

**Question: What is the process for the election of a bishop?**

**Answer:** *(Taken from The Diocese Of Springfield – Cape Girardeau, “Appointing Bishops”)*

The process of electing a new bishop starts at the diocesan level and ultimately ends with the Pope. The process itself is routed in strict confidentiality and involves many people. The first part of the new election starts with bishops submitting to the archbishop of their province, anyone they feel would make a good bishop. A province in church terms is an area encompassing one archdiocese and one or more diocese associated with the archdiocese. This area is called the suffragan see. When it comes to nominating new bishops, the archbishop has certain limited obligations and authority over the diocese within his province. In the United States, there are 33 ecclesiastical provinces.

Once the bishops have submitted to the archbishop their nominations, the archbishop, after receiving the recommendations, distributes those names given to him to all of the bishops in his province. After this, a meeting is held with all of the bishops of that province at which time a vote is taken on which names the bishops will recommend as a group. After the votes are tallied, the names, and the minutes from the meeting are sent to the apostolic nuncio in Washington DC. The list is also distributed to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The apostolic nuncio not only receives the final nominations given by the bishops, he also forwards those nominations along with information that he has gathered on the candidates to Rome. The recommendations and information gathered by the apostolic nuncio carries great weight in the final decision for a bishop. The nuncio himself actually conducts his own investigation into the suitability of each candidate recommended by the bishops. The apostolic nuncio also discusses the needs of a particular diocese with the bishop who has stepped down or retired. If the bishop needing to be replaced is no longer living, then, the nuncio corresponds with the diocesan administrator. In our case, the diocesan administrator is Msgr. Steve Orr. The nuncio usually will carry on significant dialogue with the former bishop or diocesan administrator in an attempt to fill the vacant bishop’s seat with someone who “fits the mold” for the needs of a given diocese. While the issues of a given diocese are discussed with these people (the former bishop and diocese administrator), the apostolic nuncio does not discuss the names of the candidates, these are to remain anonymous to those outside of the process.

The nuncio, after receiving all of the recommendations from the bishops in his province, is responsible to narrow the field of possible candidates. This only takes place after extensive investigation and examination of each person. Involved in the narrowing process is getting thoughts from others on the possible candidates competency. This includes sending 20 to 30 questionnaires to people who know a given candidate. In this questionnaire, the nuncio asks various questions regarding the candidate’s competency in a wide breadth of areas of administration and pastoral care. The questionnaires are completed and sent back to the nuncio in a confidential manner. Once he has received the questionnaires back, the nuncio reviews them and narrows the field down to three. He then prepares an expansive report on the three candidates he has chosen. This report and the names of the individuals being recommended is called the terna. The terna is forwarded on to the Congregation for Bishops, and Rome. Overall, this process takes between two to six months.

At the Congregation for Bishops, the documentation from the nuncio is reviewed. If a bishop being appointed is a priest, then the full congregation of bishops is involved. If the bishop being considered for a certain diocese is already a bishop somewhere else, and being transferred, then the matter is handled only by the prefect and his staff. With the election of a priest to bishop, a cardinal relator is chosen to make a full presentation of the nuncio’s nominations to the Congregation of Bishops. The Congregation of Bishops usually meet twice a month. Upon hearing the cardinal relator’s report on the nuncio’s work, the bishops at the congregation make a vote to recommend which candidate they feel is best. Often times this follows the recommendation of the terna, but occasionally the Congregation for Bishops will ask for another candidate.

Once this step is completed and further recommendation has been made by the Congregation for Bishops, a representative, usually the prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, discusses the recommendation made at the meeting to the Pope (the prefect travels to Rome to do this). The Pope will then make his decision based on the recommendations made by the Congregation of Bishops and notify the group within a few days. The Congregation then notifies the nuncio who contacts the person who has been recommended to see whether or not he accepts the appointment. If he does, the Vatican then sets a date to make the announcement official. The total expanse of time between the process beginning and ending often takes between six to eight months.