



Implementation text

Involvement of the faithful in the appointment of the diocesan bishop

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on February 3, 2022

Introduction

(1) It is the task of the diocesan bishop to carry out his ministry for the people of God in the relationship between local church diversity and universal church unity. His core tasks include involving the local church in the overall Church. The local church and the overall Church must therefore collaborate in appointing bishops. According to the directions of the Second Vatican Council, the people of God as a whole should appear as the acting subject. It is therefore urgent and necessary to involve the people of God of the diocesan local church in the appointment of bishops more closely than before.

(2) The Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC) speaks in can. 377 § 1 of two equal possibilities of appointing bishops: “The Supreme Pontiff freely appoints bishops or confirms those legitimately elected.” However, the second option is not discussed below, but only the Papal right of appointment, for which the bishops and Bishops’ Conferences draw up lists of candidates. These are however not binding on the Pope. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the appointment of bishops is one of the so-called “mixed matters” of Church and state, so that not only the internal church law of the CIC must be observed here, but also the corresponding four regulations in the concordats in the area of the German Bishops’ Conference.

(3) The Concordats have unrestricted legal priority over ecclesiastical law (can. 3 CIC). According to the Concordats in the area of the German Bishops’ Conference, the cathedral chapter and the bishops draw up lists of candidates for the Apostolic See, from which the Pope freely selects a bishop according to the Bavarian Concordat, and according to the Prussian and Baden Concordats draws up a list of three, from which in turn the respective cathedral chapter elects a bishop in a free and secret ballot. It should be noted here that, at the time of the conclusion of the Concordats, only the cathedral chapter existed as an advisory body to the bishop. Other advisory bodies have now been established, and these will be involved in appointing bishops in future, in the spirit of the Concordats.

Resolution

(4) A model regulation for the voluntary self-commitment of the respective cathedral chapters in the appointment of bishops shall be drawn up and issued. Therein, the cathedral chapters

are recommended to commit themselves to observe the following procedure in the case of a pending appointment of a bishop: The Synodal Council of the diocese¹ elects a body that has as many members as the cathedral chapter, and supports the chapter in exercising its rights in the process of appointing a bishop. The minimum criteria are:

- The members of the body who are to be added are selected in a way that is as gender- and generation-appropriate as possible.
- The same rules of confidentiality apply to the members of the co-determining body as to the members of the cathedral chapter. This applies in particular to pontifical secrecy.
- Together with the chapter, this body determines the list of suitable candidates, which the cathedral chapter sends to the Apostolic See.
- In those dioceses where the Prussian or Baden Concordats apply, the cathedral chapter furthermore undertakes to consult the participation body elected by the Synodal Council of the diocese before making its selection from the list of three from the Apostolic See. The body is entitled to make a voting recommendation to the cathedral chapter by a majority decision.

The model regulation also contains provisions for cases of conflict.

Reasons

(5) According to Church law, the respective diocesan people of God so far only have had an indirect, very limited participation, insofar as the Nuncio can also “seek individually and in secret the opinion of others from both the secular and non-secular clergy and from laity outstanding in wisdom” (can. 377 § 3 CIC). According to Concordat law, no rights of participation are provided for the faithful. Ecclesiologically, however, it would make sense to involve the entire people of God in the diocese - thus also priests outside the cathedral chapter, deacons, and above all the non-ordained faithful among the people of God - in the bishop’s appointment. Under the Church’s current law and Concordats, the following forms of participation are open to the diocesan people of God: a right of co-decision in the preparation of the list of candidates, and a right to be heard prior to the selection being made from the list of candidates. These two rights can be realised through a voluntary undertaking on the part of the respective cathedral chapter.

¹ Cf. on this the implementation text “Joint consultation and decision-making”.