ECC Guidelines for the Election and Consecration of Bishops

Recommendations Regarding Desired Characteristics of Candidates for Episcopacy

Ordinarily, a candidate should be at least forty years of age, and have been an ECC presbyter for a minimum of five years prior to candidacy. At least five years of a candidate's time as a presbyter should have been spent in pastoral ministry as a parish pastor or mission administrator or as an associate/assistant pastor, or as an institutional chaplain whose practice included sacramental ministry.

A candidate should have the explicit written endorsement (with personal affidavits) of the regional/diocesan Presbyterium of which the candidate is a member, of the faith community in which the candidate serves or is a priest in residence, and of the candidate's spouse.

Candidates for Diocesan Episcopate should visit each faith community and mission within the Diocese, acting as guest presider at Eucharist, preaching the homily, meeting with the parish board, and with members of the community within an open question-answer forum or some similar venue as determined by each faith community.

Qualities that a bishop (and therefore a candidate) should have:

A bishop should be solidly grounded in the Catholic faith, as this Communion has received it, and articulate in affirming it.

A bishop should have a sound knowledge of Scripture and theology, and be an able preacher, teacher, and evangelist.

A bishop should have a thorough familiarity with the Constitution and Canons of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, ECC ecclesiology (cf. C10-16), and an understanding of the mission of the Communion and particularly the local church (Diocese) as an "incarnational" ministry of discipleship and evangelization. Within this context, the candidate should demonstrate appreciation of the roles of the orders of ministry within the church, and the dynamics of ecclesial interaction and relationships among them:

- the Laity - the *Laos Theou*, the "People of God," into which all are joined by Baptism, and commissioned to the ministry of justice, peace and reconciliation.
- the Bishop – *Episcopos*, the "attentive" or "watchful one" and the *Pontifex* or "bridge builder," who safeguards the church's unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity, and prophetically encourages the People of God to be faithful to their baptismal covenant.
- the Presbyters, who counsel, support, exhort, nurture, and inspire the People through the ministry of Word and Sacrament; and who together constitute the Council of the Bishop.
- The Deacons, the Bishop's "eyes and ears," who interpret the world to the church, and share concretely in the bishop's prophetic and interpretive ministry as the bishop's agents or representatives.

A bishop is a consensus builder, someone with good communication skills - someone given to negotiation and reasonable compromise, engaging others in a manner that is communicative and collaborative rather than divisive or contentious, but who is nonetheless a person of conviction.

A bishop knows that there are a wonderful variety of gifts freely bestowed by the Spirit, who allots to each one individually as the Spirit chooses for the building up of the Body of Christ. A bishop seeks to recognize these gifts given to the *Laos Theou*, and to cultivate, nurture, and encourage them.

A bishop is an instrument of genuine unity and peace, always reminding the People of God that they are the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, that there should be no dissension within the Body, that they should care for one another in such a way that if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1Cor12:25-26).

A bishop prophetically engages secular society, seeking to identify new problems and propose new solutions – but to always bring out the new solutions from the storehouse of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Matt 13:52)

A bishop is a person with vision – someone who looks at the broader community in which the local church is embedded and sees not only the "big picture" of things as they are but has an "eschatological" vision of things as they should be,

shares that vision with the church, and helps the church to help the community at large move toward bringing about that "new creation."

A bishop is accessible and approachable, someone who evidences a concern for the personal and spiritual wellbeing of those whom the bishop serves and who is responsive to their needs and concerns.

A bishop is conscious that he or she was chosen and consecrated to exercise authority (*exousia*) *within* the "household" of faith ("*dia oikos*," or "diocese"), but not to have power (*dynamis*) *over* it; and that legitimate authority within the church exists to "build people up, not to tear them down" (II Cor 7:10).

The Process for the Selection of a Bishop

In a political or organizational election, we seek to discover the will of the people. In calling a bishop to service, we seek to discern the will of God.

Since the earliest days of the church, the discernment process has begun with *Testimonium* ("testimony"), the process of identifying and calling candidates. This first step in the discernment process involves the people and the clergy of a Diocese (or Diocese in formation), and the bishops of the Communion. While the nomination of a specific candidate or candidates is the desired outcome, this goal is accomplished not by surveying, polling and campaigning (though a survey may be a useful tool to facilitate dialogue), but through honest dialogue, reflection, and prayerful discernment. Whatever concrete processes may be implemented should reflect the guiding principle of *testimonium* as discernment of a call to vocation rather than "nomination to an office."

Suffragium – the process whereby a candidate is chosen – involves the people and the clergy of the diocese, but not the bishops of the Communion. *Suffragium*, like *testimonium*, is a discernment process. While "suffrage" in common usage has come to mean "one person – one *vote*," *suffragium* does not imply "majority rule." On the contrary, ecclesial suffrage (one person – one *voice*) seeks resolution through consensus. While complete consensus may not always be possible, it remains the ideal to which the people and clergy should aspire, and to which they should resolutely commit themselves. Whatever concrete process may be proposed and implemented should reflect the guiding principle of *suffragium* as discernment of a call, as well as the act of calling forth itself.

Judicium (judgment or adjudication) requires the consensus of the people, the clergy, and the bishops. As an expression of ecclesial consensus, the *judicium* is liturgically recognized and celebrated in the sacramental act of episcopal consecration. As many of the people of the Diocese as possible should be in attendance, as well as all the clergy. Ordinarily, all the bishops of the Communion (and especially diocesan bishops) should participate in the consecration of a new bishop. In addition to the essential sacramental act of episcopal consecration, their liturgical witness as "all the bishops of the province" is twofold. As ecclesial representatives of the people and clergy of their own dioceses, their participation affirms and ratifies the local community's decision by all the sister churches. It also symbolizes acceptance into the episcopal college: "the episcopate is one, each part of which is held by each one for the whole" (St. Cyprian of Carthage). For these reasons, diocesan bishops who are prevented from attending and participating should send their own written affirmation.

The full electoral process for the selection of a bishop should be characterized by the three essential ecclesial dynamics of "testimonium," "suffragium," and "judicium." Superficially, these dynamic processes correspond roughly to the three characteristic steps ordinarily associated with any election: nomination, deliberation and decision, and confirmation/ratification. But the election of a bishop is not just "any election." From the earliest days of the church the process for choosing a bishop has operated differently from secular political or organizational elections. A bishop is not elected to political office or to an administrative office in an organization; a bishop is called to an "order of ministry" within the church. So, while the three ecclesial dynamics of *testimonium, suffragium,* and *judicium* may roughly correspond to the generic sequence of any electoral process, they are nonetheless unique to the church.

Rationale: Hippolytus wrote that "the bishop should be consecrated after having been chosen by all the people." In the third century, Saint Cyprian of Carthage maintained that *testimonium, suffragium,* and *judicium* (variously involving the laity, the clergy, and synodal bishops) were established ecclesial processes throughout "almost all of the churches." Documentary evidence indicates that this was certainly the case in Rome, Spain, Roman North Africa (Cyprian of Carthage), and most probably Egypt and Syria (Origen, commenting on the influence of Hippolytus in these areas). The sole exception to the norm appears

to have been the church of Alexandria, in which the Presbyterium "had always" chosen their bishop (Jerome). The generally practiced process for choosing and consecrating a bishop was canonized (literally, in the sense of becoming an ecclesiastical "canon" – Canon 4) by the Council of Nicea.

Over time, despite the force of "divine appointment" and "apostolic tradition" (Cyprian) and the decrees of an ecumenical council of the undivided church, the established process for choosing bishops began to erode in the west, with clergy and hierarchs, and sometimes monarchs, taking increasing control of the entire process.*

Over the half century preceding Vatican II, western churches increasingly looked to the early church (albeit variously defined) as a model for understanding, interpreting, and re-grounding their present praxis. Such *resourcement* or "return to the sources" was not a nostalgic exercise, but a genuine attempt to delve into and rediscover the original charism underlying much of what the church strives to be and do today. *Resourcement* and *aggiornamento* ("bringing up-to-date") gave birth to liturgical renewal and theological development in the Roman Catholic Church and prepared the way for the Second Vatican Council. Catholic Churches outside the Roman Communion, without the constraint of centralized bureaucratic control, have continued to rediscover and reclaim the praxis that characterized the early church and first provided the foundational charismatic dynamic of Catholic identity.

This document proposes to take an ecclesial *resourcement* approach to establishing guidelines for the calling of bishops. It is intended to be an "ecclesiological" and "ecclesial" rather than an "ecclesiastical" document. That which is "ecclesiastical" has to do with the organization and administration of a church, an organizational association of churches, or a denomination. An ecclesiastical focus is therefore juridical and legislative. That which is "ecclesial" has to do with the dynamic mind, heart and soul of being and doing church. These guidelines, therefore, seek to define a context, identify a value system, set priorities, resolve apparent contradictions, and clarify ambiguities from an *ecclesiological* and *ecclesial* rather than *ecclesiastical* perspective.

*At the Fourth Lateran Council, Pope Innocent III restricted local participation in the electoral *testimonium* and *suffragium* to cathedral

chapters. Trent further restricted participation in the process. The First Vatican Council basically reinvented it. *Testimonium, suffragium,* and *judicium* are still *nominal* aspects of the current Roman Catholic process; but apart from their original context (participation by all the laity and clergy of a diocese, and "all the bishops of the province") their definition has been accommodated to fit the curial box. In the eastern churches (and those currently emulating the eastern practice), Canon 4 of the Council of Nicea remains essentially in effect, with the gloss of some ethnic and cultural nuances or specific compromises necessitated by geography or external constraints.