



“Chosen by All”
A Pastoral Letter to the People of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion
Concerning the Active Voice of All
in the Selection of the Presiding Bishop

August 28, 2013 A.D.

Feast of Saint Augustine of Hippo, bishop and doctor

Dearest Sisters and Brothers of Our Beloved Communion,

Greetings in Christ Jesus, our Shepherd!

We come to you as your brothers who serve you and are deeply committed to our constitutional mandate: *“The ministry of bishop is particularly one of guidance as first shepherd. The episcopal ministry is one of evangelism, continuity and unityⁱ.”* And so our service to you is one rooted in the preaching of the Good News, assuring an uninterrupted connection to our Catholic tradition and safeguarding our unity in faith and relationship to one another in Christ.

Our Communion is embarking upon what may first appear to be an uncharted waters in a process for the selection of our next Presiding Bishop, culminating in the election by your community’s delegates gathered as a Holy Synod in October 2014. This is a historical moment as we select and call forth one from among us who will serve as our second Presiding Bishop following the remarkable and loving ministry of Bishop Peter Hickman. This historical moment in our Communion is *not* uncharted but, in fact, clearly given to us in Sacred Scripture, our Catholic tradition and the ECC Constitution. Our desire is to reflect with you the Church’s story in its earliest centuries about the vital participation and voice of each person in the selection of bishops and to strongly encourage you to look to our own Communion’s moment in its story. In our ministry to you as bishops, we are concerned that we undertake this process with fidelity to our Catholic tradition and embrace of our Constitution’s letter *and* spirit.

Recognizing its need for leaders, the early Christian community elected them from its members. Thus, by casting lots Matthias was chosen to replace Judasⁱⁱ. The Seven, traditionally regarded as the first deacons, were also elected, though we do not know exactly howⁱⁱⁱ. None of the earliest ministers of the Church was a bishop in the sense that we understand that office today. St. Paul described a variety of ministries that eventually evolved into the offices of priest and bishop. Those terms were used interchangeably in the New Testament to mean those in charge of a particular church. The Pastoral Epistles to Timothy^{iv} and Titus^v dating from the latter part of the first century, set forth qualifications for presbyters and bishops, but used those terms without distinguishing one from the other. Later liturgical and conciliar texts often refer to the Pastoral Epistles as the ideal to which bishops should aspire. Leadership of local churches by groups of presbyters or bishops gradually gave way to the single jurisdictional episcopate that appeared at least in Asia Minor at the end of the first century, as evidenced by the letters of St. Ignatius of

Antioch (d. c. 107). Anicetus became the first official jurisdictional bishop in 154 C.E. From there the idea of ministry by one bishop gradually spread throughout the Christian world.

Early liturgical texts testify to the election and ordination of bishops. The *Didache* or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, of the second century, states: “*You must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons who are a credit to the Lord, individuals who are gentle, generous, faithful, and well tried.*” In the early third century, Hippolytus of Rome, in his *Apostolic Tradition*, asserted that, “*The one who is ordained as a bishop, being chosen by all the people, must be irrefragable.*”

In the middle of the third century St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in North Africa (d. 258) emphasized that, by virtue of divine authority, the bishop should be elected by all the faithful and, that the provincial bishops, after consenting to the election, should ordain the one elected^{vi}. He added that the people “*have the power either of choosing worthy priests and of rejecting unworthy ones*”^{vii}. Speaking of the election of Cornelius as bishop of Rome, Cyprian remarked: “*Cornelius was made bishop by the judgment of God and His Christ, by the testimony of almost all the clergy, by the vote of the people who were present, and by the college of mature priests and good people*”^{viii}. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit sometimes prompted a spontaneous election, as in the instance of St. Ambrose who was elected bishop of Milan in 373. Though some elections were contentious, most were probably without incident. In these early centuries, the nominations and elections of bishops were done solely by a popular vote of all the faithful. St. Cyprian believed elections prevented unworthy persons from becoming bishops. By the middle of the third century, however, evidence shows that women were beginning to be excluded from the voting.

In the early fifth century Celestine I (422-432) stated emphatically: “*no one who is unwanted should be made a bishop; the desire and consent of the clergy and the people and the order is required*”^{ix}. Not many years later Leo I the Great (440-461) declared: “*the one who is to be head over all should be elected by all*”^x. He also stated: “*When the election of the chief priest is being considered, the one whom the unanimous consent of the clergy and people proposes should be put forward . . . It is essential to exclude all those unwanted and unasked for, if the people are not to be crossed and end by despising or hating their bishop. If they cannot have the candidate they desire, the people may all turn away from religion unduly*”^{xi}. These fifth century bishops of Rome, Celestine and Leo condemned any attempt to impose a bishop without popular consent. Yet, there were attempts in this era to prevent the ordinary laymen from voting and restrict it only to the wealthy and powerful.

By the end of the sixth century, with the rise of feudal bishops and seeing the Church's flourishing wealth and power, secular rulers desired to influence the selection of bishops. Participation by the laity and clergy in the selection of bishops began to erode dramatically.

The witness and wisdom of the ages is self-evident and indicative for our path together as a Communion. Our Constitution firmly assents to our Catholic tradition and mandates our honor of it: *As a consequence of the basic human right of participation in self-governance, all Catholics have the right to a voice in decisions that affect them, including the choosing of their leaders, and a duty to exercise those rights responsibly*^{xii}.

We can be easily distracted from the treasure of our Catholic tradition and its witness by the ways of our North American culture of corporate business. Corporate process is composed of a number of people who are used to interview candidates for a position. It is a classic task of a search committee to search through resumes and conduct interviews for the position of executive director or CEO. In this model three candidates are the result of sifting through all applicants. Those three candidates are then presented to the board of directors, who chooses one for the job. This is *not* our model in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. We *are* synodal^{xiii}, which requires that the three voices of laity, clergy and bishop(s) come to consensus in major decisions, such as the choice of Presiding Bishop. Our Constitution's Canon 67 calls for a wide vote that includes as many of the faithful as possible to elect a bishop. Canon 68 cannot be interpreted in a vacuum, but rather in the face of our polity, the other Canons and Sub-canons, Sacred Scripture as well as Catholic tradition.

We actively encourage you, the laity and clergy of our communities, to exercise your right and responsibility to prayerfully discern and name candidates to be considered for the election as our next Presiding Bishop. Without your informed and conscientious participation, any process for such will be flawed because it is not faithful to our synodal life in Communion.

The Nomination Committee for Presiding Bishop has expressed a deadline of **Sunday, September 15, 2013** to receive your nominations. We encourage all the members of every ECC community and ministry to take the time to communicate the names of their candidates to: pbnom@lists.ecc-voices.org. Or, from **February 1- April 1, 2014**, you may submit the name of a candidate as a Floor Nominee as set forth in Canon 68.3. Your active participation by either process helps to determine the *sensus fidelium*^{xiv} of the Communion. Let the people speak!

We are best when all three voices of our synodal life are speaking and working together. It is then that the Holy Spirit reveals Herself in all that we need to continue on our journey together in Communion.

With gratitude to God for you, we remain faithfully yours, in Christ,



The Most Rev. Peter E. Hickman,
Presiding Bishop and President of the ECC Episcopal Council



The Right Rev. Steven M. Roszczewski



The Right Rev. Armando Leyva

The Right Rev. Richard K. Hollingsworth

The Right Rev. Rafael Adams, ofr

ⁱ Canon 23.c

ⁱⁱ Acts 1:15-26. Before the election of Matthias "Peter stood in the midst of the believers and spoke to them," and "they proposed two men" (Acts 1:18, and Acts 1:23).

ⁱⁱⁱ Acts 6:1-6. In regard to the election of Stephen, "The twelve gathered all the disciples together" and instructed them to "choose seven men from among you full of the Spirit and of wisdom." "What they [the twelve] said pleased the whole community..." (Acts 6:2,3,5)

^{iv} 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-19

^v Titus 1:5-9

^{vi} Epistle 67

^{vii} Epistle 67.3

^{viii} Epistle 55.8. Cyprian understood the electoral process to include four dynamic components: the "*judicium*" (judgment: choice or selection of candidates), the "*testimonium*" (testimony about the worthiness of candidates), the "*suffragium*" or election, and the "consensus," or acceptance. The "*judicium Dei*" (judgment of God) required both the "judgment of the bishops" and the "judgment of all." (Fitzgerald, 1998)

^{ix} Epistolae 4.5, PL 50:434-35

^x Epistolae 10.6 PL 54:634

^{xi} Epistolae 14.5, PL 54:673

^{xii} Canon 61.1.1.8

^{xiii} Canons 1 and 16

^{xiv} "Sense of the faithful," an understanding of what the Christian people believe, accept, and reject. It is here, the *sensus fidelium*, wherein resides the promise of Christ to protect us from error with the guidance of the Spirit. Bishops have taught what to believe, accept, and reject, but always with acceptance or a corrective response by theologians and the faithful even from the very beginning. (Acts 15)