

# The Selection of Bishops

**Few decisions have as much impact on a diocese or national church as the appointment of their bishops. The selection process is long and complicated and it presumes the good will of those involved**

**F**rom the time Matthias was chosen by lot to replace Judas as one of the Twelve, the process by which bishops are selected has been an important and often controversial issue in the church. As the American bishops take on a larger and more visible role in the debate over public policy, this selection process becomes of interest not only to Catholics but also to other American citizens.

Yet even Catholics know little about the process by which their bishops are selected. Church documents describe the process in skeletal outline, but the appointments are shrouded in secrecy with the participants bound by a vow of silence (papal secret) about the names under consideration. Although no one is willing to reveal the names and backgrounds of episcopal candidates, key participants were willing to describe in detail to me the process itself. Some interviews were given with the understanding that although the information could be published, the sources could not be revealed. Others, such as Archbishop Jean Jadot, former Apostolic Delegate to the United States, were willing to be quoted for the record.

In the appointment of bishops, it is important to distinguish between the first appointment of a priest as a bishop and his later promotion to a higher position, for example, from auxiliary to ordinary (called diocesan bishop under the new code of canon law).

## Province Candidates

For first appointments, the process begins when all the bishops (including auxiliaries) of an ecclesiastical province meet under the chairmanship of their archbishop to consider the names of priests who are possible candidates for the episcopacy. The United States is divided into 33 provinces, each under an archbishop. The bishops of a province

meet once a year, except for the Philadelphia Province, which has an indult allowing it to meet every other year. In Chicago, Cardinal John Cody refused to call a province meeting for three or four years, allegedly because he could not get the auxiliaries he wanted.

Every bishop in a province has the right to put forward the names of priests he believes would be good bishops. These names are collected by the archbishop and distributed together with *curricula vitae* to all of the bishops prior to their meeting. At the meeting, the bishops share their information and observations on each candidate. They are supposed to indicate whether their information is derived from first-hand knowledge or from what they have heard from others.

The "Norms for the Selection of Candidates for the Episcopacy in the Latin Church" (March 25, 1972) is very explicit about the qualities the bishops should look for in a candidate who must be "a good pastor of souls and teacher of the Faith: Whether they enjoy a good reputation; whether they are of irreproachable morality; whether they are endowed with right judgment and prudence; whether they are even-tempered and of stable character; whether they firmly hold the orthodox Faith; whether they are devoted to the Apostolic See and faithful to the magisterium of the church; whether they have a thorough knowledge of dogmatic and moral theology and canon law; whether they are outstanding for their piety, their spirit of sacrifice and their pastoral zeal; whether they have an aptitude for governing." Consideration must also be given to "intellectual qualities, studies completed, social sense, spirit of dialogue and cooperation, openness to the signs of the times, praiseworthy impartiality, family background, health, age and inherited characteristics."

The diocesan bishops are instructed to "take care to obtain all the information needed for carrying out this important and difficult duty." They are encouraged to consult, "although not collectively, priests of the cathedral chapter

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or diocesan consultors, or members of the council of priests, or other members of the clergy, diocesan or regular, or members of the laity."

Vatican officials are very adamant in their opposition to collective or group consultations because they fear they can be divisive and lead to politicking and pressure group activity. When groups ignore canon law and lobby anyway, it is usually against a particular candidate and not for one. According to a survey by the Canon Law Society of America's Committee on the Selection of Bishops, bishops who are consulting about potential candidates usually do this by letter. They ask priests and sometimes others in the diocese to submit names of priests they think ought to be considered. The Rev. James H. Provost reports, however, that the "returns to such mailed requests are reported to be low." One official involved in the process said, "Priests do not appreciate the importance of letters from bishops asking for names. If only 10 percent respond and they are old pastors who want someone who will not threaten them, then that is what they will get."

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### **'After the bishops have discussed the candidates, they vote on them by secret ballot'**

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The candidates put forward by a bishop are usually from his own diocese. One of the difficulties bishops have is getting information on priests outside their dioceses. The priests who become known to bishops outside their dioceses tend to be priests who hold diocesan or national offices. This reinforces the natural tendency of a bishop to nominate priests from his chancery staff. It is not surprising that chancellors and secretaries to bishops have a better chance of getting nominated at province meetings than pastors of rural parishes.

If a diocese has recently split off from another diocese, or if they share seminary facilities, the bishop will know some priests in a neighboring diocese. Bishops would also know priests in other dioceses who went with them to school at the Catholic University of America or the North American College. Thus factors that were found to be relevant to the appointment of bishops in "Survey of the American Bishops" (*AM.*, 11/12/83)—chancery positions and attendance at C.U.A. or Roman schools—are important at the very first step in the process.

Normally all of the priests nominated at a province meeting are from the province. The exceptions usually occur when the bishops want a black or Hispanic candidate and they cannot find a suitable candidate within the province. Most candidates are diocesan priests, but the bishops can nominate religious priests.

After the bishops have discussed the candidates, they vote on them by secret ballot in order to preserve the complete freedom of each one voting. The vote can be "white"

(yes) or "black" (no) or neutral. Often a bishop will abstain from voting (neutral) because he does not know the candidate. These bishops are encouraged to learn about the candidate before the next province meeting, since the candidates will be voted on again the following year when names can be added or deleted from the list.

After the votes are taken, the archbishop may ask for more discussion and another vote, if he believes it would be useful. He then is responsible for forwarding the names to the pronuncio (formerly the apostolic delegate) in Washington, D.C., together with the minutes of the meeting. The report, besides giving the votes, indicates the office (e.g., auxiliary or ordinary) and the type of diocese (large or small) for which the bishops believe the candidate is suitable. It also includes a curriculum vitae and an evaluation of each candidate. The evaluation varies in length from three lines to a half-page.

The list of candidates is also sent to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (N.C.C.B.), which has a standing Committee on the Selection of Bishops. This committee was formed during Cardinal John Dearden's term as president of the N.C.C.B. shortly after the new norms on the selection of bishops were issued by the Vatican in 1972. Early on, however, "It was found that it could not effectively function," reports Bishop James W. Malone, current N.C.C.B. president. "It still exists, but it does not meet for the purpose in its title." The problem was that in a conference the size of the United States, most members of the committee did not know the priests who were being considered for the episcopacy.

The number of names on the list varies depending on the size of the province; it includes anywhere from 5 to 25 names. The votes on the candidates are not always unanimous. Archbishop Jadot, Apostolic Delegate from May 1973 to December 1980, explained: "The voting varies. In a tiny minority, when everyone knows the priest, he gets all positive votes. If he is less known, he gets a number of positive votes and abstentions. And some are contested, half and half. It would be very exceptional to send a name that got a negative vote. This happens when a name, for some reason, is removed from the list. Someone becomes a black sheep."

How important is this list of candidates? Under canon law, the pronuncio could nominate for ordinary someone not from this pool of candidates, and the Pope could appoint any priest he wanted. In fact, the list appears to be very important. "It would be exceptional," reports Archbishop Jadot, "if a bishop were appointed without being on the list. He might not be on the list of the province where he was appointed, but he would be on some list."

### **Auxiliaries**

The next step in the process depends on whether the position to be filled is that of an auxiliary or a diocesan bishop



(an ordinary). If a diocesan bishop wants an auxiliary, he must first convince the pronuncio that there is a need. If his auxiliary has died or been promoted, this will not be difficult, but if he wants an auxiliary in a diocese that has never had one or if he requests an additional auxiliary, he will have to make his case.

An ordinary might argue that he needs help because of the size of the diocese or because his health is poor. Sometimes the pronuncio responds by saying that if the diocese is too large perhaps it should be split, or if the bishop's health is bad, perhaps he should retire. These responses will discourage some bishops from asking again for an auxiliary. Other reasons given for an auxiliary might be that a large ethnic or racial group in the diocese requires special attention. Some bishops also need help because they must devote time to work outside the diocese. Archbishop John P. Roach of Minneapolis found he was spending one-fourth of his time working on national issues when he was president of the N.C.C.B.

Although a bishop could petition Rome for an auxiliary without the support of the pronuncio, it is highly unlikely that he would be successful. Finally, even if an auxiliary is clearly needed, there appears to be an unwritten law that if a bishop has less than a year-and-a-half to retirement, then no auxiliary will be appointed, lest he be imposed on the new bishop.

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### **'Priests, religious and laity can be consulted both individually and collectively'**

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If the office to be filled is that of a diocesan bishop, then the pronuncio draws up a list of three names, a "terna," that he sends to Rome with an indication of his preference. If the position is that of auxiliary, then the diocesan bishop draws up the terna and sends it to the pronuncio. The names proposed in a terna by an ordinary will normally come from the list of priests who had been proposed by the province bishops. If one is not from this list, the pronuncio will want to know why. Sometimes the priest was not on the list because his bishop did not want to lose him to another diocese: "I wanted to save him." But if the priest was not proposed at the province level because the other bishops would not support him, then his candidacy as an auxiliary is in trouble. The pronuncio or Rome can reject all three names on the terna.

Archbishop Jadot explains, "Sometimes I would know it was useless to send the names to Rome, and I would say, 'Please put another name forward.' If I turned down a terna, I would inform Rome that I couldn't accept it." The bishop usually gets one of the three names he proposes, but not always the first name.

Archbishop Jadot reports: "I never saw an auxiliary imposed on a bishop against his will. If there is no agreement between a bishop and Rome—a stalemate—then there is no appointment." This appears to have happened in Chicago under Cardinal Cody, who had only two auxiliaries when he died. Within 15 months of his appointment as Archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Bernardin received four new auxiliaries. These appointments indicated not only that the Chicago Archdiocese is once again in favor with Rome, but also that Rome wants Cardinal Bernardin free to devote time to work for the N.C.C.B. and the synod of bishops.

### **Diocesan Bishops**

Before the terna is sent to Rome, the pronuncio does his own investigation of the candidates. If the appointment is as an ordinary, the pronuncio will request from the current ordinary (or if there is none, from the administrator) a report on the condition and needs of the diocese and the qualities desired in the ordinary. Priests, religious and laity can be consulted both individually and collectively in drawing up this report, as long as individual names are not mentioned. In St. Louis in 1979, the example, four reports—from the Archdiocesan Consultors, the Pastoral Commission, the Council of Priests and the Council of Religious Women—were also drawn up and sent to the apostolic delegate. This process was public and involved wide consultation.

The report is sent by the administrator to the pronuncio together with the names of people from various age groups and parts of the diocese whom the pronuncio can contact to check the accuracy of the report. "Usually the heads of the various administrative bodies and other persons in leadership positions are contacted," explains Thomas P. Doyle, O.P., of the pronuncio's staff. Normally, heads of religious orders in the diocese would be queried as well as lay people who are officers in diocesan lay organizations and members of advisory committees in the diocese. Some the pronuncio may have met personally in his travels, but many of these names are simply taken by the pronuncio from those listed under the name of the diocese in *The Official Catholic Directory*. All of these people are not only asked about the state of the diocese but also asked to recommend names of possible candidates to the pronuncio.

If there are bishops who have previously served in this diocese, they will be contacted about candidates for their old diocese. The pronuncio will also consult the bishops from the province to which the vacant diocese belongs as well as the president and vice president of the N.C.C.B. For an archdiocese, all the archbishops will be contacted. These bishops can recommend names of priests or bishops who might be appropriate for the vacant diocese.

After the pronuncio has narrowed down the list of candidates to eight or ten names, he sends them to the president of the N.C.C.B. Bishop Malone explains, "The pronuncio



## **'A priest supporting the ordination of women, optional priestly celibacy or a liberalized position on birth control would not be made a bishop'**

says, "These are the names that have surfaced. Give me a list of three in order of your preference and give the reasons for your preference." "

In the past there were certain American bishops who were "kingmakers" in the hierarchy because they had unique influence in the choice of bishops. Cardinal Francis J. Spellman of New York and Bishop Edward F. Hoban of Cleveland were very influential, but "There is no kingmaker among the American bishops today," reports Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, a prominent church historian.

During this inquiry, Archbishop Jadot reported that "the bishops of a region are most helpful for the new ordinary. For an auxiliary, the bishop and the priests are most helpful." While he was apostolic delegate, Archbishop Jadot recalls that "Ninety-nine percent of the time, two to five names come out strongly as the candidates. Most often there is a strange coincidence of names coming from the bishops and from the priests—seldom is there difference between them. When there is, then the apostolic delegate has to work it out." On the other hand, input from the laity appears to be of limited value. "It is exceptional when their answers are helpful," said Archbishop Jadot. "They are usually fine answers, but they have limited knowledge."

If a vacant diocese has an auxiliary, he is an obvious candidate to become the ordinary, and the pronuncio will hear from people about his qualifications. The pronuncio also hears the views of people on whether the new bishop should be from the diocese or from outside. While someone from within might be more sensitive to the local situation, someone from outside might be freer to act without his critics claiming that he is listening only to his old friends and appointing them to offices. Sometimes there is the feeling that "new blood" is needed in the diocese. Archbishop Jadot reports that "there is usually unanimity or quasi unanimity in the diocese over the question of whether the bishop should be a local person or from outside."

### **Questionnaire**

The scrutiny of a priest prior to being first appointed bishop is in some ways greater than it is for bishops who are being promoted. Bishops have already been through the process once and are better known by the pronuncio and Rome.

In order to get information about a priest for the terna, the pronuncio sends a questionnaire on the candidate to 20 or 30 people who know him. Some of these names are suggested by the priest's ordinary; others are diocesan officials

or people the pronuncio has gotten to know personally in the diocese through his travels. Not only priests but also religious and lay people are sent the questionnaire. The laity consulted tend to be officers in diocesan lay organizations or on diocesan advisory committees. Once again, names are also taken by the pronuncio from those listed under the diocese in *The Official Catholic Directory*.

The questionnaire sent by the pronuncio contains 14 items, including a request for additional names of persons who know the candidate (see accompanying questionnaire). Although the questionnaire is detailed, the covering letter indicates that it "is only to serve as an orientation. . . ." The pronuncio asks that the information be given "in a discursive manner so as to develop fully your observations."

Most of the questions deal with the obvious physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social and priestly characteristics that one would hope for in a bishop. It is interesting to note that while the questionnaire does ask about the administrative skills of the candidate (item 10), it goes into much more detail, asking about his pastoral fitness and experience (item 8). Under this item are listed not only pastoral skills but also "a spirit of ecumenism" and "the promotion and defense of human rights." And the question on leadership qualities (item 9) clearly indicates that an authoritarian pastor is not wanted: "A fatherly spirit . . . the ability to lead others to dialogue, to stimulate and receive cooperation . . . to direct and engage in team work; appreciation for the role and the collaboration of religious and laity (both men and women) and for a just share of responsibilities. . . ."

The questions on orthodoxy (item 6) indicate that a priest supporting the ordination of women, optional priestly celibacy or a liberalized position on birth control would not be made a bishop. But neither would a priest opposed to the teaching of the church on social justice. Archbishop Jadot explains: "If the priest's first reaction to *Humanae Vitae* was negative—he just blew up—and later came to accept it, this would not be a major objection. But if he does not agree with the magisterium . . . The Pope has been strong on this. He wants people who agree with himself, and this is very natural. If the priest has given a lecture or written an article against *Humanae Vitae* or for women's ordination, he would have a difficult time becoming a bishop. He is saying the opposite of the magisterium."

According to Archbishop Jadot, it is exceptional when the responses to the questionnaire reveal something about the candidate that forces his removal from the terna.

After the pronuncio has examined the responses to the questionnaires and prepared a terna, he writes a report (approximately 20 pages) in Italian, extracting and synthesizing the content of the consultation and giving his own judgment. He lists the candidates in alphabetical order and gives his choice. He sends all of the documents that he has received to Rome with his report. For the appointment of an ordinary this can be 120 to 130 letters. When the candi-



## QUESTIONNAIRE

Please describe the nature of your association with the candidate and indicate the length of time that you have known him.

1. Personal Characteristics: Physical appearance; health; work capacity; family conditions, especially regarding any manifestations of hereditary illness.
2. Human Qualities: Speculative and practical intellectual capacity; temperament and character; balance; serenity of judgment; sense of responsibility.
3. Human, Christian and Priestly Formation: Possession and practice of human, Christian and priestly virtues (prudence, justice, moral uprightness, loyalty, sobriety, faith, hope, charity, obedience, humility, piety: daily celebration of the Eucharist and of the Liturgy of the Hours, Marian devotion.)
4. Behavior: Moral conduct; comportment with people in general and in the exercise of the priestly ministry in particular; the ability to establish friendships; rapport with civil authorities: respect and autonomy.
5. Cultural Preparation: Competence and *aggiornamento* in ecclesiastical sciences; general culture; knowledge of and sensitivity toward problems of our time; facility with foreign languages; authorship of books or magazine articles worthy of note.
6. Orthodoxy: Adherence with conviction and loyalty to the doctrine and Magisterium of the Church. In particular, the attitude of the candidate toward the documents of the Holy See on the Ministerial Priesthood, on the priestly ordination of women, on the Sacrament of Matrimony, on sexual ethics and on social justice. Fidelity to the genuine ecclesial tradition and commitment to the authentic renewal promoted by the Second Vatican Council and by subsequent pontifical teachings.
7. Discipline: Loyalty and docility to the Holy Father, the Apostolic See and the Hierarchy; esteem for and acceptance of priestly celibacy as it has been set forth by the ecclesiastical Magisterium; respect for and observance of the general and particular norms governing divine worship and clerical attire.
8. Pastoral Fitness and Experience: Abilities, experience and effectiveness in the pastoral ministry; evangelization and catechesis; preaching and teaching (preparation, public speaking capability); pastoral skills in sacramental and liturgical ministries (especially in the administration of the Sacrament of Penance and the celebration of the Eucharist); the fostering of vocations; sensitivity to the needs of the missions; a spirit of ecumenism; the formation of the laity in the apostolate (family life, youth, the promotion and defense of human rights, the world of labor, culture and the media); the promotion of human causes and of social action with particular attention to the poor and the most needy.
9. Leadership Qualities: A fatherly spirit, attitude of service, taking initiative; the ability to lead others to dialogue, to stimulate and receive cooperation, to analyze and organize and carry out decisions; to direct and engage in team work; appreciation for the role and the collaboration of religious and laity (both men and women) and for a just share of responsibilities; concern for the problems of the universal and local church.
10. Administrative Skills: Accountability for and proper use of Church goods; abilities and performance in fulfilling administrative tasks; sense of justice and spirit of detachment; openness in seeking the collaboration of experts in the field.
11. Public Esteem: Estimation of the candidate on the part of confreres, the general public and the civil authorities.
12. Your Judgment of the Candidate: Suitability for the Episcopacy: His suitability for the episcopacy in general; in particular whether he would be more apt as a diocesan or an auxiliary bishop; whether in an urban, industrial, rural, large, medium or small See.
13. Any additional comments:
14. Names, addresses and qualifications of others who know the candidate well (priests, religious men and women, laity) who are truly reliable, with good sense, prudence and calm judgment.



date is already a bishop, the documentation is less. In this case, the question is not whether he is qualified to be a bishop but whether he is apt for the particular diocese. All of this can take two to four months depending on the size of the diocese or the unanimity or tension in the diocese. Archbishop Jadot noted that "Archbishop Laghi works faster than I did on appointments, but he travels less."

### Congregation for Bishops

When the documents arrive in Rome at the Congregation for Bishops, they are checked by the staff person in charge of appointments from the United States to see if they are complete. He summarizes and reports on the documents at a staff meeting of the congregation.

If everything is in order and the cardinal prefect approves, the appointment process moves forward. If the appointment involves a bishop who is being promoted, the episcopal members of the congregation do not have to review the promotion, but it can be handled by the cardinal prefect and the staff. In this case, the staff would prepare a five-page summary of the documents, which the prefect would then present with his recommendation to the Pope in a private audience.

If the appointment involves a priest who is to be made a bishop, his candidacy must be considered by the full congregation. A cardinal relator is chosen by the undersecretary of the congregation to summarize the documentation and make a report at the meeting of the congregation. The cardinal relator has to be fairly fluent in the language of the country of the candidate, since only the pronuncio's report is in Italian.

The cardinal relator is often a former papal representative from the country of the candidate being considered. But since the congregation does not have a former representative from the United States, Cardinal William Baum, an American who resides in Rome, is sometimes the cardinal relator, but not always. The job of relator is rotated in order not to overburden any of the cardinals. Cardinal Baum, for example, is also prefect of the Congregation for Education and cannot devote all of his time to the Congregation for Bishops. The more complicated and controversial the appointment, the more likely the undersecretary will try to get a relator fluent enough to understand the nuances in the documents.

All of the members of the congregation are notified two weeks before the next meeting and given the agenda, which usually consists of four or five appointments that will be up for consideration. Only those planning to attend the meeting, however, are given the pronuncio's report. Since most of the noncurial members of the congregation usually do not attend, the decisions of the 32-member congregation are heavily influenced by the 14 curial cardinals.

Cardinal Terence Cooke and Cardinal Humberto Medeiros were members of the congregation until they died,

and they have not been replaced by other Americans. In any case, they attended only a few meetings of the congregation when they were in Rome for other business. Cardinal Cooke was known to make special trips to Rome when the congregation was considering appointments in New York.

Muriel Bowen in *Concilium* (137) reported that through most of the 1970's Cardinal Heenan of Britain and Cardinal Conway of Ireland would attend meetings of the congregation when appointments were being considered for their countries. Cardinal Heenan told her that when an appointment to Upper Volta was being considered, "I keep silence, read my papers, write my letters," but when an English bishop was being appointed, "I made clear whom we consider the best man." Cardinal Wright before his death in 1979 complained to her, "Now it's reached the point where everybody falls over backwards to meet the wishes of the local church. People like myself with wider experience are ignored."

At the meetings (usually on Thursdays) of the congregation in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the cardinal relator gives his report in Italian and the members of the congregation discuss in Italian the appointment under the chairmanship of the cardinal prefect, who until recently was Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio but is now Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, from the Benin Republic in West Africa.

### 'The entire process takes from four to eight months'

After the members of the congregation discuss the appointment, they vote. Very often (some estimate 80 to 90 percent of the time) they follow the recommendation of the pronuncio. Sometimes they recommend his second or third choice. And sometimes they reject the terna altogether and tell him to present a new one.

There has been some speculation that when Archbishop Jadot was apostolic delegate from 1973 to 1980, most of his recommendations were approved at the beginning of his term but that toward the end he had more of them rejected. "[Archbishop] Jadot was very high when Paul was Pope," commented one expert on the American hierarchy, "but he went down under John Paul." This observer noted that "in 1980 when the president of the Secretariat for Nonbelievers died of a heart attack, Archbishop Jadot was appointed to replace him in a disgraceful haste in order to get him out of the United States." A Vatican official, however, categorically denied this. "It is not true that Jadot was removed," he said. "He asked to leave for reasons of health."

Whatever the case, once he got to Rome, Archbishop Jadot says he was not consulted concerning appointments to



the U.S. hierarchy. This reluctance of the Vatican to use an obvious source of information supports the view that he is out of favor in Rome.

The final step in the appointment process is taken when the prefect presents his and the congregation's recommendations to the Pope at a Saturday audience. The prefect summarizes the discussions of the congregation and reports any dissenting opinions and votes.

The Pope can play an active role at this point, especially if he knows the candidates, as might be the case with bishops being put forward for promotions. Certainly Pope John Paul II would play an active role in appointments in the Polish church, as Pope Paul did in the Italian hierarchy. The Pope would also have to play an important role if his advisers disagree with one another. Thus if the prefect and the congregation or the congregation and the pronuncio are not in agreement, the Pope would have to choose whom he would follow.

More important, perhaps, is the general orientation and direction that the Pope gives to the congregation, the pronuncio and the bishops. Archbishop Jadot, for example, was told to appoint more pastoral bishops in the United States. Pope John Paul II, for his part, seemed to stress unity and fidelity to the magisterium in his address to the American bishops making their ad limina visits in September 1983. He said that they should look for "priests who have already proven themselves as teachers of the faith as it is proclaimed by the magisterium of the church and who, in the words of St. Paul's pastoral advice to Titus, 'hold fast to the authentic message' (1:9)." He told the bishops, "It is important for the episcopal candidate, as for the bishop himself, to be a sign of the unity of the universal church . . . . Never is the unity of the local church stronger and more secure, never is the ministry of the local bishop more effective than when the local church under the pastoral leadership of the local bishop proclaims in word and deed the universal faith, when it is open in charity to all the needs of the universal church and when it embraces faithfully the church's universal discipline."

A few days after meeting with the prefect, the Pope informs the congregation of his decision. The congregation notifies the pronuncio, who then approaches the nominee and asks if he will accept the appointment. The extent of the secrecy involved in the process is evident in the number of appointees who are honestly surprised when they are approached. If the candidate accepts, Rome is notified and a date is set for the announcement. The entire process takes from four to eight months from the time a vacancy occurs.

### Conclusion

A number of things become clear from a description of the process by which a bishop is appointed. The pronuncio, as long as he maintains the confidence of the Vatican, is the key figure in the process. For ordinaries, he draws up the

terna, and for auxiliaries, he can influence or veto the terna drawn up by an ordinary. But once he loses the confidence of the Vatican, he will soon be removed. In addition to his role in developing the terna, the pronuncio is very influential through his report, which accompanies the terna. This report is in Italian, the first language of most of the staff and curial cardinals on the Congregation for Bishops. While he does send other documents to the congregation, which can be read by members of the congregation and its staff who read English, his report is the primary document. In 1973 Archbishop Jadot was asked to translate all the English documents into Italian, but he refused because of the immensity of the task. In the 1950's the documents were all translated into Latin.

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### 'Most of those involved in the process oppose making it more democratic'

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Although the pronuncio plays a key role in the selection of bishops, the American bishops are also very important. First, by nominating priests in province meetings they provide the pool of candidates from which bishops are selected. Second, by drawing up the ternae for auxiliaries, ordinaries have a tremendous impact on the American hierarchy. Two-thirds of all the U.S. bishops received their first appointments as auxiliaries, including 57 percent of the ordinaries. They also can influence the pronuncio's terna with their suggestions.

A third key actor in the process is the retiring ordinary or, in his absence, the administrator of the diocese. He determines how wide and thorough will be the consultations on the needs of the diocese and the qualities desired in the next ordinary. He recommends to the pronuncio the names of people who should be consulted about the diocese and the appointment.

A fourth set of actors are the priests and others who fill out the questionnaires on the individual candidates. These are primarily diocesan officials or members of committees listed in *The Official Catholic Directory*. With their answers they can make or break a candidate.

Fifth, there is the role of the Congregation for Bishops and its prefect. Their role appears to be primarily a check on the pronuncio. If he loses their confidence, they get him replaced.

The absence of resident American cardinals on the congregation is an obvious defect in the current operation of the congregation. But it would be of little help if American cardinals are appointed and then rarely attend, as has been the case in the past. It is silly for American Catholics to complain about Italian domination of the Roman curia if American cardinals are not willing to fly to Rome to attend important congregation meetings. Certainly the American church can afford the plane fares. But if they do attend,



they will have to learn Italian since it is the working language of the Vatican.

Finally, there is the all-important role of the Pope. He is the one who can ultimately appoint as bishop any priest he wants. While he cannot give his undivided attention to each appointment throughout the world, he sets the tone and the criteria by which candidates are nominated and evaluated. He works primarily through the Congregation for Bishops and the pronuncio, who are well aware of his wishes. If he does not like what they are doing, he can replace them.

The selection process is not a democratic process but an institutional process that attempts through wide consultation to find a candidate who will be a pastoral bishop sincerely concerned about the good of the people in his diocese. On paper it appears to be an autocratic process, but what makes it work as well as it does is the good faith of the participants, who are concerned for the good of the church and recognize the problems that would result from imposing a bishop at odds with his priests and people.

Besides good will on the part of the participants, the process works well because of the checks and balances provided by people at various levels within the process. For example, the administrator of a diocese and a small clique of

chancery officials might conceivably push a candidate who the pronuncio finds through his investigation is not widely supported. Or if the pronuncio begins appointing bishops out of touch with the needs of the American church, the American bishops, especially the archbishops and cardinals, can appeal to the Congregation for Bishops or even the Pope. Even the role of Rome is limited by the fact that it is almost totally dependent upon information that is sent to it by the pronuncio and the American church.

Although most of those involved in the process oppose making it more democratic and public, they believe that the major flaw in the process is the fact the priests do not take it seriously. Priests can have an impact through recommending names to the bishops and the pronuncio and by thoughtfully filling out the questionnaires on the candidates. Lay participants are handicapped by their limited knowledge of possible candidates. They can, however, have an important impact in describing the needs of the diocese and the kind of bishop they would like. The bishop must ultimately serve their spiritual needs and be their pastoral leader. While there might be another system that would work better, these are the procedures that are in effect, and it is best to make the most of them. ■

## *The Supper that Refreshes*

The tranquil night  
At the time of the rising dawn,  
Silent music,  
Sounding solitude,  
The supper that refreshes  
and deepens love.  
—St. John of the Cross

*a quiet place within  
where stillness speaks and  
silence listens*

*thirst finds water—  
thirsts again*

*hunger breaks bread from  
stones of distraction*

*love rises  
quiet as moonlight  
on snow.*

JOAN WILLIAMS, O.C.D.





