



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**

**FINAL REPORT OF THE 1ST PART ON
THE PROCEDURES FOR THE SELECTION
OF CANDIDATES FOR THE EPISCOPATE**



FINAL REPORT

[Original text: Italian. Working translation

INDEX

1. Purpose and Scope of these Proposals.....	2
2. Bishops with a Synodal and Missionary Profile.....	3
3. Apostolic Nuncios with a Synodal and Missionary Profile.....	3
4. Discernment by the Local Church and the Bishops of the Territory.....	4
5. The Moment of the Episcopal Succession.....	5
6. Discernment by the Apostolic Nunciature.....	6
7. Providing Differentiated Forms of Consultation.....	7
8. Reviewing the Procedures of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia.....	7
9. The Moment of Accepting the Appointment.....	7
10. Regular Evaluation of the Process.....	8

1. Purpose and Scope of these Proposals

- a. The following proposals are intended to follow up on the results of the Synodal Process 2021-2024 and, in particular, on the requests expressed in the *Synthesis Report* approved at the conclusion of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: “The Assembly calls for a review of the criteria for selecting candidates for the episcopate, balancing the authority of the Apostolic Nuncio with participation of Episcopal Conferences. There are also requests to expand consultation with the faithful People of God, and to involve a greater number of lay people and consecrated persons in the consultation process, taking care to avoid being put under any undue pressure in the selection process” (12, 1).
- b. The relevant canons of the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches must be adapted in accordance with the synodal spirit of the following proposals.
- c. The proposals take the current practice as their starting point, recognizing that it already contains elements of synodality that should be preserved and strengthened.
- d. Their purpose is to help understand and carry out the selection of candidates for the episcopate as an authentically ecclesial process, in which the roles of those called to collaborate with the Bishop of Rome and the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia that assist him are clearly defined. It is a process guided by the Holy Spirit and characterized at every stage by an attitude of prayer, listening, and discernment of what He “says to the Churches” (*Rev 2,7* and *passim*). These participants include: the People of God living in each local Church under the guidance of the bishop; the bishops belonging to the same Ecclesiastical Province or gathered in the Episcopal Conference; and the Pontifical Representation presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio.
- e. The following are guiding criteria that must be carefully contextualized. The processes for selecting candidates for the episcopate must take into account the diversity of cultures and situations within the Catholic Church and, consequently, be sufficiently flexible (considering, among other things, the differences between large and small countries, the condition of Churches where ecclesial structures are not yet firmly established, the concrete possibilities of Apostolic Nuncios entrusted with multiple Pontifical Representations, and the existence in some States of concordats regulating episcopal appointments). It is therefore possible for the Papal Representatives, after obtaining authorisation from the competent Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, to adapt the following proposals to the specific situation.
- f. These proposals pertain to the Church of the Latin rite. The discipline for the provision of local Churches established in the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches – especially regarding the role of the Patriarchal Synod – has helped strengthen the involvement of Bishops in the territory. In turn, some of these proposals may, *mutatis mutandis*, serve as inspiration for the Eastern Catholic Churches.
- g. The following concerns the processes for selecting candidates for the ministry of diocesan Bishop, coadjutor Bishop and auxiliary Bishop. In the latter case, together with an assessment of the real need for an Auxiliary in contexts where his functions could be adequately performed by priests, particular consideration will be given to the opinion of the Ordinary and the relationship of collaboration with him, so that the Auxiliary can work in harmony with the diocesan Bishop.

2. Bishops with a Synodal and Missionary Profile

- a. Personal dignity and suitability for pastoral ministry in service to a specific local Church are the two fundamental criteria in the process of selecting candidates for the episcopate. Among the qualities sought in a bishop are moral integrity, doctrinal orthodoxy, pastoral sensitivity, leadership ability, and the capacity to administer the Church's goods (cf. LG 24–27; CD 11–16; can. 378 §1).
- b. At the same time, the Second Vatican Council emphasizes that bishops, “with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community” (LG 20), and that they are called to listen to the lay faithful, to make use of their counsel, to recognize their ministries and charisms, and to entrust them with responsibilities for the good of the Church (cf. LG 27, 30, 37). Therefore, in the selection of a bishop, it is necessary to consider, among other qualities, his “synodal competencies.” Indeed, as Pope Leo XIV stated, “It is his duty to build communion among its members and with the universal Church by fostering the variety of gifts and ministries given for its own growth and for the spread of the Gospel.” In this sense, “a clear sign of [the bishop's pastoral] prudence is his exercise of dialogue as a style and method, both in his relationships with others and in his presiding over participatory bodies: in other words, in his overseeing of synodality in his particular Church” (*Address to Bishops on the occasion of their Jubilee, 25 June 2025*).
- c. Sensitivity to the needs of a synodal and missionary Church requires in a bishop openness to complexity, a disposition toward innovation, the ability to adapt to new situations, a deep knowledge of local cultures, and a willingness to integrate into them constructively.
- d. The guidelines for the Apostolic Nunciatures must be adapted to give concrete implementation to these indications.

3. Apostolic Nuncios with a Synodal and Missionary Profile

- a. Apostolic Nuncios are responsible for coordinating the process of selecting candidates for the episcopate (cf. CIC, can. 364, n. 4). They act as intermediaries between the local Churches and the competent Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and it is their task to conduct the preliminary investigation leading to the formation of the list of three candidates to be submitted to the Apostolic See (cf. can. 377 §3).
- b. Nuncios must themselves possess a synodal and missionary profile, so that they can seek these same qualities in those proposed to them as potential bishops. The members of the Holy See's diplomatic staff – among whom it is hoped that lay men and women may be welcomed in the future – must be selected based on their willingness and ability to carry out their responsibilities in a synodal style and with missionary zeal. Before assuming their role, they must be adequately formed for this purpose, acquiring pastoral sensitivity, a sense of the local Church, and appropriate experience in ecclesial discernment. For these aspects, reference is made to the work of Study Group no. 8.
- c. In the discernment process concerning the candidates to be presented to the Bishop of Rome, the staff of each Pontifical Representation, under the responsibility of the Nuncio, shall adopt a

synodal method, characterized by prayer, by “conversation in the Spirit” (or a similar method), and by a common seeking of the will of God.

4. Discernment by the Local Church and the Bishops of the Territory

- a. History shows that the local Church has ordinarily been involved in the process of selecting its Pastor, even though this participation has taken different forms over time. The synodal process encourages the appreciation and adaptation of this traditional element to present circumstances. This requires, first of all, an investment in formation, which will help all members of the People of God to refine their capacity for discernment and to acquire a deeper theological and pastoral understanding of the ministry of the Bishop.
- b. At the same time, each local Church must foster the charisms of its priests. In many dioceses, there are teams that assist the bishop in the ongoing formation of the clergy, composed of priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and laity. It is desirable that such teams, taking into account local circumstances, be established elsewhere as well, so that the Bishop is not left alone in this work of accompaniment. Within such a context, suitable figures for the episcopate will more easily be identified among the priests. It belongs in a particular manner to the Bishop, according to the evangelical logic of talents to be acknowledged and fostered, to discern who, among the diocesan clergy and also among religious priests serving in the diocese, may be proposed as candidates for the episcopate, and to allow them to acquire over time a solid and diverse pastoral experience, which will serve as a kind of remote preparation for a possible episcopal ministry.
- c. It is desirable that each local Church periodically undertake processes of discernment regarding its current state and needs. These processes should allow, on the one hand, the identification of priests within the diocese to be proposed as episcopal candidates, and on the other, the development of a profile for the future Pastor of that same local Church. These processes must involve, in particular, the diocesan participatory bodies. Therefore, in preparation for the session in which the bishops of the ecclesiastical province (or of the episcopal conference) are called to draw up a list of episcopal candidates to be submitted to the Apostolic See (cf. CIC, can. 377 §2), the bishop must convene the presbyteral council and the diocesan pastoral council. Under the guidance of their Pastor, in an atmosphere of common prayer and fraternal exchange, each of these bodies will collegially formulate a written opinion on the state and needs of the diocese. Furthermore, as a fruit of this discernment, each member of these bodies will submit to the bishop, in a sealed envelope: 1) the names of priests serving in the diocese whom they consider suitable for the episcopate (specifying, for each, the type of local Church for which he might be best suited, based on his qualities, experiences, and competencies); 2) an opinion on the profile of the future bishop of their local Church and the names of bishops or priests (not necessarily serving in the diocese) whom they consider suitable for succession. All proposals must be accompanied by clear justifications. Where circumstances allow, the cathedral chapter, the diocesan finance council, the lay council, the unions of consecrated men and women, and diocesan groups that institutionally represent youth and the poor should also be convened.
- d. The bishop, in addition to transmitting the collected material to the Apostolic Nunciature, takes it into account in preparing for the discernment he is called to carry out together with his fellow

bishops. He may also seek the opinion of other priests, deacons, consecrated persons, and laypeople of the diocese, in order to promote a discernment that involves the local Church as broadly as possible.

- e. The results of the diocesan consultations are presented by the bishop to the assembly of bishops of the ecclesiastical province or, if circumstances suggest, of the episcopal conference. This moment, too, must be understood and carried out as an ecclesial discernment process in the Holy Spirit, marked by prayer and frank exchange among the bishops. Under the guidance of the metropolitan (or the president of the episcopal conference), they collegially assess the state of their dioceses, with the aim of strengthening pastoral collaboration and shared planning. This may also help prepare for the *ad limina Apostolorum* visit (cf. can. 399 §1). In addition, they draw up a list of episcopal candidates that reflects their consensus as much as possible. This list, to be submitted to the Apostolic See, must include not only names but also detailed comments.
- f. So that the Bishops may confer with one another regarding local Churches and candidates whom they truly know, it is preferable that this discernment take place at the level of the ecclesiastical province rather than the episcopal conference – unless the country is very small. This also aligns with the desired enhancement of ecclesiastical provinces (cf. *Final Document*, no. 119).
- g. Although current norms require that this process take place at least every three years (cf. CIC, can. 377 §2), experience shows that this timeline is not always realistic. In any case, it should be held at least every five years.

5. The Moment of the Episcopal Succession

- a. The moment of the episcopal succession should become a key opportunity for the local Church to engage in discernment about itself, in order to gain a clearer awareness of its current situation and the path to which it feels called by the Lord. For this reason, as the natural conclusion of his mandate approaches, it is the outgoing bishop's responsibility to promote appropriate moments of communal discernment, in forms that, in light of the local context, appear most suitable.
- b. When the local Church becomes vacant or the Holy See authorizes the initiation of procedures for the bishop's succession, a Committee for the Provision of the Local Church is established in the diocese. This Committee interacts with the Apostolic Nuncio and is composed of two diocesan priests elected by the Presbyteral Council, two consecrated men/women and two laypersons elected by the Diocesan Pastoral Council, along with the Diocesan Administrator or Apostolic Administrator, if present. Members of the Committee must be distinguished by their discretion, impartiality, ecclesial maturity, and knowledge of the local Church. If the See is not yet vacant, it is the bishop – having been informed by the Nuncio – who convenes the relevant bodies. If the see is vacant, the Diocesan or Apostolic Administrator must convene them immediately *ad actum*, even if they are technically no longer in office. Upon taking office, the Committee members take an oath to observe confidentiality, which does not prevent them from discreetly consulting other faithful of the local Church to gather useful information. From that moment, the Nuncio relies on this Committee to clarify the state of the diocese, the profile of the new Pastor, and to receive opinions on possible candidates.

- c. At the same time, continuing a good practice already in use, the Apostolic Nuncio consults the bishops of the ecclesiastical province – or those of the episcopal conference, in the case of a very small nation – to hear their views on the state of the diocese to be provided for, the profile of the bishop who should lead it, and possible candidates.
- d. In interacting with both the diocesan committee and the bishops of the territory, the Nuncio ensures that the process is not linear – where different parties are consulted only at specific moments – but circular, involving ongoing dialogue with the local Church and the episcopate of the territory throughout the various stages in the progress of the inquiry.
- e. What is outlined in sections 4 and 5 must be carried out without giving rise to any type of pressure on the future decisions of the Holy See. For this reason, members of the aforementioned diocesan bodies should be instructed on the theological and spiritual meaning of consultation in the Church, as a tool of discernment that is essentially different from a poll or referendum. To safeguard and protect all individuals involved, special attention should be given to formation in the observance of the pontifical secret, understood as a mature expression of ecclesial responsibility.

6. Discernment by the Apostolic Nunciature

- a. The Apostolic Nuncio receives the results of the consultations carried out in each diocese and ecclesiastical province (or episcopal conference) and supplements them with further consultations, at his reasonable discretion, involving priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and laypeople.
- b. When requesting nominations or gathering information on potential episcopal candidates, in order to ensure the confidentiality required out of respect for persons, the Nuncio—without prejudice to what is stated in 5b-c – relies solely on individual informants, both clerical and lay.
- c. The Nuncio must consult a group of informants that, insofar as possible, reflects the richness and diversity of the People of God.
- d. It is essential to consult not only clergy but also a possibly equivalent number of consecrated persons and laity, avoiding risks such as clericalism, politicization or polarization of views, and familial, tribal, or ethnic influences. Informants should include a suitable number of women and young people, representatives of ecclesiastical universities and faculties, members of ecclesial movements, individuals recognized for special charisms, the poor and marginalized, and members of Indigenous communities or ethnic/linguistic minorities.
- e. In the context of gathering information on the state of the diocese and the profile of the new bishop, it is also possible to hear from individuals representing civil society and the cultural sphere, as well as those who do not profess faith or have left ecclesial practice.
- f. It is desirable that the Apostolic Nunciature maintain updated lists of members of participatory bodies in local Churches, so that it may draw information primarily from them. Additionally, to assist the Nuncio, each bishop is encouraged to compile and submit to the Nunciature, at least every three years, a list of potential informants within his diocesan territory.

- g. The Nuncio must take into account the list of informants provided by the bishop and supplement it with others, giving preference to those with a synodal and missionary sensitivity and direct knowledge of the diocesan reality or the potential candidates.
- h. The Nuncio should also consider information gathered from the Internet, which can be very helpful, while taking care to accurately verify its reliability.
- i. The faithful should be informed that they are always free to send to the Nunciature any information they consider useful regarding the state of their diocese and the profile of potential episcopal candidates.

7. Providing Differentiated Forms of Consultation

- a. The purpose of consultation is to bring to light the truth as fully as possible – both regarding the state and needs of the diocese and the dignity and suitability of potential episcopal candidates.
- b. One form of consultation is the use of confidential questionnaires. These questionnaires must: be updated in light of the criteria outlined in section 2; be tailored to the categories of respondents (bishops, priests and deacons, consecrated persons, laypeople, etc.); be adapted to different territories with the help of the episcopal conference; include questions that allow informants to express their opinions freely. No questionnaire should contain leading questions that suggest the desired answers, as their purpose is to gather testimony, not to elicit predetermined responses.
- c. A second form of consultation consists of confidential personal interviews with informants. These are especially useful, though not exclusively, where written questionnaires alone are insufficient to gain an adequate understanding of situations and individuals. Through dialogue, the Nuncio can help the faithful offer honest and detailed testimony. The Nuncio must always prepare a written report of these oral interviews.

8. Reviewing the Procedures of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia

The Dicasteries of the Roman Curia tasked with assisting the Bishop of Rome in the provision of local Churches – the Dicastery for Evangelization (Section for First Evangelization and New Particular Churches), the Dicastery for Bishops, and, without prejudice to the proper law of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches – are likewise called to review their procedures so that the method of ecclesial discernment may increasingly shape their ordinary operations, in the spirit of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* and related papal pronouncements.

9. The Moment of Accepting the Appointment

- a. After the Bishop of Rome, having received the list of three candidates for the leadership of a local Church, has made his choice, it is the responsibility of the Apostolic Nuncio to inform, in a confidential manner, the person whom the Pope intends to appoint.
- b. If requested, the designated candidate may be granted a reasonable period (no more than seven to ten days) before signing the acceptance of the appointment, so that he may pray, reflect, and seek counsel.

10. Regular Evaluation of the Process

- a. Since the Synodal Process 2021–2024 expressed the desire for a growing culture of accountability in the Church (cf. *Final Document*, nos. 95–102), it is proposed that forms of evaluation be established for the processes carried out in the selection of episcopal candidates.
- b. This evaluation should take place at regular intervals, verify whether the selection processes meet the standards of a synodal and missionary Church, foster the sharing of good practices, and implement any necessary improvements. To this end, it may be appropriate to consult a representative sample of those involved in the process (members of the local Church, bishops, the Apostolic Nuncio and Nunciature staff, *etc.*).
- c. Periodically, at the discretion of the Pope, an independent ecclesiastical commission will be established, which will also include in its evaluation the activity of the competent Dicasteries of the Roman Curia.
- d. The competent Dicastery is to transmit to the Nuncio the observations regarding the candidates at the conclusion of each process for the provision of local Churches.