

Primer: Organizing Lay Input in Bishop Selection

A major initiative of the VOTF Universal Church Reform Team for the past three years has been our effort to encourage dioceses toward greater lay involvement in recommendations for bishop selection. The national bishop selection team has worked with affiliates in two dioceses, Manchester NH and Chicago, to develop a model that others may apply as they develop their own input efforts.

From these experiences, the national bishop selection team has developed a website that collects input and allows participation of a local community in the selection of their next bishop. Other materials on the history of bishop selection and letters sent to the Vatican urging a return to more meaningful lay input during the process also are available on the VOTF web site (<http://votf.org/page/lay-input-bishop-selection-process/10586>).

For additional information, or to discuss soliciting lay input on the next bishop in your diocese, please contact Jack Doyle: john.jackdoyle@verizon.net; or Anne Southwood, Voices in Action, Universal Church Reform Coordinator: southwood2@aol.com.

The Chicago Model

*Based on experiences of the Chicago bishop selection team, Chair Janet Hauter submitted this primer. You may review the background document and the form prepared for lay input in the Archdiocese of Chicago at <http://votf.org/bishop/>. However, please do **not** submit a response unless you reside in the Chicago diocese; the team is still collecting responses.*

Bishops are required by Church law to submit their resignation on turning age 75. Catholic recommendations are now being solicited in anticipation of a new Archbishop being named to the Chicago diocese, following Cardinal George's required resignation at 75. Our Chicago Bishop Selection team developed a model to elicit and convey lay recommendations as the replacement process unfolds. Catholic responses will go directly to our Papal Nuncio. We offer our process primer as an aide to others willing to try the process elsewhere.

The Macro Picture

- ❑ Find out when your bishop reaches age 75. Try to begin your team process two years in advance to ensure timely submission to the Apostolic Nuncio (Vatican Ambassador in the U.S.), who prepares the report to Rome on episcopal replacement.
- ❑ Connect with the National Bishop Selection Team, which offers continual consultation; they are knowledgeable about the history and process of bishop selection.

- ❑ Write to the Nuncio telling him of your interest in participating in the selection process, citing Code of Canon Law 212 (demonstrating that you know you have that right).
- ❑ Contact your bishop requesting a meeting on your intent to facilitate recommendations.
- ❑ Gather a committee with the skills necessary to develop and carry out an implementation plan using specified timelines. Name responsible people. It also is helpful to include someone likely to be recognized by the current bishop.
- ❑ Project the potential costs involved in the tasks, and decide how to approach donors. (The earlier you can approach donors, the better.)

Detailed Suggestions

- ❑ Select your team wisely. Team size is less important than the skill sets possessed. Members should commit for the duration of project. Here are the skills they need:
 - Talented writer able to do public handouts, press releases, talking points
 - Media-savvy person who has access to media professionals
 - An institutional Church insider, i.e., a deacon or significant pastoral associate
 - A person familiar with social media if your plan might include YouTube, Twitter
 If people with these skills are not available, do not despair; the national team will help.
- ❑ Make an early decision as to how broad a reach is feasible. For example, will you be allowed to access parish bulletins? Will your ads run sequentially or all at once in different publications?

Developing the Plan

- ❑ Begin with the end in mind. Visualize the most successful project possible and define the steps to get there.
- ❑ Build in scenarios that allow you to shift strategy to support the overall goal, which should always be kept in sight. Some strategic questions to reflect on:
 - How many respondents do you want to engage in this project?
 - How will you get responses?
 - What methods could be best in your diocese? How will diocesan Catholics learn about your plan?
 - Will you communicate through small groups, parish bulletins, media announcements, and social media? (This is not an either/or answer but a both/and opportunity.)