Liturgy of the Hours, article 17 says that through this Liturgy, the Church takes on the role of a mother in uniting the prayers of all the Christian faithful with Christ Himself. The Vatican II Council likewise emphasized three aspects: (1)

⁴⁵ Aime Martimort, "The Liturgy of the Hours as Prayer of the Church" in *The Church at Prayer*, ed. Aime Martimort (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992) IV: 184-85 (hereafter "Prayer of the Church").

⁴⁶ CIC c. 276 §1: "*Deo in ordinis receptione novo titulo consecrati, dispensatores sint myteriorum Dei in servitum Eius populi.*"

⁴⁷ GILH 18, 28; see also Martimort, "Prayer of the Church," 185 (focusing on this connection).

the consecration of the whole day; (2) giving voice on earth to the dialogue between Christ and His Church; and (3) the praise of God before His very throne even while on earth.⁴⁸

C. The Gravity of the Obligation

Canon 276 §2 uses the term “obligatione tenentur” to describe a binding obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, unlike the use of the subjunctive voice in the same paragraph more to encourage the offering of daily Mass, mental prayer, frequent Penance, venerating Mary, and other common means of holiness.⁴⁹ As Fr. Cabral points out, the same phrase is used in canon 1247 in describing the serious obligation of the faithful to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.⁵⁰ Thus, it is generally agreed that deliberately omitting the office for a day without reason would be gravely sinful. However, there is some debate about how much omission is a grave sin. Fr. Huels argues that willfully omitting one of the hours without reason would not be gravely sinful, but failing to pray most of the Liturgy of the Hours would be.⁵¹ On the other hand, Fr. Abad says that willfully omitting Evening or Morning Prayer without reason would be gravely sinful, but only a continuous omission of the other hours numerous times be a grave sin.⁵² The Congregation for Clergy took up a dubia that asked this question. The Congregation indicated that omitting any part of the Liturgy of the Hours for trivial reasons was a serious matter, saying, “The omission of all or part of the Divine Office, on account of mere laziness or unnecessary recreation, is not licit, but rather is contempt, in proportion to the weight of grave matter, of the office of a minister and the positive law of the Church.”⁵³

⁴⁸ *Sacrosanctum concilium* 84-85.

⁴⁹ See Cabral, “A Means to Pursue Holiness,” 45.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; see also The Committee on the Liturgy of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Call to Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours” in *Thirty-Five Years of BCL Newsletters 1965-2000* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004) 591, 593 (hereafter “The Call to Prayer”) (emphasizing the gravity of the obligation.)

⁵¹ Huels, “The Liturgy of the Hours in Parishes,” 93

⁵² Jose Antonio Abad, “Title III: Liturgy of the Hours” in *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, English Language Edition*, ed. by Angel Marzoa, Jorge Miras, and Rafael Rodriguez-Ocana (Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2004) 1667, 1671

⁵³ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Response to dubia, November 15, 2000. *Notitiae* 37 (2001) 190-194: “*omissio sive totalis sive partialis Divini Officii, merae pigritiae vel non necessariae relaxationis*

D. Relaxation of the Obligation

That same response also described several reasons that may excuse a priest from praying part or all the Liturgy of the Hours, such as infirmity, pastoral ministry, charitable works, or fatigue. It stated that, because Morning and Evening Prayer are the most important parts of the Liturgy of the Hours, a particularly grave reason is needed to omit these hours.⁵⁴ Regarding dispensations, in an amendment to the 1917 Code, article 97 of *Sacrosanctum concilium* gave ordinaries the authority to dispense their subjects from the obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours for a just cause. The 1964 instruction *Inter oecumenici* reaffirmed this authority.⁵⁵ It is not clear how often this ability is used. However, one possible use could be to allow clerics (and religious) to use any official translation of the Liturgy that is helpful to them. Otherwise, only the Latin text or the vernacular versions approved for use in a given country can be used by clerics domiciled and living in that country.⁵⁶

E. The Call to Pray the Liturgy of the Hours in Common and with the Public

Two related ways in which recent developments have harkened back to a previous era are: (1) the call to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in common, at least at times; and (2) the call to pray the Liturgy of the Hours with the laity. For clerics in general, the code itself does not contain the call to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in common, except insofar as it says that members of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life are to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in accordance with their own proper law, which would often include praying in common.⁵⁷ But *Sacrosanctum concilium* and the general instructions both call on clerics to pray at least a portion of the Liturgy of the Hours in common even if

causa, non est licita, quinimmo est despectio, pro pondere materiae gravis, officii ministralis et positivae legis Ecclesiae”(my translation.)

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Congregation of Rites, instruction *Inter oecumenici* 79, June 23, 1964: AAS 56 (1964) 896.

⁵⁶ Lynch, “The Obligations and Rights of Clerics”, 355. In the United States, the authorized translations are English, Spanish, Italian, German and Slovenian. Ibid. This permission is under consideration for the new Priest’s Policy Manual for the Diocese of Arlington.

⁵⁷ 1983 Code c. 663 §3, 1174 §1.

not required by any other obligation.⁵⁸ Furthermore, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the general instructions and the code all encourage the laity to join in the Liturgy of the Hours. And to join the prayers of all the Church together, *Sacrosanctum concilium* encourages pastors of souls to ensure that the chief parts of the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Evening Prayer, are celebrated publically in churches on Sundays and more solemn feasts.⁵⁹ The general instructions also recommend that groups of the faithful pray the main hours both in church and on the occasion of gatherings.⁶⁰ According to some commentators, the Liturgy of the Hours was meant initially to be a public liturgical celebration, and that should be the goal now.⁶¹ In these provisions, the Vatican II Council and the general instructions are making a move in that direction.

CONCLUSION

Developments from the last century have made the Liturgy of the Hours simpler and easier to pray. But, as Fr. Huels states in his chapter “The Liturgy of the Hours in Parishes,” these reforms do not lessen the call of clerics to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, but rather make this duty more profound, for they present “the challenge to pray communally, to include the laity in the celebration as much as possible, to pray at the proper times and to pray with faith and devotion.”⁶² These challenges are not new; they are a renewal of the ancient purpose of the divine office. By focusing on the purposes of the Liturgy of the Hours, by treating it as, not merely a legal obligation, but as a sacred honor, and by striving to pray the liturgy more together and with the laity, clerics can better fulfill this timeless calling and better sanctify their ministries, the people of God, and the modern world.

⁵⁸ *Sacrosanctum concilium* 99.

⁵⁹ *Sacrosanctum concilium* 100.

⁶⁰ GILH 21, 27

⁶¹ USCCB Committee on the Liturgy, “The Call to Prayer 592-93; Huels, “The Liturgy of the Hours in Parishes,” 86-88; Martimort, “The Liturgy of the Hours as Prayer,” 180-84; Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 297-99.

⁶² Huels, “The Liturgy of the Hours in Parishes,” 94-95.