



Process for appointing a new bishop

Each year, vacancies for bishop arise as a result of death, retirement, illness or expansion of a diocese. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, makes the appointments. He has assistance from the Congregation for Bishops, an office at the Vatican, and his representative in various countries. In the United States, his representative is Archbishop Christophe Pierre.

The papal nuncio, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, looks at a list of suitable candidates recommended every three years by the Iowa bishops. He consults with the Iowa bishops and others as needed to help him create a list of three candidates.

The papal nuncio sends his list of three suitable candidates for bishop with his recommendation to the Congregation for Bishops. This list is called a terna (Latin for “three”).

In addition, information on the needs in a diocese is collected and forwarded on to the Congregation for Bishops. The congregation considers the needs of a diocese when making a recommendation to the Holy Father.

The Congregation for Bishops is free to nominate any one of the three suggested by the papal nuncio or it can name one whose name does not appear on the terna yet who is known to them to be the most qualified for that vacancy, given the needs and circumstances of the local diocese.

The cardinal overseeing the Congregation of Bishops submits to the Holy Father the name deemed to be most suitable for a vacancy. The Holy Father can choose any priest to fill the vacancy. However, he almost always trusts the competency of the Congregation for Bishops in its recommendation.

After the Holy Father has made his decision, the candidate is notified. An announcement is made shortly thereafter.