

Installation of Bishop Douglas John Lucia

Choosing a Bishop

In the beginning of the church, Christ chose 12 men whom He named Apostles. At the close of His life on this earth He consecrated or set apart these men as bishops. The bishop was, in imitation of the ancient shepherds, to rule, teach feed and defend Christ's "flock."

In the early days of the Church a man was often chosen by the local community of clergy and laity because of his great piety or learning or qualities of leadership. Today the pope appoints bishops. A candidate for the episcopal ministry must be at least 35 years old, five years in the priesthood, "outstanding for his solid faith, good morals, piety, zeal for souls, wisdom, prudence and human virtues, and endowed with the other talents which make him fit to fulfill the office" (Can.378 para 1).

He must hold firmly to the orthodox faith, having a devotion to the Apostolic See and be faithful to the magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church. Together with these attributes of character and spirituality he must have a thorough knowledge of dogmatic and moral theology and canon law. An aptitude of governing, a social sense and openness to the signs of the times are also required.

A candidate must have reasonably good health, and be not-too-old for the strength needed to fulfill the tasks of the episcopacy. At least every three years, the archbishop heading a province (group of dioceses) asks the bishops to submit names of one or two priests considered worthy of elevation. Syracuse is part of the New York Province. These names are then considered at a meeting of the bishops of the province and those receiving a favorable vote are forwarded to the apostolic nuncio in Washington, D.C. who, in turn, transmits them to the Holy See.

When a vacancy occurs, the apostolic nuncio consults this list and confers with the archbishop before selecting three candidates (that list is referred to as the terna). These are subjected to close scrutiny. Their associates are questioned as to qualifications and record. The fact that they were questioned, as well as their replies, is confidential.

A dossier of 30 or more pages on each of three candidates is sent with the apostolic nuncio's recommendations to the Congregation of Bishops, the Vatican department dealing with diocesan management. A diocese may be open because of the retirement, death or transfer of the bishop to another see, or, in the case of auxiliary bishops, when an assistant to the bishop is needed.

The office of the apostolic nuncio in Washington first notifies the possible appointee that the pope may appoint him to a particular diocese. He is asked if he is willing to accept. If he agrees, he conveys this affirmation to the apostolic nuncio. The apostolic nuncio, in turn, informs the Holy See and works with it to coordinate the date and time of the announcement.

When this is done the information is forwarded to the bishops directly involved: the head of the Ecclesiastical Province, The Archbishop of New York (for Syracuse), the bishop himself (if an auxiliary is being appointed), the retiring bishop, the president of the U. S. National Conference of Bishops, and of course, the bishop-elect himself. This usually happens about 10 days before the actual public announcement.

Then the National Bishops' Office of Communications and the Diocesan Communications Office is alerted to prepare information for the announcement to the press. On a designated day the Holy See, the National Catholic News Service and the Diocesan Office for Communication publish the news that the latest successor to the Apostles has been appointed.

The new bishop-elect chooses a day for his solemn ordination and installation as a bishop. If he is already a bishop, he will designate the date of his installation as shepherd of his new see.

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