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USA TODAY The life of a priest CLOSE
SEND TO A FRIEND

Roger Landry, 32, is the parish priest at Espirito Santo church in Fall River, Mass., serving the town's Portuguese community. Fall River was home to the Rev. James Porter, who molested more than 200 children before he was convicted in 1992.

Photography by Eileen Blass, USA TODAY



Photo 1 of 8 Updated 06/10/02 at 5:00 PM ET

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Father Landry, also a school chaplain, says his joy in the priesthood has not been diminished. "I knew when I was 4 years old, and I thought the priest was the luckiest man in the universe to hold the Lord in his hands and be able to give him to others," Landry says.



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Every move Landry makes is calculated to show that the trust placed in him is deserved. If he's with children in church or school, he makes sure that the room has a window or an open door or that another adult is nearby. Even if he's at the health club, he wears a black T-shirt, as if to say, "I'll never forget I'm a priest."




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"A priest who lies about himself can't be trusted to bring people to God or share the truth," Landry says. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops meets Thursday in Dallas to vote on rules for preventing, reporting and removing abusers, an estimated 1,500 priests among 140,000 in the last 40 years.



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While bishops debate zero tolerance for abusers, Landry says the church should go even further: "We need to have a zero-tolerance policy on people who cheat on their vocations in any form."




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The "sweet burden" of priestly duties consumes Landry's days from 4:45 a.m. to 11 p.m. This is his first assignment, and like most of the 120 priests and 45 religious brothers serving 100 parishes in the diocese of 60,000, he has multiple tasks, from baptisms to burials to counseling teens to visiting the infirm.



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Landry echoes the message of Pope John Paul II, who electrified Landry at World Youth Day in Denver in 1993. A photo in Landry's office shows his ordination class surrounding the beaming pope.




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The high school may be the greatest challenge in his day. "Kids are so different now. I get questions on the morality of oral sex. Would I have ever asked that of a priest? No way."




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