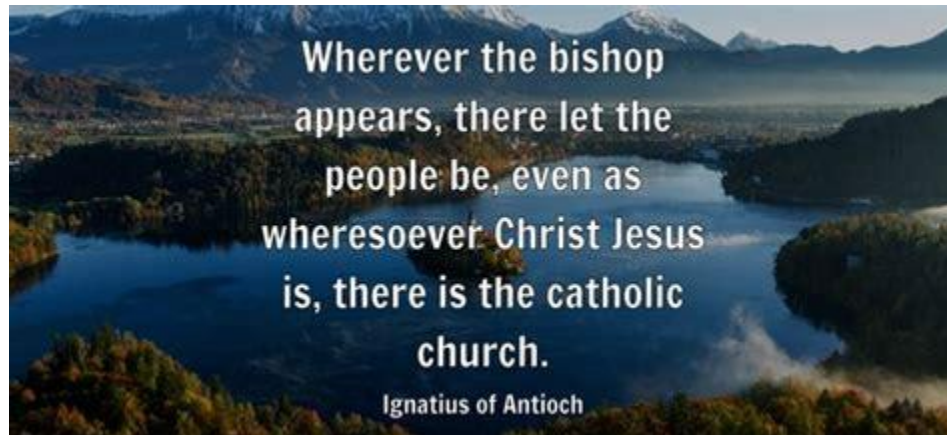


**FROM FATHER JOHN:** “*This saying is trustworthy: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Therefore, a bishop must be irreproachable, married only once, temperate, self-controlled, decent, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not aggressive, but gentle, not contentious, not a lover of money.*” (1 Timothy 3:1 – 3)



When Bishop Spies was appointed to be the *Auxiliary Bishop* of Joliet, several people asked me how bishops are selected. It's a subject that many Catholics find interesting for the simple reason that a bishop has such a large impact on the diocese and on our practice of the faith. I thought I would take this opportunity to give everyone a basic explanation of the process the church goes through in considering who is ordained and installed as a bishop.

The first thing to remember about the process to appoint a bishop is the result of the process. The result is that the Holy Father **ALWAYS** appoints each bishop. The following paragraph is a basic definition of terms that are integral to the process of selecting and appointing a bishop.

The *Apostolic Nuncio* (also known as the *Papal Nuncio*) is the pope's representative to both the government and to the church hierarchy of a given nation. He coordinates the process of deciding who to recommend to the *Dicastery for Bishops* to fill an episcopal appointment. The *Dicastery for Bishops* is a department of the Roman Curia, headed by the prefect who is a Cardinal. The most recent prefect was Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost who is now Pope Leo XIV. I imagine that a new prefect will be appointed by Pope Leo in due time. The *Dicastery* coordinates and governs all aspects of episcopal appointments. There are approximately 35 people appointed to serve on the *Dicastery*. Most of them are cardinals and archbishops. The *Diocesan Bishop* is the ordinary of the diocese and has all legal and pastoral responsibility for the diocese. An *Auxiliary Bishop* is a bishop who is appointed to assist a diocesan bishop. A *Province* is a territory comprising one archdiocese (which is the metropolitan see; for us it is the Archdiocese of Chicago) and one or more other dioceses (which are suffragan sees; for us they are the Dioceses of Joliet, Rockford, Peoria, Springfield and Belleville). A *Terna* is a list of three candidates for a vacant office, including the office of bishop.

The first stage of the process is the accumulation of recommendations for candidates for episcopal ordination from the bishops of a province. This is done each year. Each bishop submits candidates to the archbishop, the archbishop then distributes to all the bishops of the province the names and *curricula vitae* of the priests submitted to him. The bishops discuss all the priests on the list and then vote on which priests to recommend. The number of names on this list will vary over time. A priest's name may be submitted years before he is ordained a bishop. The list of recommended candidates plus the minutes of the discussion are forwarded to the apostolic nuncio in Washington D.C. and to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

The second stage of the process is the recommendation of the *Apostolic Nuncio* to the *Dicastery for Bishops*. The *Apostolic Nuncio* conducts an investigation of the suitability of each candidate that he receives from each province. He begins by requesting a report from the current bishop, or the administrator of a diocese, on the conditions and needs of the diocese. Broad consultation is conducted on the conditions and needs of the diocese. If a *Diocesan Bishop* is retiring his recommendation of a successor is given consideration.

The *Apostolic Nuncio* will consult with some individuals within each priest-candidate's diocese including his bishop, previous bishops, pastors, seminary authorities, parish staff, etc. The bishops of the province are consulted as are the president and vice president of the USCCB. The *Papal Nuncio* then narrows the list and a questionnaire is sent to twenty to thirty people who know each priest-candidate for their input. At this point, everything is collected and analyzed by the *Papal Nuncio* and he finalizes the *Terna* that is submitted to the *Dicastery for Bishops* in Rome. The candidates are listed in order of preference in the *Terna*.

In the case of an *Auxiliary Bishop*, this stage is adjusted slightly. The first thing that happens is that the *Diocesan Bishop* must justify the need for an *Auxiliary Bishop* to the *Apostolic Nuncio* and receive permission to submit a request to the *Holy Father* for the appointment of an *Auxiliary Bishop*. Once he has approval from the *Holy Father*, the process continues as described above.

The third stage is the approval of the prefect for to the *Dicastery for Bishops*. The *Terna* and all the accompanying documentation is reviewed by the prefect and his staff. One cardinal from the Dicastery is chosen to summarize and present the *Terna* and the documentation to the full Dicastery of cardinals and archbishops. The *Dicastery for Bishops* then discusses the information and votes. The *Dicastery for Bishops* may approve the *Apostolic Nuncio's Terna*, choose one or more other candidates for their *Terna* or ask that a completely new *Terna* be prepared by the *Apostolic Nuncio*. The *Dicastery for Bishops* submits a final *Terna* to the *Holy Father*.

The fourth stage encompasses the decision by the *Holy Father*. The prefect for the *Dicastery for Bishops* meets privately with the *Holy Father* to discuss the *Terna*. The *Holy Father*, usually within a few days, makes his decision, informs the prefect who then informs the *Apostolic Nuncio* who in turn contacts the candidate to inform him of the appointment by the *Holy Father* and asks the candidate if he accepts the appointment. At this point an ordination and/or installation date is set.

As you can see, it is a lengthy process and normally takes six to eight months. When Archbishop Sartain vacated the Diocese of Little Rock to become the Bishop of Joliet, the process to name his successor took two years. Throughout this process, we really don't know who will be ordained Bishop, we don't know when his appointment will be announced, we don't know if this process has been started or, possibly, if it has been completed.

The one thing we know, the one thing that we place our trust in, is that the process is ultimately controlled by the grace of the Holy Spirit and that *Holy Father*, placing his trust in the Holy Spirit, uses this process of the Church to assist him in discerning the will of God in the appointment of a bishop.

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.