



**DIOCESE OF
ST. PETERSBURG**

Bishop Lynch Shares His Thoughts Regarding the Episcopal Transition

YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

I would like to share with you an outline of the process which will be used in selecting a new bishop for this wonderful local church we call “The Diocese of St. Petersburg.”

On May 27, 2016, my seventy-fifth birthday, I will forward a letter to the Holy Father asking to retire as bishop of St. Petersburg after having reached the mandatory “age limit” for bishops. I can also submit it earlier than that if there is a good reason, such as my health, energy, and/or the needs of the diocese being greater than my ability to meet them. That letter is sent to the Holy Father’s representative in the United States, our Apostolic Nuncio. He forwards the letter to the Congregation of Bishops in Rome who will then decide how it is to be handled: (a) it can be accepted immediately but I will be told to remain in office until my successor is installed; (b) it can be accepted immediately but an Apostolic Administrator (another bishop of another diocese) can be appointed to administer the diocese until a successor is chosen; (c) it can be accepted immediately but the College of Consultors of the Diocese (seven pastors) can be asked to choose an Administrator who would then serve with slightly restricted powers until a successor is installed.

Regardless, a long and thorough process of consultation will begin led by the Apostolic Nuncio in Washington. Currently most all the cardinals in the United States will be asked what they know about the diocese and its needs for a new bishop; similarly many of the U.S. archbishops, though mostly of the region, are queried; and special attention will be given to the Archbishop of Miami and to my brother bishops throughout the state (called a “province” in ecclesiastical language).

Letters are generally also sent to some members of the College of Consultors, the Presbyteral Council leadership, some members chosen from the Diocesan Pastoral and Finance Councils and then others who may know about the diocese, for example the Rectors of our seminaries. All are given an opportunity to suggest names and, if the experience is still about the same as it was when I was more intimately involved in the process, there will be about as many names submitted during this first phase as letters mailed.

In due time, the Papal Nuncio “works” the feedback he has received and begins to focus on three possible candidates who seem to “fit the bill” meeting the needs of this diocese. Will I be asked, many people query me and my answer is “probably in the first round of

inquiry but certainly not later in the process” and, quite frankly, my influence will be no more weighted than that of others canvassed. This system works well when it is left to the good process for vetting candidates and defining needs and the responsibility is taken very seriously by the Apostolic Nuncio.

When he has his three names, the Papal Nuncio will then send the files with everything he has received to the Congregation for Bishops in Rome and it leaves both his hands and the United States for further scrutiny and ultimately presentation to the Holy Father. The Congregation for Bishops consists mostly of cardinals residing in Rome but it has other members as well. They meet every other Thursday from the first Thursday in October to the last Thursday in June (not dissimilar to the United States Supreme Court). When the Congregation has all the files in order and translation into Italian of the input if called for, the matter is given to a cardinal member of the Congregation who is called the “ponens” (which is Latin for “postulator”) who presents the names received to the full Congregation. The Papal Nuncio to the United States will have sent the files with a recommendation for first, second, and third choice among the names. The cardinal “ponens” can do the same and recommend his order of candidates, often guided by discussion from the Congregation’s staff and prefect (“chairman” in our language), currently Cardinal Marc Ouellet. After whatever discussion the members of the Congregation wish to give to the selection a vote is taken, and generally the candidate receiving the most votes is the name which is taken to the Holy Father.

The congregation also has an opportunity to signal its pleasure or displeasure with candidates number two and three but that is a process I choose not to go into here.

Finally, usually the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops sees the Holy Father sometime on the Saturday following the previous Thursday meeting of the congregation with the file(s) and the advice of the Nuncio and the Congregation. If the diocese is relatively small and seemingly inconsequential (sorry but we would fit in that category), the Pope as any CEO of very large multi-national organization, would accept the proposed name presented to him. If the vacancy is for a place like Chicago or Washington or New York, then the Holy Father might ask for more time to consult, read and reflect, pray and propose.

By Monday, usually, of the following week the Congregation has contacted the Apostolic Nuncio and asked him to gain the acceptance of the person chosen and a public announcement follows usually no less than a week after that.

Now let me close this with some FAQ’s (“frequently asked questions”):

- Will I, Bishop Lynch, know who is being proposed or likely to succeed? No.
- Would I like to know? No.

- Will anyone in St. Petersburg know who is in the running? No.
- Will there be public updates once the process begins? No.
- Will anyone in the media or on the blog-o-sphere know for sure who it is going to be? No
- Will it “leak” in Rome after the Congregation and before the Pope decides? No
- Will it “leak” in Rome or Washington prior to the formal announcement? No
- Will it “leak” in the diocese prior public announcement? I hope not.
- Will there be rumors? Highly likely. Should they be taken as “Gospel”? No

I hope to serve through to my birthday in May and as long thereafter as it takes to find a successor, but I pray that the diocese can receive new life and new energy as soon as possible. I am already praying for my successor and will ask you to do the same as the time approaches.

+RNL

- See more at: <http://bishopsblog.dosp.org/?p=6360#sthash.e1moAHCO.dpuf>
<http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/appointing-bishops.cfm>