



The Holy See

PAUL VI

APOSTOLIC LETTER ISSUED MOTU PROPRIO

APOSTOLICA SOLLICITUDO

ESTABLISHING THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
FOR THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The Apostolic concern leading Us to carefully survey the signs of the times and to make every effort to adapt the means and methods of the holy apostolate to the changing circumstances and need of our day, impels Us to establish even closer ties with the bishops in order to strengthen Our union with them "whom the Holy Spirit has placed [...] to rule the Church of God" (*Acts* 20:28). We are led to this not merely by the reverence, esteem and sense of gratitude that We rightly feel towards all Our Venerable Brothers in the episcopate, but also by the very heavy responsibility that has been laid upon Us as universal Shepherd, a responsibility that obliges Us to lead the People of God to eternal pastures. For daily experience has taught Us how helpful this kind of union will be in carrying out Our apostolic Office in this age that is so upset and full of division and yet so open to the salutary inspiration of God's grace; We intend to use every means available to Us to promote and foster it. "Thus," as We have said elsewhere, "We will not lack the consolation of their presence, the help of their wisdom and experience, the support of their counsel, and the voice of their authority" (*Discourse to the Council Fathers*, III session; AAS 56 (1965) 1011).

Hence it is only fitting, especially during the celebration of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, that this conviction has taken firm root in Us concerning the necessity and importance of making every greater use of the bishops' assistance in providing for the good of the universal Church. It was also the Ecumenical Council that gave Us the idea of permanently establishing a special Council of bishops, with the aim of providing for a continuance after the Council of the great abundance of benefits that We have been so happy to see flow to the Christian people during the time of the Council as a result of Our close collaboration with the bishops.

Now that the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican is drawing to a close, We feel the time has come to put this decision, long since made, into effect; and We are all the more happy to do so because of Our certain knowledge that the bishops of the Catholic world are in favor of this step; this is clear from the many wishes expressed in this regard in the ecumenical Council.

And so, after carefully considering the whole matter, because of our esteem and regard for all the Catholic bishops and with the aim of providing them with abundantly means for greater and more effective participation in Our concern for the universal Church, on our own initiative and by Our apostolic authority, We hereby erect and establish here in Rome a permanent Council of bishops for the universal Church, to be directly and immediately subject to Our power. Its proper name will be the Synod of Bishops.

This Synod, which, like all human institutions, can be improved upon with the passing of time, is to be governed by the following regulations:

I

The Synod of Bishops, whereby bishops chosen from various parts of the world are to offer more effective assistance to the supreme Shepherd, is to be constituted in such a way that it is: a) a central ecclesiastical institution; b) representing the whole Catholic episcopate; c) of its nature perpetual; d) as for structure, carrying out its function for a time and when called upon.

II

The Synod of Bishops has, of its very nature, the function of providing information and offering advice. It can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff; in this case, it belongs to him to ratify the decisions of the Synod.

1. The general purpose of the Synod are:

a) to promote a closer union and greater cooperation between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops of the whole world;

b) to see to it that accurate and direct information is supplied on matters and situations that bear upon the internal life of the Church and upon the kind of action that should be carrying on in today's world;

c) to facilitate agreement, at least on essential matters of doctrine and on the course of action to be taken in the life of the Church.

2. Its special and immediate purposes are:

a) to provide mutually useful information;

b) to discuss the specific business for which the Synod is called into session on any given occasion.

III

The Synod of Bishops is directly and immediately subject to the authority of the Roman Pontiff, whose responsibility is:

1. to call the Synod into session whenever he feels this will be advisable and to designate the place where the meetings are to be held;
2. to ratify the election of members described in articles V and VIII;
3. to determine matters for discussion at least six months before the Synod is to meet, if that be possible;
4. to see to it that the material to be discussed is sent to those who ought to be concerned about the discussion of these matters;
5. to set the agenda;
6. to preside over the Synod personally or through someone else.

IV

The Synod of Bishops can meet in General Session, in Extraordinary Session, and in Special Session.

V

The Synod of Bishops meeting in General Session will primarily, and as a general rule, be made up of:

1. a) the patriarchs, major archbishops and metropolitans outside of a patriarchate of the Catholic Churches of the Eastern rite;
- b) the bishops elected by individual national episcopal Conferences, in accordance with the regulations in article VIII;
- c) the bishops elected by the episcopal Conferences which have been established for a number of

nations which do not have their own individual Conference, in accordance with the regulations in article VIII;

d) along with the above, ten religious chosen from the Roman Union of Superiors General to represent the clerical religious institutes.

2. The cardinals who are in charge of departments of the Roman Curia will also attend the General Sessions of the Synod of Bishops.

VI

The Synod of Bishops in Extraordinary Session will be made up of:

1. a) the patriarchs, major archbishops and metropolitans outside of a patriarchate of the Catholic Churches of the Eastern rite;

b) the Presidents of national episcopal Conferences;

c) the Presidents of episcopal Conferences which have been established for a number of nations which do not have their own individual Conferences;

d) three religious chosen by the Roman Union of Superiors General to represent the clerical religious institutes.

2. The cardinals who are in charge of the departments of the Roman Curia will also attend the Extraordinary Sessions of the Synod of Bishops.

VII

The Synod of Bishops meeting in Special Session will be made up of the patriarchs, major archbishops and metropolitans outside of a patriarchate of the Catholic Churches of the Eastern rite, as well as of those who represent either the episcopal Conferences of one or a number of nations or the religious institutes, as has been established in article V and article VIII, but in this case, all of them are to belong to the region for which the Synod of Bishops is being convoked.

VIII

The Bishops who will represent individual national Conferences are to be chosen in this manner:

a) one for each national episcopal Conference which has 25 members or less;

b) two for each national episcopal Conference of no more than 50 members;

c) three for each national episcopal Conference which has more than 100 members.

The episcopal Conferences which take in a number of nations will choose their representatives on the same basis.

IX

In choosing those who are to represent the episcopal Conferences of one or a number of nations and the religious institutes in the Synod of Bishops, great attention should be paid not just to the general knowledge and wisdom of individuals, but also to their theoretical and practical knowledge of the matter which the Synod is to take up.

X

The Supreme Pontiff may, if he so chooses, increase the number of members of the Synod of Bishops by adding bishops, or religious to represent the religious institutes, or clerics who are experts, to the extent of fifteen percent of the total number of the members mentioned in articles V and VIII.

XI

At the conclusion of the Session for which the Synod of Bishops has been convoked, the persons making up the Synod lose their office by that very fact, and the same is true of any individual members who have had some special role or function.

XII

The Synod of Bishops is to have a permanent General Secretary, with a suitable number of assistants assigned to him. In addition, any Session of the Synod of Bishops is to have a Special Secretary of its own who remains in office until the end of the Session.

Both the General Secretary and the Special Secretaries are to be named by the Supreme Pontiff.

We decree and establish all this, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at St. Peter's, Rome, on the fifteenth day of September, in the year 1965, the third of Our Pontificate.

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