

## **STUDY GROUPS**

on relevant questions from the *Synthesis' Report* of the First Session  
of the XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH:  
COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION

### **STUDY GROUP N. 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.**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** **OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> PART ON** **THE PROCEDURES FOR THE SELECTION** **OF CANDIDATES FOR THE EPISCOPATE**

[Original text: Italian. Working translation]

The report of Study Group 7 intends to help to understand and carry out the process of selecting candidates for the Episcopate as an ecclesial moment, guided by the Holy Spirit and characterized by an attitude of prayer, listening, and discernment. In this process, numerous subjects are involved, in different capacities: first of all, the local Church guided by its Bishop; then the Bishops belonging to the same Ecclesiastical Province or gathered in the Episcopal Conference; finally, the Pontifical Representation presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio, which maintains contact with the Roman Curia.

After having recommended that, in the selection of the Bishop, account be taken, among the required qualities, of the “synodal competencies” of the candidates, that is, sensitivity to the needs of a synodal and missionary Church, the Group expresses the hope that the Nuncios themselves first possess a synodal and missionary profile so as to be able, in turn, to seek it in those who are indicated to them as possible Bishops.

In the awareness that, from the earliest centuries, the local Church has been consulted in various ways in the process of selecting its own Bishop, the Group proposes that periodically each Diocese implement processes of discernment regarding its own state and its own needs: processes that can allow, on the one hand, the identification within the Diocese of Priests to be proposed as candidates for the Episcopate and, on the other hand, the formulation of the profile of the future Pastor of that local Church. In particular, in view of the session in which the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province

(or of the Episcopal Conference) are called to draw up a list of candidates for the Episcopate to be transmitted to the Apostolic See, the Group proposes that the Bishop convene at least the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, so that each of the members may submit to the Bishop, in a sealed envelope, the names of Priests operating in the Diocese whom he judges suitable for the Episcopate, and an opinion regarding the profile of the future Bishop of their own local Church, with the names of Bishops or Priests whom they consider suitable for succession. The results of these consultations must be presented by the Bishop to the assembly of the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province or of the Episcopal Conference, who will draw up a list of candidates for the Episcopate that is as much as possible an expression of their consensus.

The Group further proposes that, when the moment of the succession of the Pastor approaches, the outgoing Bishop promote specific moments of communal discernment. Moreover, at the moment in which the local Church becomes vacant or the Holy See authorizes the initiation of the procedures for succession, it suggests that a Committee for the provision of the local Church be established in the Diocese, of which the Apostolic Nuncio avails himself in order to clarify the state of the Diocese, the profile of the new Pastor, and also to obtain opinions on possible candidacies.

For his part, the Nuncio receives the results of the consultations carried out in each Diocese and in each Ecclesiastical Province (or in the Episcopal Conference) and integrates them with further consultations. In this regard, the Group recommends consulting not only Clerics, but also an equivalent number of lay and consecrated persons. The purpose of the consultation is to bring out as much as possible the truth, both regarding the state of the Diocese and its needs, and regarding the worthiness and suitability of the possible candidates for the Episcopate. The Group suggests updating and differentiating the questionnaires to be administered to informants, as well as making use of personal interviews, which are especially useful where the written questionnaire appears insufficient to obtain an adequate knowledge of situations and persons.

The Group considers that the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia tasked with assisting the Bishop of Rome in the provision of the local Churches are also, for their part, called to review their procedures so that the method of ecclesial discernment may shape their ordinary activity.

In the spirit of the synodal process 2021–2024, the Group further proposes providing for forms of evaluation of the processes of selecting candidates for the Episcopate. Such evaluation must take place at regular intervals, ascertain whether the processes meet the standards of a synodal and missionary Church, promote the sharing of good practices, and adopt the measures that will prove necessary. Periodically, at the discretion of the Pope, the Group finally suggests establishing an independent ecclesiastical commission, which will include in its evaluation the work of the Dicasteries of the Curia.