



EXCERPT FROM THE DIRECTORY
FOR THE PASTORAL MINISTRY OF BISHOPS

“Apostolorum Successores”

on Structures of Participation in the Pastoral
Ministry of the Bishop

The Directory is fundamentally pastoral and practical in nature, offering suggestions and concrete guidelines for the activity of Bishops, without prejudice to the prudent discretion of each individual Bishop in judging how best to apply them in the particular conditions of his diocese, taking into account the local mentality and social situation, and the growth of his people's faith. In this Directory, whatever is drawn from the discipline of the Church retains the same force that it has in its original source.

The principal sources of this Directory are the documents of the Second Vatican Council, as well as more recent pontifical teaching and the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

Significantly, this Directory is being published shortly after the promulgation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, which brought together the ideas and proposals of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held in 2001 and devoted to a study of the episcopal ministry under the heading: "The Bishop, minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the hope of the world". This recent Apostolic Exhortation completed the series of Post-Synodal Magisterial reflections by the Holy Father on the different vocations of the People of God, in the context of the ecclesiology of communion set out by the Second Vatican Council, focusing on the diocesan Bishop as the visible sign and central principle. Hence, this Directory is closely linked to the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* with regard to its doctrinal and pastoral foundations. It was produced after wide consultation, taking note of suggestions and comments received from various diocesan Bishops and from some Bishops Emeritus.

The section on The Diocesan Synod is used as a guiding resource to the preparation and delivery of the Synod of The Diocese of Parramatta.

THE DIOCESAN SYNOD

166. Act of Governance and Event of Communion.

According to a norm of pastoral practice handed down through the centuries, codified by the Council of Trent, taken up again by the Second Vatican Council and regulated in the Code of Canon Law, the highest of all diocesan structures of participation in the Bishop's pastoral governance is the diocesan Synod (495). A Synod is both an act of episcopal governance and an event of communion, and thus it expresses the character of hierarchical communion that belongs to the nature of the Church (496).

167. The Nature of the Synod.

The diocesan Synod is a consultative gathering or assembly, convoked and chaired by the Bishop, to which priests and other faithful of the particular Church are called, in accordance with canonical norms, so as to help the Bishop in his task of leading the diocesan community. In and through a Synod, the Bishop solemnly exercises the office and ministry of shepherding his flock.

168. The Application and Adaptation of Universal Discipline.

In its dual dimension as “an action of episcopal governance and an event of communion” (497), the Synod is a suitable means by which to apply and adapt the laws and the norms of the universal Church to the particular situation of the diocese. It indicates the methods to be adopted in diocesan apostolic work, overcomes difficulties arising in the apostolate and the governance of the diocese, inspires activities and initiatives of a general nature, proposes sound doctrine and corrects any errors of faith or morals that might exist.

169. The Composition of the Synod as an Image of the Particular Church.

In accordance with the canonical prescriptions (498), the membership of the Synod must reflect the diversity of vocations and apostolic undertakings, and the social and geographic variety which characterizes the diocese. A prevalent role should be entrusted to clerics, however, in view of their office in the ecclesial communion. The contribution of the Synod members will be all the more valuable if they are distinguished for their moral rectitude, pastoral prudence, apostolic zeal, competence and prestige.

170. The Presence of Observers from other Churches or Christian Communities.

In order to give a greater role to ecumenical concerns in normal pastoral work, the diocesan Bishop, if he judges it opportune, can invite as observers some ministers or members of other Churches or ecclesial communities that are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. Their presence contributes to the growth of mutual understanding and reciprocal charity and may lead to fraternal collaboration. In choosing observers, it is usually advisable

to consult the leaders of the churches and communities concerned, who can then suggest the persons best suited to represent them (499).

171. The Rights and Duties of the Bishop in the Synod.

It falls to the Bishop, after consulting the presbyteral council, to convoke a diocesan Synod when in his judgement circumstances so suggest (500). It is the Bishop's responsibility to decide how often to convoke a Synod. The criteria that guide the Bishop in making this decision are the needs of the diocese and those of diocesan governance. He should consider the need for overall pastoral planning, the need to apply higher norms or guidelines in the diocesan setting, the need for greater ecclesial communion as well as collective solutions to particular problems in the diocese. In evaluating whether it would be opportune to convoke a Synod, the Bishop will take into account the outcome of his pastoral visits, which will offer him a greater insight into the spiritual needs of the diocese than he could obtain from sociological studies or polls. Moreover, it falls to the Bishop to determine the agenda for the Synod and to issue the Decree of Convocation on the occasion of an important liturgical feast. The faculty to convoke a diocesan Synod does not belong to one who temporarily presides over a diocese (501), but if the Bishop has the care of several dioceses or has the care of one as the proper Ordinary but of another as Administrator, he can convoke one diocesan Synod for all the dioceses entrusted to him (502). From the beginning of the Synod, the Bishop will make it clear that the participants are called to assist the diocesan Bishop with their opinions and consultative votes. This consultative form of voting means that the Bishop is free to accept or not to accept the opinions of the Synod participants, even though he recognizes their importance. On the other hand, the Bishop will not dissociate himself from opinions and votes expressed by a large majority except for grave doctrinal, disciplinary or liturgical reasons. If necessary, the Bishop should explain from the outset that the Synod can never set itself in opposition to the Bishop by claiming to "represent" the People of God. Once the Synod has been convoked, the Bishop presides over it personally, although he can delegate a Vicar general or episcopal Vicar to fulfil this responsibility for individual sessions of the Synod (503). Through the Synod, the Bishop exercises his teaching role in the Church, discerning, instructing and correcting, so that all may come to adhere to the Church's doctrine. It is the Bishop's duty to suspend or dissolve the diocesan Synod, should grave doctrinal, disciplinary or social reasons intervene which, in his judgement, disturb the peaceful course of the Synodal discussions (504). Before promulgating the Decree of suspension or dissolution, the Bishop would do well to seek the opinion of the presbyteral council, even though he remains free to make whatever decision he thinks best (505). The Bishop will make sure that the Synodal texts are redacted with precise language, so as to avoid unduly generic or merely exhortative expressions. Only the Bishop may sign the declarations and decrees of the Synod. The language used in the documents should indicate clearly that the diocesan Bishop is the sole legislator at the

diocesan Synod. He should keep in mind that a Synodal decree which contradicts a higher law is juridically invalid.

172. The Preparation of the Synod.

The Bishop should be fully involved in the preparation, planning and celebration of the Synod, using up-to-date methods adapted to the current needs of the Church. To this end, the Bishop should follow the Instruction on Diocesan Synods published jointly by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (506). In order that the Synod may proceed smoothly, yielding truly fruitful results for the growth of the diocesan community, it requires good preparation. For this purpose, the Bishop forms a preparatory commission with the task of assisting him and carrying out instructions during the preparatory phase. In this way, the agenda of the Synod can begin to take shape.

173. Gathering Suggestions, Circulating Information and Offering Prayers in the Preparatory Phase.

The faithful are to be invited by the Bishop freely to formulate their suggestions for the Synod, and priests in particular should be encouraged to submit proposals regarding the pastoral governance of the diocese. On the basis of these contributions and with the assistance of experts or of elected Synod members, the Bishop determines the various issues that are to be presented for discussion and deliberation during the Synod. From the beginning of the preparatory work, the Bishop should keep the entire diocese informed about the event and he should continue to request their fervent prayers for its successful outcome. He may also wish to offer suitable aids for preaching, in order to promote widespread catechesis on the nature of the Church, on the dignity of the Christian vocation and on the participation of all the faithful in their supernatural mission, in the light of conciliar teaching.

174. The Celebration of the Synod.

The ecclesial character of the Synodal assembly manifests itself principally in the liturgical celebrations which constitute the visible focal point of the Synod (507). All the faithful should be welcome to participate in the solemn eucharistic liturgies to mark the opening and closing of the Synod, as well as the daily celebrations of Mass. Discussions and debates on the issues or draft proposals are reserved to the members of the Synodal assembly, always in the presence and under the direction of the Bishop or his delegate. "All proposed questions are subject to the free discussion of the members during sessions of the Synod" (508), but "the Bishop has the duty to exclude from the Synodal discussions theses or positions – as well as proposals submitted to the Synod with the mere intention of transmitting to the Holy See 'polls' in their regard – discordant with the perennial doctrine of the Church or the Magisterium, or concerning material reserved to Supreme ecclesiastical

authority or to other ecclesiastical authorities” (509). Once the Synodal sessions have concluded, the Bishop entrusts the task of drafting Synodal documents to various commissions, giving them appropriate instructions. Finally, the Bishop examines the prepared texts and, as the sole legislator, he signs the Synodal decrees and declarations and orders their publication with his personal authority (510).

Upon the conclusion of the Synod, the Bishop is to communicate the decrees and declarations to the Metropolitan and the Episcopal Conference in order to foster communion and harmony in matters of law between the particular Churches of the region. Likewise, the Bishop will send a copy of the Synodal documentation via the Apostolic Nunciature to the relevant Dicasteries of the Holy See, particularly the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (511). If Synodal documents issue norms without defining how they are to be applied, then it will be the Bishop who determines how to implement them, enlisting the aid of the relevant diocesan agencies.

175. “Forum” Meetings and other similar Ecclesial Assemblies.

It is desirable that the substance of the norms of the Code of Canon Law concerning the diocesan Synod and the directions contained in the Instruction on Diocesan Synods, *servatis servandis*, be observed in “forum” meetings and in other ecclesial assemblies which are of a synodal nature. The Bishop will guide such assemblies with a great sense of responsibility and see to it that no proposals are adopted which are contrary to the faith and discipline of the Church.