



*Original text: Italian
Unrevised translation*

1st General Congregation
October 2, 2024

**PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE 10 WORKING GROUPS
ESTABLISHED BY POPE FRANCIS**

Group 7

Some aspects of the person and ministry of the Bishop (criteria for selecting candidates to Episcopacy, judicial function of the Bishops, nature and course of *ad limina* *Apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective (SR 12 and 13)

1) Defining of themes

In conformity with the mandate received from the Holy Father, and noting that other Groups are working on the judicial function of the Bishop (Subgroup 7) as well as the role of Pontifical Representatives (Group 8), Group 7 proposes to examine the following questions in greater depth:

- criteria for selecting candidates for the episcopate who place themselves at the service of the Church in a missionary synodal perspective;
- involvement of Episcopal Conferences and local Churches in their plurality in the selection process;
- the modalities for carrying out *ad limina* visits in a missionary synodal perspective.

The group agreed that it would be advisable to begin with the first two points and to continue with the third point at a later date.

2) Purpose of the Work

The Group intends to offer the Holy Father assessments and proposals to ensure that the ministry of the bishop may better correspond to the model of a missionary synodal Church, a vision of Church that is emerging thanks to the synodal journey of 2021-2024 and to a more active involvement of the People of God in the process of selecting new bishops.

It must be remembered that the Pope has the sole responsibility for appointing bishops or for confirming legitimately elected bishops (can. 377 § 1 CIC), and that the provision of bishops in the Catholic Church - except for particular cases reserved by special procedures mostly to the Secretariat of State (such as the selection of Papal Representatives) - falls under the competence of following three Dicastries of the Roman Curia: the Dicastery for Bishops (for territories of common law), the Dicastery for Evangelisation - Section Two (for territories of first evangelisation where *ius missionalis* is in force), the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches (for the Eastern Catholic Churches). While the procedures followed in the latter Dicastery are juridically outlined, and consequently are public, those adopted by the first two Dicastries are

only partially derivable from the canonical norms in force (cf. cann. 377ff CIC), norms that are complemented by consolidated internal practices.

These norms already provide for the involvement of Episcopal Conferences and members of the local Church in the process of selecting bishops (cf. can. 377 § 3 CIC), but the norms do not always seem to be well understood and respected. What emerges here is the need to consider fundamental, and not incidental or optional, the synodal, i.e. participatory, dimension of the procedure for identifying candidates for the episcopate.

3) Working Material

The Group intends to use a synodal methodology to consider:

- the contributions received by the General Secretariat of the Synod in the First Stage of the Synodal Process (from Episcopal Conferences, Eastern Ecclesiastical Structures, International Groupings of Episcopal Conferences, USG-UISG), contributions which at times explicitly raise the issue of the selection of candidates for the episcopate;
- observations and proposals gathered by the Dicastery for Bishops at their recent Ordinary Congregation specifically dedicated to this theme, subject of course to confidentiality requirements;
- requests that emerged from the First Session of the Synod Assembly and were collected in the *Synthesis Report*;
- considerations that will arise in this regard from the Second Session of the Synod Assembly;
- expertise gained in civil society regarding the selection of management personnel, bearing in mind that in such procedures there is an increased tendency to focus on the candidate's personal experiences, and thus on the complexity of their history, in all its facets that structure the course of any human story.

4) Expectations of the People of God

- **Greater transparency.** The call emerges for greater transparency and accountability in the processes of selecting candidates for the episcopate, the confidentiality of which sometimes gives rise among the faithful to doubts regarding the honesty of the procedures implemented and, more generally, unease regarding methods deemed inconsistent with a synodal Church model.
- **More attention to the reality of the local Church.** There arises the need to take into better account the history and current situation of a given local Church in the process of selecting who will be called to lead it as bishop. It is important, in particular, that the discernment take into account the cultural factors that shape the face of a Church and which, by their very nature, require an attentive listening to its members and a direct knowledge of its experience.
- **More involvement of the local church in selecting candidates.** There is a desire for more effective involvement of diocesan synodal bodies in the process of selecting bishops, beginning with the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council. At the end of this discernment, for example, the local Church could be called upon to draw up a 'profile' of the bishop it needs. Such a process could also positively represent a moment in which a Church becomes aware of its own journey and the directions in which the voice of the Holy Spirit is calling it.

5) Fundamental questions

- What qualities must candidates for episcopal ministry in a missionary synodal Church possess??
- In the process of selecting candidates for the episcopate, how can key contacts be more extensively and effectively involved? How can the questionnaire(s) currently used be revised

and adapted to different circumstances? How can it be ensured that existing standards are respected? What changes can be made to them? How can Episcopal Conferences be better involved? What more effective collaboration can be established between the presidency of Episcopal Conference and the Apostolic Nunciature (taking into account the concordats between States and the Apostolic See which, in certain cases, regulate the processing of candidatures)? What greater participation of the People of God is possible and realistic, e.g. the Presbyteral Council, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, consecrated persons and the lay faithful involved in pastoral life, taking particular account of women? How should the necessary confidentiality of the enquiry regarding candidates be united to the legitimate need for transparent procedures?

- How should the initial and ongoing formation of those called to the episcopate take shape?

6) Further Steps

- To enter into dialogue with the Apostolic Nuncios and the Members and Officials of the Dicasteries concerned. The Group also considers it appropriate to schedule a joint meeting with Group 8 on Pontifical Representatives.
- Consult the Presidencies of the Episcopal Conferences to learn their experience and expectations.
- Given that this is a delicate matter, from which it is obviously excluded the evaluation of the contents regarding individual candidatures for the episcopate, the group intends to further assess the possible inclusion additional in these discussions so that they might contribute to the discernment.

Lastly, regarding the reflection on *ad limina* visits, the Group awaits the results from the survey that the Dicastery for Bishops (which is responsible for their organisation, cf. the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, Art. 108) has already requested all the Bishops' Conferences to complete, calling on them to evaluate existing practice and formulate proposals for improvement.