

Decree Concerning The Pastoral Office Of Bishops In The Church

CHRISTUS DOMINUS

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Decree Concerning The Pastoral Office Of Bishops In The Church

CHRISTUS DOMINUS

Proclaimed by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965

PREFACE

1. Christ the Lord, Son of the living God, came that He might save His people from their sins^[1] and that all men might be sanctified. Just as He Himself was sent by the Father, so He also sent His Apostles.^[2] Therefore, He sanctified them, conferring on them the Holy Spirit, so that they also might glorify the Father upon earth and save men, "to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12), which is the Church.

2. In this Church of Christ the Roman pontiff, as the successor of Peter, to whom Christ entrusted the feeding of His sheep and lambs, enjoys supreme, full, immediate, and universal authority over the care of souls by divine institution. Therefore, as pastor of all the faithful, he is sent to provide for the common good of the universal Church and for the good of the individual churches. Hence, he holds a primacy of ordinary power over all the churches.

The bishops themselves, however, having been appointed by the Holy Spirit, are successors of the Apostles as pastors of souls.^[3] Together with the supreme pontiff and under his authority they are sent to continue throughout the ages the work of Christ, the eternal pastor.^[4] Christ gave the Apostles and their successors the command and the power to teach all nations, to hallow men in the truth, and to feed them. Bishops, therefore, have been made true and authentic teachers of the faith, pontiffs, and pastors through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to them.^[5]

3. Bishops, sharing in the solicitude for all the churches, exercise this episcopal office of theirs, which they have received through

episcopal consecration,[6] in communion with and under the authority of the supreme pontiff. As far as their teaching authority and pastoral government are concerned, all are united in a college or body with respect to the universal Church of God.

They exercise this office individually in reference to the portions of the Lord's flock assigned to them, each one taking care of the particular church committed to him, or sometimes some of them jointly providing for certain common needs of various churches.

This sacred synod, therefore, attentive to the conditions of human association which have brought about a new order of things in our time,[7] intends to determine more exactly the pastoral office of bishops and, therefore, has decreed the things that follow.





CHAPTER I

THE RELATIONSHIP OF BISHOPS TO THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

I. The Role of the Bishops in the Universal Church

4. By virtue of sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college, bishops are constituted as members of the episcopal body.^[8] "The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in teaching and pastoral direction, or rather, in the episcopal order, the apostolic body continues without a break. Together with its head, the Roman pontiff, and never without this head it exists as the subject of supreme, plenary power over the universal Church. But this power cannot be exercised except with the agreement of the Roman pontiff."^[9] This power however, "is exercised in a solemn manner in an ecumenical council."^[10] Therefore, this sacred synod decrees that all bishops who are members of the episcopal college, have the right to be present at an ecumenical council.

"The exercise of this collegiate power in union with the pope is possible although the bishops are stationed all over the world, provided that the head of the college gives them a call to collegiate action, or, at least, gives the unified action of the dispersed bishops such approval, or such unconstrained acceptance, that it becomes truly collegiate action."^[11]

5. Bishops chosen from various parts of the world, in ways and manners established or to be established by the Roman pontiff, render more effective assistance to the supreme pastor of the Church in a deliberative body which will be called by the proper name of Synod of Bishops.^[12] Since it shall be acting in the name of the entire Catholic episcopate, it will at the same time show that all the bishops in hierarchical communion partake of the solicitude for the universal Church.^[13]

6. As legitimate successors of the Apostles and members of the

episcopal college, bishops should realize that they are bound together and should manifest a concern for all the churches. For by divine institution and the rule of the apostolic office each one together with all the other bishops is responsible for the Church.[14] They should especially be concerned about those parts of the world where the word of God has not yet been proclaimed or where the faithful, particularly because of the small number of priests, are in danger of departing from the precepts of the Christian life, and even of losing the faith itself.

Let bishops, therefore, make every effort to have the faithful actively support and promote works of evangelization and the apostolate. Let them strive, moreover, to see to it that suitable sacred ministers as well as auxiliaries, both religious and lay, be prepared for the missions and other areas suffering from a lack of clergy. They should also see to it, as much as possible, that some of their own priests go to the above-mentioned missions or dioceses to exercise the sacred ministry there either permanently or for a set period of time.

Bishops should also be mindful, in administering ecclesiastical property, of the needs not only of their own dioceses but also of the other particular churches, for they are also a part of the one Church of Christ. Finally, they should direct their attention, according to their means, to the relief of disasters by which other dioceses and regions are affected.

7. Let them especially embrace in brotherly affection those bishops who, for the sake of Christ, are plagued with slander and indigence, detained in prisons, or held back from their ministry. They should take an active brotherly interest in them so that their sufferings may be assuaged and alleviated through the prayers and good works of their confreres.





II. Bishops and the Apostolic See

8. (a) To bishops, as successors of the Apostles, in the dioceses entrusted to them, there belongs per se all the ordinary, proper, and immediate authority which is required for the exercise of their pastoral office. But this never in any way infringes upon the power which the Roman pontiff has, by virtue of his office, of reserving cases to himself or to some other authority.

(b) The general law of the Church grants the faculty to each diocesan bishop to dispense, in a particular case, the faithful over whom they legally exercise authority as often as they judge that it contributes to their spiritual welfare, except in those cases which have been especially reserved by the supreme authority of the Church.

9. In exercising supreme, full, and immediate power in the universal Church, the Roman pontiff makes use of the departments of the Roman Curia which, therefore, perform their duties in his name and with his authority for the good of the churches and in the service of the sacred pastors.

The fathers of this sacred council, however, desire that these departments-which have furnished distinguished assistance to the Roman pontiff and the pastors of the Church-be reorganized and better adapted to the needs of the times, regions, and rites especially as regards their number, name, competence and peculiar method of procedure, as well as the coordination of work among them.[15] The fathers also desire that, in view of the very nature of the pastoral office proper to the bishops, the office of legates of the Roman pontiff be more precisely determined.

10. Furthermore, since these departments are established for the good of the universal Church, it is desirable that their members, officials, and consultors as well as legates of the Roman pontiff be more widely taken from various regions of the Church, insofar as it is possible. In such a way the offices and central organs of the Catholic Church will exhibit a truly universal character.

It is also desired that some bishops, too-especially diocesan bishops-will be chosen as members of the departments, for they will be able to report more fully to the supreme pontiff the thinking, the

desires, and the needs of all the churches.

Finally, the fathers of the council think it would be most advantageous if these same departments would listen more attentively to laymen who are outstanding for their virtue, knowledge, and experience. In such a way they will have an appropriate share in Church affairs.





CHAPTER II

BISHOPS AND THEIR PARTICULAR CHURCHES OR DIOCESES

I. Diocesan Bishops

11. A diocese is a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to a bishop to be shepherded by him with the cooperation of the presbytery. Thus by adhering to its pastor and gathered together by him through the Gospel and the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit, it constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative.

Individual bishops who have been entrusted with the care of a particular church-under the authority of the supreme pontiff-feed their sheep in the name of the Lord as their own, ordinary, and immediate pastors, performing for them the office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing. Nevertheless, they should recognize the rights which legitimately belong to patriarchs or other hierarchical authorities.[\[16\]](#)

Bishops should dedicate themselves to their apostolic office as witness of Christ before all men. They should not only look after those who already follow the Prince of Pastors but should also wholeheartedly devote themselves to those who have strayed in any way from the path of truth or are ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and His saving mercy until finally all men walk "in all goodness and justice and truth" (Eph. 5:9).

12. In exercising their duty of teaching-which is conspicuous among the principal duties of bishops[\[17\]](#)-they should announce the Gospel of Christ to men, calling them to a faith in the power of the Spirit or confirming them in a living faith. They should expound the whole mystery of Christ to them, namely, those truths the ignorance of which is ignorance of Christ. At the same time they should point out the divinely revealed way to give glory to God and thereby to attain to eternal happiness.[\[18\]](#)

They should show, moreover, that earthly goods and human institutions according to the plan of God the Creator are also disposed for man's salvation and therefore can contribute much to the building up of the body of Christ.

Therefore, they should teach, according to the doctrine of the Church, the great value of these things: the human person with his freedom and bodily life, the family and its unity and stability, the procreation and education of children, civil society with its laws and professions, labor and leisure, the arts and technical inventions, poverty and affluence. Finally, they should set forth the ways by which are to be answered the most serious questions concerning the ownership, increase, and just distribution of material goods, peace and war, and brotherly relations among all countries.[19]

13. The bishops should present Christian doctrine in a manner adapted to the needs of the times, that is to say, in a manner that will respond to the difficulties and questions by which people are especially burdened and troubled. They should also guard that doctrine, teaching the faithful to defend and propagate it. In propounding this doctrine they should manifest the maternal solicitude of the Church toward all men whether they be believers or not. With a special affection they should attend upon the poor and the lower classes to whom the Lord sent them to preach the Gospel.

Since it is the mission of the Church to converse with the human society in which it lives,[20] it is especially the duty of bishops to seek out men and both request and promote dialogue with them. These conversations on salvation ought to be noted for clarity of speech as well as humility and mildness in order that at all times truth may be joined to charity and understanding with love. Likewise they should be noted for due prudence joined with trust, which fosters friendship and thus is capable of bringing about a union of minds.[21]

They should also strive to make use of the various media at hand nowadays for proclaiming Christian doctrine, namely, first of all, preaching and catechetical instruction which always hold the first place, then the presentation of this doctrine in schools, academies, conferences, and meetings of every kind, and finally its dissemination through public statements at times of outstanding events as well as by the press and various other media of

communication, which by all means ought to be used in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.[22]

14. Bishops should take pains that catechetical instruction-which is intended to make the faith, as illumined by teaching, a vital, explicit and effective force in the lives of men-be given with sedulous care to both children and adolescents, youths and adults. In this instruction a suitable arrangement should be observed as well as a method suited to the matter that is being treated and to the character, ability, age, and circumstances of the life of the students. Finally, they should see to it that this instruction is based on Sacred Scripture, tradition, the liturgy, magisterium, and life of the Church.

Moreover, they should take care that catechists be properly trained for their function so that they will be thoroughly acquainted with the doctrine of the Church and will have both a theoretical and a practical knowledge of the laws of psychology and of pedagogical methods.

Bishops should also strive to renew or at least adapt in a better way the instruction of adult catechumens.

15. In exercising their office of sanctifying, bishops should be mindful that they have been taken from among men and appointed their representative before God in order to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. Bishops enjoy the fullness of the sacrament of orders and both presbyters and deacons are dependent upon them in the exercise of their authority. For the presbyters are the prudent fellow workers of the episcopal order and are themselves consecrated as true priests of the New Testament, just as deacons are ordained for the ministry and serve the people of God in communion with the bishop and his presbytery. Therefore bishops are the principal dispensers of the mysteries of God, as well as being the governors, promoters, and guardians of the entire liturgical life in the church committed to them.[23]

They should, therefore, constantly exert themselves to have the faithful know and live the paschal mystery more deeply through the Eucharist and thus become a firmly-knit body in the unity of the charity of Christ.[24] "Intent upon prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4), they should devote their labor to this end that all those committed to their care may be of one mind in prayer[25] and

through the reception of the sacraments may grow in grace and be faithful witnesses to the Lord.

As those who lead others to perfection, bishops should be diligent in fostering holiness among their clerics, religious, and laity according to the special vocation of each.^[26] They should also be mindful of their obligation to give an example of holiness in charity, humility, and simplicity of life. Let them so hallow the churches entrusted to them that the feeling of the universal Church of Christ may shine forth fully in them. For that reason they should foster priestly and religious vocations as much as possible, and should take a special interest in missionary vocations.

16. In exercising their office of father and pastor, bishops should stand in the midst of their people as those who serve.^[27] Let them be good shepherds who know their sheep and whose sheep know them. Let them be true fathers who excel in the spirit of love and solicitude for all and to whose divinely conferred authority all gratefully submit themselves. Let them so gather and mold the whole family of their flock that everyone, conscious of his own duties, may live and work in the communion of love.

In order effectively to accomplish these things, bishops, "ready for every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21) and "enduring all things for the sake of the chosen ones" (2 Tim. 2:10), should arrange their life in such a way as to accommodate it to the needs of our times.

Bishops should always embrace priests with a special love since the latter to the best of their ability assume the bishops' anxieties and carry them on day by day so zealously. They should regard the priests as sons and friends^[28] and be ready to listen to them. Through their trusting familiarity with their priests they should strive to promote the whole pastoral work of the entire diocese.

They should be solicitous for the spiritual, intellectual and material welfare of the priests so that the latter can live holy and pious lives and fulfill their ministry faithfully and fruitfully. Therefore, they should encourage institutes and hold special meetings in which priests might gather from time to time both for the performance of longer exercises and the renewal of their spiritual life and for the acquisition of deeper subjects, especially Sacred Scripture and theology, the more important social questions, and the new methods

of pastoral activity.

With active mercy bishops should pursue priests who are involved in any danger or who have failed in certain respects.

In order to be able to look more closely to the welfare of the faithful according to the condition of each one, bishops should strive to become duly acquainted with their needs in the social circumstances in which they live. Therefore, they ought to employ suitable methods, especially social research. They should manifest their concern for everyone, no matter what their age, condition, or nationality, be they natives, strangers, or foreigners. In exercising this pastoral care they should preserve for their faithful the share proper to them in Church affairs; they should also respect their duty and right of actively collaborating in the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ.

They should deal lovingly with the separated brethren, urging the faithful also to conduct themselves with great kindness and charity in their regard and fostering ecumenism as it is understood by the Church.^[29] They should also have a place in their hearts for the non-baptized so that upon them too there may shine the charity of Christ Jesus, to whom the bishops are witnesses before all men.

17. Various forms of the apostolate should be encouraged, and in the whole diocese or in any particular areas of it the coordination and close connection of all apostolic works should be fostered under the direction of the bishop. Thus all undertakings and organizations, be they catechetical, missionary, charitable, social, familial, educational, or anything else pursuing a pastoral aim, should be directed toward harmonious action. Thus at the same time the unity of the diocese will also be made more evident.

The faithful should be earnestly urged to assume their duty of carrying on the apostolate, each according to his state in life and ability. They should be admonished to participate in and give aid to the various works of the apostolate of the laity, especially Catholic Action. Those associations should also be promoted and supported which either directly or indirectly pursue a supernatural objective, that is, either the attaining of a more perfect life, the spreading of the Gospel of Christ to all men, and the promoting of Christian doctrine or the increase of public worship, or the pursuing of social aims or the performing of works of piety and charity.

The forms of the apostolate should be properly adapted to the needs of the present day with regard not only for man's spiritual and moral circumstances but also for his social, demographic, and economic conditions. Religious and social research, through offices of pastoral sociology, contributes much to the efficacious and fruitful attainment of that goal, and it is highly recommended.

18. Special concern should be shown for those among the faithful who, on account of their way of life, cannot sufficiently make use of the common and ordinary pastoral care of parish priests or are quite cut off from it. Among this group are the majority of migrants, exiles and refugees, seafarers, air-travelers, gypsies, and others of this kind. Suitable pastoral methods should also be promoted to sustain the spiritual life of those who go to other lands for a time for the sake of recreation.

Episcopal conferences, especially national ones, should pay special attention to the very pressing problems concerning the above-mentioned groups. Through voluntary agreement and united efforts, they should look to and promote their spiritual care by means of suitable methods and institutions. They should also bear in mind the special rules either already laid down or to be laid down by the Apostolic See[30] which can be wisely adapted to the circumstances of time, place, and persons.

19. In discharging their apostolic office, which concerns the salvation of souls, bishops per se enjoy full and perfect freedom and independence from any civil authority. Hence, the exercise of their ecclesiastical office may not be hindered, directly or indirectly, nor may they be forbidden to communicate freely with the Apostolic See, or ecclesiastical authorities, or their subjects.

Assuredly, while sacred pastors devote themselves to the spiritual care of their flock, they also in fact have regard for their social and civil progress and prosperity. According to the nature of their office and as behooves bishops, they collaborate actively with public authorities for this purpose and advocate obedience to just laws and reverence for legitimately constituted authorities.

20. Since the apostolic office of bishops was instituted by Christ the Lord and pursues a spiritual and supernatural purpose, this sacred ecumenical synod declares that the right of nominating and

appointing bishops belongs properly, peculiarly, and per se exclusively to the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Therefore, for the purpose of duly protecting the freedom of the Church and of promoting more conveniently and efficiently the welfare of the faithful, this holy council desires that in future no more rights or privileges of election, nomination, presentation, or designation for the office of bishop be granted to civil authorities. The civil authorities, on the other hand, whose favorable attitude toward the Church the sacred synod gratefully acknowledges and highly appreciates, are most kindly requested voluntarily to renounce the above-mentioned rights and privileges which they presently enjoy by reason of a treaty or custom, after discussing the matter with the Apostolic See.

21. Since the pastoral office of bishops is so important and weighty, diocesan bishops and others regarded in law as their equals, who have become less capable of fulfilling their duties properly because of the increasing burden of age or some other serious reason, are earnestly requested to offer their resignation from office either at their own initiative or upon the invitation of the competent authority. If the competent authority should accept the resignation, it will make provision both for the suitable support of those who have resigned and for special rights to be accorded them.



II. Diocesan Boundaries

22. For a diocese to fulfill its purpose the nature of the Church must be clearly evident to the people of God who constitute that diocese. To this end also bishops must be able to carry out their pastoral duties effectively among their people. Finally, the welfare of the people of God must be served as perfectly as possible.

All this demands, then, a proper determination of the boundaries of dioceses and a distribution of clergy and resources that is reasonable and in keeping with the needs of the apostolate. All these things will benefit not only the clergy and Christian people involved, but also the entire Catholic Church.

Concerning diocesan boundaries, therefore, this sacred synod decrees that, to the extent required by the good of souls, a fitting revision of diocesan boundaries be undertaken prudently and as soon as possible. This can be done by dividing dismembering or uniting them, or by changing their boundaries, or by determining a better place for the episcopal see or, finally, especially in the case of dioceses having larger cities, by providing them with a new internal organization.

23. In revising diocesan boundaries first place must be accorded to organic unity of each diocese, with due regard to the personnel, the offices and institutions, which form, as it were, a living body. In individual cases all circumstances should be carefully studied and the general criteria which follow should be kept in mind.

**1) In
determining a
diocesan
boundary, as
far as
possible
consideration
should be
given the
variety in
composition
of the people**

**of God, for
this can
contribute
greatly to a
more effective
exercise of
the pastoral
office. At the
same time the
natural
population
units of
people,
together with
the civil
jurisdictions
and social
institutions
that compose
their organic
structure,
should be
preserved as
far as
possible as
units. For this
reason,
obviously, the
territory of
each diocese
should be
continuous.**

**Attention
should also
be given, if
necessary, to
civil
boundaries
and the
special
characteristics
of regions**

**and peoples,
such as their
psychological,
economic,
geographic
and historical
backgrounds.**

**2) The extent
of the diocese
and the
number of its
inhabitants
should
generally be
such that, on
the one hand,
the bishop
himself- even
though
assisted by
others-can
officiate at
pontifical
functions,
make pastoral
visitations,
faithfully
direct and
coordinate all
the works of
the apostolate
in the diocese
and know well
especially his
priests, and
also the
religious and
lay people
who are
engaged in
diocesan
projects. On**

the other hand, an adequate and suitable area should be provided so that bishop and clergy, mindful also of the needs of the universal Church, can usefully devote all their energies to the ministry.

3) Finally, in order that the ministry of salvation be more effectively carried out in each diocese, it should be considered a general rule that each diocese have clergy, in number and qualifications at least sufficient, for the proper care of the people of God; also, there should be no lack of

**the offices,
institutions
and
organizations
which are
proper to the
particular
church and
which
experience
has shown
necessary for
its efficient
government
and
apostolate;
finally,
resources for
the support of
personnel
and
institutions
should be at
hand or at
least
prudently
foreseen in
prospect.**

For this same purpose, where there are faithful of a different rite, the diocesan bishop should provide for their spiritual needs either through priests or parishes of that rite or through an episcopal vicar endowed with the necessary faculties. Wherever it is fitting, the last named should also have episcopal rank. Otherwise the Ordinary himself may perform the office of an Ordinary of different rites. If for certain reasons, these prescriptions are not applicable in the judgment of the Apostolic See, then a proper hierarchy for the different rites is to be established.[31]

Also, where similar situations exist, provision should be made for the faithful of different language groups, either through priests or

parishes of the same language, or through an episcopal vicar well versed in the language-and if needs be having the episcopal dignity-or at least in some other more appropriate way.

24. In order to bring about the changes and alterations of dioceses as set forth in numbers 22-23-and leaving untouched the discipline of the Oriental Churches-it is desirable that the competent episcopal conferences examine these matters each for its respective territory. If deemed opportune, they may employ a special episcopal commission for this purpose, but always taking into account the opinions of the bishops of the provinces or regions concerned. Finally, they are to propose their recommendations and desires to the Apostolic See.



III. Assistants in the Pastoral Office of the Diocesan Bishops

1. Coadjutor and auxiliary bishops

25. The pastoral office of Bishops should be so constituted for the governing of dioceses that the good of the Lord's flock is always the supreme consideration. Rightly to achieve this goal, auxiliary bishops will frequently be appointed because the diocesan bishop cannot personally fulfill all his episcopal duties as the good of souls demands, either because of the vast extent of the diocese or the great number of its inhabitants, or because of the special nature of the apostolate or other reasons of a different nature. Sometimes, in fact, a particular need requires that a coadjutor bishop be appointed to assist the diocesan bishop. Coadjutor and auxiliary bishops should be granted those faculties necessary for rendering their work more effective and safeguarding the dignity proper to bishops. This, of course, should always be accomplished without detriment to the unity of the diocesan administration and the authority of the diocesan bishop.

Furthermore, coadjutor and auxiliary bishops, since they are called to share part of the burden of the diocesan bishops, so should exercise their office that they may proceed in all matters in single-minded agreement with him. In addition, they should always show respect and reverence for the diocesan bishop and he, in turn, should have a fraternal love for coadjutor and auxiliary bishops and hold them in esteem.

26. To the extent that the good of souls demands, the diocesan bishop should not hesitate to ask the competent authority for one or more auxiliaries who will be appointed for the diocese without the right of succession.

If there is no provision for it in the letter of nomination, the diocesan bishop is to appoint his auxiliary or auxiliaries as vicar generals or at least as episcopal vicars. They shall be dependent upon his

authority only and he may wish to consult them in examining questions of major importance, especially of a pastoral nature.

Unless competent authority has otherwise determined, the powers and faculties which auxiliary bishops have by law do not cease when the office of the diocesan bishop comes to an end. It is also desirable that when the See is vacant the office of ruling the diocese- unless some serious reasons persuade otherwise-should be committed to the auxiliary bishop or, when there are more than one, to one of the auxiliaries.

A coadjutor bishop, appointed with the right of succession, must always be named vicar general by the diocesan bishop. In particular cases the competent authority can grant him even more extensive faculties.

In order to provide for the greatest possible present and future good of the diocese, the diocesan bishop and his coadjutor should not fail to consult with each other on matters of great importance.

2. The diocesan curia and commissions

27. The most important office in the diocesan curia is that of vicar general. However, as often as the proper government of the diocese requires it, one or more episcopal vicars can be named by the bishop. These automatically enjoy the same authority which the common law grants the vicar general, but only for a certain part of the diocese, or for a determined type of transaction or for the faithful of a determined rite.

Among the collaborators of the bishop in the government of the diocese are numbered those presbyters who constitute his senate, or council, such as the cathedral chapter, the board of consultors or other committees according to the circumstances or nature of various localities. These institutions, especially the cathedral chapters, should be reorganized wherever necessary in keeping with present day needs.

Priests and lay people who belong to the diocesan curia should realize that they are making a helpful contribution to the pastoral ministry of the bishop.

The diocesan curia should be so organized that it is an appropriate instrument for the bishop, not only for administering the diocese but also for carrying out the works of the apostolate.

It is greatly desired that in each diocese a pastoral commission will be established over which the diocesan bishop himself will preside and in which specially chosen clergy, religious and lay people will participate. The duty of this commission will be to investigate and weigh pastoral undertakings and to formulate practical conclusions regarding them.

3. The diocesan clergy

28. All presbyters, both diocesan and religious, participate in and exercise with the bishop the one priesthood of Christ and are thereby constituted prudent cooperators of the episcopal order. In the care of souls, however, the first place is held by diocesan priests who are incardinated or attached to a particular church, for they have fully dedicated themselves in the service of caring for a single portion of the Lord's flock. In consequence, they form one presbytery and one family whose father is the bishop. In order to distribute more equitably and properly the sacred ministries among his priests, the bishop should possess a necessary freedom in bestowing offices and benefices. Therefore, rights or privileges which in any way limit this freedom are to be suppressed.

The relationships between the bishop and the diocesan priests should rest most especially upon the bonds of supernatural charity so that the harmony of the will of the priests with that of their bishop will render their pastoral activity more fruitful. Wherefore, for the sake of greater service to souls, let the bishop call the priests into dialogue, especially about pastoral matters. This he should do not only on a given occasion but at regularly fixed intervals insofar as this is possible.

Furthermore all diocesan priests should be united among themselves and so should share a genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of the whole diocese. They should also be mindful that the benefits they receive by reason of their ecclesiastical office are closely bound up with their sacred work. Therefore they should contribute generously, as the bishop may direct and as their means permit, to the material needs of the diocese.

29. The closer collaborators of the bishop are those priests who are charged with a pastoral office or apostolic organizations of a supra-parochial nature, whether in a certain area of the diocese or among special groups of the faithful or with respect to a specific kind of activity.

Priests assigned by the bishop to various works of the apostolate, whether in schools or in other institutions or associations, contribute an exceedingly valuable assistance. Those priests also who are engaged in supra-diocesan works are commended to the special consideration of the bishop in whose diocese they reside, for they perform outstanding works of the apostolate.

30. Pastors, however, are cooperators of the bishop in a very special way, for as pastors in their own name they are entrusted with the care of souls in a certain part of the diocese under the bishop's authority.

**1) In
exercising
this care of
souls, pastors
and their
assistants
should so
fulfill their
duty of
teaching,
sanctifying
and
governing
that the
faithful and
the parish**

**communities
will truly
realize that
they are
members
both of the
diocese and
of the
universal
Church. For
this reason,
they should
collaborate
with other
pastors and
priests who
exercise a
pastoral office
in the area
(such as
vicars forane
and deans),
as well as
with those
engaged in
works of a
supra-
parochial
nature. In this
way the
pastoral work
in the diocese
will be unified
and made
more
effective.**

**Moreover, the
care of souls
should
always be
infused with a
missionary**

**spirit so that
it reaches out
as it should to
everyone
living within
the parish
boundaries. If
the pastor
cannot
contact
certain
groups of
people, he
should seek
the
assistance of
others, even
laymen who
can assist
him in the
apostolate.**

**To render the
care of souls
more
efficacious,
community
life for priests-
especially
those
attached to
the same
parish-is
highly
recommended.
This way of
living, while it
encourages
apostolic
action, also
affords an
example of
charity and**

unity to the faithful.

2) In the exercise of their teaching office it is the duty of pastors to preach God's word to all the Christian people so that, rooted in faith, hope and charity, they will grow in Christ, and as a Christian community bear witness to that charity which the Lord commended.

[32] It is also the duty of pastors to bring the faithful to a full knowledge of the mystery of salvation through a catechetical instruction which is consonant with each one's age. In imparting this instruction

**they should
seek not only
the
assistance of
religious but
also the
cooperation
of the laity,
establishing
also the
Confraternity
of Christian
Doctrine.**

**In discharging
their duty of
sanctifying
their people,
pastors
should see to
it that the
celebration of
the
Eucharistic
Sacrifice is
the center and
culmination of
the whole life
of the
Christian
community.
They should
labor without
stint that the
faithful are
nourished
with spiritual
food through
the devout
and frequent
reception of
the
Sacraments**

**and through
intelligent and
active
participation
in the Liturgy.
Pastors
should also
be mindful of
how much the
sacrament of
Penance
contributes to
developing
the Christian
life and,
therefore,
should
always make
themselves
available to
hear the
confessions
of the faithful.
If necessary,
they should
invite the
assistance of
priests who
are
experienced
in various
languages.**

**In fulfilling
their office as
shepherd,
pastors
should take
pains to know
their own
flock. Since
they are the
servants of all**

**the sheep,
they should
encourage a
full Christian
life among the
individual
faithful and
also in
families, in
associations
especially
dedicated to
the
apostolate,
and in the
whole parish
community.
Therefore,
they should
visit homes
and schools
to the extent
that their
pastoral work
demands.
They should
pay especial
attention to
adolescents
and youth.
They should
devote
themselves
with a
paternal love
to the poor
and the sick.
They should
have a
particular
concern for
workingmen.
Finally, they**

should encourage the faithful to assist in the works of the apostolate.

3) Assistant pastors, as cooperators with the pastor, make under the authority of the pastor an indispensable and active contribution to the pastoral ministry. Therefore, there should always be fraternal association, mutual charity and reverence between the pastor and his assistants. They should assist one another with counsel, help and example, providing a united will and common zeal in the service of the parish.

31. In forming a judgment on the suitability of a priest for the administration of any parish the bishop should take into consideration not only his knowledge of doctrine but also his piety, apostolic zeal and other gifts and qualities which are necessary for the proper exercise of the care of souls.

Now the parish exists solely for the good of souls. Wherefore, the bishop should be able to provide more easily and effectively for vacant pastorates. To this end all rights whatsoever of presentation, nomination, reservation, excepting the right of Religious-and where it exists, the law of concursus whether general or particular-are to be suppressed.

Pastors should enjoy in their respective parishes that stability of office which the good of souls demands. The distinction between removable and irremovable pastors is to be abrogated and the procedure for transferring and removing pastors is to be re-examined and simplified. In this way the bishop, while observing natural and canonical equity, can better provide for the needs of the good of souls.

Pastors who are unable to fulfill their office properly and fruitfully because of the increasing burden of old age or some other serious reason are urgently requested to tender their resignation voluntarily upon the invitation of the bishop. The bishop should provide suitable support for those who have resigned.

32. Finally, the same concern for souls should be the basis for determining or reconsidering the erection or suppression of parishes and any other changes of this kind which the bishop is empowered to undertake on his own authority.

4. Religious

33. (In all that follows with Religious are included also the members of other institutes who profess the evangelical counsels.) All Religious have the duty, each according to his proper vocation, of cooperating zealously and diligently in building up and increasing the whole Mystical Body of Christ and for the good of the particular

churches.

It is their first duty to foster these objectives by prayer, works of penance and the example of their own life for which this sacred synod strongly urges them to increase their esteem and zeal. With due consideration for the character proper to each religious community, they should also enter more vigorously into the external works of the apostolate.

34. Religious priests are by consecration assumed into the responsibilities of the presbyterate so as to become themselves the prudent cooperators of the episcopal order. Today they can be of even greater help to bishops in view of the greater needs of souls. Therefore, they can be said in a real sense to belong to the clergy of the diocese inasmuch as they share in the care of souls and in carrying out works of the apostolate under the authority of the prelates.

Other members of religious communities, both men and women, also belong in a special way to the diocesan family and offer great assistance to the sacred hierarchy. With the increasing demands of the apostolate they can and should offer that assistance even more and more.

35. In order that the works of the apostolate be carried out harmoniously in individual dioceses and that the unity of diocesan discipline be preserved intact, these principles are established as fundamental:

**1) All
Religious
should always
look upon the
bishops, as
upon
successors of
the Apostles,
with devoted
respect and
reverence.
Whenever
they are**

**legitimately
called upon to
undertake
works of the
apostolate,
they are
obliged to
discharge
their duties as
active and
obedient
helpers of the
bishops.[33]**

**Indeed,
Religious
should
consider it an
honor to
respond
promptly and
faithfully to
the requests
and desires of
the bishops
and in such a
way they may
assume an
even more
ample role in
the ministry of
human
salvation. This
they should
do with due
respect for the
character of
their institute
and in keeping
with their
constitutions
which, if
needs be,
should be**

**accommodated
to this goal in
accord with
the principles
of this
conciliar
decree.**

**Especially in
view of the
urgent need of
souls and the
scarcity of
diocesan
clergy,
Religious
communities
which the not
dedicated
exclusively to
the
contemplative
life can be
called upon by
the bishops to
assist in
various
pastoral
ministries.
They should,
however, keep
in mind the
particular
character of
each
community.
Superiors
should
encourage
this work to
the utmost, by
accepting
parishes, even**

**on a
temporary
basis.**

**2) Religious
engaged in the
active
apostolate,
however, must
always be
imbued with
the spirit of
their Religious
community,
and remain
faithful to the
observance of
their rule and
spirit of
submissiveness
due to their
own superiors.
Bishops
should not
neglect to
impress this
obligation
upon them.**

**3) The institute
of exemption,
by which
Religious are
called to the
service of the
supreme
pontiff or other
ecclesiastical
authority and
withdrawn from
the jurisdiction**

**of bishops,
refers chiefly to
the internal
order of their
communities
so that in them
all things may
be properly
coordinated
and the growth
and perfection
of the
Religious
common life
promoted.[34]**

**These
communities
are also
exempt so that
the supreme
pontiff can
dispose of
them for the
good of the
universal
Church[35] and
any other
competent
authority for
the good of the
churches
under its own
jurisdiction.**

**This
exemption,
however, does
not exclude
Religious in
individual
dioceses from
the jurisdiction
of bishops in**

**accordance
with the norm
of law, insofar
as the
performance of
their pastoral
office and the
right ordering
of the care of
souls requires.**

[36]

**4) All
Religious,
exempt and
non-exempt,
are subject to
the authority of
the local
Ordinaries in
those things
which pertain
to the public
exercise of
divine worship-
except where
differences in
rites are
concerned-the
care of souls,
the sacred
preaching
intended for
the people, the
religious and
moral
education of
the Christian
faithful,
especially of
the children,
catechetical
instruction and**

**liturgical
formation.
They are
subject to the
local Ordinary
also in what
pertains to the
decorum
proper to the
clerical state
as well as in
the various
works which
concern the
exercise of the
sacred
apostolate.
Catholic
schools
conducted by
Religious are
also subject to
the authority of
the local
Ordinaries for
purposes of
general policy-
making and
vigilance, but
the right of
Religious to
direct them
remains intact.
Religious also
are bound to
observe all
those things
which councils
or conferences
of bishops
shall
legitimately
prescribe for**

**observance by
all.**

**5) A well-
ordered
cooperation is
to be
encouraged
between
various
religious
communities
and between
them and the
diocesan
clergy. There
should also be
a very close
coordination of
all apostolic
works and
activities which
especially
depend upon a
supernatural
attitude of
hearts and
minds, rooted
in and founded
upon charity.
The Apostolic
See is
competent to
supervise this
coordination
for the
universal
Church; sacred
pastors are
competent in
their own
respective
dioceses: and**

**patriarchal
synods and
episcopal
conferences in
their own
territory.**

**For those
works of the
apostolate
which
Religious are
to undertake,
bishops or
episcopal
conferences,
religious
superiors or
conferences of
major religious
superiors
should take
action only
after mutual
consultations.**

**6) In order to
foster
harmonious
and fruitful
mutual
relations
between
bishops and
religious, at
stated times
and as often as
it is deemed
opportune,
bishops and
religious
superiors
should meet to**

**discuss those
affairs which
pertain to the
apostolate in
their territory.**





CHAPTER III

CONCERNING BISHOPS COOPERATING FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF MANY CHURCHES

I. Synods, Councils and especially Episcopal Conferences

36. From the very first centuries of the Church bishops, as rulers of individual churches, were deeply moved by the communion of fraternal charity and zeal for the universal mission entrusted to the Apostles. And so they pooled their abilities and their wills for the common good and for the welfare of the individual churches. Thus came into being synods, provincial councils and plenary councils in which bishops established for various churches the way to be followed in teaching the truths of faith and ordering ecclesiastical discipline.

This sacred ecumenical synod earnestly desires that the venerable institution of synods and councils flourish with fresh vigor. In such a way faith will be deepened and discipline preserved more fittingly and efficaciously in the various churches, as the needs of the times require.

37. In these days especially bishops frequently are unable to fulfill their office effectively and fruitfully unless they develop a common effort involving constant growth in harmony and closeness of ties with other bishops. Episcopal conferences already established in many nations-have furnished outstanding proofs of a more fruitful apostolate. Therefore, this sacred synod considers it to be supremely fitting that everywhere bishops belonging to the same nation or region form an association which would meet at fixed times. Thus, when the insights of prudence and experience have been shared and views exchanged, there will emerge a holy union of energies in the service of the common good of the churches.

Wherefore, this sacred synod decrees the following concerning episcopal conferences:

38.

1) An episcopal conference is, as it were, a council in which the bishops of a given nation or territory jointly exercise their pastoral office to promote the greater good which the Church offers mankind, especially through the forms and methods of the apostolate fittingly adapted to the circumstances of the age.

2) Members of the episcopal conference are all local Ordinaries of every rite-excluding vicar generals-and coadjutors, auxiliaries and other titular bishops who perform a special work entrusted to them by the Apostolic See or the episcopal

**conferences.
Other titular
bishops,
legates of the
Roman pontiff,
because of their
exceptional
office in the
territory are not
de iure
members of the
conferences.**

**Local
Ordinaries and
coadjutors hold
a deliberative
vote. Auxiliaries
and other
bishops who
have a right to
attend the
conference will
hold either a
deliberative or a
consultative
vote, as the
statutes of the
conference
determine.**

**3) Each
episcopal
conference is to
draft its own
statutes for
recognition by
the Apostolic
See. In these
statutes, among
other things,
offices should
be established
which will aid in**

achieving its purpose more efficaciously, for example, a permanent board of bishops, episcopal commissions and a general secretariat.

4) Decisions of the episcopal conference, provided they have been approved legitimately and by the votes of at least two-thirds of the prelates who have a deliberative vote in the conference, and have been recognized by the Apostolic See, are to have juridically binding force only in those cases prescribed by the common law or determined by a special mandate of the Apostolic See, given either

**spontaneously
or in response
to a petition of
the conference
itself.**

**5) Wherever
special
circumstances
require and with
the approbation
of the Apostolic
See, bishops of
many nations
can establish a
single
conference.**

**Communications
between
episcopal
conferences of
different nations
should be
especially
encouraged in
order to
promote and
safeguard the
common good.**

**6) It is highly
recommended
that the prelates
of the Oriental
Churches,
promoting the
discipline of
their own
churches in
synods and
efficaciously
fostering works**

for the good of religion, should take into account also the common good of the whole territory where many churches of different rites exist. They should exchange views at inter-ritual meetings in keeping with norms to be given by the competent authority.



II. The Boundaries of Ecclesiastical Provinces and the Erection of Ecclesiastical Regions

39. The good of souls requires fitting boundaries not only for dioceses but also for ecclesiastical provinces; indeed it sometimes counsels the establishment of new ecclesiastical regions. Thus the needs of the apostolate will be better met in keeping with social and local circumstances. Thus, too, the relationships of the bishops with each other and with their metropolitans, and with other bishops of the same nation and even between bishops and civil authorities will be rendered easier and more fruitful.

40. Therefore, in order to accomplish these aims this sacred synod decrees as follows:

1) The boundaries of ecclesiastical provinces are to be submitted to an early review and the rights and privileges of metropolitans are to be defined by new and suitable norms.

2) As a general rule all dioceses and other territorial divisions that are by law equivalent to dioceses

should be attached to an ecclesiastical province. Therefore dioceses which are now directly subject to the Apostolic See and which are not united to any other are either to be brought together to form a new ecclesiastical province, if that be possible, or else attached to that province which is nearer or more convenient. They are to be made subject to the metropolitan jurisdiction of the bishop, in keeping with the norms of the common law.

3) Wherever advantageous, ecclesiastical

**provinces
should be
grouped into
ecclesiastical
regions for
the structure
of which
juridical
provision is
to be made.**

**41. It is fitting
that the
competent
episcopal
conferences
examine the
question of
boundaries of
such
provinces
and the
establishment
of regions in
keeping with
the norms
given with
respect to
diocesan
boundaries in
numbers 23-
24. They are
then to
submit their
suggestions
and desires
to the
Apostolic
See.**



III. Bishops Having an Inter-Diocesan Office

42. Since pastoral needs require more and more that some pastoral undertakings be directed and carried forward as joint projects, it is fitting that certain offices be created for the service of all or many dioceses of a determined region or nation. These offices can be filled by bishops.

This sacred synod recommends that between the prelates or bishops serving in these offices and the diocesan bishops and the episcopal conferences, there exist always fraternal association and harmonious cooperation in the expression of pastoral concern.

These relationships should also be clearly defined by common law.

43. Since, because of the unique conditions of their way of life, the spiritual care of military personnel requires special consideration, there should be established in every nation, if possible, a military vicariate. Both the military vicar and the chaplains should devote themselves unsparingly to this difficult work in complete cooperation with the diocesan bishops.[37]

Diocesan bishops should release to the military vicar a sufficient number of priests who are qualified for this serious work. At the same time they should promote all endeavors which will improve the spiritual welfare of military personnel.[38]

GENERAL DIRECTIVE

General Directive

44. This sacred synod prescribes that in the revision of the code of canon law suitable laws be drawn up in keeping with the principles stated in this decree. Due consideration should also be given the observations made by the commissions and the council Fathers.

This sacred synod also prescribes that general directories be prepared treating of the care of souls for the use of both bishops and pastors. Thus they will be provided with certain methods which will help them to discharge their own pastoral office with greater ease and effectiveness.

There should be prepared also a particular directory concerning the pastoral care of special groups of the faithful as the different circumstances of individual nations or regions require. Another directory should be composed concerning the catechetical instruction of the Christian people; this directory will consider the fundamental principles of such instruction, its disposition and the composition of books on the subject. In preparing these directories, special attention should be given to the views which have been expressed both by the commissions and the council Fathers.



NOTES

PREFACE

[1] cf. Matt. 1:21.

[2] cf. John 20:21.

[3] cf. First Vatican Council, fourth session, part 1 of Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, c. 3, Denz. 1828 (3061).

[4] cf. First Vatican Council, fourth session, Introduction to Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Denz. 1821 (3050).

[5] cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, chap. 3, nos. 21, 24 and 25: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 24-25, 29-31.

[6] cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, chap. 3, no. 21: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 24-25.

[7] cf. John XXIII's apostolic constitution, *Humanae Salutis*, Dec. 25, 1961: A.A.S. 54 (1962) p. 6.

CHAPTER I

[8] cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, chap. 3, no. 22: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 25-27.

[9] *ibid.*

[10] *ibid.*

[11] *ibid.*

[12] cf. Paul VI's motu proprio, *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, Sept. 15, 1965.

[13] cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, chap. 3, no. 23: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 27-28.

[14] cf. Pius XII's encyclical letter, *Fidei Donum*, April 21, 1957: A.A.S. 49 (1957) p. 27 ff.; also cf. Benedict XV's apostolic letter, *Maximum Illud*, Nov. 30, 1919: A.A.S. 11 (1919) p. 440; Pius XI's encyclical letter, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Feb. 28, 1926: A.A.S. 18 (1926) p.68.

[15] cf. Paul VI's allocution to the cardinals, prelates and various officials of the Roman curia, Sept. 21, 1963: A.A.S. 55 (1963) p. 793 ff.

CHAPTER II

[16] cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches, Nov. 21, 1964, nos. 7-11 A.A.S. 57 (1965) p. 29 ff.

[17] cf. Council of Trent, fifth session, Decree De Reform., c. 2, Mansi 33, 30; 24th session, Decree De Reform., c. Mansi 33, 159 [cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. chap. 3, no. 25: A.A.S. 57 (1965) p. 29 ff.]

[18] cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, chap. 3, no. 25: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 29-31.

[19] cf. John XXIII's encyclical letter, Pacem in Terris, April 11, 1963, passim: A.A.S. 55 (1963) pp. 257-304.

[20] cf. Paul VI's encyclical letter, Ecclesiam Suam, April 6, 1964: A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 639.

[21] cf. Paul VI's encyclical letter, Ecclesiam Suam, April 6, 1964: A.A.S. 56 (1964) pp. 644-645.

[22] cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Communications Media, Dec. 4, 1963: A.A.S. 56 (1964) pp. 145-153.

[23] cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Dec. 4, 1963: A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 97 ff; Paul VI's motu proprio, Sacram Liturgiam, Jan. 25, 1964: A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 139 ff.

[24] Pius XII's encyclical letter, Mediator Dei, Nov. 20, 1947: A.A.S. 39 (1947) p. 97 ff.; Paul VI's encyclical letter, Mysterium Fidei, Sept. 3, 1965.

[25] cf. Acts 1:14 and 2:46.

[26] cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, chap. 6, nos. 44 and 45: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 50-52.

[27] cf. Luke 22:26-27.

[28] cf. John 15:15.

[29] cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism, Nov. 21 1964: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 90-107.

[30] cf. St. Pius X's motu proprio, *Iampridem*, March 19, 1914: A.A.S. 6 (1914) p. 174 ff.; Pius XII's apostolic constitution, *Exul Familia*, Aug. 1, 1952: A.A.S. 54 (1952) p. 652 ff.; *Leges Operis Apostolatus Maris*, compiled under the authority of Pius XII Nov. 21, 1957: A.A.S. 50 (1958) p. 375 ff.

[31] cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches, Nov. 21, 1964, no. 4: A.A.S. 57 (1965) p. 77.

[32] cf. John 13:35.

[33] cf. Pius XII's allocution of Dec. 8, 1950: A.A.S. 43 (1951) p. 28; also cf. Paul VI's allocution of May 23, 1964: A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 571.

[34] cf. Leo XIII's apostolic constitution, *Romanos Pontifices*, May 8, 1881: *Acta Leonis XIII*, vol. 2, 1882, p. 234.

[35] cf. Paul VI's allocution of May 23, 1964: A.A.S. 56 (1965) pp. 570-571.

[36] cf. Pius XII's allocution of Dec. 8, 1950, 1. c.



CHAPTER III

[37] cf. Consistorial Congregation's Instruction to Military Ordinariates, April 23, 1951: A.A.S. 43 (1951) pp. 562-565; Formula Regarding the Conferring of the Status of Military Ordinariates, Oct. 20, 1956: A.A.S. 49 (1957) pp. 150-163; Decree on Ad Limina Visits of Military Ordinariates, Feb. 28, 1959: A.A.S. 51 (1959) pp. 272-274; Decree on the Granting of Faculties for Confessions to Military Chaplains, Nov. 27, 1960: A.A.S. 53 (1961) pp. 49-50. Also cf. Congregation of Religious' Instruction on Religious Military Chaplains, Feb. 2, 1955: A.A.S. 47 (1955) pp. 93-97.

[38] cf. Consistorial Congregation's letter to the cardinals, archbishops and bishops of Spanish-speaking nations, June 27, 1951: A.A.S. 43 (1951) p. 566.