



## DIOCESE OF PENSACOLA-TALLAHASSEE

### BACKGROUND: Selection of a Bishop

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The Vatican office officially known as the Congregation for Bishops has the responsibility of selecting candidates to become the world's bishops. Each year, hundreds of vacancies in dioceses are created by death, retirement, illness, or expansion. The Congregation for Bishops, in conjunction with the papal representative of a country or region, makes inquiry into the suitability of one priest or another and submits to the Holy Father nominees for each post to be filled.

It is not as simple a process as it seems. First of all, the Congregation for Bishops must gather information on diocesan parishes, schools and other institutions so that any appointment would meet the needs of the local church. To do so, the congregation gathers information from bishops in other dioceses and from the priests and lay people of the diocese in need of a bishop.

A list of names of those who are considered to be worthy of consideration as bishop is submitted to the archbishop of the province. In the case of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, that is Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of the Archdiocese of Miami. The Miami Province includes all seven dioceses of Florida. The bishops of the province consult and submit a list of names to the Apostolic Nuncio, the Vatican's representative for a given country. In the case of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, the Apostolic Nuncio is Archbishop Pietro Sambi, who is located in Washington, DC. Archbishop Sambi also serves as the representative of the Holy Father and the Vatican nation-state to the government of the United States. In addition to the names submitted by the province, there may be others worthy of consideration that have come to the attention of the Apostolic Nuncio. From these consultations, the Nuncio begins to compile a list of suitable candidates.

Three names are eventually submitted to the Congregation for Bishops in Rome by the Apostolic Nuncio. This list is called a terna, Latin for "three." The terna is ranked by preference of the nuncio from most likely to least likely for any given appointment. Once the terna has been submitted to Rome, the Congregation for Bishops is free to nominate any one of the three. For that matter, the Congregation may nominate 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 church.

The Congregation for Bishops then submits to the Holy Father the name deemed to be most suitable. Of course, the Holy Father can choose any priest or bishop to fill the vacancy; he need not choose from the terna at all. The pope is not bound by the nomination list of the Congregation yet almost always trusts their competency in these matters.

After the Holy Father has made his decision, the candidate is notified. He is bound by secrecy until the announcement is made public in Rome. If the man chosen is already a bishop, he is installed in his new diocese in a timely manner. If the man chosen is a priest, he is ordained a bishop first, usually at the time of his installation.