

# THE MINISTRY OF BISHOPS

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Episcopal Church

at

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## FOREWORD

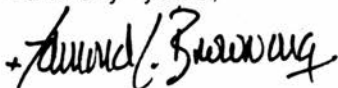
It gives me great pleasure to commend to you this study document on "The Ministry of Bishops" which has grown out of dialogue in the House of Bishops on the role of the episcopate in the contemporary Church. The demands of the Episcopal ministry are extraordinary. As this document suggests, it is time for the Episcopal Church to take "a close look at what it wants its bishops to be and to do."

At the House of Bishops meeting in Philadelphia in September, 1989, Bishop John Ashby, Chairman of the Committee on Ministry, called for a theological statement on the episcopate. Responding to that request, the Committee on the Pastoral Letter, under the leadership of Bishop Richard Grein, decided to underwrite a commentary on the Ordinal for a Bishop found in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. With funds provided by Trinity Institute, the Committee on the Pastoral Letter commissioned three scholars to co-author the study. Those chosen were Robert Wright of General Theological Seminary (General Editor), Richard Norris of Union Theological Seminary in New York, and Louis Weil of Church Divinity School of the Pacific. Drafts of the document were circulated to all bishops for comment twice before this version was adopted by the House of Bishops at the General Convention in July 1991 for study throughout the Church.

The paper before you examines the role of the episcopate in the life of the church historically and singles out several pastoral functions set forth in the ordinal which the authors believe could be helpful in considering the renewal and reform of the episcopate. I invite you to consider this document as the first step in a church-wide conversation on the role of the bishop in the Episcopal Church. I encourage you to study it carefully, both individually and corporately, in parishes and dioceses, as laity and clergy. Then I

urge you to send your comments to Trinity Institute at the address provided on the back of the title page. The Institute will receive and correlate your responses on behalf of the Committee on the Pastoral Letter which will report its findings to the House of Bishops.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edmond L. Browning". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Edmond L. Browning  
Presiding Bishop

## PRECIS

This document examines the role of a bishop in light of the promises made in the Ordination of a Bishop in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Prior to reading this text, it may be helpful to read through the ordination service focusing in particular upon the examination of the bishop-elect on pages 517-518.

The authors of "The Ministry of Bishops" were asked to focus on three pastoral roles or functions which are vital to the office of bishop but are sometimes misunderstood or neglected today. As you read, you will discover that these three central activities also subsume virtually all of the other promises the bishop-elect makes. The three pastoral functions discussed are:

1. The Bishop as Proclaimer of the Gospel and Teacher of the Christian Faith.
2. The Bishop as Provider of and Presider over the Sacraments. (Baptism and Eucharist)
3. The Bishop as leader in the Councils of the Church, local, national and supra-national.

In each of these cases the function of the bishop is examined historically, but the uniqueness of our present circumstances are fully acknowledged. In fact, several basic historical lessons concerning the communal nature of the church and the bishop's relationship to that community are used to redefine the contemporary church and the role of the bishop in a most instructive way. These basic principles, taken from the document, could be the starting points for the rethinking and renewal of episcopal ministry.

1. This document is about the place of the Bishop in the life of a Christian community.

2. The church, the people of God, is a community not a corporation.
3. The bishop is a member of that community.
4. The bishop's role grows out of, not apart from, the community.
5. The bishop presides over the sacraments as a member of the assembly of the baptized rather than as someone apart from it.
6. The church, as an evolving community, is a body of lifelong learners, constantly striving to live more fully in "the Christian way."
7. The bishop is an apostolic link between the tradition and the contemporary community of learners.
8. The bishop, therefore, is the "anchor" person in the church's entire ministry of proclamation and instruction.
9. In the early church there were two regular occasions for the ministry of proclamation and teaching: i) the process of Christian initiation culminating in baptism (catechesis), and ii) the Sunday liturgy. As the 'first citizen' and chief teacher the bishop presided at both the baptismal and eucharistic liturgies, the two public actions in which the church most definitively enacted its identity.
10. Though it is impossible today for the bishop to preside at every baptism or Sunday liturgy, the symbolic significance of these pastoral roles and their roots in the worshipping community are a good place to start rethinking the vocation of a bishop and the bishop's essential connection with the local congregation.
11. Finally, the bishop's role as a leader and an administrator grow out of and are dependent upon the bishop's prior pastoral roles associated with teaching and presiding at the sacraments.

12. The form of church government symbolized in the bishop's presidency of the eucharist is collegial and conciliar in character. This model should apply to all the bishop's leadership functions.
13. The collegial character of the bishop's relationship with the clergy of the diocese is established symbolically in the ordination of a priest, when the other presbyters present at the ordination join the bishop in laying hands on the ordinand. That same collegiality is also implied in the bishop-elect's promise to sustain and take counsel with fellow presbyters in the diocese.

In conclusion, the document proposes the recovery of a specifically pastoral/liturgical model of the bishop's role in the parishes and missions of a diocese. "When this model is followed," the authors maintain, "the assembly is offered an opportunity which, in spite even of infrequency of personal contact, will reveal the place of the bishop in the community, not as a visiting dignitary, but as one who fulfills a specific and crucial role of symbolic presence and unity for all the congregations of the diocese. The bishop will be seen as one who leads the people in the great common signs of Christian identity and as a bridge between the local community and all other parishes and missions of the diocese, and of the diocese with the church throughout the world" (p. 22).



# THE MINISTRY OF BISHOPS

## INTRODUCTION

1. It is not easy to find out what we Episcopalians, or Anglicans generally, make of the office of bishop. On the whole, we have tended simply to take bishops for granted. In ecumenical dialogues, we have regularly insisted upon "the historic episcopate" as an institution that directly serves the unity of the churches and therefore has an essential place in any scheme for the reconciliation of different Christian traditions. On the other hand, we have, with equal regularity, been hesitant to insist either upon a particular theological understanding of the office of bishop or upon a particular constitutional form of it. Bishops, as we see them in practice, are simply the heads or presidents of what might best be called extended local churches<sup>1</sup>: local churches articulated into a number of parishes, congregations, communities, and other institutions, but united in communion with their single pastor, the bishop.

2. Generally speaking, this model of episcopal ministry has worked well with us. Its economy and modesty are from many points

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<sup>1</sup>"Local church" is best defined as that assembly (*ekklesia*) of believers in which all the interlocked orders of ministry -- i.e., the *whole* ministry of Word and Sacrament -- are represented: laity, deacons, bishop, and presbyters. Hence in an episcopally ordered body, "local church" means what we normally call the "diocese." Thus the diocese is not, as it is sometimes called, a "middle judicatory," since in the Episcopal Church there are no judicatories in the ordinary sense of that term below the level of the diocese; and a parish is not "the local church."

of view commendable. In different historical and local circumstances, the office of bishop has varied in its shape and functions, and no one wants to foreclose flexibility for the future by insisting dogmatically upon a particular style of episcopacy. On the other hand, too easy a satisfaction with this very general characterization of the office can blind us to the need for critical attention to the way in which episcopacy actually functions in our own time and place.

3. The Episcopal Church is always, more often in informal than in formal and considered ways, making decisions that affect the manner in which the pastoral office of the bishop is *seen* and *exercised*. Thus the very procedures followed in the election of a bishop project an image of the office itself and of the sort of person who might normally seek or be nominated for it; yet few inquire what this image is or how well it corresponds to the requirements of pastoral leadership in the church. To take another example, canon law makes provision for the election of suffragan bishops, while at the same time the extra-canonical practice of employing assisting bishops seems to be growing. Each of these devices meets an obvious need, but at the same time each of them raises, and indeed creates, problems about the pastoral role and responsibility of the bishop -- problems that the Episcopal Church has never seriously addressed. There are, moreover, practical pressures upon bishops to concern themselves more and more exclusively with administrative concerns, institutional policy-making, and crisis-management; and

these pressures too generate questions about what Episcopalians think bishops are for, questions which are often, and rightly, echoed by our partners in ecumenical dialogue.

4. For these reasons, and others that might be cited as well, it is time that the Episcopal Church took a close look at what it wants its bishops to be and to do -- and in particular, perhaps, at what it says about them in its new *Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>2</sup> To be sure there is not, and probably cannot be, a prescription for a style of episcopacy that will fit the circumstances of every local church. Nevertheless there are deep and weighty traditions about the meaning of the office of bishop which need to be taken into serious account in any consideration of this matter -- and none more seriously than the characterization of episcopacy that appears in *The Book of Common Prayer's* rite for the ordination of a bishop.

5. There the pastoral role of the bishop incorporates at least three central activities: that of proclaiming and teaching, that of providing the sacraments and especially presiding in the church's eucharistic service of God, and that of exercising supervisory or administrative leadership in the councils of the Church, local, national, and supra-national. In what follows, we have tried to explicate these roles and their significance in the life of the Church *historically*, with two particular aims: first, that of calling

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<sup>2</sup>The Church of England has recently published a fine study of 354 pages, *Episcopal Ministry: The Report of the Archbishops' Group on the Episcopate* (Church House, London, 1990).

attention to elements in the pastoral office of the bishop which, in our present situation, run the risk of being forgotten or neglected; and second, that of raising the question how these elements can be incorporated in a reformed and renewed episcopate. We are here engaged, then, not in prescription but in exploration.

## 1. THE BISHOP AS PROCLAIMER AND TEACHER

6. The Preface to the Ordinal in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* describes bishops as persons "who carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church" (p. 510). In later statements and expressions which expand and develop this brief and summary description, it becomes plain that one essential dimension of the "apostolic work" consists in proclaiming and teaching. The address of the Presiding Bishop which opens the ordinand's Examination (p. 517) reminds the bishop-elect that to be "one with the apostles" entails engagement in the activity of "proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the Gospel"; and this injunction is later rephrased in the form of a question: "Will you boldly proclaim and interpret the Gospel of Christ, enlightening the minds and stirring up the conscience of your people?" (p. 518). The bishop in fact is to "feed the flock of Christ," and to do so by guarding and defending them "in [Christ's] truth" and by being "a faithful steward of his holy Word" (p. 521). For just this reason, the bishop promises to "be faithful," not only in prayer, but also "in the

study of Holy Scripture," that he or she "may have the mind of Christ" (p. 518).

7. This emphasis on the role of the bishop as teacher of the Church is nothing new either in Anglican tradition or in Christian tradition generally. It was the conviction of such Anglican reformers as John Jewel that "the key, whereby the way and entry to the Kingdom of God is opened unto us, is the word of the Gospel and the expounding of the law and Scriptures";<sup>3</sup> and they were therefore convinced that the ordained ministry as a whole had as its most prominent function "to instruct the people."<sup>4</sup> When, indeed, they spoke of the administration or governance of the Church, it was for the most part the Church's guidance by and under the Gospel that they had in mind: a "spiritual" and interpretative function that belonged in a pre-eminent way, as they saw it, to the Church's official overseers and leaders, the bishops. No doubt the Reformers, when they sounded this theme, did so in an idiom that reflected the problems and prepossessions of their own time and place; but they were nevertheless right in claiming that in this matter they had merely "returned to the apostles and old Catholic fathers."<sup>5</sup> They no doubt remembered how Gregory of Nazianzus had characterized the work of the priestly and episcopal ministry as "education" and "healing," which consisted in "giving in due season to each his

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<sup>3</sup>John Jewel, *An Apologie of the Church of England II* (in T.H.L. Parker, ed., *English Reformers [Library of Christian Classics 26, Philadelphia, 1966]*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* (LCC 26, p. 21).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* I (LCC 26, p. 17).

portion of the Word," and which required above all "wisdom, which is chief of all things, and holds in her embrace everything which is good, so that even God himself prefers this title to all the names by which he is called."<sup>6</sup>

8. This image of the bishop as teacher, interpreter of the Scriptures, and bearer of the Word of redemption has concrete historical and institutional roots. The gospels picture Jesus as, among other things, the teacher of a band of disciples. Acts portrays the Apostle Paul as "teaching . . . in public and from house to house," and "declaring . . . the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20: 20,27) and Paul himself speaks of a tradition which he bears and hands on (see 1 Cor. 15:1-5) and of the "treasure" of the gospel conveyed, by him and others, "in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). Early Christian communities -- the churches that produced the gospels and collected the letters of Paul -- were therefore acutely conscious of their responsibility to transmit and inculcate the authentic message of redemption in Christ as the core and basis of a particular "truth," that is, a particular way of seeing, and living in, the world.

9. From early times, therefore, there were special "places" in the life of the Church that were marked out and reserved for a ministry of proclamation and teaching. One of these, of course, was the Sunday liturgy, which, as it developed, in effect

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<sup>6</sup>See the sermon "In Defense of His Flight," esp. 22, 35, 50 (*Post-Nicene Fathers* VII:209ff.).

institutionalized the reading and exposition of the Scriptures as an essential element in the business of the assembled Church. A second -- more prominent in the early Church than it is today -- was the whole process of Christian initiation, culminating in baptism. Elaborated over the centuries, this initiatory process involved lengthy and systematic catechesis, whose aim was the intellectual and moral formation of new disciples of "the way." The centrality of the catechumenate in the life of early Christian churches is attested by the fact that some of the texts we have inherited under the name of "creeds" are in fact products of this initiatory process. They originally evolved as syllabi of doctrinal instruction that at the same time, because they took the form of professions of faith, signified believers' acceptance of the New Covenant with God in Christ -- a covenant sealed by the gift of the Spirit.

10. The ministry of proclamation and teaching, then, was quickly institutionalized -- in homiletic exposition of the Scriptures and in the instruction of neophytes -- in connection with the eucharistic and baptismal liturgies, the two public actions in which the churches most definitively enacted their identity under God. For just this reason, however, the bishop early became the focal representative of the Church's ministry of teaching. As "first citizen" and shepherd of the community, the bishop presided in both the eucharistic and the baptismal liturgies. Thus bishops were the normal expositors of Scripture in the Sunday liturgy, and there also devolved upon them the responsibility of expounding the "faith" (i.e.,

the creed in one or another of its various local forms) and the "mysteries" (i.e., the liturgical enactment of believers' union with Christ: baptism and eucharist) in the course of the catechumenate.

11. This did not mean -- and the point needs to be emphasized -- that the bishop enjoyed a monopoly of the Church's teaching ministry. Presbyters might be delegated to preach (though one ordinarily hears of their preaching on week-days); and lay-persons<sup>7</sup> as well as deacons and presbyters played prominent roles in the instruction of neophytes. The bishop, however, was understood to sit at the center of all this activity: to be, as it were, the "anchor-person" of the Church's entire ministry of proclamation, instruction, and formation.

12. This image of the teacher-bishop first surfaces as an explicit theme in Irenaeus of Lyon's five books *Against Heresies*, probably written around 180-185, especially in his lengthy polemic against the gnostics of the school of Valentinus. In Irenaeus's eyes, these particular Christian gnostics, and indeed the whole movement of thought to which they belonged, were guilty of offering an explication of the Church's Gospel -- its "kerygma" or "tradition" -- which in fact overturned and contradicted that gospel. They spoke the Church's language, he insisted, but when they set out to explain

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<sup>7</sup>By modern standards. The reference is of course to catechists, who in the ancient church often figured in lists of "clergy," though they were not ordained. It is this role that Origen filled -- no doubt in an extraordinary way -- during his years in Alexandria as head of the "catechetical school."



it -- and especially in their interpretation of the Scriptures -- they turned out to say something entirely different from what it was intended to convey. He argued, therefore, that the true key to the Scriptures was the ordinary instruction given to converts when they sought baptism -- instruction whose content he summarized, in varying forms of words, as "the rule of faith" or "the rule of truth." In his eyes, this "rule" -- a near ancestor of our creeds -- was, as near as might be, a setting out of the "plot" of the Scriptures; and for just that reason it could both be used to interpret them and at the same time be established by their testimony. It represented, in fact, a summary expression of the very same apostolic teaching, the same kerygma, that could be found in the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of Paul; it differed from them only in its form and in the fact that it is handed down orally in the churches.

13. "Orally," however, did not imply, for Irenaeus, some vague, hidden process that no one could detect or point to. It meant, as we have seen, public transmission by way of the increasingly institutionalized practice of baptismal catechesis. It was entirely natural, therefore, that Irenaeus should find the ultimate guarantors of this process of transmission in the bishops, who at once administered, presided over, and participated in the regular, rhythmical process of instructing neophytes. That is why he could say that the bishops had received the apostles' own "place of teaching" (*Against Heresies* 3.3.1): the apostolic mission of

conveying, in and for the Church, the authentic message of redemption and liberation in Christ. Indeed it is this fact that constitutes the heart of Irenaeus's notion of "apostolic succession." In the first instance, bishops are "successors of the apostles" in the very precise sense that they have inherited both the apostolic message as that was publicly transmitted in the Church's teaching ministry, and also the apostolic responsibility and authority as "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4.1).

14. Any present-day appropriation of this image of the bishop as teacher must therefore, in the first place, stress the responsibility that belongs to the episcopal office. The bishop is, to begin with, a person under authority: one committed in virtue of office to sustaining the Church's identity and mission by "proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the Gospel" (BCP, p. 517). The stress here is on what is to be proclaimed and interpreted: the bishop's teaching must answer to the apostolic proclamation of Christ's resurrection and to "the Gospel" -- what Irenaeus would also have called "the kerygma" -- as those are given to the Church both in the written books of the old and new covenants and in the catechetical tradition that is distilled in the "rule of faith" or "creeds." Hence the *Book of Common Prayer* expects, and indeed requires, of the bishop that he or she be a serious student of the Scriptures; not merely one who is knowledgeable about the fruits of academic study of the Bible, but also one whose personal experience and understanding of the world are informed by

meditative appropriation of the wisdom of the Scriptures in all their variety. As a teacher of the Church, the bishop must be a seeker after "the mind of Christ," who himself is "our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1.30).

15. In the second place, though only as a person under authority, the bishop in teaching speaks with authority. The word "authority" here does not of itself connote coercive power, nor does it connote any sort of incorrigibility. It means that bishops, as their communities' "first citizens," speak weightily; that their official word of teaching grows out of, and points people back to, the truth on which the community is founded. A bishop may or may not be a professional student of theology; for the bishop's primary concern is not with theologies as such, but with people's knowledge of God, their ability to understand themselves and their world, and to direct their lives and actions, in accord with the realities attested in the Scriptures and in the Church's language of teaching, praise, and prayer. Furthermore, this authority is of the very specific sort that belongs properly to a teacher; its aim is to bring people to that point of maturity in Christian faith and life where they can function, in their own spheres, as teachers and so as "authorities" themselves.

16. In the third place, the *Book of Common Prayer* must be taken with the utmost seriousness when it insists that the teaching office of the bishop involves a work of interpretation. To appropriate the sense of the Church's kerygma as that is conveyed in

the Bible and the catechetical tradition is always a matter of "rendering" it -- both in the light of the interpreter's particular circumstances, cultural setting, and problems, and in the light of earlier interpretations. To transmit the tradition, then, is to interpret it: to grasp new dimensions of its meaning, to envisage it in fresh perspectives. To be sure, no interpretation ever captures the full range or depth of the Gospel's significance; and for that reason the wise teacher never allows a particular reading of the tradition, however engaging or fruitful it may be, to displace or to replace its gnarled and knotty sources. Nevertheless every honest reading of that tradition opens a new way into its depths. The bishop, then, as the Church's principal teacher, will play the interpreter unashamedly -- and weigh with critical sympathy the interpretations of others, ancients and moderns alike; but no more than a loving expositor of Shakespeare's plays will he or she suppose that people are better off in making do with such interpretations than they are in coming to terms with the original. Good teachers delight more in what they interpret than they do in their own renderings of it.

17. Finally, it needs to be said that the image of the bishop as teacher, writ large as it is in the *Book of Common Prayer*, corresponds to a picture of the Church as a body of learners or apprentices -- disciples of the Lord, or of "the Way" (see Acts 9:1-2, 19:9,23). The church whose bishop is a student-teacher of the tradition is a body of people who are in the business of appropriating

a certain way of life as their own -- of learning and "trying on," both theoretically and in practice, the dispositions, attitudes, and values that belong properly to persons who share the destiny and the calling of God's Christ. To recover a sense of the Church's teaching function, and especially as that takes shape in the office of bishop, therefore entails an ongoing reconsideration of the very life of the Church itself.

## 2. THE BISHOP AS PROVIDER OF THE SACRAMENTS

*Key to living organization*

18. From a contemporary perspective, the relation of a bishop to the sacraments as indicated in much early Christian literature runs the risk of being a merely theoretical link drawn from a model of pastoral oversight which is now remote from the situation of the Church in modern society. When in the Prayer Book at the Examination of a bishop-elect the Presiding Bishop (or a bishop appointed by the Presiding Bishop) says that the new bishop is "to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments of the New Covenant" (p. 517), the gathered assembly take for granted that in the experience of the majority of the baptized members of the diocese, that specified relation of the bishop to the ordinary sacramental life of the diocese will be expressed most frequently in "providing for the administration of the sacraments" through the ordination of presbyters as the usual celebrants of the sacraments in the various parishes and missions of the diocese. Actual contact

with the bishop as celebrant will for most be limited to the canonical visitation and perhaps some major diocesan event.

19. It is important to recognize that the modern Church is thus heir to a dislocation of model which originates in the radically transformed social situation of the Church in the fourth century. From that time, as a consequence of the great expansion of the Church which followed its liberation under the Emperor Constantine, the bishop's relation to the eucharist became less that of a sign of direct pastoral relation to the local community and more that of a remote overseer of all the baptized in a given geographical area. The response of the Catechism concerning the ministry of a bishop reflects this altered model; the bishop is "pastor of a diocese," not of a local assembly which can gather on Sunday with the bishop to participate as a body in the fundamental sign of their baptismal unity. The primary expression of the bishop's relation to the baptized in the regular celebration of the eucharist has thus shifted from a direct relation as pastor to that of provider for the sacramental life of the diocese as a whole.

20. This shift, although it occurred in early Christian history, is significant for us today as we work to recover a fuller sense of the relation of sacramental responsibility to pastoral oversight. In the early Church, bishops presided at the eucharist because they presided over the common life of the Christian community. Sacramental responsibility was the articulation of a pastoral

relation to a specific body of people. We have tended to work from an inversion of that model. As soon as a person is ordained to the presbyterate, they are understood by the Church to have the authority to preside at the eucharist. A former vocabulary, somewhat alien to us today, makes the point clear: the newly ordained priest had the "power to confect the sacraments." This vocabulary reflects an understanding of the sacraments in which the act has become narrowly the action of the priest rather than a sign of faith within the general context of pastoral ministry. For many centuries the Church resisted this concept of what was called "absolute ordination." Ordination was conferred until the late twelfth century with reference to specific pastoral responsibility; presiding at the eucharist was an expression not of sacerdotal power but of pastoral care. The change in attitude which permitted absolute ordinations from the end of the twelfth century is indicative of a dissociation of the ordained from the ordinary lives of Christian laity.

21. This historical development is important in our consideration of episcopal ministry since the break between presbyteral ordination and pastoral care is a kind of delayed reverberation of an earlier break between the bishop and the local congregation. In fact, one can interpret the historical evolution of delegation of pastoral/sacramental ministry to presbyters as the result of an underlying theological energy from within the nature of the Church to preserve this personal link. At an earlier time, the

bishop had been able, within a less complex geographical situation, to preserve this link personally. The eventual separation of the priest's sacramental ministry from a specific context of pastoral responsibility, however, is indicative of a gradual alienation of all the ordained ministries from an ecclesial context as the basis of their meaning. At the same time there was a consequent clericalization of the sacramental rites of the Church in which they became sacred actions which only the ordained could perform rather than common actions of the whole people of God in union with their pastoral leaders.

22. This ecclesial perspective is an imperative for the Church today, and it is one for which enormous insight can be gained from the understanding of pastoral oversight during the first centuries of Christianity. We find in the early evidence an affirmation of the role of pastoral and sacramental leadership, but also a firm sense that it is the entire assembly of the baptized that celebrates the eucharist. Although the New Testament does not specify who presided at the earlier eucharistic assemblies, there is no evidence to suggest that this presidency was exercised in an arbitrary fashion. Even if we assume that when one of the apostles was present he would appropriately have offered the eucharistic blessing, the itinerant nature of their ministry meant that others would fulfill that role when the apostles moved on. This presider was perhaps often the host in whose home the community gathered. There is evidence from the immediate post-apostolic period that it



was thought a prophet should (when present) pronounce the blessing (*Didache*, ch. 10). At this same time, i.e., the end of the first century, the *Letter of Clement to the Corinthians* speaks of bishops-presbyters as "those who have presented the gifts," which most commentators understand as a reference to the eucharistic elements. In this document, those presiding at the eucharist are the leaders of the local community "with the consent of the whole Church" (44,3).

23. It is in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch that we find most clearly the bishop as the sign of the unity in the Church in his role as presider at the eucharist. In his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, Ignatius writes: "Only that eucharist is to be considered legitimate which is celebrated under the presidency of the bishop or under that of the one he appoints. There where the bishop appears let the community be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the whole Church" (8:1-2). In the model of leadership reflected in the writings of Ignatius, the local church is presided over by a bishop who is assisted in his ministry by presbyters and deacons. For Ignatius, the role of the bishop is that of a personal symbol of the unity of all those who gather with him in the celebration of the eucharist. The unifying ministry of the bishop is so reflected in the bishop's presidency over the eucharistic assembly that it can be said for Ignatius that in this common action the unity of the Church is created (*Trallians* 1.1, *Ephesians* 1.3).

24. It is important to remember, however, that in the time of Ignatius the local church was not a diocese, to employ a later canonical term, but a single body or a single eucharistic assembly of all the Christians in a given area. The image of the bishop's role in the eucharist as the unifying symbol of the local church was thus supported in the regular experience of Christians at each Sunday's assembly. From the fourth century onward, the Church's situation in society led to a gradual shift away from that model toward an administrative model in which the bishop was increasingly experienced as the overseer of clergy to whom the immediate pastoral/sacramental relation to the local communities had been delegated.

25. One other witness from pre-Constantinian Christianity is especially relevant to our subject. About a century after Ignatius, Hippolytus of Rome wrote *Apostolic Tradition* as a conservative summary of the tradition in which the author had been formed. *Apostolic Tradition* is thus generally held to reflect usages dating back to the youth of Hippolytus, that is, about 180 A.D. The ordination of the one "chosen by all the people" to be their bishop takes place in the context of the eucharist, and the first act of the new bishop is to proclaim the eucharistic prayer over the gifts which are the oblation of the entire Church. Hippolytus thus witnesses to the continuity of the tradition which we observed in Ignatius: the one who presides over the Church is the one who presides at the eucharist. The emphasis does not seem to be one of a

narrowly conceived sacerdotal power, but rather that of a fundamental relation of pastoral oversight for which the presiding role in the eucharist is seen as its primary public expression. If one wants to use the language of "power" in this context, the power to preside at the eucharist must be ascribed to the responsibility of pastoral oversight. This assertion rests upon the decisive testimony of *Apostolic Tradition*: the liturgical actions of the new bishop are not manifestations of an isolated power but rather are the liturgical expression of his presidency over the community of the baptized in an act of corporate worship. The episcopate does not appear so much as a ritual function but rather as a charism whose purpose is to build up the common life of the Church. Nor can the charism be seen as a purely individual gift to the ordinand; the gifts pertain to the collegial order into which a person is ordained. The newly ordained comes to participate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit to that order for the upbuilding of the community of the baptized.

26. What emerges from this approach to the ministry of the bishop is that it is the entire Christian assembly which is the subject of a liturgical action, and that all the various participants, whether lay or ordained, constitute a single celebrating assembly. The laity are not merely observers of what the clergy perform. The ancient liturgical texts clearly support this view. Not a single prayer in the early sacramentaries of both the eastern and western rites has the bishop or priest speak in the first person singular, but rather always to proclaim the prayers using the "we" of the entire

Christian assembly. This suggests that, even acting in that role as head of the assembly, the presider at the eucharist acts as a member of the assembly rather than in distinction from it.

27. The recovery of such a sense of the presiding role for the bishop or the bishop's ordained delegate has important implications for the renewal of our self-understanding as the Church, and for the way that self-understanding is imaged in the ordinary liturgical models of our parishes and missions. Our recovery of a more adequate theological understanding of our baptismal identity as the people of God must find its appropriate connection with our understanding of the eucharistic action: the only qualification for participating in the offering of the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving is the baptism which has made each of us an active participant in the eucharistic assembly. The eucharist is not the action of clerical suppliers to essentially passive lay consumers. The recovery of a baptismal framework as the context of the eucharistic action permits us to get beyond the debates of the sixteenth century with their opposing views of, on the one hand, the priest offering Christ, or, in the reaction to that, of the Christian people offering only themselves. The action in the eucharist is that of the whole body of Christ, head and members, offering the whole body of Christ to God. In *The City of God*, Augustine states the theological basis for this view: "This is the sacrifice of Christians; we being many are one body in Christ. And this also the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, . . . that it may

be plain to her that in that which she offers she herself is offered" (10,6).

28. This corporate understanding of liturgical celebration is echoed in one of the questions put to the bishop-elect in the Examination: "As a chief priest and pastor, will you encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries, . . . and celebrate with them the sacraments of our redemption?" (BCP, p. 518). The bishop's liturgical role is at the center of the pastoral office accepted in ordination. Given present geographical realities as to the size of most dioceses, it is evident that, at the level of ordinary experience, most of the people of a diocese will share only rarely with their bishop in the realization of this promise. Unless the Church is sensitive to the dislocation between the image behind this promise and the occasions in which it is realized, it is an invitation to the parishes and missions of a diocese to operate within a narrowly congregational experience of the Christian life. The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* marks a potentially significant recovery of the pastoral/liturgical role of a bishop in the parishes and missions of a diocese by its rubrical norms for the bishop's role in what may be, in practical reality, only a canonical visitation every twelve or eighteen months. In the specifications, for example, of the bishop's role at the rite of Holy Baptism, the directions (p. 298) indicate that the bishop should preside at the celebration of the rite. When this model is followed, the assembly is offered an opportunity which, in spite even of infrequency of personal contact,

will reveal the place of the bishop in the community, not as a visiting dignitary, but as one who fulfills a specific and crucial role of symbolic presence and unity for all the congregations of the diocese. The bishop will be seen as one who leads the people in the great common signs of Christian identity and as a bridge between the local community and all the other parishes and missions of the diocese, and of the diocese with the Church throughout the world.

### 3. THE BISHOP AS LEADER IN THE CHURCH

29. The bishop is to give leadership to the diocese and to "share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world," as the third paragraph of the Examination in the Ordinal (p. 510) puts it. The bishop's particular ministry is described "as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese" in the Catechism, where this episcopal ministry is contrasted with the priest's ministry of "sharing" with the bishop in oversight (*episcopus*) and the deacon's ministry of "assisting" bishops and priests (pp. 855-856). Thus we may say that, whereas the ministry of all Christians ("the laity") from the viewpoint of the Catechism is to "represent Christ," each of the three orders within the Body does this in a particular way, whether by leadership, sharing, or assistance. Already in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus from the early third century, these three roles are foreshadowed, and in the Prayer Book's ordination rites these relationships are expressed in the different ways that

hands are laid on: bishops together in the ordination of a bishop, both bishop and fellow presbyters in the ordination of a priest, and the bishop alone in the ordination of a deacon (pp. 521, 533, 545). At the same time it remains true, of course, that the bishop's primary relationship to the community of faith is through baptism.

30. The particular role of a bishop in leadership was vividly described as early as the year 240 by the eminent African theologian, Origen: "Those who faithfully discharge the office of a bishop in the Church may appropriately be called the rafters, by which the whole building is sustained and protected, both from the rain and from the heat of the sun" (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 3.3). This concept of *episcopate*, or oversight, the bishop serving as conciliar leader and president in synod, is set forth in the Prayer Book where the bishop is asked to "share with fellow bishops in the government of the whole Church, to sustain and take counsel with fellow presbyters, and to guide and strengthen the deacons and others" (p. 518), but this episcopal ministry or function of administrative leadership is not compartmentalized by the Prayer Book or divorced in any narrow way from the bishop's other two ministries as president of eucharistic worship and as apostolic witness to Christian teaching. Thus, in order for the bishop "to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole church" (pp. 518, 855), drawing upon "the faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs and those of every generation who have looked to God in hope" (p. 517), it is also necessary that affirmative answers be given

to all the other questions posed to the bishop-elect on page 518. As administrator both within and beyond the bounds of the diocese, and yet operating within established constitutional and canonical limits, the bishop is also expected to be the chief priest or leader of worship, as well as the principal teacher and preacher, within the diocese.

31. Because the bishop exercises this sort of leadership in the whole church, he or she also pledges fidelity to the Holy Scriptures and to the Church's doctrine, discipline, and worship (pp. 513, 518). It is for this same reason that the bishop always presides at Confirmations, Receptions, Reaffirmations (pp. 412-419), Ordinations (pp. 510-555, 855) and Consecrations of Churches (pp. 566-579), as well as being the normal presider and preacher at baptism (p. 298), the eucharist (pp. 13, 322, 354), and celebrations of new ministry (p. 558). Thus the bishop's role in "leading, supervising, and uniting the Church" (preface to the ordination rites, p. 510), in "building up the Church" (prayer of episcopal consecration, p. 521), is directly related to everything else that the bishop does. Sacramentally and iconographically, the bishop's wider role in the leadership of the diocese and of the whole Church is thus given visual expression at a new bishop's Ordination by the presidency of the Presiding Bishop or the Presiding Bishop's episcopal delegate as chief consecrator (p. 511), by the joining of other bishops in the laying-on-of-hands in the prayer of consecration (p. 521, a practice tracing back to the earliest surviving ordination rites in the history



of the Christian church, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus in the early third century), and by the recommended presence of other bishops and representative presbyters standing together "with the new bishop at the Altar as fellow ministers of the Sacrament" (p. 553).

32. Classically, the pattern for this role of the bishop as administrative and conciliar leader is derived from the early church in the model of St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage who died in 258, who portrays the bishop as the bond of unity between each local church or diocese and all the others. It is especially to his writings that we must turn in order to find the patristic foundations for the doctrines of episcopal collegiality and conciliar leadership that are today developed and expounded in the third paragraph of the Examination of a bishop-elect in the Ordinal of the *Book of Common Prayer* (p. 517). Cyprian emphasized that bishops have inherited both the apostolic message and also the apostolic responsibility and authority (Letter 3.3). Stressing the need for unity with one's bishop, a point already made in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century, Cyprian continues, "The Church is the people united to the bishop, the flock clinging to its shepherd. From this you should know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop" (Letter 66.8). Even more, to be "in communion" with one's bishop is to be "in communion with the Catholic Church" (Letter 55.1). In Cyprian as well as in the North African church of at least a generation before his day, we find an emphasis on the need for

bishops to meet together and to reach a "common mind" under the Spirit's guidance. "The episcopate is a single whole, in which each individual bishop has a right to and a responsibility for the whole," writes Cyprian (*On Unity*, 5), by which he seems to mean that each bishop shares in the one episcopate, not as having a part of the whole but as being an expression of the whole. Thus for Cyprian, writes Bishop Kallistos Ware, "The universal Church is not a monolithic, totalitarian collectivity, in which the individual is swallowed up by the greater whole. It is, on the contrary, a family of local churches."<sup>8</sup> In Cyprian's own words, "there is one Church throughout the whole world divided by Christ into many members, also one episcopate diffused in a harmonious multitude of many bishops" (*Letter 55.24*). For Cyprian, therefore, as for the Episcopal Church today, there is a collegiality that the bishop shares with the priests of a given diocese, as well as a different sort of collegiality that the bishop shares with other bishops in the wider church at large.

33. As for those bishops who deny this by insisting on their own teachings or actions even to the point of schism, Cyprian declares, perhaps idealistically by the standards of our own day: "He, therefore, who observes neither the unity of the Spirit nor the bond of peace, and separates himself from the bond of the Church and from the college of the bishops, can have neither the power nor the

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<sup>8</sup>Kallistos Ware, "Patterns of Episcopacy in the Early Church and Today: An Orthodox View," 25 in *Bishops, But What Kind?*, ed. Peter Moore, London, 1982, p. 18.

honor of a bishop since he has not wished either the unity or the peace of the episcopate" (Letter 55.24). Finally, in a way that could not anticipate the questions raised in our time by the existence of suffragan bishops and of overlapping jurisdictions in full communion, Cyprian expounds the Lord's words in John 10:16, "There shall be one flock and one shepherd" by stating his own maxim: "A number of shepherds or of flocks in one place is unthinkable" (*On Unity*, 8). Providing an ecclesiological foundation for his doctrine of episcopal collegiality, Cyprian summarizes, in the earliest surviving treatise on the nature of the Church: "It is particularly incumbent upon those of us who preside over the Church as bishops to uphold this unity firmly and to be its champions, so that we may prove the episcopate also to be itself one and undivided" (*On Unity*, 5).

34. The bishop's bonds with the diocese and with the wider church, of which Cyprian writes so eloquently and which are epitomized by the Prayer Book in the words of the Examination that is addressed to the bishop-elect (p. 517), are actualized in every proper area of episcopal ministry in the Church today. Ideally speaking, therefore, the bishop's role as administrative leader is an all-but-literal replication of the advice given as early as Ignatius of Antioch to the Church at the beginning of the second century: "Do nothing without the bishop" (*Trallians*, 2.2.). Yet, precisely because this advice can not be obeyed literally, the bishop from very early on, as still today, follows this advice by leading, presiding, and overseeing, rather than by direct participation alongside every

baptized person in every area of the Church's work and ministry. The bishop does not need to do everything personally, but to see that every necessary thing does happen. The bishop must hold up the vision, articulate the basic theology, and help provide the institutional structures by which it can occur.

35. The comprehensive role that the Prayer Book sets out for the bishop as sign of unity in Christ and the one through whom each member of the diocese is in communion with the whole Church and its mission has still further dimensions beyond those that are expressed in the office of teaching and proclaiming as well as in the liturgy. There is also the service of leadership that the bishop performs when appointing committees, when presiding at the diocesan convention, when making visitations of parishes, when proposing names to fill vacant cures, and when serving as pastor to, and co-worker with, the clergy of the diocese, as well as when speaking in the House of Bishops, attending Lambeth Conference, and taking part in the wider councils of the Church. These are not just disparate and humdrum tasks that need to be completed but, rather, essential elements continuous with the episcopal work of Ignatius and Hippolytus and Irenaeus and Cyprian in the nurture and formation and inspiration of the Church for its own proper ministries today. In each of these ways the bishop is exercising *episcopate*, oversight and leadership and governance that is the proper ministry of the episcopal office, and so also when preaching the Gospel, when teaching the Catholic Faith, and when calling for initiatives in

evangelism, ecumenism, and mission. The bishop defines the diocese; it is the jurisdictional region over which he or she is the ordinary. As its sign of unity, as the one charged to "boldly proclaim and interpret the Gospel of Christ, enlightening the minds and stirring up the conscience of the people" (p. 518), the bishop unites the diocese within itself and to the whole Church, both articulating the vision and making sure that it happens, gathering the people of God and then dispatching them. As Cyprian might say, the bishop is not only the one who is sent but the one who sends, or, as the Prayer Book puts it, the bishop is "chief priest and pastor," charged to "encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries" (p. 518).

36. The episcopate is a unique, distinct and different, but not "superior," order in the Church, functioning both individually and collegially, calling each parish or congregation beyond itself to those wider obligations and responsibilities that transcend what could otherwise become a parochialism or congregationalism that might be inward-looking and narrowly based. A proper doctrine of the Church, or ecclesiology, thus depends upon a proper ministry of the episcopate. It is the bishop's distinct vocation to translate into personal reality within the Church's life that which is already imaged, liturgically and theologically, in the Prayer Book itself.

## CONCLUSION

37. We have ended this exploration with a consideration of that pastoral role of the bishop which is easiest for Christians who are members of a "corporate society" to understand: that of leadership connected with administration and supervision. For us, it is neither difficult nor inconvenient to envisage the bishop as a kind of "chief executive officer," overseeing varied functions in the complex organizational life of a modern diocese. The corporate world itself today is engaged in an ongoing search for patterns of leadership which adequately describe the relationships between leaders and followers, between corporate goals and the common good. There is a striking congruence between much of that effort and the search outlined in this paper. What does it say to the church when secular institutions seriously use such words as "visionary," "servant," and "responsibility" to characterize effective leadership?

38. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that a bishop is not simply a corporate executive. He or she presides not over a corporation but over a "people" to which he or she *belongs*; and from this point of view the bishop is more like a "first citizen" than an imported manager. It is this circumstance above all that is conveyed and symbolized by the bishop's presidency at the Eucharist (and, in that setting, at the rites of Christian initiation): that role sets the bishop *within* the community, standing *with* the laity, the presbyters, and the deacons in the action by which the whole

assembly enacts its common identity in Christ -- its new relation to God in the Spirit. Thus the bishop's presidency at the Eucharist intimates and symbolizes the proper *form* of episcopal government: its essentially collegial and conciliar character, whether within or beyond the local church.

39. Then too, this people in whose midst the bishop stands and works, is -- or at any rate ought to be -- itself a body of disciples of "the way." Hence a significant part of the bishop's leadership role is summed up in a responsibility for *proclaiming* and *teaching* -- for reaching out and for bringing the community along in the understanding and practice of its calling to follow Christ.

40. This picture presents neither an impossible role nor a far-fetched ideal. To actualize it in some significant degree in our society would, however, require much practical thought and effort; for the very style of authority classically associated with pastoral office is in many respects foreign to contemporary habits of mind. It would, in fact, require deliberate institutional changes calculated to change people's perception of the nature of leadership and authority in the Church and hence the way in which that leadership and authority function in practice. On the other hand, it is also true that to rethink episcopacy in this manner would indeed be to re-form the life of the church -- and hopefully to bring it closer to its calling under God. The question which these explorations raises in our minds is whether -- and how -- the Episcopal Church could

undertake such a rethinking for the sake of its own faithfulness in mission and life.



## STUDY GUIDE

The following suggestions for studying "The Ministry of Bishops" are offered for the use of diocesan committees and other church groups that are engaged, either in the search for a bishop, or in the review and renewal of the office of the episcopate.

First, read through the liturgy for the Ordination of a Bishop in the Book of Common Prayer, focusing, in particular, on the examination of the bishop-elect on pages 517-518.

Second, make a list of all the roles and functions mentioned in the course of the examination and in the promises, the charges, and the prayers.

Third, add to that list any additional roles or responsibilities which you think are appropriate to the office of bishop.

Fourth, prioritize your list.

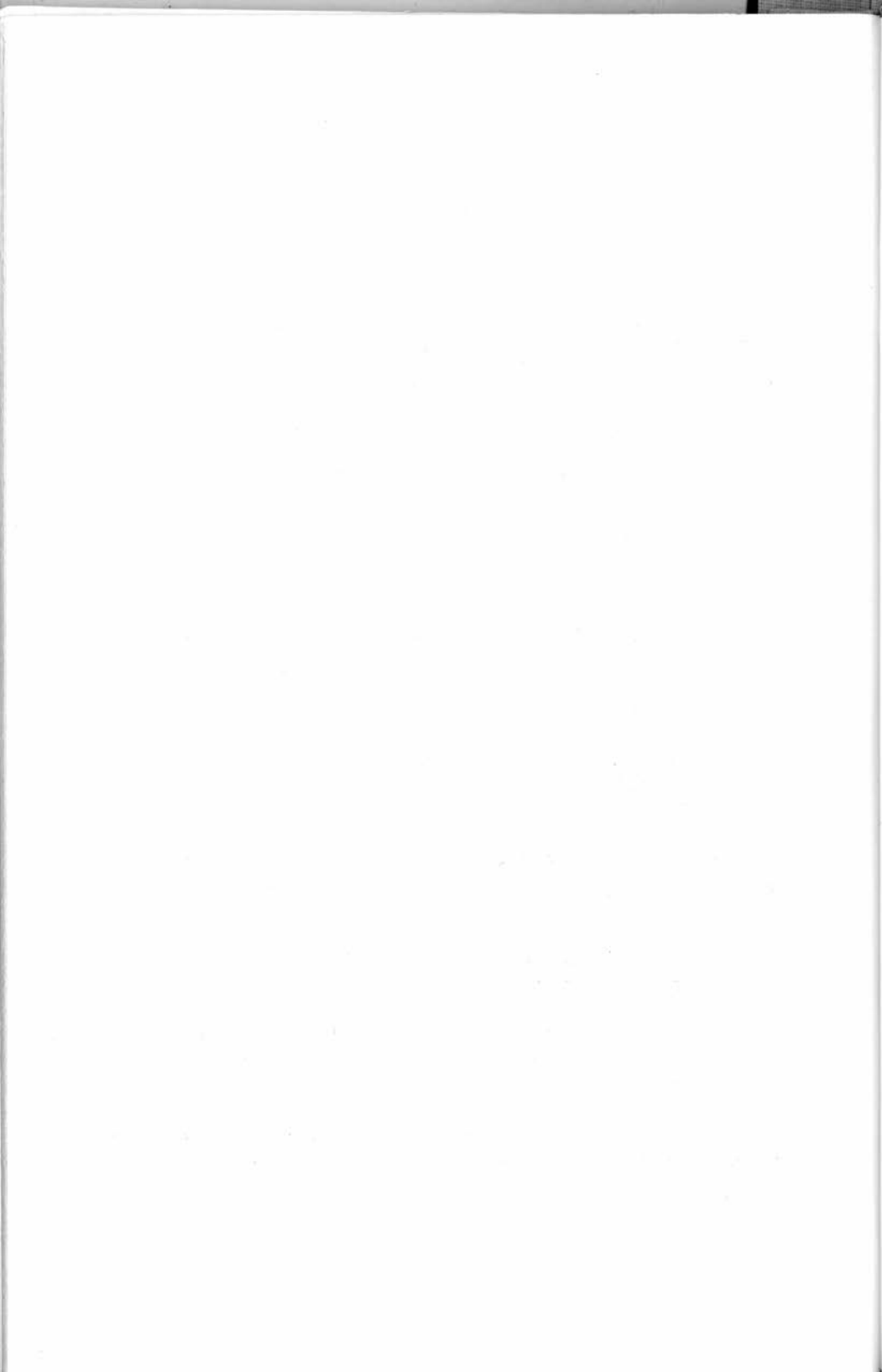
Fifth, read the study document contained herein, identifying all the roles and functions in particular categories and subcategories as you proceed.

Sixth, compare your prioritized list with the list derived from the study document. Are your priorities similar to those of the document?

Seventh, ask yourselves how, in light of the study document, you would revise your list.

Finally, knowing that no bishop could possibly fulfill all our expectations, carefully revise and limit your list and your priorities to accord with reality.

For an ecumenical perspective, follow again these same steps together with a representative group of Roman Catholics and/or of Lutherans.



**POSSIBLE DIOCESAN STUDY-PROGRAM ON  
THE MINISTRY OF BISHOPS**

Six possible sessions, which can however be reduced to two, depending upon the intensity desired and the time available. There can be two speakers, the first, a theologian, to lead the sessions in part one, and the second, a Bishop, to lead the sessions in part two.

**PART I: BISHOPS IN THE PAST**

1. Bishops in the New Testament
2. Bishops in the Early Church
3. Bishops in the Anglican Tradition

**PART II: BISHOPS IN THE PRESENT**

1. The Bishop as Proclaimer and Teacher
2. The Bishop as Provider of the Sacraments
3. The Bishop as Leader in the Church

**TWO ALTERNATIVE SCHEMAS FOR PART II:**

1. The Bishop in the Diocese
2. The Bishop in the National Church
3. The Bishop in the Anglican Communion

1. The Bishop relating to laity, deacons, and priests
2. The Bishop relating to other bishops
3. The Bishop relating to non-Episcopalians and to non-Christians