

THE CODE OF CANON LAW



ANCIENT APOSTOLIC
CATHOLIC CHURCH

EDITOR

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The Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church

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Promulgation Decree

We, Felix, by the grace of God and the authority of apostolic succession, Primate and Presiding Archbishop of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church, with the full consent and approval of the Synod of Bishops convened in King's Lynn on the 8th of March, do hereby promulgate this Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church, declaring it to be the binding law of our Church from the 9th of March. Given at the Primatial See, 8th of March, in the year of Our Lord 2026.

+++ Felix Gibbins





**THE
ANCIENT APOSTOLIC
CATHOLIC CHURCH**

CODE *of* CANON LAW
English Edition

Rooted in the Faith of the Undivided Church

Governed by Synodal Tradition

Called to Mission in the Modern World

Promulgated by the authority of
The Most Reverend Dr Felix Gibbins OSD
Primate and Presiding Archbishop
With the consent of the Synod of Bishops

2026

CODE OF CANON LAW

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Introduction of the Primate

The Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church

To the Venerable Bishops, Beloved Priests, Deacons, Religious, and All the Faithful of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is with profound gratitude to Almighty God and in the presence of the communion of saints that I present to you this Code of Canon Law, the fruit of extended prayer, study, and fraternal deliberation amongst the bishops of our Church. This Code represents not merely a collection of ecclesiastical regulations, but a sacred covenant expressing how we, as a particular Church within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, understand ourselves called to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ in ordered communion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Distinctive Significance of This Code

For an independent Catholic jurisdiction with valid apostolic succession to establish its own Code of Canon Law is an act of profound ecclesial significance. It represents the exercise of that ordinary episcopal authority which flows from apostolic succession itself, whereby bishops possess the right and duty to shepherd the portion of God's flock entrusted to their care. The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church, possessing valid orders through unbroken apostolic succession, exercises legitimate episcopal jurisdiction within its canonical territory. This Code expresses that jurisdiction in systematic form, providing the legal framework within which our pastoral mission unfolds.

We are conscious that throughout Church history, particular Churches, regional councils, and independent Catholic jurisdictions have exercised the authority to establish their own canonical structures whilst maintaining fidelity to apostolic doctrine and sacramental communion. The Eastern Catholic Churches, the various national and regional councils of the early Church, and numerous independent Catholic jurisdictions throughout history have demonstrated that authentic Catholicity permits legitimate diversity in canonical expression whilst preserving essential unity in faith, sacraments, and apostolic governance. This Code stands in that venerable tradition.

The Work of the Synod Under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

This Code emerged through the careful and prayerful deliberations of the Synod of Bishops of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church. The Synod, as the supreme legislative authority of our Church, convened in multiple sessions over an extended period, during which the bishops together sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer, study of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, consultation with canonical and theological experts, and fraternal discussion. Each canon was examined, debated, refined, and approved through the collective discernment of the episcopal college, ensuring that our canonical structure reflects both the wisdom of the universal Church and the particular needs of our pastoral mission.

We are mindful of the promise of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who assured His apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth and remain with the Church always. We trust that the same Spirit who guided the apostolic college at Jerusalem, who inspired the great ecumenical councils, and who continues to sanctify and direct the Church universal, has also guided our synodal deliberations. Whilst we make no claim to infallibility, we do profess confidence that authentic episcopal collegiality, exercised in prayer and study, yields canonical structures suited to the Church's mission. The unanimous approval of the Synod of Bishops testifies to this shared conviction.

Relationship to the Universal Canonical Tradition

This Code acknowledges its debt to the canonical tradition of the universal Church, particularly the 1983 Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church, which has served as the foundation for much of our canonical structure. We have deliberately preserved substantial continuity with Roman canonical tradition in matters of fundamental doctrine, sacramental discipline, and ecclesiastical governance. Where we have adapted, clarified, or expanded canonical provisions, we have done so not in a spirit of innovation for its own sake, but to serve the particular pastoral needs of our faithful and to express canonical principles in language that is simultaneously traditional, clear, and accessible.

Our independence does not signify isolation or rejection of the broader Catholic communion. Rather, it represents the exercise of that legitimate autonomy which has always existed within the Catholic Church for particular Churches to govern themselves according to their proper law whilst maintaining communion in faith and sacraments. We recognise one baptism, confess one faith, celebrate one Eucharist, and revere the same sacred Tradition. Our canonical independence serves not separation but rather the fuller expression of Catholic diversity within apostolic unity.

A Living Document for Pastoral Ministry

The Synod has deliberately crafted these canons to serve as a living document rather than a merely juridical text. Each canon has been expanded to include not only legal requirements but also theological rationale, pastoral guidance, and practical direction. This approach reflects our conviction that canon law exists not as an end in itself but as an instrument of the Church's salvific mission. The law serves the Gospel; it does not replace it. These canons aim to facilitate the proclamation of the faith, the celebration of the sacraments, the exercise of pastoral care, and the good order of ecclesial life.

We have been particularly attentive to those faithful who seek in our Church a home for traditional Catholic worship and belief. Many who have joined our communion have done so precisely because they find here both doctrinal orthodoxy and liturgical reverence. This Code provides the canonical framework within which such faithful can be shepherded with pastoral sensitivity, doctrinal integrity, and proper ecclesiastical order. It is our hope that these canons will serve not as burdensome regulations but as helpful guides for bishops, priests, and faithful alike in navigating the complexities of contemporary ecclesial life whilst remaining firmly rooted in apostolic tradition.

The Conciliar Nature of Our Governance

The establishment of this Code through synodal process reflects the conciliar governance structure of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church. The Synod of Bishops functions as the supreme authority of our Church, with the Primate serving as first among equals rather than exercising monarchical

authority. This ancient model of Church governance, rooted in the practice of the early Church and maintained in the Christian East, ensures that major decisions affecting the entire Church emerge from the collective wisdom and discernment of the episcopal college rather than the will of a single prelate.

The Code itself reflects this conciliar structure, establishing clear procedures for synodal deliberation, episcopal accountability, and shared governance. No bishop, including the Primate, stands above the law or outside the bounds of canonical accountability. This constitutional framework protects both the rights of the faithful and the proper exercise of episcopal authority, ensuring that our Church remains a communion of mutual responsibility under the Lordship of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Our Responsibility and Yours

As Primate, I accept the solemn responsibility to ensure that this Code is faithfully observed throughout the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church. Together with my brother bishops, I am charged with interpreting these canons authentically, applying them with pastoral wisdom, and ensuring their proper implementation. We bishops must be the first to observe what we require of others, modelling obedience to our own law and thereby demonstrating that canonical discipline flows from love of the Church rather than mere legalism.

To the priests and deacons of our Church, I commend this Code as an essential resource for your ministry. You will find within these pages clear guidance for the celebration of the sacraments, the preaching of the Gospel, the pastoral care of souls, and the administration of parishes and ministries. Study these canons carefully, consult them regularly, and apply them faithfully. Where questions arise or circumstances perplex, do not hesitate to seek guidance from your bishop, who shares with you the ministry of shepherding Christ's flock.

To the lay faithful, this Code belongs to you as well. These are not merely regulations for clergy but the common law of our ecclesial communion. Within these pages you will find your rights articulated and protected, your obligations clarified, and the structures of Church governance explained. You have both the right and the duty to know the law of your Church, to understand how it serves the mission of salvation, and to hold your pastors accountable to its proper observance. An informed laity strengthens the entire Church.

Looking Forward

This Code marks a significant milestone in the development of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church, but it is not the end of our canonical evolution. As our Church grows, as new pastoral challenges emerge, and as the Synod's understanding deepens through experience, these canons will require periodic review and revision. We commit ourselves to approaching such future work with the same seriousness, prayer, and fraternal deliberation that characterised the establishment of this Code. The law must remain a living instrument serving the Church's mission rather than a static monument to past decisions.

We are profoundly conscious that canonical structures, however carefully crafted, remain human instruments subject to the limitations inherent in all human endeavours. We do not claim perfection for this Code. Where experience reveals deficiencies, ambiguities, or pastoral inadequacies, we trust that future synods will address them with the same spirit of fidelity to Tradition and pastoral concern

that guided our work. The Church's law, like the Church itself, exists in via, journeying towards that perfect communion which awaits us in the Kingdom of God.

A Prayer for Our Church

As this Code takes effect throughout our Church, I invite all the faithful to join me in prayer to the Holy Spirit, asking His continued guidance and blessing upon our communion. May the same Spirit who guided the apostles at Jerusalem, who inspired the Fathers at the great councils, and who continues to sanctify the Church universal, grant us wisdom to understand these canons, charity to apply them with pastoral sensitivity, and perseverance to observe them faithfully. May our common life under this law give glory to God, build up the Body of Christ, and lead souls to eternal salvation.

Let us entrust this Code and our entire Church to the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, to Saint Joseph, Protector of the Universal Church, to Saint Thomas Aquinas, patron of our seminary and model of integrating faith and reason, and to all the saints who have gone before us in faith. May their prayers accompany our efforts to live as a faithful Catholic community, ordered by law but animated by love, governed by canons but guided by the Gospel, structured by human wisdom but sanctified by divine grace.

Given at the Oratory of St David, on the ninth day of February, in the Year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty six, and promulgated by decree of the Synod of Bishops of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church.



✠ ✠ ✠ Dr Felix Gibbins OSB Cam
Primate and Presiding Archbishop



A Companion Overview
to the
CODE OF CANON LAW

*Understanding the Six Volumes of the Law
That Governs Our Church*

Volume I: Book of General Rules

The Constitutional Foundation of the Church's Legal Order

Overview

Volume I establishes the foundational principles upon which the entire Code rests. Every legal system requires a constitutional framework defining how its laws are made, interpreted, applied, and changed. Volume I is, in essence, the “law about law” – the meta-legal framework that ensures the remaining five volumes operate coherently and justly. As the Jesuit canonist John Beal has observed, “General norms are the grammar of canonical language; without them, the individual canons would be mere words without syntax” (New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, 2000).

The volume opens with Canon 1, which establishes a fundamental jurisdictional principle: these laws apply only to the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church. This is not a statement of isolation but of proper canonical order. As the great medieval canonist Gratian observed in the twelfth century, and as the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) affirmed, each particular Church possesses the authority to govern its own internal affairs whilst maintaining communion in faith and sacraments with the universal Church.

Key Contents

Section I: Ecclesiastical Laws and Custom

The opening section (Canons 1–18) addresses the fundamental questions every legal system must answer: Who is bound by these laws? When do they take effect? How are they to be interpreted? What happens when there is doubt? Canon 8 establishes that all baptised members who have reached the age of reason are bound by ecclesiastical law – a principle rooted in the sacramental theology articulated by the Council of Trent (Session VII, 1547), which taught that baptism incorporates a person into the visible communion of the Church with all its attendant rights and obligations.

The treatment of doubt deserves particular attention. Canon 10 addresses doubts about both law and fact, reflecting the ancient canonical principle, articulated by Pope Boniface VIII in his *Regulae Iuris* (1298): “In dubiis, pro reo” – in cases of doubt, the decision should favour the person. This principle protects the faithful from being unjustly burdened by ambiguous legislation.

The subsection on custom (Canons 19–24) recognises that living communities develop practices over time which, if maintained with the deliberate intention of establishing a binding norm, can acquire the force of law. This reflects the teaching of Pope Gregory IX, who declared in the thirteenth century that custom is “the best interpreter of laws.” Canon 22 preserves the traditional Thirty Year Rule, whilst Canon 24 protects immemorial customs

from casual abrogation – a provision that safeguards liturgical and devotional practices of long standing.

Section II: Administrative Acts, Dispensations, and the Power of Governance

The second section addresses dispensations (Canons 25–31), statutes, ordinances, and the power of governance. A dispensation relaxes an ecclesiastical law in a particular case without changing the law itself. As St Thomas Aquinas taught in the *Summa Theologiae* (I-II, q. 97, a. 4): “The legislator cannot foresee every particular case; and therefore the wise application of law sometimes demands that its strict requirements be relaxed in particular cases for the sake of a higher good.” The Angelic Doctor’s reasoning remains the theological foundation for the Church’s dispensing power.

Canon 26 establishes an important limit: laws defining the essential nature of a canonical institute or juridical act cannot be dispensed. One cannot, for example, dispense from the requirement of water for valid baptism, because water pertains to the very substance of the sacrament as instituted by Christ – a distinction between divine law and ecclesiastical law that the Council of Trent (Session VII, Canon 13) made central to sacramental theology.

The canons on the power of governance (beginning in Subsection III) establish the fundamental distinction between legislative, executive, and judicial power in the Church. This tripartite division, whilst adapted to the Church’s hierarchical structure, ensures that authority is exercised with appropriate checks and balances.

Section III: Provision and Loss of Ecclesiastical Office

This section (beginning at Canon 61) establishes the procedures for appointing, transferring, and removing persons from ecclesiastical office. The canons cover free conferral by competent authority, presentation, election (including detailed electoral procedures in Canons 78–91), and postulation. Subsection IV addresses the loss of ecclesiastical office through resignation, transfer, removal, or deprivation. These canons ensure that the governance of the Church is conducted according to transparent and just procedures rather than arbitrary will – a principle with roots in the canonical reforms of Pope Gregory VII in the eleventh century, which sought to free ecclesiastical appointments from secular interference.

Why This Volume Matters

Without the general norms of Volume I, the remaining five volumes would lack the framework necessary for coherent interpretation and application. This volume ensures that the AACC’s canonical system operates with clarity, consistency, and justice. It protects the rights of the faithful by establishing that laws must be properly promulgated before they bind, that doubts are resolved in favour of the person, and that custom and pastoral wisdom have recognised roles in the application of law. For the future of the AACC, Volume I provides the constitutional stability that enables growth: as new dioceses are established, as the Synod promulgates additional legislation, and as new pastoral challenges emerge, it is these general norms that will ensure continuity, coherence, and the proper protection of rights.

Volume II: The People of God

The Church as a Communion of Persons, Rights, and Structures

Overview

Volume II is the largest and most structurally complex section of the Code, and rightly so: it addresses the very identity and organisation of the Church as a community of persons called together by God. The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), fundamentally reshaped Catholic ecclesiology by placing the concept of the “People of God” at the centre of the Church’s self-understanding. As *Lumen Gentium* §9 declares: “At all times and in every nation, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to Him. He has, however, willed to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge Him in truth and serve Him in holiness.” Volume II translates this theological vision into canonical reality.

The volume spans five major sections: the Christian faithful and their rights, associations, the hierarchical constitution of the Church, particular churches and their groupings, and ecclesiastical provinces and their internal ordering. It addresses everything from the fundamental equality of all the baptised to the precise procedures for electing a Primate.

Key Contents

Section I: The Christian Faithful

The opening canons (102–157) articulate a theology of baptismal dignity with profound juridical implications. Canon 102 defines the Christian faithful as all those who, through baptism, share in Christ’s threefold office as priest, prophet, and king. This Christological foundation, drawn directly from *Lumen Gentium* §10–12, means that every baptised person possesses a genuine participation in the Church’s mission, not merely by delegation from the hierarchy but by the grace of the sacrament itself.

Canon 106 establishes a principle of radical equality: all the faithful possess “a true equality in dignity and activity.” This is not mere rhetoric but a juridical principle with practical consequences. The canons then set out a comprehensive charter of rights and duties: the right to spiritual assistance (Canon 111), freedom of worship (Canon 112), the right to form associations (Canon 113), the right to Christian education (Canon 115), freedom in theological inquiry (Canon 116), the right to choose a state of life (Canon 117), and the protection of reputation and privacy (Canon 118). As the American canonist James Coriden has written, “The listing of rights in canon law serves as a kind of constitution for the Church, establishing the basic liberties that no authority may suppress” (*An Introduction to Canon Law*, 3rd ed., 2004).

Canon 110, addressing obedience and speaking up, deserves special attention. The faithful owe obedience to their pastors but also possess the right – indeed, sometimes the duty – to make their concerns known to Church leadership. This balance reflects the teaching of St Robert Bellarmine, Doctor of the Church, who argued that whilst obedience to lawful authority is a Christian duty, that authority itself is accountable to the Gospel and to the common good of the faithful.

The Formation of Clergy (Subsection IV)

A substantial portion of Section I addresses the formation of clergy through seminaries (Canons 130–157). The Council of Trent, in its twenty-third session (1563), mandated the establishment of seminaries for the formation of priests – one of the most consequential reforms in the history of the Catholic priesthood. The AACCC’s canons stand in direct continuity with this Tridentine reform, whilst incorporating the insights of more recent magisterial teaching, particularly St John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), which emphasised that priestly formation must be simultaneously human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral.

Canon 143 places prayer at the heart of seminary life, reflecting St Charles Borromeo’s insistence that the seminary should be, above all, a school of prayer. Canon 145 requires “solid doctrinal and cultural instruction,” whilst Canon 149 mandates theological studies conducted “under the light of faith” – the method of *sacra doctrina* described by St Thomas Aquinas in the opening question of the *Summa Theologiae*. Canon 146 requires proficiency in languages, and Canon 152 insists on pastoral training with a clear practical purpose.

Section II: Associations of the Christian Faithful

Beginning at Canon 182, this section provides the canonical framework for associations within the Church. The faithful’s right to form associations is rooted in the natural law principle of free association, affirmed by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and by the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (1965). The canons distinguish between public associations (erected by competent Church authority) and private associations (established by the faithful themselves), each with appropriate levels of oversight and autonomy.

Section III: The Hierarchy of the Church

This is perhaps the most constitutionally significant section of the entire Code. It establishes the governance structure of the AACCC, beginning with the office of the Primate (Canons 213–216 and following). The AACCC adopts a conciliar model of governance rooted in the practice of the undivided Church of the first millennium. The Primate serves as *primus inter pares* (“first among equals”) rather than exercising monarchical authority, and the Synod of Bishops functions as the supreme authority.

This structure has deep historical and theological roots. The patristic scholar Brian Daley SJ has demonstrated that the early Church's governance was fundamentally conciliar, with bishops gathering in synods to make binding decisions. The Council of Nicaea (325), the Council of Constantinople (381), the Council of Ephesus (431), and the Council of Chalcedon (451) all operated on the principle that the college of bishops, gathered in council, exercises supreme authority. St Cyprian of Carthage, writing in the third century, declared: "The episcopate is one; each individual bishop holds his share in its totality" (*De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 5). The AACC's canonical structure recovers and maintains this ancient conciliar model.

Canon 216 asserts that the Primate's authority is exercised "not to diminish but to enhance and safeguard each bishop's own" authority – a principle of subsidiarity consistent with the teaching of Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and affirmed by the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus* (1965).

The section also establishes the Synod of Bishops (Subsection II), the role of Primatial legates (Subsection III), and the powers and responsibilities of diocesan bishops. The treatment of impeded and vacant sees ensures continuity of governance during periods of transition.

Sections IV–V: Particular Churches, Provinces, and Internal Ordering

Section IV (beginning at Canon 235) addresses the organisation of particular churches – dioceses, territorial prelatures, abbaties, and other structures. Section V (beginning at Canon 293) establishes ecclesiastical provinces and regions, the role of metropolitans, particular councils, conferences of bishops, and the detailed internal ordering of dioceses – including the diocesan curia, vicars general, chancellors, archives, parishes, pastors, vicars forane (deans), and chaplains. This comprehensive treatment of the Church's local and regional structures ensures that pastoral governance operates effectively at every level.

The provision for vicars forane (Subsection X) reflects the ancient practice, attested since the fourth century, of appointing senior clergy to exercise supervisory authority over groups of parishes within a diocese. The canons on chaplains (Subsection XI) address the pastoral care of specific communities such as hospitals, prisons, schools, and military personnel.

Why This Volume Matters

Volume II is the beating heart of the Code because it addresses the Church's most fundamental reality: she is a people. Before she is an institution, a hierarchy, or a legal system, the Church is the People of God gathered by baptism into a communion of faith, hope, and love. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus Caritas Est* (2005): "The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life."

For the AACC's future, these canons provide the constitutional architecture for sustainable growth. The conciliar governance model ensures that expansion does not come at the expense of accountability. The comprehensive treatment of diocesan structures – from the curia to parishes to chaplaincies – provides the organisational framework within which pastoral

ministry takes place. And the charter of the faithful's rights ensures that the Church remains a communion of mutual responsibility under the Lordship of Christ.

Volume III: Institutes of Consecrated Life, Societies of Apostolic Life, and the Teaching Function of the Church

The Evangelical Counsels as Living Witness to the Kingdom

Overview

Volume III addresses the consecrated life – those men and women who, by professing the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience through vows or sacred bonds, dedicate themselves wholly to God's service. This form of Christian discipleship has been present in the Church from the earliest centuries, beginning with the desert fathers and mothers of Egypt and Syria – St Antony of Egypt, St Pachomius, St Macrina the Younger, and the communities described by St John Cassian in his Conferences and Institutes. The great monastic rules of St Basil the Great in the East and St Benedict of Nursia in the West established the patterns of communal religious life that have shaped Christian civilisation for fifteen centuries. Volume III also incorporates, in its concluding section, the canonical framework for the Church's teaching office (*munus docendi*): preaching, catechesis, missionary activity, Catholic education, and social communications.

The Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965), taught that the consecrated life is not a compromise between the clerical and lay states but a distinct vocation, "a gift which the Church has received from its Lord and which by His grace it always preserves." St John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996) further developed this teaching, describing the consecrated life as an "icon of the Transfigured Christ" – a living sign of the world to come.

Key Contents

Section I: General Rules for All Institutes of Consecrated Life

The opening canons (380–414) establish the theological foundations and general norms applicable to all forms of consecrated life. Canon 380 defines its nature: individuals "give themselves wholly to God, dedicating themselves to His honour, to the building up of the Church, and to the salvation of the world." They strive for "perfect charity" and serve as "a visible sign in the Church, foretelling heavenly glory."

Canon 385 insists on the preservation of each institute's founding charism and spiritual traditions. As *Vita Consecrata* (§36) teaches, the charism of a religious institute is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the entire Church, and its preservation is not mere conservatism but fidelity to

the Spirit's creative work. The AACC's Code provides robust canonical protections for this spiritual patrimony.

The Code provides for diverse forms of consecrated life: religious institutes with solemn vows, the eremitic or anchoritic life (Canon 411) – which St Jerome called “the oldest form of religious life in the Church” – the order of virgins (Canon 412), and the possibility of approving new forms (Canon 413). This openness reflects the Church's recognition, affirmed by the Council of Chalcedon (451), that the Holy Spirit continues to inspire new expressions of radical discipleship.

Governance, Formation, and the Apostolate

The volume establishes detailed norms for the internal governance of religious institutes, including the roles of superiors (Canons 430–433), general chapters (Canon 438), the admission and formation of candidates (Subsections IV–VI), the obligations and rights of members (Subsection VII), and the apostolate of institutes (Subsection VIII). The canons on dismissal (Subsection IX) balance the institute's right to protect its mission with the individual member's right to due process – a balance emphasised by St Ignatius of Loyola in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus.

Subsection XI addresses secular institutes, a form of consecrated life recognised by Pope Pius XII in the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* (1947), in which members live the evangelical counsels in the midst of the world without external signs of religious life.

Section II: Societies of Apostolic Life

The concluding section addresses societies whose members pursue the society's apostolic purpose and live a common life as brothers or sisters, but do not take public religious vows. These societies – such as the Oratorians of St Philip Neri, the Sulpicians, and the Vincentians – represent a distinct canonical form of community life oriented towards specific apostolic works.

Why This Volume Matters

The consecrated life has always been, in the words of the historian David Knowles, “the barometer of the Church's spiritual health.” When religious life flourishes, the Church is renewed; when it declines, the entire body suffers. St Bernard of Clairvaux, Doctor of the Church, expressed this with characteristic force: “The religious life is the light of bishops, the nursery of the priesthood, and the school of holiness for the entire Church.”

For the AACC, providing a robust canonical framework for consecrated life is essential to attracting and supporting those called to this radical form of witness. As the Church grows and new communities are established, these canons ensure stability, accountability, and spiritual protection. The incorporation of the teaching function into this same volume reflects a deep theological coherence: those who have consecrated themselves wholly to God are among the

primary witnesses and teachers of the faith, and the evangelical life and the missionary mandate of the Church are inseparable. Together, the canons of Volume III address the interior vocation of consecrated persons and the outward proclamation through which the faith is transmitted to every generation. Looking ahead, the canons on missionary activity and Catholic education are equally vital as the Church extends its reach, particularly in international contexts where the demand for orthodox Catholic formation is strong, and they provide the framework for the AACCC's expanding educational mission through St Thomas Aquinas Seminary and its growing range of programmes.

The Teaching Function of the Church (Munus Docendi)

Proclaiming the Faith to Every Generation

Overview

The concluding section of Volume III addresses one of the Church's three essential functions (tria munera): the teaching office (munus docendi). Christ's command to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20) is the charter of the Church's teaching mission. This section provides the canonical framework within which that mission is carried out through preaching, catechesis, missionary activity, Catholic education, and the use of modern communications.

The First Vatican Council (1870) solemnly defined the Church's teaching authority in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, whilst the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* (1965) placed the Word of God – Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition together – at the heart of the Church's proclamation. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (§85) affirms: "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone."

Key Contents

Section I: Preaching the Word of God

Canon 532 establishes the Church's fundamental right and duty to proclaim the Gospel, a right that is "independent of any government or human authority." This assertion of ecclesial liberty echoes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), which affirmed the Church's right to fulfil her divine mission without interference from the State. Canon 530 identifies bishops as "authentic teachers of the faith," in continuity with the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* §25.

The canons on preaching (539–548) establish the homily as the primary form of preaching, to be offered at every Sunday and holy day Mass. Canon 545 requires that preaching present the core content of the faith, whilst Canon 546 insists that teaching be adapted to the audience – a principle articulated by St Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church, in his *Regula Pastoralis*: “The same exhortation is not suited to all, because all are not bound together by the same quality of character.” Canon 548 extends the Church’s concern to “the marginalised and non-believers,” reflecting the missionary ecclesiology emphasised by the Second Vatican Council’s Decree *Ad Gentes* (1965).

The treatment of heresy, apostasy, and schism (Canon 534) provides clear definitions of these canonical offences, drawing on the dogmatic teaching of the ecumenical councils, particularly the Council of Nicaea (325) and the Council of Chalcedon (451), which established the boundaries of orthodox faith.

Section II: Catechesis, Mission, Education, and Communications

The second section is comprehensive in scope. The canons on catechesis (549–557) establish systematic formation in the faith as a fundamental pastoral responsibility. As the General Directory for Catechesis (1997) describes it, catechesis is “an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life” – not merely religious instruction but formation in prayer, worship, moral life, and community. Canon 553 places particular responsibility upon parish priests, whilst Canon 551 recognises the shared responsibility of parents, bishops, religious, and the laity.

The missionary canons (558–566) address the Church’s outward-facing mission to those who have not yet received the Gospel. Canon 558 declares that “the whole Church is missionary by its very nature,” reflecting the teaching of *Ad Gentes* §2 and the consistent emphasis of Popes from Paul VI (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975) to Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013). The provision for catechists in mission territories (Canon 562) recognises a ministry with ancient roots, attested in the writings of Origen and St Augustine of Hippo.

The canons on Catholic education (Subsection III) affirm the Church’s right to establish and direct schools, reflecting the teaching of Pope Pius XI in *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929) and the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965). The canons on social communications (Subsection IV) address the Church’s use of modern media, drawing on the Council’s Decree *Inter Mirifica* (1963) and St John Paul II’s teaching on the “new evangelisation.”

Why This Volume Matters

Teaching is the means by which the faith is transmitted across generations. As Cardinal Avery Dulles SJ wrote: “A Church that ceases to teach ceases to be a Church; it becomes merely a community that has forgotten its own story” (*The Craft of Theology*, 1992). For the AACC, this volume is of particular significance because many of the faithful who seek a home in this jurisdiction do so precisely because they value orthodox doctrine and traditional teaching.

These canons ensure that expectation is met through robust legal requirements for sound preaching, faithful catechesis, and rigorous educational standards.

The canons of this section are equally vital as the Church extends its reach, particularly in international contexts where the demand for orthodox Catholic formation is strong. They also provide the canonical framework for the AACC's expanding educational mission through St Thomas Aquinas Seminary and its growing range of programmes.

Volume IV: The Sanctifying Office of the Church

Munus Sanctificandi: The Sacraments and Sacred Worship

Overview

Volume IV is the spiritual heart of the Code. It addresses the Church's sanctifying function (*munus sanctificandi*) – the means by which God's grace is communicated to His people through the sacred liturgy and, supremely, through the seven sacraments. The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), declared: "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows" (§10).

This volume is the most extensive in the Code, covering baptism, confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, penance and reconciliation, the anointing of the sick, Holy Orders, matrimony, sacramentals, the Liturgy of the Hours, ecclesiastical funerals, the veneration of saints and relics, vows and oaths, sacred places, and sacred times. Its comprehensiveness reflects the Church's conviction, solemnly taught by the Council of Trent (Session VII, 1547), that the seven sacraments were instituted by Christ, confer the grace they signify, and are necessary for salvation. As St Thomas Aquinas teaches in the *Summa Theologiae* (III, q. 60, a. 1): "The sacraments are signs which produce grace in the soul; they accomplish what they signify."

Key Contents

Section I: The Sacraments in General, Baptism, and Confirmation

Canon 602 establishes that the Church exercises her sanctifying office "most especially in the sacred liturgy, which is the exercise of Christ's priestly office." This is not human invention but divine institution: in the liturgy, Christ Himself acts through His Body the Church. The opening canons (602–614) address the general principles governing all sacraments, including the requirement to observe approved liturgical books (Canon 612) and the proper use and care of holy oils (Canon 613).

The canons on baptism (615–641) are comprehensive. They cover the rite, preparation, ministers, godparents, recording, and every conceivable pastoral circumstance – including doubtful baptisms (Canon 634), foundlings (Canon 635), and miscarried fetuses (Canon 636). This thoroughness reflects the Church's understanding, taught by the Council of Florence in

the Decree for the Armenians (1439) and reiterated by the Council of Trent, that baptism is “the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.” As St Ambrose of Milan, Doctor of the Church, wrote in *De Sacramentis*: “You were plunged into water; you came to the priest; you were anointed. Consider how many sacraments there are: the whole world could not have contained them.”

The canons on confirmation (642–655) establish this sacrament as the completion of baptismal grace, conferred through anointing with sacred chrism and the laying on of hands. The theological understanding reflected here draws upon the teaching of the Council of Florence and the Catechism of the Council of Trent, which describe confirmation as strengthening the baptised to bear witness to Christ – the sacrament of Christian maturity and apostolic mission.

Section II: The Most Holy Eucharist

The Eucharistic canons (656–709) are among the most detailed in the entire Code, reflecting the supreme importance of the Eucharist in Catholic life. Canon 656 describes the Eucharist as “the Church’s most holy sacrament, in which Christ the Lord himself is truly, really, and substantially present.” This affirmation of the Real Presence is grounded in the solemn definition of the Council of Trent (Session XIII, 1551), which employed the term “transubstantiation” to describe the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and in the earlier teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which first used this term in a conciliar context.

The canons address the celebration of Mass, concelebration (Canon 661), visiting priests (Canon 662), daily celebration (Canon 663), the role of deacons and laity (Canon 665), preparation for Mass (Canon 666), ministers of Holy Communion (Canon 667), the rite of communion including the Eucharistic fast (Canon 674), the Easter duty (Canon 675), Viaticum for the dying (Canons 676–677), the reservation and veneration of the Blessed Sacrament including tabernacle norms (Canons 688–698), and the system of Mass intentions and stipends (Canons 699–709). Notably, Canon 2 of Volume I establishes that the Mass may be celebrated in either the modern form (*Novus Ordo*) or the traditional Latin form (Tridentine Mass), with the Tridentine Mass available in both Latin and the vernacular – a provision of particular significance for the AACC.

Section III: Penance, Reconciliation, and the Anointing of the Sick

Canon 713 establishes the sacrament of penance as the means by which “baptised people are restored to communion with God and the Church after sin.” The canons provide detailed guidance on the administration of confession, the qualities required of confessors, general absolution, and the absolute inviolability of the confessional seal. St John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, captured the pastoral character of this sacrament in the fourth century: “The priest sits in the confessional as a healer, not a judge” (*De Sacerdotio*, III). The Council of Trent (Session XIV, 1551) provided the definitive doctrinal framework for the sacrament, teaching that confession of sins to a priest is necessary “by divine law.”

The canons on the anointing of the sick address the pastoral care of the seriously ill and dying. This ministry is rooted in the apostolic practice described in the Epistle of James: “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). The Council of Trent (Session XIV, 1551) taught that this sacrament was “instituted by Christ our Lord, hinted at in Mark 6:13 and promulgated by the Apostle James.”

Section IV: Holy Orders

The canons on Holy Orders (758 onwards) address the sacrament by which men are ordained to the episcopate, priesthood, and diaconate. The AACC maintains the Catholic teaching, solemnly defined by the Council of Trent (Session XXIII, 1563), that ordination confers an indelible sacramental character and that the sacrament was divinely instituted. The canons cover the celebration and minister of ordination (Subsection I), the requirements for candidates including irregularities and impediments (Subsection II), and the documentation required (Subsection III).

The theology of Holy Orders reflected in these canons draws upon the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* §§28–29, which describes the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon as participating in the one priesthood of Christ, and upon the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), which emphasises that the priest acts in *persona Christi Capitis* – in the person of Christ the Head.

Section V: Marriage

The matrimonial canons (802–870) constitute a comprehensive treatment of one of the most pastorally complex areas of Church law. Canon 802 establishes the nature of marriage, and Canon 803 its essential properties: unity and indissolubility. Canon 858 affirms the Catholic teaching on the indissolubility of consummated sacramental marriage: it “cannot be dissolved by any human authority or for any reason other than death.” This teaching is rooted in Christ’s own words: “What God has joined together, let no one put asunder” (Matthew 19:6), and was solemnly defined by the Council of Trent (Session XXIV, 1563).

The canons address pastoral preparation for marriage (Canon 808), impediments both diriment and prohibitive (Canons 816–830), matrimonial consent and its defects (Canons 831–839), canonical form (Canons 840–850), the effects of marriage including parental responsibility (Canon 853), the separation of spouses (Canons 858–870), and the Pauline Privilege (Canon 860). As Pope Benedict XVI observed: “Marriage law is not an obstacle to pastoral charity but an expression of it,” because the legal protection of the marriage bond safeguards the dignity of the spouses and the welfare of children.

Sections VI–VII: Other Acts of Divine Worship, Sacred Places, and Sacred Times

The concluding sections are extensive and rich. Section VI covers sacramentals (Canon 871: “sacred signs that in some way resemble the sacraments”), exorcism (Canon 877), the Liturgy

of the Hours (Canons 878–880), ecclesiastical funerals and the practice of burial and cremation (Canons 881–886), the veneration of saints, sacred images and relics (Canons 887–889), and vows and oaths. Section VII addresses sacred places – churches, oratories, private chapels, shrines, altars, and cemeteries – and sacred times, including Sundays, feast days, and days of penance.

The canons on sacred places draw upon a tradition stretching back to the earliest Christian basilicas and the theology of consecration articulated by Eusebius of Caesarea in his description of the dedication of the church at Tyre (c. 317). The canons on sacred times reflect the Church’s ancient practice of sanctifying the rhythm of the year through the liturgical calendar – a practice already well developed by the time of Pope St Leo the Great in the fifth century.

Why This Volume Matters

Volume IV matters because the sacraments matter. They are the privileged means by which God communicates His grace to the faithful. As St Leo the Great, Doctor of the Church, taught: “What was visible in our Saviour has passed over into the sacraments” (Sermo 74). For the AACC, this volume is of supreme practical importance because it provides the detailed guidance clergy need for the daily celebration of the sacraments. When a priest faces a pastoral question about baptism, marriage, confession, or any other sacramental matter, it is to these canons that he turns. The comprehensiveness and clarity of these canons directly serves the sanctification of souls, which is, as the canonical tradition reminds us, “the supreme law in the Church” (*salus animarum suprema lex*).

Volume V: The Temporal Goods of the Church

Stewardship of Resources in Service of Mission

Overview

Volume V addresses the acquisition, administration, and stewardship of temporal goods. Whilst this subject may appear prosaic beside the sacramental theology of Volume IV, it is no less essential to the Church’s mission. Churches need buildings; clergy need support; the poor need assistance; the mission needs resources. As Pope Paul VI observed in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967): “The Church has never viewed material goods as an end in themselves, but always as means to serve human dignity and the common good.”

The theological foundation for the Church’s right to own and administer property is firmly established in both Scripture and Tradition. The earliest Christian communities pooled their resources (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35), and the Church’s right to possess temporal goods was recognised by the Council of Nicaea (325) and formally incorporated into imperial law by Emperor Constantine. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus* (§28), and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (§8), both affirm the Church’s right and duty to use temporal goods for spiritual ends.

Key Contents

Section I: General Principles

Canon 948 establishes that the Church possesses, by its very nature, the right to acquire, retain, administer, and alienate temporal goods “independent of secular authority.” This right exists in service of the Church’s proper ends: divine worship, the support of clergy, and works of apostolate and charity. Canon 949 extends this capacity to the universal Church, the Primatial See, particular churches, and all juridical persons. Canon 950 places all Church property under the ultimate stewardship of the Primatial See.

Section II: Acquisition of Goods

The canons on acquisition (953–963) address the various means by which the Church may lawfully obtain temporal goods: donations, collections, offerings, and prescription. Canon 954 affirms the Church’s right to require support from the faithful – a right with biblical foundations in St Paul’s teaching: “The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). Canon 955 addresses the bishop’s duty to remind the faithful of their obligation to support the Church’s mission, and Canon 958 regulates the taking of collections.

Section III: Administration of Goods

The administrative canons (964 onwards) establish structures of financial governance: supreme stewardship by the Primatial See (Canon 964), ordinary supervision by diocesan bishops (Canon 965), the requirement for consultation in major and extraordinary acts (Canon 966), and the role of finance committees (Canon 968). These canons ensure accountability at every level, guarding against the kind of financial mismanagement that has damaged Christian institutions in recent decades.

Why This Volume Matters

Sound financial stewardship is a moral imperative. The faithful entrust their resources to the Church in the expectation that they will be used wisely and transparently. As the canonist John Huels has written, “Financial transparency in the Church is not merely good practice; it is a requirement of justice owed to the faithful” (The Pastoral Companion, 2009). The Second Vatican Council’s Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (§17) emphasised that Church resources must be administered “not for the enrichment of the institution but for the service of souls.”

For the AACC, this volume is essential to building and maintaining trust as the Church grows. Clear financial governance, proper oversight, and robust accountability structures are not bureaucratic luxuries but the foundations upon which a credible and sustainable Church is built.

Volume VI: Penalties and Other Punishments

Discipline in Service of Communion, Justice, and Conversion

Overview

Volume VI addresses the canonical penal system – perhaps the most sensitive area of Church law. The Church’s power to impose penalties is not an expression of punitive vindictiveness but of pastoral responsibility. Canonical penalties serve three purposes, as the universal canonical tradition teaches: the repair of scandal, the restoration of justice, and the reform of the offender. The theological foundation for ecclesiastical penalties is rooted in Christ’s own words to the apostles: “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18).

St Augustine of Hippo, Doctor of the Church, provided the classic theological framework for ecclesiastical discipline in his letters and sermons, arguing that correction must always serve the end of charity: “Punishment is the medicine of the Church; the physician cuts not to kill but to heal” (Sermo 82). The Council of Trent (Session XXV, 1563) reaffirmed the Church’s authority to impose penalties whilst insisting that bishops exercise this power “not as lords over the flock but as servants of God’s people.”

Key Contents

Section I: Censures, Expiatory Penalties, and Penal Remedies

The Code distinguishes between censures (medicinal penalties intended to lead to repentance) and expiatory penalties (imposed for the reparation of harm). The three censures are excommunication (Canon 976), interdict (Canon 977), and suspension (Canon 978). Excommunication, the most severe censure, prohibits the offender from celebrating or receiving the sacraments, exercising ecclesiastical offices, and performing acts of governance. It is a grave measure imposed only for the most serious offences, and always with the hope that the offender will repent and seek reconciliation.

Canon 981 enumerates expiatory penalties, which may include deprivation of office, prohibition from residing in a particular place, or other proportionate measures. Canon 982 addresses penal precepts, warnings, and supervisory measures – pastoral interventions that fall short of formal penalties but serve to correct behaviour before more severe action becomes necessary. Canon 983 addresses external penance, reflecting the ancient penitential discipline of the Church described by Tertullian, St Cyprian, and the Shepherd of Hermas.

Section II: The Application of Penalties

Canons 984–985 establish the procedural requirements for imposing penalties, ensuring due process and the protection of the accused’s rights. Canon 984 insists on the obligation to institute formal procedure, reflecting the ancient principle of natural justice, expressed by

Pope St Gregory the Great: “No one is to be condemned unheard.” Canon 985 addresses extra-judicial decrees and their limits. These procedural safeguards echo the canonical reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which established foundational principles of due process in ecclesiastical proceedings.

Section III: Particular Offences and Their Penalties

The Code enumerates specific offences organised into seven subsections. Offences against the faith (Subsection I) include apostasy, heresy, and schism (Canon 986) and the teaching of condemned doctrines (Canon 987). Offences against Church authority (Subsection II) include violence against ecclesiastical persons (Canon 990), disobedience and false oaths (Canon 991), and usurpation of office (Canon 995). Offences against the sacraments (Subsection III) address the attempted celebration of the Eucharist by the unordained (Canon 999), simony (Canon 1000), the desecration of the Eucharistic species (Canon 1002), solicitation in confession (Canon 1004), the violation of the confessional seal (Canon 1005), and illicit episcopal consecration (Canon 1006).

Canon 1005, addressing the violation of the sacramental seal, is of particular gravity. The absolute confidentiality of confession has been a non-negotiable principle of Catholic discipline since at least the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). St John Nepomucene was martyred in 1393 rather than reveal the contents of a confession – a witness that the Church holds in perpetual honour.

Subsection IV addresses offences against reputation, including calumny and the falsification of documents (Canons 1009–1010). Subsection V covers offences against special obligations, including the abandonment of sacred ministry (Canon 1011) and financial misconduct by clergy and religious (Canon 1012). Subsection VI addresses offences against human life, dignity, and liberty, including the gravest crimes: violence, homicide, abortion (Canon 1013), and sexual offences against vulnerable persons (Canon 1014). The penalties for these crimes are severe and reflect the AACC’s absolute commitment to the protection of the vulnerable – a commitment rooted in Christ’s own warning: “If anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

Subsection VII: Reinstatement

The final subsection (Canons 1016–1019) provides for the reinstatement of those who have been unjustly penalised, establishing grounds for the review of final judgments when new evidence emerges or procedural injustice is demonstrated. This provision reflects the Church’s commitment to both justice and mercy – the conviction that the canonical system must not only punish wrongdoing but also correct its own errors.

Why This Volume Matters

As the canonist Thomas Green has observed, “The penal system is the immune system of the canonical body politic; without it, the Church would be unable to protect itself from internal threats to its mission and communion.” No legal system is complete without provisions for enforcement and the consequences of non-compliance. For the AACC, a just and effective penal system assures the faithful that their pastors are held to account, that the sacraments are protected from abuse, and that the canonical order serves the common good.

The inclusion of reinstatement provisions is equally significant. As Pope St John Paul II taught in *Dives in Misericordia* (1980), the Church’s justice must always be tempered by mercy, for both justice and mercy flow from the same divine source. The AACC’s penal system reflects this balance: firm in its defence of ecclesial communion, yet always oriented towards the conversion and reconciliation of the offender. In the words of the Prophet Micah, which stand as a fitting motto for this entire volume: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Conclusion: A Living Law for a Living Church

The six volumes of the Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church together constitute a comprehensive legal framework that is at once rooted in the universal canonical tradition and adapted to the AACC’s particular mission and identity. From the general norms that establish how the law itself operates (Volume I), through the structures that organise the People of God (Volume II), the norms governing consecrated life and the teaching office together (Volume III), the detailed provisions for sacramental celebration and sacred worship (Volume IV), the principles of financial stewardship (Volume V), and the penal system that safeguards communion (Volume VI) – each volume serves the same overarching purpose: the salvation of souls.

The canonical tradition has long recognised this supreme principle. The final canon of the 1983 Roman Code (Canon 1752) declares that the salvation of souls “must always be the supreme law in the Church” (*salus animarum suprema lex in Ecclesia semper esse debet*). This principle, rooted in the teaching of Christ Himself and articulated by the Fathers of the Church from St Irenaeus (“The glory of God is the human being fully alive”) to St Augustine (“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you”), animates every canon in this Code.

What distinguishes this Code from many canonical texts is its deliberately accessible and educational character. The Synod of Bishops has crafted these canons not as a closed legal code intelligible only to specialists, but as a living document that speaks to every member of the Church. This approach reflects the conviction, expressed in the Primate’s introduction, that “canon law exists not as an end in itself but as an instrument of the Church’s salvific mission.”

As the AACCC continues to grow and develop – establishing new dioceses, forming new clergy, receiving new faithful, and responding to new pastoral challenges – this Code will serve as both anchor and compass: an anchor rooting the Church in the apostolic tradition and the universal canonical patrimony, and a compass guiding her response to the ever-changing circumstances of the modern world. The law is not a fossil but a living instrument, subject to interpretation, development, and revision by the Synod as the needs of the Church require.

In the words of Pope St John XXIII, who set in motion the renewal of both the Church and her canonical tradition: “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing; the way in which it is presented is another.” So too with canon law: the substance of the Church’s canonical tradition remains constant, but its expression must be renewed in every generation to serve the living Church’s living mission. The Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church represents precisely such a renewal – faithful to Tradition, attentive to the present, and open to the future, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for the greater glory of God.





A Chronological Table of Canonical Sources

From the Didache to the Present Day

I. Introduction: Two Millennia of Canonical Tradition

Canon law is as old as the Church herself. From the moment the apostles gathered in Jerusalem to make binding decisions for the community of believers, the Church has exercised legislative authority – establishing norms for worship, discipline, and governance that express her faith in juridical form. As the medieval historian James Brundage has observed, the history of canon law is, in a very real sense, inseparable from the institutional history of the Roman Catholic Church.

The chronological table that forms the centrepiece of this essay maps the major canonical collections, ecumenical councils, codifications, and papal documents that have shaped the tradition from which the Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church draws. It traces an unbroken line from the *Didache* (c. AD 50–120), the oldest surviving canonical document outside the New Testament, to the AACC’s own Code of 2026. This lineage demonstrates that the AACC’s Code is not an innovation but the latest expression of a living tradition nearly two thousand years old.

St Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church, provides the theological framework within which this entire canonical tradition is to be understood. In the *Summa Theologiae*, he defines law in terms of reason, the common good, competent authority, and promulgation. Every entry in the table that follows – from the apostolic decree at Jerusalem to the AACC’s Code – satisfies this definition: each is an act of reasoned deliberation, directed to the common good of the faithful, enacted by competent authority, and made known to those it governs.

St Augustine, Doctor of the Church, provides the complementary principle that a law lacking justice does not truly possess the character of law. The canonical tradition has always insisted that Church law must serve justice and ultimately the salvation of souls – the *salus animarum* that the final canon of every Code declares to be the supreme law of the Church.

II. How to Read This Table

The chronological table is divided into four eras, each representing a distinct phase in the development of canonical legislation:

Era I: The Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic Age (c. AD 30–325) – from the Council of Jerusalem to the Council of Nicaea. This era encompasses the scriptural foundations, the earliest church orders (the *Didache*, the *Apostolic Tradition*, the *Didascalía*), and the first development of conciliar and patristic canonical authority.

Era II: The Age of the Ecumenical Councils and the Great Collections (325–1140) – from Nicaea to Gratian. This era witnesses the canonical legislation of the ecumenical councils, the great systematic collections of East and West (the *Dionysiana*, the *Hispana*, the *Nomocanon*), and the integration of canonical and civil law in the Byzantine tradition.

Era III: Classical Canon Law: Gratian to the Corpus Iuris Canonici (1140–1503) – from Gratian’s *Decretum* to the first printed edition of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*. This era transforms canon law into an autonomous academic discipline and produces the six collections that governed the Latin Church for centuries.

Era IV: Modern Codifications and the Present Day (1904–2026) – from the commission for codification established by Pius X to the AACC’s Code. This era encompasses the codifications of 1917 and 1983, the Second Vatican Council, the Eastern Code (CCEO), and the AACC’s own canonical achievement.

For each entry, the table provides the date, the name of the canonical source, and a brief description of its significance for the development of the tradition. Footnotes provide full scholarly references following the Oxford University guidelines for citation.

III. A Chronological Table of Canonical Sources

Date	Source	Significance
I. The Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic Age (c. AD 30–325)		
c. AD 49–50	Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)	First exercise of conciliar legislative authority; the apostolic formula in Acts 15:28 becomes the prototype of all conciliar decrees.
c. 50–90	Pauline Epistles	Earliest canonical norms: qualifications for bishops/deacons (1 Tim 3; Titus 1); Eucharistic discipline (1 Cor 11); community discipline (1 Cor 5; 2 Thess 3).
c. 50–120	Didache	Oldest surviving canonical document outside the NT; contains liturgical regulations for baptism, Eucharist, fasting, and appointment of bishops and deacons.
c. 215	Apostolic Tradition (Hippolytus)	Detailed ordination rites, catechumenate regulations, baptismal liturgy, and Eucharistic prayers for the Roman community.
c. 230–250	Didascalia Apostolorum	First comprehensive canonical corpus for a local (Syrian) church; regulations for bishops, clergy, widows, and penitents.
c. 250–258	Cyprian of Carthage: Councils and Letters	African conciliar tradition established; episcopal collegiality articulated as the unity of the episcopate in which each bishop holds his share in its totality.

c. 375–380	Apostolic Constitutions	Eight books synthesising Didache, Didascalia, and Apostolic Tradition; widely influential throughout the East.
c. 370–379	Canonical Letters of St Basil	Epistulae 188, 199, 217: divided into 85 canons governing penance and clerical discipline; remain binding in the Eastern canonical tradition.
II. The Age of the Ecumenical Councils and the Great Collections (325–1140)		
325	Council of Nicaea I	20 canons: metropolitan structure (Canon 6), collegial ordination (Canon 4), provincial synods twice yearly (Canon 5). Foundation of conciliar canonical legislation.
381	Council of Constantinople I	7 canons: honorary precedence of Constantinople (Canon 3); regulation of episcopal jurisdiction.
419	Codex Canonum Ecclesiae Africanae	Collection of 105 canons from African councils; important source for penitential and sacramental discipline.
431	Council of Ephesus	Defended autonomy of local churches; upheld independence of Cyprus from Antioch.
451	Council of Chalcedon	28 canons of far-reaching significance; Canon 28 granted Constantinople privileges equal to those of Rome (contested by papal legates).
c. 500–520	Collectio Dionysiana	Dionysius Exiguus compiled Latin translations of Greek conciliar canons with papal decretals; foundation of Western canonical tradition.
c. 535	Synagoge Canonum (John III Scholasticus)	50 systematic titles arranging canons of councils and Fathers; most important early Eastern systematic collection.
c. 529–534	Corpus Iuris Civilis (Justinian I)	Codex, Digest, Institutes, Novellae: first 13 titles of Book I concern ecclesiastical matters; foundation of Byzantine canonical-civil integration.
c. 560–636	Isidore of Seville: Etymologiae and Collectio Hispana	Etymologiae defined essential characteristics of good legislation; Hispana was most comprehensive canonical collection of Visigothic Spain.
c. 630	Nomocanon in XIV Titles	Combined ecclesiastical canons with Justinianic civil law; revised by Patriarch Photius c. 883; definitive Eastern canonical collection.
692	Council in Trullo (Quinisext)	102 canons supplementing Councils V and VI; comprehensive codification of Eastern disciplinary law; ranked patriarchal sees

		canonically.
c. 700–725	Collectio Canonum Hibernensis	Irish collection arranged topically; influenced canonical development in England, Gaul, and Italy.
774	Collectio Dionysio-Hadriana	Pope Hadrian I sent enlarged Dionysiana to Charlemagne; accepted as Codex Canonum at Synod of Aachen (802); authoritative canonical text of Carolingian Empire.
c. 847–852	Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals	Mixture of genuine and forged papal letters; lasting impact on development of papal jurisdiction despite later exposure as forgeries.
c. 1012–1023	Decretum of Burchard of Worms	20 books attempting to reconcile antinomies; predecessor of Gratian; widely used in German-speaking lands.
c. 1094–1095	Decretum and Panormia of Ivo of Chartres	Systematic canonical collections; methodological precursor to Gratian's dialectical approach.
III. Classical Canon Law: Gratian to the Corpus Iuris Canonici (1140–1503)		
c. 1140	Decretum Gratiani	Concordia Discordantium Canonum: c. 4,000 texts harmonised through dialectical method; foundation of Western canonical science as autonomous discipline.
1215	Fourth Lateran Council	70 constitutions; Constitution 21 (Omnis utriusque sexus) established annual confession and Easter communion; high-water mark of medieval canonical reform.
1234	Decretales of Gregory IX (Liber Extra)	Compiled by St Raymond of Penafort OP; first collection of universal law officially promulgated by a pope; organised in 5 books.
1298	Liber Sextus (Boniface VIII)	Supplemented the Decretales; included the 88 Regulae Iuris – concise maxims of canonical interpretation.
1317	Constitutiones Clementinae	Legislation of Clement V and Council of Vienne (1311–1312).
c. 1325	Extravagantes Joannis XXII	Post-Clementine papal legislation of John XXII.
1500–1503	Corpus Iuris Canonici (Chappuis edition)	Six collections published together for first time under this title by Jean Chappuis in Paris.
1545–1563	Council of Trent	Most extensive reform legislation in Church history: seminary foundation (Session XXIII), canonical form for marriage (Tametsi, Session XXIV), sacramental discipline, episcopal residence.

1580	Editio Romana (Gregory XIII)	Official edition of Corpus Iuris Canonici produced by Correctores Romani; authoritative text until 1917.
IV. Modern Codifications and the Present Day (1904–2026)		
1904	Arduum Sane Munus (Pius X)	Motu Proprio establishing commission to codify canonical legislation; beginning of modern codification movement.
1917	Codex Iuris Canonici	2,414 canons in 5 books; first systematic codification of Latin canon law; promulgated by Benedict XV (Providentissima Mater Ecclesia).
1870	Pastor Aeternus (Vatican I)	Defined papal primacy and infallibility; canonical consequences for structure of governance.
1962–1965	Second Vatican Council	Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963), Lumen Gentium (1964), Gaudium et Spes (1965); renewed ecclesiology requiring canonical expression.
1983	Codex Iuris Canonici (revised)	1,752 canons translating Vatican II ecclesiology into canonical language; promulgated by John Paul II (Sacrae Disciplinae Leges).
1990	CCEO (Sacri Canones)	1,546 canons for the Eastern Catholic Churches in 30 titles; introduced concept of Church sui iuris; promulgated by John Paul II.
2026	Code of Canon Law of the AACC	Promulgated by Synod of Bishops; recovers conciliar governance of first millennium; living document combining juridical norms with theological rationale and pastoral guidance.

IV. Commentary: Themes Across the Tradition

The Continuity of Conciliar Authority

The most striking feature of the chronological record is the unbroken continuity of conciliar legislative authority. From the Council of Jerusalem (c. AD 49–50) through the ecumenical councils to the Synod of Bishops of the AACC, the Church has consistently understood herself as a community governed by the collective discernment of her bishops gathered in council. The apostolic formula in Acts 15:28, expressing a decision reached by the Holy Spirit and by the assembled Church together, is the prototype of every conciliar decree in the table.

St Cyprian of Carthage articulated the theological principle that underlies this conciliar tradition by teaching that the episcopate is one and that each individual bishop holds his share in its totality. The AACC’s Code, with its Synod of Bishops as supreme authority and its Primate as *primus inter pares*, recovers this first-millennium model of governance.

The Dialectic of Diversity and Unity

The table reveals that canonical diversity has been the norm rather than the exception throughout Church history. The East and West developed parallel but distinct canonical traditions – the Latin tradition of the *Dionysiana*, the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, and the modern codifications alongside the Eastern tradition of the *Synagoge*, the *Nomocanon*, and the CCEO. Within the Latin West itself, regional collections (the *Hispana*, the *Hibernensis*, the Gallican and African collections) coexisted for centuries before Gratian’s synthesising work. The CCEO’s concept of the Church *sui iuris* formally recognises this diversity as a constitutional principle.

From Collection to Codification

A major theme of the table is the gradual movement from private collection to official codification. For the first millennium, canonical legislation was preserved in private collections of varying authority and scope. Gratian’s *Decretum* (c. 1140) was itself a private work, never officially promulgated. The *Decretales* of Gregory IX (1234) marked the first official promulgation of a universal canonical collection by papal authority. The 1917 Code completed the transition by reducing the entire canonical tradition to a single systematic code. As the Jesuit canonist Ladislav Orsy has observed, canon law is theology in action, and it represents the Church’s attempt to live out its beliefs in a structured way.

The Integration of Doctrine and Discipline

Every ecumenical council in the table combined doctrinal definition with canonical legislation. Nicaea promulgated both its creed and its twenty canons. Trent reformed both doctrine and discipline. The Second Vatican Council, whilst promulgating no canons as such, articulated the ecclesiology that required canonical expression in the 1983 Code. As Pope St John Paul II declared, the new Code could be understood as a great effort to translate that same conciliar doctrine and ecclesiology into canonical language.

The Enduring Principle: *Salus Animarum*

Running through the entire chronological record is the conviction that canonical legislation exists to serve the salvation of souls. Gratian opened his *Decretum* with the principle that the human race is governed by two things, namely natural law and custom – but the telos of canonical governance is always pastoral. St Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church, captured this principle when he insisted that those who exercise authority in the Church must do so as servants, not as lords. The final canon of both the 1983 Roman Code and the AACC’s Code declares the governing principle: *Salus animarum suprema lex* – the salvation of souls is the supreme law.

V. The AACC’s Code Within This Tradition

The Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church, promulgated by the Synod of Bishops in 2026, stands at the end of the chronological table – but not at the end of the tradition. It is the latest expression of a canonical heritage that stretches back nearly two thousand years, drawing upon every era and every strand of the tradition mapped in the table above.

From the apostolic age, it inherits the conviction that the Church possesses legislative authority conferred by Christ Himself. From the patristic era, it inherits the principle of episcopal collegiality articulated by Cyprian and embodied in the conciliar tradition. From the great canonical collections of East and West, it inherits the systematic organisation of canonical material. From Gratian and the classical canonists, it inherits the dialectical method of harmonising disparate sources. From the modern codifications, it inherits the systematic structure of a comprehensive code. And from the Second Vatican Council, it inherits the renewed ecclesiology that places the People of God at the centre of canonical concern.

As the Primate declares in his introduction, throughout Church history, particular Churches, regional councils, and independent Catholic jurisdictions have exercised the authority to establish their own canonical structures whilst maintaining fidelity to apostolic doctrine and sacramental communion. The AACC's Code is crafted to serve as a living document – including theological rationale, pastoral guidance, and practical direction alongside juridical requirements.

VI. Conclusion: A Living Tradition

The chronological table presented in this essay demonstrates that canonical legislation is not a modern invention imposed upon the Church's life but a constitutive dimension of that life from the very beginning. The tradition is remarkable for its continuity – the same conciliar, collegial, and pastoral principles animate the Council of Jerusalem and the AACC's Synod of Bishops – and for its capacity for renewal, adapting canonical forms to the pastoral needs of each generation whilst preserving the substance of the apostolic faith.

St Leo the Great, Doctor of the Church, captured the spirit that has animated the entire tradition when he wrote to Anastasius of Thessalonica that those who govern the Church must do so not as having dominion over the heritage of God, but as an example to the flock. This is the spirit in which the AACC's Code has been promulgated, and in which it is commended to all the faithful.





A Brief History of Canon Law

From the Council of Jerusalem to the Present Day

I. Introduction: A Law as Old as the Church Herself

Canonical legislation is not a modern invention. It is as old as Christianity itself. From the moment the apostles gathered in Jerusalem to resolve the question of how Gentile converts should be received into the faith, the Church has exercised legislative authority – making binding decisions, establishing norms for worship and discipline, and ordering her communal life according to the Gospel. As the medieval historian James Brundage has observed: ‘The history of canon law is, in a very real sense, the institutional history of the Roman Catholic Church.’

This essay traces the development of that canonical tradition from its origins in the apostolic age, through the great collections of the patristic era, the medieval transformation wrought by Gratian’s *Decretum*, the formation of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, the modern codifications of 1917 and 1983, and the parallel Eastern tradition culminating in the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO) of 1990. It concludes by situating the Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church within this venerable lineage – demonstrating that the AACC’s Code is not an innovation but the latest expression of a tradition reaching back to the apostles themselves.

II. The Apostolic Age: Scripture as the First Canon Law

The Council of Jerusalem (c. AD 49–50)

The earliest exercise of legislative authority in the Church is recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The question at issue was fundamental: must Gentile converts submit to circumcision and the full observance of the Mosaic Law in order to be saved? The apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem to deliberate, and their decision was communicated in a letter of remarkable canonical significance:

It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.

The formula ‘it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us’ is the prototype of every subsequent conciliar decree in the history of the Church. The Jerusalem assembly combined theological discernment with practical legislation, establishing a pattern that would be followed by every ecumenical council from Nicaea to Vatican II.

The Legislative Authority of the Apostles

The apostolic writings reveal a community that exercised legislative and disciplinary authority from the very beginning. Christ Himself conferred this authority when He said to Peter: ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ He extended it to the apostolic college as a whole: ‘If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.’

St Paul’s epistles are replete with canonical provisions. He establishes norms for the celebration of the Eucharist and the exercise of spiritual gifts, qualifications for bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and procedures for community discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1–13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15). The Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) are, in essence, the earliest canonical manuals for the governance of local churches. The Apostle to the Gentiles was, in a real sense, the Church’s first canon lawyer.

III. The Sub-Apostolic and Ante-Nicene Church: The First Canonical Collections

The Didache (c. AD 50–120)

The *Didache* – the *Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations* – is almost certainly the oldest surviving canonical document outside the New Testament. Most scholars date it to the late first or early second century, though some have argued for a date as early as AD 50–70. It has been described as containing ‘the oldest collection of canon law’ in the patristic corpus.

The *Didache* opens with a moral catechesis structured around the ‘Two Ways’ – the Way of Life and the Way of Death: It then provides the earliest surviving liturgical regulations for baptism, requiring that the candidate be baptised ‘in living water’ (running water) where possible, and prescribing a Trinitarian formula, followed by instructions for the Eucharist, and regulations governing the appointment of bishops and deacons. The *Didache* thus demonstrates that canonical regulation of the Church’s worship, ministry, and discipline was already established within the first generation of Christian life.

The Apostolic Tradition, the Didascalia, and the Apostolic Constitutions

The canonical tradition of the ante-Nicene Church continued to develop through a series of increasingly comprehensive collections. The *Traditio Apostolica* (*Apostolic*

Tradition), attributed to Hippolytus of Rome and composed c. 215, provides detailed regulations for ordination, the catechumenate, baptism, the Eucharist, and fasting. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* (*Teaching of the Apostles*), composed in Syria c. 230–250, represents the first attempt at a comprehensive canonical corpus for a local church. The *Apostolic Constitutions*, compiled in Syria c. 375–380, gathered and synthesised earlier material into eight books of canonical legislation that became widely influential throughout the East.

The Witness of the Church Fathers

The Fathers of the ante-Nicene Church bear witness to a growing canonical consciousness. Tertullian, writing c. 210–213, reports that councils (*concilia*) were held in the provinces ‘to decide questions and to represent the whole Christian name.’ St Cyprian of Carthage, in the mid-third century, presided over a series of African councils that established norms for baptism, penance, and the reconciliation of the lapsed. Cyprian’s ecclesiology, with its emphasis on episcopal authority exercised in collegial communion, profoundly influenced the canonical tradition:

The episcopate is one; each individual bishop holds his share in its totality.

St Basil the Great (330–379), Doctor of the Church, composed three canonical letters – *Epistulae* 188, 199, and 217 – that were subsequently divided by Eastern canonists into eighty-five canons governing penance, clerical discipline, and moral theology. These *Canonical Letters of St Basil* remain part of the living canonical tradition of the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches to this day.

IV. The Ecumenical Councils: Doctrine and Discipline United

The ecumenical councils are the supreme expression of the Church’s legislative authority. From Nicaea (325) to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), these great assemblies have combined doctrinal definition with canonical legislation, demonstrating that the Church’s teaching and her law are inseparable aspects of a single mission.

The Council of Nicaea (325)

The first ecumenical council, convened by Emperor Constantine at Nicaea in 325, promulgated twenty canons alongside its celebrated creed. These canons addressed the reconciliation of schismatics, the ordination and conduct of clergy, the prohibition of usury, the proper celebration of Easter, and – most significantly – the jurisdictional structure of the Church. Canon 6 recognised the pre-eminent authority of the great sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch: establishing the pattern of metropolitan and

patriarchal jurisdiction that would shape the Church's governance for centuries. As Eusebius of Caesarea records, the Council of Nicaea was understood by its participants as a new Pentecost – an assembly guided by the Holy Spirit to establish norms binding upon the entire Church.

From Constantinople to Chalcedon

The subsequent ecumenical councils continued the pattern of combining doctrinal and canonical legislation. The Council of Constantinople I (381) produced seven canons establishing the honorary precedence of Constantinople and regulating episcopal jurisdiction. The Council of Chalcedon (451) produced twenty-eight canons of far-reaching significance, including Canon 28, which granted Constantinople 'equal privileges' with Rome – a provision that was contested by the papal legates and has remained a point of canonical divergence between East and West.

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215)

The Fourth Lateran Council, convoked by Pope Innocent III, represents perhaps the high-water mark of medieval canonical reform. Its seventy constitutions touched virtually every aspect of Church life. Constitution 21, *Omnis utriusque sexus*, established the obligation of annual confession and Easter communion – norms that remain binding to this day. The Council reformed preaching, regulated clerical conduct, addressed the relationship between ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction, and mandated provision for the care of the poor. Its legislative achievement demonstrates the capacity of canonical legislation to serve as an instrument of comprehensive pastoral reform.

The Council of Trent (1545–1563)

The Council of Trent produced the most extensive body of reform legislation in the history of the Church. Meeting over eighteen years in twenty-five sessions, the Council reformed the celebration of the sacraments, mandated the establishment of seminaries for the formation of clergy, required the residence of bishops in their dioceses, established the canonical form for the celebration of marriage through the Decree *Tametsi*, and reformed the governance of religious orders. Trent's canonical legislation shaped Catholic life for four centuries and created the conditions that would eventually make a comprehensive codification both desirable and possible.

V. The Medieval Transformation: From Gratian to the Corpus Iuris Canonici

Before Gratian: The Collections of the First Millennium

For the first millennium, the Church's canonical legislation was preserved in a bewildering variety of regional collections. In the East, the most significant were the *Synagoge Canonum* of John III Scholasticus (c. 550), which arranged the canons of councils and Fathers into fifty systematic titles, and the *Nomocanon in XIV Titles* (c. 630, revised c. 883), which combined ecclesiastical canons with the relevant legislation of Emperor Justinian. The interweaving of canonical and civil law in the Byzantine tradition reflected the reality that, for subjects of the Roman Empire, 'canon law was civil law.'

In the West, the most important early collection was the *Collectio Dionysiana*, compiled by the Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus c. 500–520. Dionysius systematically translated Greek conciliar canons into Latin and combined them with papal decretals, creating for the first time a comprehensive Latin collection of universal canonical authority. His collection was later sent to Charlemagne by Pope Hadrian I in 774 and became the authoritative canonical text of the Carolingian Empire.

St Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636), Doctor of the Church, contributed not only the *Collectio Hispana* – the most comprehensive canonical collection of Visigothic Spain – but also his systematic reflection on the nature of law in the *Etymologiae*, which defined the essential characteristics of good legislation and influenced canonical jurisprudence for centuries.

The ninth century witnessed the production of the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* (c. 847–852), a collection containing a mixture of genuine and forged papal letters. Though their authenticity was eventually exposed, these decretals had a lasting impact on the development of papal jurisdiction and the centralisation of canonical authority in Rome.

Gratian's Decretum (c. 1140): The Foundation of Classical Canon Law

The decisive turning point in the history of canon law came c. 1140, when the Camaldolese monk Gratian, working in Bologna, produced his *Concordia Discordantium Canonum* ('Harmony of Discordant Canons'), universally known as the *Decretum*. This monumental work – comprising nearly four thousand texts drawn from councils, papal decretals, patristic writings, Roman law, and penitentials – transformed the study of canon law from a subsidiary branch of theology into an autonomous academic discipline.

Gratian's opening words set the tone for the entire work: 'The human race is ruled by two things, namely natural law and customs.' His method was dialectical: he placed apparently contradictory canonical authorities side by side and then resolved the contradictions through his own commentary (the *dicta Gratiani*), applying the principles of logic and legal reasoning to the canonical tradition. As the canonist Stephan Kuttner has demonstrated, Gratian's achievement was to create 'harmony from dissonance' – a unified system from centuries of disparate legislation.

Recent scholarship, particularly the work of Anders Winroth, has shown that the *Decretum* may have been produced in two or more recensions, suggesting that it was a living text refined over time. Whatever the precise circumstances of its composition, the *Decretum* became the foundational text of the Western canonical tradition, studied and glossed in every medieval university and forming the first part of what would become the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*.

The Decretals of Gregory IX (1234)

The second major component of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* was the collection of papal decretals commissioned by Pope Gregory IX in 1230 and completed by the Dominican canonist St Raymond of Peñafort in 1234. Known as the *Liber Extra* or simply the *Decretales*, this collection gathered papal legislation from the pontificate of Gratian's time to Gregory IX's own reign, organised into five books. It was the first collection of universal law promulgated by a pope for the entire Latin Church and became the principal source of canonical authority alongside the *Decretum*. St Raymond of Peñafort, Doctor of the Church and patron of canonists, was himself one of the greatest legal minds of the medieval Church.

The Completion of the Corpus Iuris Canonici

The *Corpus Iuris Canonici* grew over the following centuries through the addition of four further collections. The *Liber Sextus* (1298), promulgated by Pope Boniface VIII, supplemented Gregory IX's Decretals with subsequent legislation. It included the celebrated *Regulae Iuris* – eighty-eight maxims of canonical interpretation that distilled centuries of jurisprudential wisdom into concise legal principles. The *Constitutiones Clementinae* (1317), collecting the legislation of Pope Clement V and the Council of Vienne (1311–1312), were followed by the *Extravagantes* of John XXII and the *Extravagantes Communes*. These six collections were first published together under the title *Corpus Iuris Canonici* by Jean Chappuis in Paris between 1500 and 1503.

The *Corpus Iuris Canonici* governed the Latin Church for over six centuries, from the time of Gratian to the promulgation of the first modern codification in 1917. As St Thomas Aquinas, Doctor Communis of the Church, taught in the thirteenth century: 'Custom has the force of law, abolishes law, and is the interpreter of law.' The entire

canonical tradition embodied in the *Corpus* reflected this dynamic interplay between written legislation and lived practice.

VI. The First Modern Codification: The 1917 Code

By the end of the nineteenth century, the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* had become unwieldy. Centuries of subsequent legislation – papal bulls, conciliar decrees, curial decisions, and local legislation – had accumulated in an often contradictory mass that was extremely difficult to navigate. The need for a systematic codification was widely recognised.

On 19 March 1904, Pope St Pius X issued the *Motu Proprio Arduum Sane Munus*, establishing a commission to codify the Church's canonical legislation. The immense work of codification was entrusted to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, who led a team of canonists over thirteen years in reducing the vast canonical tradition to a systematic code of 2,414 canons organised into five books. The method was modelled on the great civil codifications of the nineteenth century, particularly the *Code Napoléon* of 1804 and the German *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* of 1900.

The Code was promulgated by Pope Benedict XV on 27 May 1917 through the apostolic constitution *Providentissima Mater Ecclesia* and took effect on Pentecost Sunday, 19 May 1918. For the first time in history, the entire canonical legislation of the Latin Church was contained in a single, systematically organised volume. The 1917 Code served the Church faithfully for sixty-five years, through two world wars, the pontificates of seven popes, and the transformative experience of the Second Vatican Council.

VII. The Second Codification: The 1983 Code

On 25 January 1959, Pope St John XXIII announced not only the convocation of the Second Vatican Council but also the revision of the 1917 Code of Canon Law. The Council's renewed ecclesiology – particularly its teaching on the People of God, the collegiality of bishops, the universal call to holiness, and the rights of the lay faithful – required canonical expression. As John XXIII declared at the Council's opening: 'The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing; the way in which it is presented is another.' The same principle applied to canonical legislation.

The revision process, which occupied over two decades of consultation and drafting, culminated in the promulgation of the revised Code by Pope St John Paul II on 25 January 1983. In his apostolic constitution *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*, John Paul II described the new Code in terms of direct relevance to the AACCC's own canonical endeavour:

In a certain sense, this new Code could be understood as a great effort to translate this same conciliar doctrine and ecclesiology into canonical language.

John Paul II was also careful to situate the Code within the broader order of grace and charism:

The Code is not intended as a substitute for faith, grace, charisms, and above all charity in the life of the Church and of the faithful. On the contrary, its purpose is rather to create such an order in the ecclesial society that, while assigning the primacy to love, grace, and charisms, it at the same time renders their organic development easier in the life of both the ecclesial society and the individual persons who belong to it.

The 1983 Code comprises 1,752 canons, concluding with the celebrated axiom that has served as the guiding principle of the entire canonical tradition: *Salus animarum, quae suprema semper lex esse debet, prae oculis habeatur* – ‘The salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church, is to be kept before one’s eyes.’

VIII. The Eastern Code: The CCEO of 1990

The canonical tradition of the Christian East has always been distinct from, though parallel to, the Latin tradition. Whilst the West developed the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* and its modern codifications, the Eastern Churches preserved their canonical heritage through the *nomocanon* tradition – collections interweaving ecclesiastical canons with the relevant provisions of imperial law.

The need for a modern codification of Eastern canon law was recognised as early as the pontificate of Pius XI, but the project was not completed until 1990, when Pope St John Paul II promulgated the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, CCEO) through the apostolic constitution *Sacri Canones*.

The CCEO is distinctive in several respects. It comprises 1,546 canons and is structured not around the seven-book framework of the Latin Code but around thirty titles reflecting the Eastern Churches’ own canonical categories. Most significantly, the CCEO introduces the concept of the Church *sui iuris* – a self-governing Church with its own hierarchy, liturgical tradition, and canonical discipline, existing in full communion with the Bishop of Rome:

The CCEO demonstrates that canonical diversity within Catholic unity is not an anomaly but a fundamental principle of the Church’s canonical tradition. Different Churches may legitimately govern themselves according to their own proper law, provided they maintain communion in faith, sacraments, and apostolic governance.

This principle is directly relevant to the canonical self-understanding of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church.

IX. The Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church

The Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church, promulgated by the Synod of Bishops in 2026, represents the latest expression of a canonical tradition stretching back nearly two thousand years. As the Primate declares in his introduction: ‘Throughout Church history, particular Churches, regional councils, and independent Catholic jurisdictions have exercised the authority to establish their own canonical structures whilst maintaining fidelity to apostolic doctrine and sacramental communion.’

The AACC’s Code acknowledges its debt to the 1983 Roman Code whilst adapting and expanding that tradition in several significant ways. The canons have been deliberately crafted to serve as a living document – including theological rationale, pastoral guidance, and practical direction alongside juridical requirements. The governance structure reflects the conciliar model of the undivided Church of the first millennium, with the Synod of Bishops as supreme authority and the Primate serving as *primus inter pares*.

This Code thus stands in a canonical lineage that includes the Council of Jerusalem, the *Didache*, the canons of the ecumenical councils, the collections of Dionysius Exiguus and Isidore of Seville, Gratian’s *Decretum*, the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, the codifications of 1917 and 1983, and the Eastern CCEO. It inherits the theological conviction, expressed by St Thomas Aquinas, that law is ‘an ordinance of reason, for the common good, made by the one who has care of the community, and promulgated.’ It inherits the pastoral principle, articulated by St Augustine, that ‘an unjust law is no law at all.’ And it inherits the supreme canonical axiom that the salvation of souls is the highest law of the Church.

X. Conclusion: Continuity and Renewal

The history of canon law is a story of continuity and renewal. From the apostolic decree at Jerusalem to the AACC’s Code of 2026, the Church has continuously legislated for her own ordered life – not as an act of bureaucratic self-perpetuation, but as an expression of her mission to proclaim the Gospel, celebrate the sacraments, and shepherd the People of God. Each generation has received the canonical tradition it inherited, adapted it to the pastoral needs of its own time, and transmitted it, enriched and refined, to the generation that followed.

As the Jesuit canonist Ladislav Örsy has written: ‘Canon law is theology in action; it is the Church’s attempt to live out its beliefs in a structured way.’ The Ancient Apostolic

Catholic Church's Code stands squarely within this tradition. It is rooted in the apostolic faith, shaped by the canonical wisdom of two millennia, adapted to the pastoral needs of the present, and open to the future under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

St Leo the Great, Doctor of the Church, writing to Anastasius of Thessalonica in the fifth century, captured the enduring principle that has animated the entire canonical tradition:

Let those who govern the Church do so not as having dominion over the heritage of God, but as an example to the flock, knowing that they too must render an account to the Chief Shepherd.

This is the spirit in which the AACCC's Code has been promulgated, and in which it is commended to all the faithful: as an instrument of service, a framework for ordered communion, and a witness to the ancient conviction that the Church's law, like the Church herself, exists for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.



How to Read and Use This Code

A Practical Guide for Clergy, Religious, and Laity

I. Introduction: A Code Written to Be Understood

The Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church is a living document. Unlike many legal codes, it was written not merely for lawyers but for every member of the Church – bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and lay faithful alike. As the Primate makes clear in his introduction, the Code belongs to the lay faithful as well as to the clergy and serves as the common law of the Church’s ecclesial communion.

This chapter is a practical guide to reading and using the Code. It explains how the canons are structured, what the symbols and abbreviations mean, how cross-references work, and – most importantly – how to find the canon relevant to a particular pastoral situation. You do not need a degree in canon law to use this Code. What you need is this guide and a willingness to read carefully.

As the Jesuit canonist Ladislav Örsy has written, canon law is a practical expression of theology and the Church’s attempt to live out its beliefs in a structured way. The distinguished American canonist James Coriden has similarly observed that a Code of Canon Law is meant to serve the community rather than being an end in itself. The same pastoral spirit animates this guide.

II. The Anatomy of a Canon

Each canon is identified by a number and, typically, a descriptive title. Understanding the internal structure of a canon is essential to reading the Code accurately.

Canon Numbers

The canons are numbered sequentially from Canon 1 through to the final canon. This sequential numbering runs continuously across all seven Volumes. Thus Canon 602 (the first canon of Volume V) follows directly from Canon 601 (the last canon of Volume IV). This means that every canon in the Code has a unique number, and you can refer to any canon simply by its number, without needing to specify the Volume.

Example: Canon 1 establishes applicability: these laws apply only to the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church. Canon 2 specifies the approved liturgical rites and books. Canon 34 addresses incorporation into the Church by baptism.

The Paragraph Symbol: §

Many canons are subdivided into numbered paragraphs, indicated by the section symbol § (the *signum sectionis*, from the Latin *sectio*). This symbol has been used in legal documents since the medieval period and is standard in canonical, civil, and common law texts worldwide.

The paragraph symbol works as follows:

Example: §1 denotes the first paragraph of a canon. §2 denotes the second paragraph, and so on. When a canon has only one paragraph, no § symbol appears, and the text constitutes the entire canon.

When a canon is subdivided into paragraphs, each paragraph typically addresses a distinct aspect of the same subject. The paragraphs should be read together as a complete treatment of the topic, not as isolated rules. For example, Canon 2 is divided into six paragraphs (§1 through §6), each addressing a different aspect of approved liturgical rites: §1 lists the primary liturgical books, §2 specifies the forms of the Mass, §3 permits private use of other rites, §4 governs dispensations for public use of other rites, §5 addresses consistency in traditional forms, and §6 ensures continuity of existing norms.

To cite a specific paragraph within a canon, the standard form is: **Canon 2 §3** (meaning Canon 2, paragraph 3). This notation is used throughout the Code whenever one canon cross-references another.

Sub-Paragraphs and Numbered Items

Within individual paragraphs, further subdivisions may appear as numbered items (1 , 2 , 3) or as lettered sub-points (a, b, c). These typically enumerate lists of conditions, requirements, or categories. They should be read as part of the paragraph to which they belong.

Example: Canon 8 §1 specifies who must obey ecclesiastical laws, and then lists three conditions that must be met. Canon 2 §1 lists the approved liturgical books as a numbered series of items within the paragraph.

III. Understanding Cross-References

The Code is an interconnected legal system, not a collection of isolated rules. Canons frequently refer to other canons for definitions, conditions, exceptions, or related provisions. Understanding how cross-references work is essential to reading any canon correctly.

Types of Cross-Reference

Cross-references in the Code take several forms:

i. Direct References

These cite a specific canon by number, typically in the form see Canon 368 or in accordance with Canon 883 §3. A direct reference means that you **must** consult the cited canon in order to understand the provision fully. The referring canon and the referenced canon should be read together as complementary parts of a single legal framework.

Example: When a canon says that it is subject to the provisions of Canon 406, it means that Canon 406 establishes conditions or limits that qualify the

current rule. You must read Canon 406 to understand the full scope of the current provision.

ii. Parenthetical References

These appear in parentheses, typically as (Canon 47) or (see Canon 165–178). Parenthetical references indicate related provisions that illuminate or supplement the current canon. They are strongly advisory: you should consult the cited canon for a complete understanding, even though the current canon may be intelligible on its own.

iii. Abbreviations: cf. and see also

The abbreviation *cf.* (from the Latin *confer*, meaning compare) indicates a canon that deals with a related topic and may shed light on the provision being read. See also serves a similar function. These references are advisory rather than obligatory but are often essential for understanding the broader canonical context.

Following a Chain of Cross-References

Occasionally, a canon will refer you to a second canon, which in turn refers to a third. This is not an error or an attempt at obscurity; it reflects the interconnected nature of the legal system. As Gratian, the father of systematic canon law, observed in the twelfth century, human society is governed by natural law and custom, and the interrelation of canons mirrors the interrelation of the principles they express.

Practical tip: When you encounter a cross-reference, follow it immediately. Read the cited canon in full, then return to the original canon. This ensures that you understand the complete legal picture before forming a judgement or taking action.

IV. Kinds of Law in the Code

Not all canons are of the same type. The Code contains several distinct kinds of law, and understanding the differences between them is essential for correct interpretation and application.

Universal Laws and Particular Laws

A **universal law** applies to the entire AACC – every diocese, every parish, every member. Most canons in this Code are universal laws. A **particular law** applies only to a specific territory, region, or community. Particular laws are typically enacted by a bishop for his diocese or by a bishops' conference for a nation or region.

Invalidating Laws and Disqualifying Laws

Some canons **invalidate** acts or **disqualify** persons. These are among the most important canons in the Code, because an act performed in violation of an invalidating law has no legal effect – it is null and void. Canon 7 explains that a law is understood to invalidate an act or to disqualify a person only when it expressly states that the act is null or the

person is incapable. As the medieval axiom has it: *Odia restringi, et favores convenit ampliari* – penalties are to be interpreted strictly, and favours broadly.

Example: Certain canons governing the form of marriage are invalidating: a marriage celebrated without the required canonical form is not merely illicit but invalid – it does not exist in the eyes of the Church. The terms invalid and null in a canon are always a signal that the provision has the most serious canonical consequences.

Merely Obligatory Laws

Most canons are **merely obligatory**: they create a duty to act in a certain way, and violation of that duty may incur a penalty or require correction, but the act itself remains valid. For example, a priest who celebrates Mass without proper vestments acts illicitly (unlawfully) but not invalidly – the Mass is still a valid Mass, though the priest may be subject to disciplinary action.

The Principle of Doubt

Canon 10 establishes a foundational principle that, if it is uncertain whether a law actually exists or applies, the law does not bind until clarified. This ancient canonical principle – *in dubiis, pro reo* (in doubtful cases, favour the accused) – protects the faithful from being bound by uncertain or ambiguous provisions. As Pope Boniface VIII declared in his celebrated *Regulae Iuris*, the law should be read more favourably where doubt remains.

V. How Canons Are Interpreted

Canon 12 establishes who has the authority to interpret the Code authoritatively: the Synod of Bishops, or the Primate when entrusted with that power. However, every reader of the Code engages in interpretation whenever they apply a canon to a particular situation. Canon 13 provides the rules for this task.

The Rules of Interpretation

Canon 13 establishes that canonical laws are to be understood according to the proper meaning of the words considered in their text and context. If the meaning remains doubtful or obscure, the interpreter should have recourse to parallel passages (if any), the purpose and circumstances of the law, and the mind of the legislator. As St Thomas Aquinas taught, law is an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by one who has care of the community and duly promulgated. The mind of the legislator in this Code is the pastoral intention of the Synod of Bishops.

Canon 14 establishes a further principle of great practical importance: **laws which establish a penalty, or restrict the free exercise of rights, or contain an exception to the law, are to be interpreted strictly.** This means that penal canons and restrictive canons may never be extended by analogy to cases not expressly covered. St Alphonsus Liguori, Doctor of the Church, captured this principle by explaining that law is given

for the good of the community and ceases to bind in a particular case when it no longer serves that good.

Filling Gaps in the Law

No Code can anticipate every situation. Canon 15 provides guidance for cases not expressly covered by the Code. When a gap exists, the matter is to be resolved by having recourse to: laws enacted for analogous cases; the general principles of law observed with canonical equity; the jurisprudence and practice of the Church; and the common and constant opinion of learned authors. This provision ensures that the Code can function as a living system, capable of addressing unforeseen situations through principled reasoning rather than rigid literalism.

VI. Dispensations: When the Law May Be Relaxed

One of the most distinctive features of canon law, setting it apart from most civil legal systems, is the institution of the **dispensation**. A dispensation is the relaxation of a merely ecclesiastical law in a particular case, granted by competent authority for a just and reasonable cause.

The dispensing power is an expression of the pastoral character of canon law. It recognises that general rules, however wisely crafted, cannot anticipate every individual circumstance, and that rigid application of the law may sometimes harm rather than help the salvation of souls. As Canon 30 requires, a dispensation must always be grounded in a just and reasonable cause: the authority granting it must weigh the circumstances, the importance of the law in question, and whether relaxation will genuinely serve the spiritual good of the person or community concerned.

Canon 27 establishes who may grant dispensations: the diocesan bishop may dispense the faithful from disciplinary laws – both universal and particular – whenever he judges that such dispensation will promote their spiritual welfare. Certain dispensations are reserved to the Primatial See or require special authority. In genuine emergencies, where delay would cause serious harm, a local Ordinary may grant a dispensation even in normally reserved cases.

Practical tip: If you encounter a canonical requirement that seems impossible or pastorally harmful in a particular case, do not assume the law is simply inapplicable. Instead, consult your Ordinary about the possibility of a dispensation. The dispensing power exists precisely for such situations.

VII. Finding the Canon You Need: A Practical Method

The most common practical question facing any reader of the Code is: *How do I find the canon relevant to my situation?* This section provides a step-by-step method.

Step 1: Identify the Area of Church Life

Ask yourself: does my question concern worship and the sacraments (Volume V)? The rights or duties of a member of the faithful (Volume II)? Church property or finances (Volume VI)? Discipline or penalties (Volume VII)? Preaching or education (Volume IV)? Consecrated life (Volume III)? Or a fundamental procedural question about how laws work (Volume I)? The seven-volume structure is designed so that you can reach the right section of the Code quickly by identifying the general area.

Step 2: Navigate to the Relevant Section and Subsection

Each Volume is divided into Sections and Subsections with descriptive headings. Once you have identified the relevant Volume, scan the Section and Subsection headings until you find the specific topic. For example, within Volume V (The Sanctifying Office), Section II addresses the Most Holy Eucharist, Section III addresses Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, and Section V addresses Marriage.

Step 3: Read the Canon in Full

Once you have found a potentially relevant canon, read it in its entirety – including all paragraphs (§ subdivisions) and any cross-referenced canons. A canon taken out of context, or read only partially, can be seriously misleading.

Step 4: Follow All Cross-References

If the canon references other canons, follow each reference and read the cited canon before forming a judgement. The cross-references are not decorative; they are integral to understanding the provision.

Step 5: Consider the Pastoral Context

Remember the supreme principle of canonical interpretation: *salus animarum suprema lex* – the salvation of souls is the supreme law. Every canon exists to serve this end. If a strict reading of a canon would produce a result contrary to the spiritual good of the faithful, consider whether a dispensation, canonical equity, or a broader interpretation might be appropriate. Consult your Ordinary if in doubt.

VIII. Quick-Reference Guide: Common Pastoral Situations

The following table provides a quick guide to finding the relevant canons for the most common pastoral situations. It is not exhaustive but will serve as a starting point for most enquiries.

Pastoral Situation	Starting Point
Preparing for baptism	Canons 602–640
Celebrating confirmation	Canons 641–660

Questions about the Eucharist/Mass	Canons 661–730
Hearing confessions / penance	Canons 731–770
Anointing of the sick	Canons 771–790
Ordination questions	Canons 791–830
Marriage preparation / impediments	Canons 831–900
Funerals and burial	Canons 910–930
Rights of the lay faithful	Canons 102–130
Clergy formation / seminary	Canons 131–175
Incardination of clergy	Canons 176–200
Parish governance	Canons 340–365
The Synod of Bishops / Primate	Canons 213–240
Dispensations from the law	Canons 25–31
Preaching and catechesis	Canons 532–570
Religious life / vows	Canons 380–530
Church finances / property	Canons 948–975
Penalties / excommunication	Canons 976–1011
Custom and its force of law	Canons 19–24

X. Key Terms and Canonical Vocabulary

The Code uses certain technical terms that may be unfamiliar to lay readers. The following definitions will assist in reading the canons correctly.

Term	Meaning
Canon	An individual law or regulation within the Code. From the Greek <i>kanon</i> (rule or measuring rod).
Ordinary	The diocesan bishop, vicar general, or episcopal vicar – anyone who exercises ordinary governance authority in a diocese.
Local Ordinary	The Ordinary of a particular place: the diocesan bishop or those equivalent to him in law.

Primate	The Presiding Archbishop of the AACC, who serves as <i>primus inter pares</i> (first among equals) within the Synod of Bishops.
Primaatial See	The central office and authority of the Primate.
Synod of Bishops	The supreme legislative, judicial, and executive authority of the AACC.
Dispensation	The relaxation of a merely ecclesiastical law in a particular case, for a just and reasonable cause.
Incardination	The canonical attachment of a cleric (deacon, priest, or bishop) to a particular diocese or religious institute.
Licit / Illicit	Lawful / unlawful. An illicit act violates the law but may still be valid.
Valid / Invalid	Canonically effective / without legal effect. An invalid act is null and produces no canonical consequences.
Latae sententiae	A penalty incurred automatically by the very commission of the offence, without a formal sentence being pronounced.
Ferendae sententiae	A penalty imposed only after a formal process and judicial or administrative sentence.
Domicile	A person's established canonical residence, determining their proper parish and Ordinary.
Juridical person	An entity (not a human person) recognised in canon law as having rights and obligations: e.g. a diocese, parish, or religious institute.
Aequitas canonica	Canonical equity: the principle by which the strict letter of the law is tempered by justice and mercy in individual cases.
Salus animarum	The salvation of souls – the supreme law of the Church and the ultimate criterion for interpreting and applying every canon.

XI. Conclusion: The Code as Servant, Not Master

This Code exists to serve the Church, not to dominate it. As Pope St John Paul II wrote when promulgating the 1983 Roman Code, the Code was not intended to substitute for faith, grace, charisms, and above all charity in the life of the Church and

of the faithful. The same is true of the AACC's Code. It is a framework for ordered communal life, not a replacement for the Gospel.

St Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church, insisted on the principle that no one should be condemned unheard – a principle of natural justice that pervades the entire canonical tradition. St Augustine taught that love is the ultimate criterion by which all law must be judged and the guiding principle of Christian action. The canonist John Huels captures the same insight in modern terms by explaining that canon law is pastoral in purpose and directed to the salvation of souls and the good order of the ecclesial community.

If you encounter a canon that puzzles you, read it again in its full context, follow its cross-references, and consider its pastoral purpose. If you remain uncertain, consult your parish priest, your Ordinary, or the Office of the Synod Secretariat. The canonical tradition has always held that the faithful have a right to understand the laws by which they are governed. This Code was written with that right in mind.

The final canon of the Code states the principle that governs everything that precedes it:

Salus animarum suprema lex. – The salvation of souls is the supreme law.

May this Code, read with faith and applied with charity, serve the glory of God and the salvation of all the faithful of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church.



Independent Catholic Jurisdictions in Historical Perspective

I. Introduction: The Phenomenon of Independent Catholicism

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church exists within a tradition far older and more extensive than is commonly recognised: the tradition of independent Catholic jurisdictions possessing valid apostolic succession, celebrating authentic Catholic sacraments, professing the apostolic faith, and governing themselves through their own canonical structures outside the administrative communion of the Roman See. This tradition stretches from the ancient Church of the East, which flourished beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire from the second century onwards, through the medieval independence of the See of Utrecht, to the great separation movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the diverse landscape of independent Catholic churches that exists today.

This essay situates the AACC within this broader history. It examines the theological, canonical, and historical precedents for legitimate independence, addresses the critical questions of sacramental validity, ecclesial legitimacy, and canonical standing, and demonstrates that the AACC's existence as an independent Catholic jurisdiction is not an anomaly but the expression of principles deeply rooted in the Church's own tradition. As the Primate declares: 'Throughout Church history, particular Churches, regional councils, and independent Catholic jurisdictions have exercised the authority to establish their own canonical structures whilst maintaining fidelity to apostolic doctrine and sacramental communion.'

II. The Theological Foundations of Legitimate Independence

Validity, Legitimacy, and Communion: Necessary Distinctions

Before examining the historical record, three terms must be carefully distinguished. *Validity* refers to the sacramental reality of a church's orders and sacraments: are the sacraments genuinely conferred, does the episcopal succession transmit authentic apostolic authority? *Legitimacy* refers to the ecclesial reality of a church's existence: does the community possess the essential marks of a true particular church? *Communion* refers to the juridical relationship between churches: is the community in administrative union with other churches, and particularly with the See of Rome?

Catholic theology has always recognised that these three concepts, though related, are separable. A church may possess valid orders and sacraments whilst not being in communion with Rome. A church in schism may nevertheless be a 'true particular church' possessing authentic ecclesial reality. The Second Vatican Council affirmed this distinction when it taught that separated Eastern Churches, possessing apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, 'are true particular Churches' even though they are not in full communion with the Roman See. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith confirmed this teaching in *Dominus Iesus*

(2000), stating that the Church of Christ is present and operative in these Churches, even though they lack full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

Augustine: The Sacraments Belong to Christ

The theological principle upon which all questions of sacramental validity outside Roman communion depend was articulated definitively by St Augustine of Hippo, Doctor of the Church (354–430), in his treatise against the Donatists:

The baptism of Christ belongs to Christ, no matter who administers it.

Augustine’s argument, directed against the Donatist claim that sacraments administered by unworthy or schismatic ministers were invalid, established the principle that sacramental validity depends upon the sacrament’s objective character – its proper matter, form, and intention – not upon the moral status or jurisdictional allegiance of the minister. The sacraments belong to Christ; they are not the property of any particular institution or prelate. Augustine further taught that those who have been baptised or ordained in schism possess genuine sacraments, even if they possess them outside the visible communion of the Catholic Church.

This Augustinian principle was confirmed by the Council of Trent, which solemnly defined that sacraments conferred with the proper matter, form, and intention are valid regardless of the minister’s state of grace or canonical standing. St Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church, provided the philosophical rationale: ‘The sacrament is not conferred by the minister’s own power, but by the power of Christ.’ The minister acts as an instrument of Christ, and the sacrament’s efficacy derives from Christ’s power, not the minister’s jurisdiction.

Subsistit In: The Church of Christ Beyond Roman Boundaries

The Second Vatican Council’s *Lumen Gentium* teaches that the Church of Christ ‘subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him,’ whilst acknowledging that ‘many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside her structure.’ The choice of *subsistit in* rather than the simple *est* of earlier magisterial texts has been interpreted by Francis Sullivan SJ as a recognition that the Church of Christ is present – truly, not merely analogically – in communities that possess the essential elements of ecclesiality even when they are not in full communion with the Roman See.

The Council explicitly identified these essential elements: the written Word of God, the life of grace, faith, hope, charity, other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the visible elements of the Church. Where these elements are present in their fullness – and particularly where apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist are maintained – the Church of Christ is authentically present, even outside the visible boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church.

III. First-Millennium Precedents for Legitimate Independence

The Church of the East: Catholicism Beyond the Empire

The most ancient precedent for an independent Catholic jurisdiction is the Church of the East, which flourished in the Persian Empire from at least the second century. This church, tracing its origins to the apostolic mission of St Thomas and the evangelisation of Mesopotamia, developed its own liturgical, theological, and canonical tradition entirely independent of the five patriarchates within the Roman Empire. By the fifth century, the Church of the East had its own Catholicos-Patriarch, its own canonical structure, its own liturgical rite, and its own theological schools, whilst professing the same apostolic faith and maintaining valid apostolic succession.

The Church of the East was never in administrative communion with Rome, yet it was authentically Catholic in the qualitative sense articulated by Georges Florovsky: catholicity denotes the fullness of truth and life that is present wherever the Church of Christ exists in the integrity of her faith, sacraments, and apostolic ministry. John Meyendorff observes that the Church of the East demonstrates that apostolic Christianity existed and flourished beyond the boundaries of any single administrative structure from the very earliest period.

The See of Utrecht: Independence Within Western Catholicism

Within Western Catholicism itself, the most significant precedent for legitimate independence is the ancient See of Utrecht. Founded by St Willibrord, who was consecrated by Pope Sergius I in 696, the Church of Utrecht maintained a degree of canonical autonomy that was unusual in the Latin West. In 1145, Pope Eugene III granted the Cathedral Chapter of Utrecht the right to elect its own bishops. In 1520, Pope Leo X, in the bull *Debitum Pastoralis*, granted Bishop Philip of Burgundy an extraordinary privilege: that neither he nor his successors, nor any of their clergy or laity, should ever have their cause brought before any external tribunal, rendering all such proceedings *ipso facto* null and void.

When the Dutch hierarchy was unjustly deposed in the early eighteenth century, the Chapter of Utrecht exercised its ancient right of election, choosing Cornelius Steenoven as Archbishop in 1723. The apostolic succession was maintained through the consecration of Steenoven and his successors, and the Roman Catholic Church itself acknowledged the validity of these orders. As C. B. Moss observes, the See of Utrecht preserved its independence and its valid sacramental life for centuries before the Old Catholic movement formally adopted the name. The case of Utrecht demonstrates that a church can maintain valid orders, authentic sacraments, and fidelity to Catholic doctrine whilst existing outside Roman administrative communion – and do so for centuries.

Autocephaly in the Eastern Tradition

The Eastern Churches provide abundant precedent for legitimate canonical independence. The ecumenical councils recognised the autocephaly of national and regional churches: the Council of Nicaea confirmed the ancient rights of the sees of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem; the Council in Trullo explicitly confirmed the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus, based on its apostolic foundation. St Basil the Great, Doctor of the Church, recognised that

churches could legitimately differ in canonical discipline whilst maintaining communion in faith, and that the bond of unity was constituted by shared faith and mutual recognition rather than by submission to a single administrative centre.

IV. The Old Catholic Movement Following Vatican I

The Rejection of *Pastor Aeternus*

The First Vatican Council's definition of papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction in the constitution *Pastor Aeternus* (18 July 1870) provoked the most significant separation from Rome since the Protestant Reformation. Leading Catholic theologians, most notably Johann Joseph Ignaz von Dollinger, the distinguished Church historian at the University of Munich, argued that the new dogmas were incompatible with the faith of the undivided Church. Dollinger contended that papal infallibility was unknown to the Fathers, unrecognised by the ecumenical councils, and contradicted by the historical record.

Owen Chadwick, in his authoritative history, notes that the opposition to *Pastor Aeternus* was not confined to fringe elements but included some of the most learned and devout Catholics in Central Europe, whose conscience would not permit them to accept what they regarded as a novelty in the Church's teaching. Klaus Schatz SJ observes that the definition of papal primacy represented a decisive shift from the collegial model of governance that had prevailed in the first millennium to a monarchical model that the Eastern Churches had always rejected.

The Formation of Old Catholic Churches

In 1871, a congress at Munich attracted several hundred participants, including theological faculty from leading German universities. The movement formally constituted itself as the Old Catholic Church, deliberately choosing the name 'Old' to indicate that they were preserving the ancient Catholic faith against what they perceived as Roman innovation. In 1873, Joseph Hubert Reinkens was elected bishop, and was consecrated by the Old Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht, Hermann Heykamp, thereby establishing episcopal succession for the German Old Catholic Church through the venerable and undisputed line of the See of Utrecht.

The Declaration of Utrecht (1889) articulated the Old Catholic doctrinal position: adherence to the faith of the undivided Church as expressed in the first seven ecumenical councils, acceptance of the Vincentian Canon, and rejection of the new Roman dogmas. The Declaration explicitly invoked St Vincent of Lerins's principle: 'What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all – that is truly Catholic.' The Old Catholic Churches thus claimed not to have left the Catholic Church but to have remained faithful to the ancient faith whilst Rome had departed from it.

The Question of Validity

The sacramental validity of Old Catholic orders has never been seriously disputed. The Roman Catholic Church itself acknowledged that the See of Utrecht maintained valid apostolic succession: the Utrecht line was considered schismatic but not heretical, and the validity of its orders was recognised under Roman Catholic canon law. This recognition extends to all

bishops and priests ordained within the unbroken Utrecht succession. Karl Pruter and J. Gordon Melton, in their authoritative sourcebook, document the numerous lines of apostolic succession that flow from the Utrecht consecrations into the wider independent Catholic movement.

V. The Polish National Catholic Church

The Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) represents a different model of independent Catholicism: a church born not from doctrinal dispute but from pastoral necessity and the cultural aspirations of a particular community. Founded in 1897 by Fr Franciszek Hodur in Scranton, Pennsylvania, the PNCC emerged from the frustrations of Polish immigrant communities in the United States who felt that the Roman Catholic hierarchy was unresponsive to their pastoral needs and cultural identity.

Hodur was elected bishop by his community and consecrated in 1907 by the Old Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht, Gerardus Gul, thereby receiving valid episcopal orders through the undisputed Utrecht succession. The PNCC adopted the seven ecumenical councils, maintained the apostolic faith, celebrated valid sacraments, and governed itself through a synodal structure in which both clergy and laity participated in decision-making.

The significance of the PNCC for the theology of independent Catholicism lies in its demonstration that the impulse towards canonical independence can arise from legitimate pastoral concerns: the desire of a particular community to be shepherded by bishops who share their language, their culture, and their pastoral priorities. Paul Fox argues that the PNCC represented not a rejection of Catholicism but its deepest expression: the principle that the Church exists to serve the faithful, not the faithful to serve an institutional structure. The PNCC maintained communion with the Union of Utrecht until 2003, when it separated over doctrinal and moral disagreements, forming the Union of Scranton.

VI. The Philippine Independent Church

The Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Philippine Independent Church), founded in 1902 by Isabelo de los Reyes and led by Bishop Gregorio Aglipay, represents yet another model: independence as an expression of national liberation and the de-colonisation of the Church. The Philippine Independent Church emerged from the Philippine Revolution against Spanish colonial rule, which had been inseparable from the institutional Roman Catholic Church.

Aglipay was a Roman Catholic priest who was excommunicated for his involvement in the revolution. Under his leadership, the Philippine Independent Church adopted a constitution, established a hierarchy, and organised itself as a national Catholic church, maintaining Catholic liturgical forms and professing the Catholic faith whilst asserting complete independence from Rome.

The question of apostolic succession was resolved in 1948 when the Episcopal Church (USA) consecrated three bishops for the Philippine Independent Church, thereby providing an

additional line of episcopal succession. The Philippine Independent Church subsequently entered into full communion with the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, demonstrating the possibility of an independent Catholic jurisdiction finding recognition and communion beyond the Roman institutional framework.

The Philippine Independent Church is significant because it demonstrates the universality of the impulse towards independent Catholicism. It is not merely a European or North American phenomenon; it arises wherever the pastoral needs of the faithful require structures of governance that are responsive to local conditions and cultural realities. The Church, as St Paul taught, is a body with many members, and the diversity of her visible expressions is not a defect but a reflection of her inner richness.

VII. The Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church and Latin American Independence

Dom Carlos Duarte Costa, Roman Catholic Bishop of Botucatu (later titular Bishop of Maura), represents a further dimension of independent Catholicism: prophetic witness against institutional corruption. In 1945, Duarte Costa publicly denounced the Vatican's relationship with fascist regimes and its failure to speak against the persecution of Jews during the Second World War. He was excommunicated, but, possessing valid episcopal orders conferred within the Roman Catholic Church itself, he proceeded to establish the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church (*Igreja Católica Apostólica Brasileira*).

Duarte Costa's succession has been widely recognised as valid. The Roman Catholic Church never challenged the validity of his orders, which were conferred by Roman Catholic bishops in full communion with the Holy See. His successors have carried this line of succession into numerous independent Catholic jurisdictions throughout the Americas and beyond. The case of Duarte Costa demonstrates that valid apostolic succession can and does pass beyond the boundaries of Roman communion through the actions of validly ordained Roman Catholic bishops, and that the sacraments so conferred belong to Christ, not to the institutional structure from which the bishop has departed.

VIII. The Catholicate of the West and the AACC's Eastern Connection

The Foundation of the Catholicate

The Catholicate of the West, under which the AACC received its charter, represents a distinctive tradition within independent Catholicism: one that deliberately sought to recover the connection between Western Christianity and the ancient Eastern Churches. The first Catholicos of the West, Hugh George de Willmott Newman (Mar Georgius), was consecrated in 1944 under the auspices of the Patriarchate of the God-protected city of Antioch, receiving the title *Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Holy Metropolis of Glastonbury, the Occidental Jerusalem, and Catholicos of the West*.

The title *Catholicos* is of profound significance. In the Eastern tradition, a Catholicos is the head of an autocephalous church: the word derives from the Greek *katholikos*, meaning ‘universal’ or ‘general,’ and has been used since the fourth century to designate the principal bishop of a church possessing self-governing authority. The Armenian Apostolic Church, the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the Church of the East all use this title for their supreme hierarch. By establishing a Catholicate of the West, the founding bishops sought to create a canonical structure that would bring the synodal, autocephalous governance model of the Eastern Churches into the Western context.

On 14 July 1945, the Catholicos of the West and the Patriarch mutually agreed that the Catholicate would be completely independent, not under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate but under the sole jurisdiction of the Catholicos. This agreement established the Catholicate as an autonomous jurisdiction with its own canonical authority, rooted in Eastern apostolic succession whilst serving the Western faithful.

The AACC’s Charter and Eastern Heritage

The AACC’s charter, granted by the Catholicate of the West, thus situates the Church within a lineage that connects Western Catholic practice with Eastern apostolic authority. This connection is not merely historical or ornamental; it is ecclesiologicaly constitutive. The AACC inherits through its charter a tradition of autocephalous self-governance that antedates the division between East and West, and that reflects the model of Church governance practised throughout the Christian world in the first millennium.

The significance of this Eastern connection is threefold. First, it provides the AACC with lines of apostolic succession that derive from the ancient Patriarchate of Antioch, whose foundation is attributed to St Peter himself – the same apostle upon whom the Roman See bases its own primacy. Second, it situates the AACC within the synodal and autocephalous tradition of the Eastern Churches, providing canonical and theological precedent for the Church’s conciliar governance model. Third, it embodies the principle, affirmed by the Second Vatican Council in *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, that the diversity of liturgical, theological, spiritual, and disciplinary traditions within the Church ‘does not impair her unity but rather manifests it.’

Peter Anson, in his comprehensive study of independent bishops, documents the complex web of apostolic successions that flow through the various lines associated with the Catholicate of the West, noting that these include successions deriving from the Syrian Orthodox, Old Catholic, and other ancient Christian traditions. Henry Brandreth, writing from an Anglican perspective, acknowledges that whatever questions may be raised about the canonical regularity of particular consecrations, the sacramental reality of the apostolic succession transmitted through these lines is a theological fact that cannot be dismissed by jurisdictional objections.

IX. Validity, Legitimacy, and Canonical Standing: A Theological Assessment

The Sacramental Criterion: Valid Orders and Authentic Sacraments

The fundamental criterion by which the Catholic theological tradition assesses the ecclesial reality of any community is sacramental: does the community possess valid orders and

celebrate authentic sacraments? As the Second Vatican Council taught, the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church's life, and where a valid Eucharist is celebrated by a validly ordained priest in apostolic succession, the Church of Christ is authentically present.

The AACC possesses valid apostolic succession through unbroken sacramental transmission. This succession derives from the ancient lines that flow through the Catholicate of the West, connecting the AACC to the apostolic foundation of the Church of Antioch. The AACC's bishops are validly consecrated; its priests are validly ordained; its sacraments are authentically celebrated. By the criterion that the Catholic tradition itself establishes – the criterion applied by the Council of Trent, by St Thomas Aquinas, by St Augustine, and by the Second Vatican Council – the AACC possesses the essential sacramental marks of a true particular church.

St Thomas Aquinas teaches that even a bishop who has been separated from communion retains the power of order, which inheres in the sacramental character and cannot be removed by any merely jurisdictional act. St Robert Bellarmine, Doctor of the Church, confirms that the power of order, once conferred, belongs to the recipient permanently and is exercised validly even outside the visible communion of the Roman See. The Council of Trent defined that ordination imprints an indelible character that can be neither lost nor removed.

The Ecclesiological Criterion: Elements of Ecclesiality

Beyond sacramental validity, the Second Vatican Council identified a broader set of 'elements of sanctification and of truth' that constitute the ecclesial reality of a community. These include: the written Word of God, the life of grace, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, the interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements including apostolic succession, episcopal governance, and the sacramental life.

The AACC possesses all of these elements in their fullness. It professes the faith of the seven ecumenical councils and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It celebrates all seven sacraments instituted by Christ. It maintains apostolic succession through the laying on of hands. It is governed by bishops in synodal communion. It orders its life according to a comprehensive Code of Canon Law that stands in continuity with the universal canonical tradition. By the ecclesiological criteria that the Roman Catholic Church itself employs, the AACC is not merely a community possessing 'elements' of ecclesial life; it possesses the essential constitutive marks of a true particular church.

The Canonical Criterion: Legitimate Self-Governance

The canonical tradition recognises that churches possessing valid orders, authentic sacraments, and fidelity to the apostolic faith have the right to govern themselves through their own canonical structures. The CCEO formally recognises this principle in its concept of the Church *sui iuris* – a church 'of its own right' – defined as a grouping of the faithful joined to a hierarchy according to the norms of law. The CCEO further specifies that each Church *sui iuris* possesses its own rite: its own liturgical, theological, spiritual, and disciplinary patrimony.

The AACC, whilst not a Church *sui iuris* within the technical meaning of the CCEO, exercises the same canonical principles. It possesses a hierarchy with valid apostolic succession, governs itself according to its own comprehensive Code of Canon Law, celebrates the sacraments in forms recognised as valid by the wider Catholic tradition, and professes the apostolic faith. The canonical right to self-governance flows from the sacramental reality of apostolic succession

itself: bishops, by virtue of their consecration, possess the *tria munera* – the threefold power to teach, sanctify, and govern – and the exercise of these powers constitutes the legitimate governance of a particular church.

X. The Patristic Theology of Canonical Diversity

The patristic tradition consistently affirmed the principle that the Catholic Church can and does contain within herself legitimately diverse canonical structures. St Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258) articulated the foundational principle:

The episcopate is one; each individual bishop holds his share in its totality.

Cyprian vigorously defended the canonical independence of the African bishops against Roman claims, insisting that each bishop possessed his own liberty and power of judgement within his diocese, accountable to God alone. This Cyprianic principle was not an aberration but the norm of the pre-Nicene Church: bishops governed their sees in communion with one another, but no bishop possessed jurisdiction over another's diocese.

St Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church (d. 604), protested against any bishop claiming a title implying universal jurisdiction, insisting that such a claim was incompatible with the collegial nature of the episcopate. Gregory's insistence that he was *servus servorum Dei* – the servant of the servants of God – rather than 'universal bishop' embodies the patristic understanding that primacy is a ministry of service and coordination, not a jurisdiction of command.

The Dominican theologian Yves Congar, one of the most influential ecclesialogists of the twentieth century, argued that the diversity of canonical structures within the one Catholic Church is not merely tolerable but theologically necessary: the Church's catholicity requires that the one faith be expressed in forms appropriate to diverse cultures, peoples, and circumstances. Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) affirmed that the eucharistic ecclesiology of the first millennium implies that each local church celebrating the Eucharist in the integrity of the apostolic faith is the whole Body of Christ in that place, not a subordinate branch of a centralised institution.

XI. The AACCC in Historical Perspective: Continuity and Distinction

What the AACCC Shares with Other Independent Catholic Jurisdictions

The AACCC shares with the Old Catholic Churches the commitment to the faith of the undivided Church and the rejection of post-schism doctrinal innovations that contradict the consensus of the first millennium. It shares with the Polish National Catholic Church the conviction that the faithful are entitled to be shepherded by bishops who are responsive to their pastoral needs and cultural context. It shares with the Philippine Independent Church the understanding that the Church's governance must be freed from patterns of centralisation that impede the pastoral mission. It shares with the Catholicate of the West, from which it received its charter, the conviction that the synodal and autocephalous traditions of the Eastern Churches provide the authentic model for Catholic governance.

What Distinguishes the AACC

Several features distinguish the AACC from many other independent Catholic jurisdictions. First, the AACC has promulgated a comprehensive Code of Canon Law – a complete canonical structure governing every aspect of the Church’s life, from the celebration of the sacraments to the administration of temporal goods, from the formation of seminarians to the resolution of disputes. As the Primate observes: ‘For an independent Catholic jurisdiction with valid apostolic succession to establish its own Code of Canon Law is an act of profound ecclesial significance.’

Second, the AACC is governed by a Synod of Bishops exercising supreme authority, with the Primate serving as *primus inter pares*. This synodal structure is not merely a preference but a constitutional principle, enshrined in canonical law and reflecting the governance model of the undivided Church.

Third, the AACC maintains both the modern rite (*Novus Ordo*) and the traditional Latin rite (*Usus Antiquior*), providing a canonical home for those who seek traditional Catholic worship and belief. As the Primate writes: ‘Many who have joined our communion have done so precisely because they find here both doctrinal orthodoxy and liturgical reverence.’

Fourth, the AACC’s charter from the Catholicate of the West provides an Eastern ecclesial heritage that enriches and authenticates its self-understanding as a particular Church within the one Catholic communion. This Eastern connection is not a mere historical curiosity but a living bond that situates the AACC within the oldest tradition of autocephalous Catholic governance.

The AACC’s Canonical Acknowledgement of the Broader Tradition

The AACC’s Code itself acknowledges the Church’s place within the wider tradition of legitimate Catholic independence: ‘This Code acknowledges its debt to the canonical tradition of the universal Church, particularly the 1983 Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church, which has served as the foundation for much of our canonical structure. We have deliberately preserved substantial continuity with Roman canonical tradition in matters of fundamental doctrine, sacramental discipline, and ecclesiastical governance.’

At the same time, the Code asserts the AACC’s legitimate canonical autonomy: ‘Our independence does not signify isolation or rejection of the broader Catholic communion. Rather, it represents the exercise of that legitimate autonomy which has always existed within the Catholic Church for particular Churches to govern themselves according to their proper law whilst maintaining communion in faith and sacraments.’

XII. Conclusion: Catholicity in Diversity

The historical record surveyed in this essay demonstrates that independent Catholic jurisdictions are not anomalies or aberrations but manifestations of a principle that has operated throughout the Church’s history: the principle that the one Catholic Church can legitimately be composed of multiple self-governing churches, each possessing valid orders, celebrating authentic sacraments, professing the apostolic faith, and governing itself through its own canonical structures.

This principle was practised by the Church of the East from the second century onwards; it was embodied in the independence of the See of Utrecht from the eighth century; it was affirmed by the ecumenical councils in their recognition of autocephalous churches and patriarchal jurisdictions; it was articulated by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church – Augustine, Cyprian, Gregory, Aquinas – in their teaching on sacramental validity, episcopal collegiality, and canonical diversity; it was recovered by the Old Catholic movement following Vatican I; it was expressed in the national churches of Poland and the Philippines; and it was given its most recent theological articulation by the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*.

The AACC stands firmly within this tradition. Possessing valid apostolic succession through its charter from the Catholicate of the West, celebrating authentic Catholic sacraments, professing the faith of the seven ecumenical councils, and governing itself through a Synod of Bishops under the presidency of a Primate who serves as *primus inter pares*, the AACC is a true particular church within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ. Its canonical independence is not a departure from Catholic tradition but its faithful expression.

As the Primate concludes: ‘We recognise one baptism, confess one faith, celebrate one Eucharist, and revere the same sacred Tradition. Our canonical independence serves not separation but rather the fuller expression of Catholic diversity within apostolic unity.’



The Theology of Law in the Church

*Why the Church Needs Law
and Why Law and Gospel Are Not Opposed*

I. Introduction: The Perennial Question

Why does the Church need law? The question is as old as Christianity itself. From the earliest days of the apostolic community, there have been those who regarded law and Gospel as fundamentally opposed – as though the gift of grace rendered all external regulation superfluous, even harmful. The Apostle Paul himself had to contend with this misunderstanding when he wrote to the Romans: ‘Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!’ (Romans 6:1–2). The antinomian temptation – the belief that Christian freedom abolishes the need for ordered communal life – has recurred in every century of the Church’s history, from the Gnostic movements of the second century to certain strands of the sixteenth-century Reformation, and it persists today in the vague but widespread sentiment that the Church would be better off without juridical structures.

This essay argues that such a view rests upon a fundamental misunderstanding both of law and of the Gospel. Rightly understood, law in the Church is not the enemy of grace but its servant; not the contradiction of love but its ordering principle; not the suppression of the Spirit but the framework within which the Spirit’s gifts are received, protected, and shared. As the distinguished Jesuit canonist Ladislav Őrsy has written: ‘Canon law is theology in action; it is the Church’s attempt to live out its beliefs in a structured way.’

To demonstrate this, we shall draw upon the Church’s deepest theological resources: the treatise on law in the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas, Doctor Communis of the Church; the political theology of St Augustine of Hippo as developed in the *De Civitate Dei*; the teaching of the ecumenical councils; and the witness of Sacred Scripture itself.

Our aim is not merely academic. The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church has promulgated its own Code of Canon Law as a living document for pastoral ministry. If the faithful are to receive this Code not as a burden but as a gift, they must understand why the Church legislates at all – and why that legislation, far from being opposed to the Gospel, is one of the means by which the Gospel bears fruit in the ordered life of the Christian community.

II. The Nature of Law: St Thomas Aquinas and the *Summa Theologiae*

The most comprehensive and enduring theological treatment of the nature of law in the Western tradition is found in the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). In the *Prima Secundae*, questions 90 to 97, the Angelic Doctor develops a unified theory of law that encompasses the eternal law of God, the natural law inscribed in human reason, divine positive law as revealed in Scripture, and human

positive law, including the law of the Church. Understanding this framework is essential to grasping why canon law exists and how it relates to the Gospel.

The Definition of Law

Aquinas begins with a definition that has shaped all subsequent Catholic jurisprudence. Law, he writes, is:

an ordinance of reason, for the common good, made by the one who has care of the community, and promulgated.

Each element of this definition is theologically significant. First, law is an *ordinance of reason* (*ordinatio rationis*). It is not the arbitrary will of a sovereign but a rational ordering directed towards intelligible ends. This distinguishes Aquinas's understanding from the voluntarism of later thinkers such as William of Ockham, who argued that law is essentially an act of will. For Aquinas, law participates in reason itself – ultimately in the eternal reason of God. Law that contradicts reason is not true law but a corruption of law: '*Lex iniusta non est lex*' – an unjust law is no law at all.

Second, law is directed towards the *common good* (*bonum commune*). No law may legitimately serve the private interests of the legislator; it must serve the good of the community as a whole. Applied to the Church, this means that canon law exists not for the convenience of the hierarchy but for the salvation of souls and the good order of the ecclesial community. As the canonical tradition declares: *salus animarum suprema lex* – the salvation of souls is the supreme law.

Third, law must be made by the one who has care of the community (*ab eo qui curam communitatis habet*). In the Church, this means that canonical legislation proceeds from those who hold legitimate pastoral authority: the Synod of Bishops, the Primate, and individual bishops within their dioceses. The authority to legislate is not self-assumed but flows from episcopal consecration and canonical mission.

Fourth, law must be *promulgated*. A law that is not made known to those whom it binds has no binding force. This requirement, seemingly technical, is deeply pastoral: it protects the faithful from being bound by hidden or secret regulations and ensures transparency in the Church's governance. As St Isidore of Seville observed in the seventh century: 'Laws are enacted when they are promulgated; they are confirmed when they are approved by the practice of those who observe them.'

The Four Species of Law

Aquinas distinguishes four species of law, each related to the others in a hierarchical order. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for grasping the place of canon law within the broader order of God's governance.

i. Eternal Law (Lex Aeterna)

The eternal law is the plan of divine wisdom insofar as it directs all actions and movements of creation towards their proper ends. As Aquinas writes:

The eternal law is nothing other than the reason of divine wisdom, insofar as it directs all actions and movements.

Every other species of law participates in and derives its authority from the eternal law. God, as the sovereign ruler of the universe, governs all things through His providence, and this providential governance, considered as law, is the eternal law. The significance of this for canon law is profound. If the eternal law is the ultimate source of all legitimate law, then canon law, insofar as it is a genuine ordinance of reason directed towards the common good, participates in God's own governance of His Church.

ii. Natural Law (Lex Naturalis)

The natural law is the participation of the rational creature in the eternal law:

The natural law is nothing other than the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature.

Because human beings are made in the image of God and endowed with reason, they can discern, at least in its fundamental principles, the order that God has inscribed in creation. The first principle of the natural law, Aquinas teaches, is that 'good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.' From this self-evident principle flow the more specific precepts of natural morality: the preservation of human life, the education of children, the pursuit of truth, and the ordering of life in community.

The natural law is accessible, in principle, to all human beings through the exercise of reason, and it is not abolished by the Gospel but rather confirmed, deepened, and perfected by grace. As the First Vatican Council taught in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*: God can be known with certainty through the natural light of human reason, and the moral law inscribed in the human heart reflects the eternal law of the Creator.

For canon law, the natural law provides both a foundation and a limit. Many canonical provisions – particularly those concerning marriage, justice, and the administration of goods – are rooted in natural law principles. At the same time, no ecclesiastical law may contradict the natural law, because both derive from the same divine source.

iii. Divine Positive Law (Lex Divina)

Divine positive law is the law that God has directly revealed through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Aquinas teaches that divine positive law was necessary because human reason, weakened by sin, is not always able to discern the natural law clearly, and because God has called humanity to a supernatural end that exceeds the capacity of unaided reason to discover.

The New Law of the Gospel is, for Aquinas, primarily the grace of the Holy Spirit given to believers:

The New Law is chiefly the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given to those who believe in Christ.

This is a crucial point. The New Law is not, in the first instance, a written code but an interior principle of grace. However, Aquinas immediately adds that the New Law also includes certain external elements – the sacraments, the moral precepts of the Gospel, and the structures of the Church – which serve as dispositions for receiving grace and as means of expressing it in communal life. The external structures of the Church, including her canonical legislation, are therefore integral to the New Law, not opposed to it.

The Council of Trent reaffirmed this teaching against those Reformers who argued that justification by faith alone rendered all external works and structures unnecessary. The Council taught that the justified person is truly renewed and sanctified, and is bound to observe the commandments of God and of the Church:

If anyone says that the justified person is not bound to observe the commandments of God and of the Church, but only to believe, as if the Gospel were merely an absolute promise of eternal life without the condition of observing the commandments: let him be anathema.

iv. Human Positive Law (Lex Humana)

Human positive law is the law made by human legislators – whether civil or ecclesiastical – to apply the general principles of natural and divine law to specific circumstances. As Aquinas explains, the natural law provides general principles, but their application to concrete situations requires the work of practical reason, which is the task of the legislator.

Canon law is a species of human positive law. It applies the principles of divine and natural law to the particular circumstances of the Church's communal life. This means that canon law is neither divine law (it can be changed by legitimate authority) nor arbitrary invention (it must conform to divine and natural law). It occupies a middle ground: genuinely authoritative, because it participates in the eternal law; yet genuinely human, because it involves prudential judgments about particular circumstances. As Aquinas teaches: 'It belongs to the same authority to interpret and to dispense from the law.' The Church's ability to dispense from her own legislation is not a deficiency but a sign of law's pastoral character.

Law, Virtue, and the Common Good

Aquinas's understanding of law is inseparable from his understanding of virtue. The purpose of law is not merely to restrain evil but to form persons in virtue and to direct

them towards the common good. Law is pedagogical: it teaches, guides, and habituates the community in the practice of justice, temperance, prudence, and charity. Applied to the Church, this means that canon law exists not merely to punish wrongdoers but to form the faithful in the virtues necessary for Christian life.

As Aquinas writes with characteristic wisdom:

The purpose of human law is to lead people to virtue, not suddenly, but gradually.

This insight has direct application to the AACC's Code, which has been deliberately crafted as a pedagogical document, including theological rationale and pastoral guidance alongside juridical requirements.

III. Two Cities, One Lord: St Augustine and the Ordering of Earthly Life

If Aquinas provides the systematic framework for understanding the theology of law, it is St Augustine of Hippo (354–430), *Doctor Gratiae*, who provides the existential and historical context within which that framework takes on urgency. Augustine's masterwork, the *De Civitate Dei*, written between 413 and 426 in the aftermath of the sack of Rome by Alaric's Visigoths, is the foundational text of Christian political theology.

The Two Cities

Augustine's central insight is the distinction between two cities, two loves, two orientations of the human will:

Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly city by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly city by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.

These two cities are intermingled in the present age; they cannot be neatly separated into visible institutions. The Church on earth is not simply identical with the City of God, nor is the State simply identical with the earthly city. Rather, the two cities coexist within every human institution, including the Church herself.

This has profound implications for canon law. Because the Church on earth is a community of saints and sinners, a *corpus permixtum* (mixed body), she cannot rely solely upon the interior movements of grace to maintain ordered life. The wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest (Matthew 13:24–30). External structures of law, governance, and discipline are necessary precisely because the Church *in via* – the Church on pilgrimage – has not yet arrived at the perfection of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Canon law is, in this sense, an eschatological necessity: it belongs to the time between the Ascension and the Parousia.

Order, Peace, and the *Tranquillitas Ordinis*

Augustine defines peace as the *tranquillitas ordinis* – the tranquillity of order:

The peace of all things is the tranquillity of order. Order is the distribution which allots things equal and unequal, each to its own place.

This definition has direct application to the life of the Church. The peace of the ecclesial community depends upon the proper ordering of relationships, rights, duties, and structures. Canon law serves this peace by establishing the ordered framework within which the Church's mission can be pursued without confusion, injustice, or the arbitrary exercise of power. Without canonical order, the Church would be subject to what Augustine elsewhere describes as the *libido dominandi* – the lust for domination that corrupts every human community when power is exercised without accountability.

The Use of Temporal Means for Spiritual Ends

Augustine was no dualist. Unlike the Manichaeans whom he had once followed, he did not regard temporal institutions as inherently evil. As he writes in *De Doctrina Christiana*, all things are to be either enjoyed (*frui*) or used (*uti*): God alone is to be enjoyed as the ultimate end, whilst all created goods – including the structures of the Church – are to be used as means towards that end. Canon law is a temporal instrument in the service of an eternal purpose. It is to be used wisely, justly, and with pastoral charity as a means of ordering the Church's life towards the salvation of souls.

IV. The Threefold Order: Divine Law, Natural Law, and Ecclesiastical Law

Building upon the foundations laid by Aquinas and Augustine, we can now articulate more precisely the relationship between the three orders of law most directly relevant to the Church's canonical tradition.

Divine Law and the Church's Constitution

Certain features of the Church's structure and discipline are of divine institution and therefore not subject to change by any human authority. These include the seven sacraments as instituted by Christ, the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon, the indissolubility of consummated sacramental marriage, and the deposit of faith entrusted to the apostles. Canon law cannot alter these divinely constituted elements; it can only regulate their exercise. The canonical provisions governing the celebration

of baptism, for example, do not create the sacrament – Christ did that – but they order its celebration so that it is carried out validly, licitly, and with proper pastoral care.

Natural Law and the Canonical Tradition

Many canonical provisions are rooted in natural law principles. The canons governing marriage, for instance, reflect the natural law understanding of marriage as a permanent, exclusive union ordered towards the procreation and education of children – a teaching affirmed by the Council of Trent and by the Second Vatican Council. The natural law also provides a critical standard by which ecclesiastical legislation can be judged. No canon may contradict the natural law, because both derive ultimately from the eternal law of God. As Gratian, the father of systematic canon law, wrote in the twelfth century: ‘Natural law prevails in dignity over customs and constitutions. Whatever has been recognised by usage, or laid down in writing, if it contradicts natural law, must be considered null and void.’

Ecclesiastical Law: Its Nature, Authority, and Limits

Ecclesiastical law comprises those canonical provisions that are of purely human (ecclesiastical) origin – provisions established by the Church’s legislative authority that could, in principle, be otherwise. These derive their binding force from the legitimate authority of the Church’s pastors, an authority rooted in the apostolic mandate to ‘bind and loose’ (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). As the Second Vatican Council taught: ‘In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent.’

At the same time, purely ecclesiastical provisions can be modified or abrogated when pastoral necessity requires it. This is the basis of the dispensing power, by which the rigour of the law is tempered in particular cases for just cause. As Aquinas taught: ‘It belongs to the same authority to interpret and to dispense from the law,’ and as Gratian observed: ‘Custom is the best interpreter of laws.’

V. Law and Gospel: Answering the Objection

We are now in a position to address directly the objection with which we began: that law and Gospel are fundamentally opposed.

The Pauline Objection

The most common form of the objection appeals to St Paul’s teaching on justification by faith. If we are saved by grace through faith, and not by works of the law (Ephesians 2:8–9), then what need for canonical legislation? The answer, as Paul himself makes clear, is that the freedom of the Gospel is not freedom from all order but freedom for the service of God and neighbour. Paul’s critique of ‘the law’ in Romans and Galatians

is directed specifically at the Mosaic ceremonial law as a means of justification; it is not a critique of all ordered communal life. Indeed, Paul himself exercises legislative authority in his epistles, establishing norms for the celebration of the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 11:17–34), the exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14), the resolution of disputes (1 Corinthians 6:1–8), and the discipline of members (1 Corinthians 5:1–13). The Apostle to the Gentiles was, in effect, the Church’s first canon lawyer.

The Council of Trent addressed this question definitively, teaching that whilst justification is by grace, the justified person is bound to observe the commandments of God and of the Church.

The Charismatic Objection

A second form of the objection holds that the Church should be governed solely by the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, without institutional structures. This view rests upon a false dichotomy between charism and institution. As the Second Vatican Council taught in *Lumen Gentium*: the Holy Spirit guides the Church both through hierarchical gifts (the sacraments, ordained ministry, and canonical structures) and through charismatic gifts (prophecy, healing, teaching, and other extraordinary gifts). These two modes of the Spirit’s action are not opposed but complementary. Canon law provides the ordered framework within which charismatic gifts can be discerned, authenticated, and exercised for the building up of the whole community.

The great Dominican theologian Yves Congar captured this complementarity with precision: the Church is simultaneously a society structured by law and a communion animated by the Holy Spirit, and these two dimensions ‘do not stand beside each other as two separate realities but interpenetrate one another.’

The Pastoral Objection

A third form of the objection, perhaps most common today, holds that law is inherently rigid and impersonal, and therefore incompatible with pastoral tenderness. This objection contains an element of truth: law can be applied legalistically. But the answer to legalism is not the abolition of law; it is the wise and charitable application of law. As Pope Francis has written:

It is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual’s actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being.

The canonical tradition itself provides instruments for avoiding legalism: dispensations, which relax the law in particular cases; *aequitas canonica* (canonical equity), by which the strict letter is tempered by justice and mercy; and the fundamental principle that the salvation of souls is the supreme law. St Alphonsus Liguori, Doctor of the Church and patron of moral theologians, captured this balance: ‘The law is given for the good

of the community; when it ceases to serve that good in a particular case, it ceases to bind.’

VI. The Witness of Sacred Scripture

The Old Testament: Law as Gift

In the Old Testament, the Torah is not experienced as a burden but as a gift – the expression of God’s covenant love for His people. The Psalmist declares: ‘Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day’ (Psalm 119:97). The giving of the Law at Sinai is presented not as divine tyranny but as the establishment of a covenant in which God’s people are given the means to live in right relationship with their Creator and with one another. Canon law, like the Torah, is not a burden imposed upon an unwilling people but a means of ordering the covenant community’s life.

The New Testament: Order in the Apostolic Church

The New Testament provides abundant evidence that the apostolic Church exercised legislative authority from the very beginning. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) established binding norms for the reception of Gentile converts. Paul’s epistles contain extensive regulatory provisions. The Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) establish qualifications for bishops, presbyters, and deacons – the earliest canonical provisions governing ordination and ecclesiastical office.

Christ Himself conferred legislative authority upon the apostles when He said to Peter: ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven’ (Matthew 16:19). This ‘power of the keys’ is the ultimate theological foundation for the Church’s canonical authority.

VII. The Witness of the Ecumenical Councils

The ecumenical councils of the Church provide a continuous witness to the necessity and legitimacy of canonical legislation.

The Council of Nicaea (325), the first ecumenical council, promulgated twenty canons alongside its celebrated creed – demonstrating from the very first council that doctrinal definition and canonical legislation belong together in the Church’s exercise of her authority. The Nicene canons addressed the ordination of clergy, the reconciliation of schismatics, the celebration of Easter, and the organisation of ecclesiastical provinces. They established precedents that have shaped canonical practice for seventeen centuries.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) produced twenty-eight canons governing episcopal elections, monastic discipline, clerical conduct, and the rights of metropolitan sees. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215), convoked by Pope Innocent III, produced seventy constitutions reforming virtually every aspect of Church life: the obligation of annual confession and communion, procedures for combating heresy, regulations governing preaching, and provisions for the care of the poor. This council demonstrates the capacity of canonical legislation to serve as an instrument of comprehensive pastoral reform.

The Council of Trent (1545–1563) produced the most extensive body of canonical reform legislation in the history of the Church, addressing the sacraments, the formation of clergy, the residence of bishops, and the reform of abuses. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), whilst promulgating no canons as such, mandated a comprehensive revision of the Church’s canonical legislation to bring it into conformity with the Council’s renewed ecclesiology. The resulting 1983 Code, promulgated by Pope St John Paul II, is the immediate ancestor of the AACC’s own Code.

VIII. Conclusion: Law in the Service of Love

The Church needs law because the Church is a community of human persons living in the present age, journeying towards the Kingdom of God. She needs law because her members are saints and sinners, because the gifts of grace must be received and shared through ordered structures, because rights must be protected and duties defined, and because the celebration of the sacraments, the preaching of the Gospel, and the governance of the community all require a framework of normative regulation.

But the law that the Church needs is not a law opposed to the Gospel. It is a law that serves the Gospel – rooted in the eternal wisdom of God, mediated through the natural law inscribed in human reason, specified by the divine positive law of Scripture and Tradition, and applied to the concrete circumstances of ecclesial life by the prudential authority of the Church’s pastors. It is a law that forms the faithful in virtue, protects their rights, and orders the community’s life towards the salvation of souls. It is, in short, a law that serves love.

St Augustine captured this with a phrase that serves as the perfect epigraph for any Code of Canon Law:

Dilige et quod vis fac – Love, and do what you will.

Augustine did not mean that love abolishes all restraint. He meant that when love is genuine – when it is the love of God and neighbour that the Gospel commands – it will necessarily express itself in ordered, just, and generous action. Canon law provides the framework within which such love finds its communal expression.

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church's Code of Canon Law is offered to the faithful in this spirit. It is not a burden but a gift; not a contradiction of the Gospel but its juridical expression; not the enemy of pastoral charity but its servant. May the study and observance of these canons lead all the faithful more deeply into the mystery of Christ, who is Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and in whom all law finds its fulfilment and its end.



The Conciliar Tradition in Church Governance

Synodal Authority from the Apostolic Age to the Present

I. Introduction: Conciliarity as the Church's Native Governance

How is the Church to be governed? The question has been answered differently at different times and in different places, but from the very beginning one principle has remained constant: the Church is governed collegially. Bishops gather together – in synods, councils, and assemblies – to discern the will of the Holy Spirit, to resolve disputes, to define doctrine, and to legislate for the good order of the Christian community. This conciliar or synodal principle is not a medieval invention, still less a modern one. It is the native mode of the Church's governance, attested in Sacred Scripture, practised by the Fathers, canonised by the ecumenical councils, and preserved in the Eastern tradition throughout the centuries.

As the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, has written with characteristic directness:

Conciliarity is not an attribute of the Church; it is the very mode of the Church's existence.

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church has adopted a conciliar model of governance in which the Synod of Bishops serves as the supreme authority and the Primate exercises his office as *primus inter pares* – first among equals. This essay traces the history of this conciliar tradition from the apostolic age to the present day, demonstrating that the AACC's governance structure recovers the authentic practice of the undivided Church of the first millennium.

II. The Apostolic Foundation: The Council of Jerusalem

The model for all subsequent conciliar activity is found in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Faced with the question of whether Gentile converts must submit to the Mosaic Law, the apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem to deliberate:

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter.

The deliberation involved testimony (Peter, Paul, Barnabas), appeal to Scripture (James's citation of Amos 9:11–12), and collective discernment. The resulting decree was issued in the name of the entire assembly and attributed not merely to human wisdom but to the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials. St John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, commenting on this passage in his *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, observed that the formula 'the apostles and the elders' demonstrates the

collegial character of the decision: it was not Peter alone, nor James alone, but the entire assembly that spoke with authority. St Paul's own account of the Jerusalem conference, in Galatians 2:1–10, confirms this collegial character and emphasises the mutual recognition that lay at its heart.

The Jerusalem assembly established four principles that would define conciliar governance for the rest of Christian history. First, that major questions of faith and discipline are to be resolved by the gathering of bishops and elders, not by individual fiat. Second, that such gatherings invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Third, that the resulting decisions are communicated in written form as binding norms. Fourth, that the decisions are made by the assembly as a whole, not merely by its most prominent members. These four principles – collegiality, invocation of the Spirit, written promulgation, and collective authority – constitute the enduring grammar of conciliar governance.

III. The Ante-Nicene Church: Synods, Councils, and Collegial Episcopacy

The Witness of the Fathers

The sub-apostolic and ante-Nicene Fathers bear abundant witness to the practice of collegial governance. St Ignatius of Antioch, writing c. 107, insists that the bishop is the centre of the local church's unity, but always in communion with the college of presbyters and deacons: 'Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.' St Irenaeus of Lyons, writing c. 180, appeals to the succession of bishops in the great sees as the guarantee of authentic teaching, yet his appeal is always to a college of witnesses, not to a single authority.

Tertullian, writing c. 210–213, provides the earliest explicit testimony to the practice of regional councils in North Africa: he reports that councils (*concilia*) were held among the provinces of the Greek-speaking East 'to discuss and determine all things of moment, with due solemnity.'

But it is St Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) who provides the most developed theology of collegial episcopacy in the ante-Nicene period. In his treatise *De Unitate Ecclesiae* (*On the Unity of the Church*), Cyprian articulates the principle that has become foundational for conciliar ecclesiology:

The episcopate is one; each individual bishop holds his share in its totality.

For Cyprian, no bishop stands alone. Each bishop shares in the one episcopate, and the unity of the Church depends upon the communion of bishops with one another. This communion is maintained and expressed through synodal gatherings. As Cyprian writes

in another letter: ‘For this reason a large body of bishops is appointed, linked by the bond of mutual concord and the chain of unity.’ Cyprian’s ecclesiology is profoundly conciliar: the bishop governs his diocese with proper authority, but major decisions are made collegially, through the gathering of bishops in council.

The Growth of Provincial Synods

By the early third century, the practice of provincial synods was well established across the Christian world. The Council of Carthage (c. 220–230) is the first Western assembly about which we are well informed. In the East, synods were held at Iconium, Synnada, Bostra, and other centres. St Basil the Great, Doctor of the Church, described this practice as an established custom: ‘Whenever a matter has come up for investigation, the custom has been for the bishops to gather together from their several cities to deal with the question at issue.’

St Augustine of Hippo, Doctor of the Church, contributed a crucial insight about the nature of conciliar authority. In his writings against the Donatists, he argued that the common judgement of bishops, expressed through councils, has greater authority than the private opinion of any individual: ‘In matters that remain uncertain, the common judgement of bishops is to be preferred to the private opinion of any individual, however eminent.’ This principle of conciliar superiority over individual authority would become a cornerstone of the canonical tradition.

IV. The Ecumenical Councils: The Conciliar Principle Canonised

The Council of Nicaea (325)

The Council of Nicaea, convened by Emperor Constantine in 325, is the foundational ecumenical council and the model of conciliar governance in the Catholic tradition. Its significance lies not only in the Nicene Creed but equally in its twenty canons, which established the canonical structure of the universal Church.

Canon 4 established the principle of collegial ordination, requiring that a bishop be consecrated by all the bishops of his province, or at minimum three:

A bishop should be appointed by all the bishops in the province; but should this be difficult, at least three should assemble, and the votes of the absent bishops also should be given in writing, and then the ordination should take place.

Canon 5 mandated the holding of provincial synods twice yearly – establishing regular conciliar governance as a canonical requirement, not merely a custom. Canon 6, the most constitutionally significant, recognised the supra-metropolitan authority of the

great sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, appealing to ‘ancient custom’ as its authority:

Let the ancient customs be maintained. Thus in Egypt, Libya, and the Pentapolis, let the Bishop of Alexandria have authority over all these, since this is also the custom of the Bishop of Rome. Similarly in Antioch and in the other provinces the prerogatives of the churches are to be preserved.

As the patristic scholar Brian Daley SJ has demonstrated, Canon 6 of Nicaea established a pattern of primacy that was regional and relational rather than absolute and monarchical. The great sees exercised a ‘primacy of honour’ and pastoral oversight, but always in communion with and accountability to the broader episcopal college. St Athanasius of Alexandria, Doctor of the Church, who attended Nicaea as a young deacon, would later appeal to its canons as definitive: ‘What was decided at Nicaea was sufficient.’

Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon

The Council of Constantinople I (381) added a crucial element to the conciliar structure by granting Constantinople a ‘primacy of honour after the Bishop of Rome, because Constantinople is the New Rome.’ This decision, based explicitly on political rather than apostolic grounds, would have far-reaching consequences for the relationship between East and West.

The Council of Ephesus (431) defended the principle that local and regional churches possess genuine autonomy, specifically upholding the independence of the Church of Cyprus from Antiochene jurisdiction. This principle of legitimate ecclesial autonomy within the universal communion is directly relevant to independent Catholic jurisdictions such as the AACC.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) was a watershed in the development of conciliar governance. Its celebrated Canon 28 extended the logic of Constantinople I, granting Constantinople ‘equal privileges’ with Rome:

The Fathers rightly granted privileges to the throne of Old Rome, because it was the capital city. And the one hundred and fifty most religious bishops, actuated by the same consideration, gave equal privileges to the most holy throne of New Rome.

Pope St Leo the Great rejected Canon 28, arguing that it violated the apostolic foundations of the Nicene arrangement. This dispute between Rome and Constantinople over the nature and grounds of primacy would define the ecclesiological debate for the next millennium and remains unresolved between the Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

V. The Pentarchy: Governance Through Five Patriarchal Sees

By the mid-fifth century, the Church's governance had crystallised around five great patriarchal sees: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. This arrangement, known as the Pentarchy, was given formal legal expression in the legislation of Emperor Justinian I, particularly in *Novella* 131 (545). It received ecclesiastical sanction at the Council in Trullo (Quinisext Council) in 692, which ranked the five sees in their canonical order.

The Pentarchy represented a model of collegial governance in which the universal Church was administered through the cooperative authority of five patriarchal sees, each exercising jurisdiction over its respective region whilst maintaining communion with the others. The Orthodox scholar John Meyendorff has described the Pentarchy as 'the practical expression of the conciliar principle applied to the universal governance of the Church.' Each patriarch was supreme within his own territory, but no patriarch – including the Bishop of Rome – could act unilaterally in matters affecting the universal Church.

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215), meeting in the Latin West, formally ranked the five patriarchal sees in the order: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem. Even in the medieval West, the ancient pentarchical structure was recognised as the constitutional framework of the universal Church.

The Theological Significance of the Pentarchy

The Pentarchy was never merely an administrative convenience. It expressed a theological conviction about the nature of the Church's unity. Unity was maintained not through the monarchical authority of a single see but through the communion (*koinonia*) of patriarchal sees, each possessing genuine authority and each accountable to the others through conciliar structures. As Nicholas Afanasiev argued in his seminal essay 'The Church Which Presides in Love': the primacy of Rome in the early Church was a primacy of witness and service, not of jurisdiction in the modern sense.

St Gregory the Great (d. 604), Doctor of the Church, provides perhaps the most eloquent patristic testimony to this vision of collegial primacy. He declared that he accepted and venerated the first four ecumenical councils 'just as I do the four books of the Holy Gospel.' Yet Gregory also insisted, with equal force, that the title 'universal bishop' was inappropriate for any bishop – including the Bishop of Rome: 'If any man calls himself universal bishop, he is a forerunner of the Antichrist.' For Gregory, primacy was inseparable from service, and the pope's title was not *dominus universalis* but *servus servorum Dei* – servant of the servants of God.

St Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), the most important Eastern theologian of the seventh century, also affirmed the conciliar principle whilst acknowledging Rome's

particular role as a guardian of orthodoxy. The Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas has interpreted this patristic evidence as demonstrating that primacy and conciliarity are not opposed but mutually constitutive: there can be no primacy without conciliarity, and no conciliarity without a ‘first’ who convenes and coordinates the synodal process.

VI. The Eastern Conciliar Tradition: A Living Witness

The Eastern Churches – both Orthodox and Catholic – have preserved the conciliar model of governance more consistently than the Latin West. In the Eastern tradition, the patriarch is never an absolute monarch. He governs his Church in and through a permanent synod of bishops. As Meyendorff observes: ‘In the Byzantine canonical tradition, the patriarch is always a bishop among bishops; his authority is conciliar, not monarchical.’

The great Dominican ecclesiologist Yves Congar captured the significance of the Eastern tradition for the universal Church: ‘The Eastern Churches have preserved, through centuries of isolation and adversity, a model of governance that the West would do well to study and, where appropriate, to recover.’

The Second Vatican Council itself acknowledged the ecclesiological significance of the Eastern conciliar tradition. The Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, affirmed the legitimate diversity of Eastern canonical and liturgical traditions. The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, went further, recognising that the Eastern Churches’ conciliar governance and their understanding of the relationship between local and universal Church represent ‘an authentic expression of Catholicity.’

VII. The Second Vatican Council: The Rediscovery of Collegiality

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) represents the most significant attempt in the modern Latin Church to recover the conciliar and collegial dimensions of Church governance. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, taught that the college of bishops, together with and never without the Bishop of Rome as its head, is the subject of supreme and full authority over the universal Church:

The order of bishops, which succeeds to the college of apostles and gives this apostolic body continued existence, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church, provided we understand this body together with its head the Roman Pontiff and never without this head.

Lumen Gentium §23 further developed the theology of collegiality, teaching that ‘the collegiate spirit is also concretely realised by the mutual relationships of individual

bishops with particular Churches and with the universal Church.’ The Decree *Christus Dominus* on the pastoral office of bishops reaffirmed the synodal dimension of episcopal governance.

The Jesuit theologian Klaus Schatz has demonstrated that the teaching of Vatican II on collegiality represents a genuine recovery of the patristic and conciliar tradition, after centuries in which the Latin Church had increasingly centralised authority in the papacy. As Congar observed: ‘Vatican II did not invent collegiality; it rediscovered what the Church of the first millennium had always practised.’

VIII. The AACC’s Recovery of the Conciliar Tradition

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church’s model of governance stands squarely within this ancient conciliar tradition. As the Primate declares in his introduction to the Code:

This ancient model of Church governance, rooted in the practice of the early Church and maintained in the Christian East, ensures that major decisions affecting the entire Church emerge from the collective wisdom and discernment of the episcopal college rather than the will of a single prelate.

The AACC’s governance embodies five principles drawn directly from the conciliar tradition of the first millennium.

i. The Synod of Bishops as Supreme Authority

The Code establishes the Synod of Bishops as the supreme legislative, judicial, and executive authority of the Church. This recovers the practice of the ecumenical councils and the Eastern synodal tradition, in which the gathered bishops – not a single prelate – constitute the highest authority.

ii. The Primate as Primus Inter Pares

The Primate exercises his office as first among equals – convening, coordinating, and presiding over the Synod, but not exercising monarchical authority over it. Canon 216 establishes that the Primate’s authority is exercised ‘not to diminish but to enhance and safeguard each bishop’s own’ authority. This mirrors the description of Roman primacy in the first millennium offered by scholars such as Afanasiev, Zizioulas, and Meyendorff: a primacy of service, coordination, and witness rather than of unilateral jurisdiction.

iii. Collegial Ordination

Following the principle established by Canon 4 of Nicaea, the AACC requires the collegial participation of bishops in the consecration of new bishops – ensuring that episcopal succession is maintained through the college, not through individual action.

iv. Canonical Accountability

The Code establishes that no bishop, including the Primate, stands above the law or outside canonical accountability. This reflects Cyprian's insistence that each bishop holds his share in the one episcopate, and Gregory the Great's conviction that the exercise of pastoral authority must always be accountable to the community it serves.

v. Legitimate Autonomy Within Communion

The AACC exercises legitimate autonomy as an independent Catholic jurisdiction with valid apostolic succession, whilst maintaining communion in faith, sacraments, and apostolic governance with the broader Catholic tradition. This mirrors the ecclesiological model of the Pentarchy and the principle of the Church *sui iuris* recognised in the Eastern canonical tradition.

IX. Conclusion: An Ancient Model for a Living Church

The conciliar tradition is not a relic of the past. It is a living ecclesiological principle, attested in Scripture, practised by the Fathers, canonised by the ecumenical councils, preserved in the Christian East, and rediscovered by the Second Vatican Council. The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church's adoption of this model is not an innovation but a return to the most ancient and authentically Catholic form of Church governance.

As the great Dominican theologian Yves Congar wrote, surveying the history of authority in the Church:

The Church of the first millennium was a communion of Churches, each governed by its bishop in synodal communion with his brother bishops. This is not merely a historical observation; it is a theological norm.

The AACC's Code of Canon Law translates this theological norm into canonical reality. The Synod of Bishops, the conciliar governance model, and the office of Primate as *primus inter pares* all express the conviction that the Church is most authentically herself when her bishops gather together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discern the will of God for His people. In the words of Christ Himself, which remain the charter of all conciliar governance: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'



The Synod of Bishops as Supreme Authority

A Theological and Historical Study

I. Introduction: The Synodal Principle and the Governance of the Church

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church is governed by a Synod of Bishops exercising supreme authority, with the Primate serving as *primus inter pares* – first among equals. This constitutional structure is not a modern innovation but the deliberate recovery of the governance model that animated the Church for her first thousand years: the conviction that the bishops of the Church, gathered in council under the presidency of the first among them, constitute the highest legislative, judicial, and doctrinal authority within the Christian community.

The Primate declares in his introduction to the Code: ‘The Synod of Bishops functions as the supreme authority of our Church, with the Primate serving as first among equals rather than exercising monarchical authority. This ancient model of Church governance, rooted in the practice of the early Church and maintained in the Christian East, ensures that major decisions affecting the entire Church emerge from the collective wisdom and discernment of the episcopal college rather than the will of a single prelate.’

This essay traces the synodal principle from its scriptural origins through the great ecumenical councils, the first-millennium practice of pentarchy, the Eastern synodal tradition, and the canonical legislation of both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Catholic Churches, before examining the AACC’s own constitutional provisions as set out in Canons 219–227 of the Code. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the AACC’s conciliar governance model stands firmly within the mainstream of the Church’s theological and canonical tradition, and that synodality – far from being an alternative to legitimate authority – is the most ancient and authentic form in which that authority has been exercised.

II. The Scriptural Foundations of Synodal Governance

The Council of Jerusalem: The Paradigmatic Synod

The scriptural foundation for all subsequent synodal governance is the Council of Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15. Confronted with the question of whether Gentile converts must observe the Mosaic law, the apostles and elders gathered together to consider the matter. After debate, deliberation, and the testimony of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, James proposed a solution that was accepted by the assembly and communicated to the churches in a letter bearing the remarkable formula: ‘It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.’

This formula is of the highest ecclesiological significance. It establishes three foundational principles that have governed every authentic synod since. First, it affirms

the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit in conciliar deliberation: the council's authority is not merely human but pneumatological. Second, it demonstrates that apostolic authority was exercised collegially: Peter did not decide the matter alone, nor did James, nor Paul, but the assembly as a whole. Third, it shows that the decision was binding upon the entire Church, communicated through a synodal letter and received by the churches as authoritative.

St John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, commenting on this passage, emphasises the collegial character of the apostolic decision: the apostles did not each act independently but gathered to deliberate together, and their common mind, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, carried an authority that no individual apostle's judgment could possess. Our Lord Himself had promised: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.' The council is the privileged locus of Christ's presence in the Church's governance.

Apostolic Collegiality in the Pauline Epistles

The Pauline epistles confirm that the apostolic Church was governed through consultation and mutual accountability rather than monarchical command. St Paul describes his visit to Jerusalem to consult with the 'acknowledged pillars' – James, Cephas, and John – who extended to him 'the right hand of fellowship.' Paul's apostleship was independent in origin (received directly from Christ) but exercised in communion with the other apostles. He sought their recognition not because his authority depended upon it, but because the unity of the Church demanded it.

Paul's letters also reveal a practice of inter-ecclesial communication and mutual consultation: he instructs the Colossians to exchange letters with the church at Laodicea and exercises his apostolic authority over the Corinthian church in explicit consultation with the community: 'When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus.' This pattern of collegial deliberation, shared communication, and communal discernment constitutes the scriptural archetype of synodal governance.

III. The Patristic Development of the Synodal Principle

Clement of Rome and the Apostolic Succession of Order

The earliest post-apostolic witness to the principle of ordered governance through succession is St Clement of Rome (d. c. 99), whose letter to the Corinthians establishes that the apostles appointed bishops and deacons, and that these in turn were to appoint their successors, so that the Church's ministry would be continued in orderly fashion. Clement's concern is not with a monarchical primacy but with good order – with the principle that the Church's governance must proceed through established and recognised authority exercised in harmony.

Ignatius of Antioch: The Bishop in Council

St Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 107) provides the earliest testimony to the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, and insists that nothing in the church should be done without the bishop. Yet Ignatius does not envisage the bishop as an isolated autocrat. He speaks of the bishop surrounded by his *presbyterium* as the apostles surrounded Christ: ‘Be united with the bishop and with those who preside, as a pattern and lesson of incorruptibility.’ The Ignatian model is inherently conciliar: the bishop governs *in council* with his presbyters, not by solitary decree.

Cyprian of Carthage: The Episcopate as Collegial Unity

No Father of the Church articulated the synodal principle more powerfully than St Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258). His celebrated dictum constitutes the theological foundation of the AACC’s governance:

The episcopate is one; each individual bishop holds his share in its totality.

For Cyprian, every bishop possesses the fullness of episcopal authority within his own diocese, but the episcopate itself is a single, indivisible college. No bishop stands above other bishops; all share equally in the one episcopate. This principle was expressed concretely at the Council of Carthage in 256, which Cyprian opened with the declaration that no bishop should set himself up as a ‘bishop of bishops’ or compel his colleagues to obedience by tyrannical terror, since every bishop possesses his own liberty and power of judgement.

Cyprian’s collegial ecclesiology was not merely theoretical. He governed the Church of Carthage through regular regional synods at which the bishops of Africa deliberated together on matters of doctrine, discipline, and pastoral practice. Against Roman attempts to impose a uniform baptismal discipline, Cyprian defended the right of each regional church to determine its own canonical practice, provided the bond of faith and charity was maintained. This Cyprianic model – a college of bishops deliberating in synod, with the first among them serving as president rather than monarch – is precisely the model adopted by the AACC.

Augustine: The Authority of Councils over Individual Bishops

St Augustine of Hippo, Doctor of the Church (354–430), developed Cyprian’s ecclesiology into a mature theology of conciliar authority. Augustine taught explicitly that the judgement of a universal council possesses an authority superior to that of any individual bishop, including the Bishop of Rome:

Who does not know that the judgement of a plenary council is to be preferred to that of any individual bishop?

For Augustine, the authority of councils derives from the Holy Spirit’s guidance of the Church gathered in deliberation. Councils can correct the errors of individual bishops;

they can settle disputes that no single bishop has the authority to resolve; and their decrees bind the universal Church. This Augustinian principle – that conciliar authority exceeds individual authority – is embedded in the AACC’s Code, which provides that ‘only the Synod of Bishops may approve changes to canons, doctrine or church governance.’

The Eastern Fathers: Basil, Athanasius, and the Conciliar Imperative

The Eastern patristic tradition developed the synodal principle with particular rigour. St Basil the Great, Doctor of the Church (329–379), appealed repeatedly for conciliar resolution of disputes, insisting that the peace of the Church could only be restored through the common deliberation of the bishops. He taught that ecclesiastical governance must be exercised ‘with all the bishops of the region united in mind and purpose, so that whatever is decided bears the weight of common consent.’

St Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–373), the great champion of Nicene orthodoxy, recognised that the Council of Nicaea derived its authority not from any single bishop’s confirmation but from the consensus of the bishops gathered from across the Christian world: it was the universality and unanimity of the synod that guaranteed the truth of its teaching.

IV. The Ecumenical Councils: Synodality in Practice

Nicaea and the Establishment of Synodal Structures

The Council of Nicaea (325), the first of the seven ecumenical councils received by the undivided Church, not only resolved the Arian crisis but established synodal governance as the normative structure of Church administration. Canon 5 of Nicaea mandated the convening of provincial synods twice yearly – before Lent and in the autumn – so that disputes could be examined and resolved through collective episcopal deliberation. Canon 6 recognised the existing metropolitan structure, confirming that the bishops of each region governed their provinces through synods presided over by the metropolitan.

The significance of these canons cannot be overstated. Nicaea did not merely recommend synodal governance; it mandated it as the ordinary form of Church administration. As Leo Donald Davis SJ observes, the Nicene canons established a system in which no bishop governed in isolation, but every bishop exercised his authority within a structured framework of synodal accountability.

Constantinople, Chalcedon, and the Pentarchic System

The subsequent ecumenical councils developed the synodal system into the pentarchic structure that governed the undivided Church. Constantinople I (381) accorded the see of Constantinople ‘privileges of honour after the Bishop of Rome, because Constantinople is the New Rome.’ Chalcedon (451) expanded this in Canon

28, granting Constantinople ‘equal privileges’ with Rome. Canon 19 of Chalcedon reiterated the Nicene requirement for provincial synods twice yearly.

The pentarchic system that emerged from these councils was not a system of papal monarchy but of synodal communion among five patriarchal sees: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Each patriarchate governed itself through its own synod of bishops, and the ecumenical councils represented the synodal gathering of all the patriarchates for the resolution of matters affecting the universal Church. As John Meyendorff observes, the pentarchic structure was ‘the institutional expression of the communion ecclesiology of the first millennium,’ in which no single bishop possessed authority over the others except through conciliar consensus.

The Council in Trullo and the Canonical Synthesis

The Council in Trullo (692), also known as the Quinisext Council, is of particular importance for the theology of synodal governance because it undertook a comprehensive canonical synthesis of the entire preceding tradition. Canon 2 explicitly confirmed the authority of the canons of all the preceding councils, including regional synods, and established them as binding upon the universal Church. The Council in Trullo also recognised the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus, confirming the principle that a church possessing apostolic foundation has the right to govern itself through its own synod.

This canonical synthesis demonstrates that the first-millennium Church understood synodal governance not as a temporary expedient but as the permanent and normative form of Church administration, rooted in apostolic practice and confirmed by ecumenical legislation.

V. Apostolic Canon 34: The Foundational Text of Synodal Governance

No single canonical text has exerted greater influence on the theology of synodal governance than Apostolic Canon 34, which the 2007 Ravenna Statement of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church identified as the foundational expression of the relationship between primacy and synodality:

The bishops of every region must acknowledge him who is first among them and account him as their head, and do nothing of consequence without his consent; but each may do those things only which concern his own diocese and the places subject to it. But neither let him who is the first do anything without the consent of all; for so there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit.

This text establishes the dialectical principle that governs the AACC's constitutional structure: the *protos* (first) cannot act without the consent of the bishops, and the bishops cannot act without the consent of the *protos*. Neither primacy nor collegiality is absolute; each is conditioned by the other. The result is a structure of mutual accountability in which authority is exercised through deliberation and consensus rather than through unilateral command.

As Metropolitan John Zizioulas has observed: 'In Orthodox ecclesiology there can be no such thing as primacy without a council, nor, conversely, can there be a council without a primate.' Metropolitan Kallistos Ware emphasises that this reciprocity is not a compromise or a balance of power but a theological principle rooted in the nature of the Church herself: the Church is constituted as a communion of persons, and her governance must reflect that communal nature.

The AACC's Code embodies Apostolic Canon 34 with precision. Canon 219 establishes that 'together with the Primate as their head, all bishops form one college called the Synod of Bishops,' whilst Canon 221 provides that 'only the Synod of Bishops may approve changes to canons, doctrine or church governance' and that the Primate alone may convene, preside over, and dissolve the Synod. Neither the Primate without the Synod nor the Synod without the Primate possesses supreme authority; it is their communion that constitutes the governing authority of the Church.

VI. The Eastern Synodal Tradition and Its Canonical Expression

The Permanent Synod in Eastern Governance

The Eastern Churches preserved and developed the first-millennium synodal model with a consistency that the Western Church, increasingly centralised under papal monarchy, did not maintain. In the Eastern patriarchates, the Holy Synod became a permanent institution: the patriarch governed the patriarchal church not alone but together with a synod of bishops who shared in the legislative, judicial, and administrative functions of governance. Alexander Schmemmann described this as the 'synodal principle' in its most developed form: the patriarch is the head of the synod, but the synod is the governing authority of the church.

The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO), promulgated by Pope St John Paul II in 1990, gave this tradition formal canonical recognition within the Catholic communion. The CCEO establishes that within each patriarchal church *sui iuris*, the Synod of Bishops of the patriarchal church is the supreme authority in all matters of legislation, adjudication, and administration. The patriarch is 'the father and head' of his church, but he exercises his authority in and through the synod, not above it. This CCEO structure is the immediate canonical precedent for the AACC's own governance provisions.

The Orthodox Synodal Model

In the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, the synodal principle has been maintained as the exclusive form of supreme governance. Nicholas Afanasiev, in his influential essay on the eucharistic foundations of Church order, argued that the synod derives its authority from the same source as the Eucharist itself: the gathering of the faithful around the bishop, who acts *in persona Christi*, constitutes the Church, and the gathering of bishops in synod constitutes the governance of the churches.

Georges Florovsky emphasised that the authority of councils is not a human convention but a charismatic gift: the Holy Spirit guides the Church gathered in council, and the council's decrees carry the authority of the Spirit's guidance, just as the apostles at Jerusalem could declare 'it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.' The Dominican theologian Yves Congar recognised the enduring validity of this Eastern synodal tradition, observing that the conciliar structure of governance is not merely one option among many but belongs to the deep nature of the Church herself.

VII. The Doctors of the Church on Synodal Authority

Thomas Aquinas: Law as an Ordinance of the Community

St Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church (1225–1274), provides the philosophical and theological framework within which synodal governance is to be understood. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas defines law as 'an ordinance of reason, for the common good, made by the one who has care of the community, and promulgated.' Crucially, Aquinas teaches that the authority to make law belongs properly to the whole community or to the person who has care of the community. Where the Church is governed by a college of bishops, the legislative authority belongs to that college assembled in synod.

Aquinas further teaches that the determination of matters of faith belongs to the authority of the universal Church assembled in council. He writes that it belongs to the authority of the one to whom it pertains to determine those things which are of faith, so that they may be held by all with unwavering faith; and this authority belongs to the council of the universal Church or to the one whose office includes the care of the entire Church. This Thomistic principle – that doctrinal authority is properly conciliar – is central to the AACCC's constitutional provision that only the Synod of Bishops may approve changes to doctrine.

Robert Bellarmine: The Council as the Church's Voice

St Robert Bellarmine SJ, Doctor of the Church (1542–1621), though writing in the context of post-Tridentine Roman Catholic ecclesiology, nonetheless affirmed the indispensable role of councils in the governance of the Church. Bellarmine taught that a general council, legitimately convened and conducted, cannot err in matters of faith

and morals, because the Holy Spirit who guides the Church is present in a special way when the bishops are gathered in solemn deliberation. Even Bellarmine, the great defender of papal authority, recognised that the council possesses an authority that no individual bishop, however exalted, can claim for himself alone.

Gregory the Great: Primacy as Service, Not Dominion

St Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church (d. 604), provides the patristic model for the AACC's understanding of primatial authority within the synodal structure. Gregory insisted that the Bishop of Rome should be known not as 'universal bishop' but as *servus servorum Dei* – the servant of the servants of God. When the Patriarch of Constantinople assumed the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch', Gregory protested vigorously, declaring that the use of such a title was a proud and foolish word, and that no bishop should claim a title implying universal jurisdiction.

Gregory's theology of primacy as service rather than dominion provides the theological foundation for the AACC's understanding of the Primate as *primus inter pares*. The Primate's authority, like Gregory's, is exercised not to diminish but to enhance and safeguard each bishop's own authority, ensuring unity of faith and discipline while respecting the legitimate autonomy of local governance.

VIII. Lumen Gentium and the Recovery of Collegiality

The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, represents the most significant recovery of the synodal principle within the Western Catholic tradition since the first millennium. Chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* teaches that the order of bishops, which succeeds to the college of the apostles and gives the apostolic body continued existence, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church, provided that it is understood together with its head and never without this head.

This teaching restored the theology of episcopal collegiality to a central place in Western Catholic ecclesiology. The bishops are not merely delegates of the pope, nor administrators of portions of a centralised institution; they are, by virtue of their episcopal consecration, sharers in the supreme authority of the Church when they act together as a college. Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) described this recovery of collegiality as a return to the ecclesiology of the first millennium, in which the Church was understood as a communion of particular churches governed by their bishops in synodal fellowship.

Pope St John Paul II took this recovery further in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), in which he made the extraordinary invitation to leaders and theologians of other Churches to engage with him in a patient and fraternal dialogue on the forms in which the Petrine ministry might be exercised, acknowledging that the current form is not the

only possible one. Pope Francis has declared that synodality is ‘the path that God expects of the Church in the third millennium,’ and has invited the Western Church to learn from the Eastern synodal tradition.

The AACC’s synodal governance structure represents a concrete realisation of the ecclesiological vision that *Lumen Gentium* articulated and that subsequent popes have endorsed. Where the Roman Catholic Church has moved slowly towards greater synodality within a structure that retains monarchical elements, the AACC has adopted the fully synodal model of the first millennium, implementing in canonical law what the Second Vatican Council taught in theological principle.

IX. The AACC’s Constitutional Structure: Canons 219–227

The Synod as College of Bishops (Canon 219)

Canon 219 of the AACC Code establishes the foundational constitutional principle: ‘Together with the Primate as their head, all bishops form one college called the Synod of Bishops. This college expresses the unity of the episcopate under the Primatial See, manifesting the communion of bishops in the governance of the Church.’ The language deliberately echoes *Lumen Gentium* 22, transposing the Second Vatican Council’s theology of collegiality into binding canonical legislation.

Canon 219 §2 specifies that ‘by virtue of their consecration and communion with the Primate, bishops share supreme authority over the universal Church – always in union with the Primate, never apart from him.’ This formulation preserves the dialectical principle of Apostolic Canon 34: neither the Primate alone nor the bishops alone possess supreme authority; it is their communion that constitutes the governing authority.

The Exercise of Synodal Authority (Canons 220–221)

Canon 220 provides that the Synod exercises its highest authority through regular meetings and through collegial decisions recognised by the Primate as genuine acts of the college. Canon 221 establishes the critical balance between primatial presidency and synodal authority: only the Primate may convene, preside over, and dissolve the Synod; but only the Synod may approve changes to canons, doctrine, or church governance. This dual provision ensures that neither element can function without the other – the Primate controls the procedure of the Synod, but the Synod alone controls its substance.

Membership, Voting, and the Binding Force of Decrees (Canons 222–223)

Canon 222 establishes that all diocesan bishops have both the right and the duty to participate in and vote at the Synod. The Primate may invite non-bishops to attend, but voting is reserved to the episcopal members, ‘ensuring clarity of authority while allowing broader consultation.’ Canon 223 provides that no synodal decree binds the

Church unless it is approved by both the Primate and the synod fathers, confirmed by the Primate, and promulgated at his instruction. This provision reflects the ancient principle that conciliar decrees require both synodal consensus and primatial confirmation to become binding law.

Vacancy and Continuity of Governance (Canon 218)

Canon 218 addresses the critical constitutional question of governance during a vacancy or impediment of the Primatial See: ‘When the Primatial See is vacant or impeded, the ordinary governance of the Church continues unchanged through the authority of the Synod of Bishops.’ This provision confirms that the Synod’s authority is not derived from the Primate but is inherent in the episcopal college itself. The Synod can govern the Church even in the absence of the Primate, ensuring continuity and stability.

Election of the Primate (Canon 268 §5)

Perhaps the most significant constitutional provision is Canon 268 §5: ‘The Synod of Bishops alone elects the Primate and selects him from among their brethren.’ The Primate is not appointed from above, nor does he assume office by hereditary succession; he is chosen by his brother bishops from among their own number. This provision anchors the Primate’s authority firmly within the synodal structure: his authority is conferred by the college and exercised within the college, never apart from it.

X. Theological Synthesis: Why Synodality Is the Authentic Form of Church Governance

The historical and theological evidence surveyed in this essay converges upon a single conclusion: synodal governance is not one option among many for the ordering of the Church’s life, but the form of governance that most faithfully reflects the Church’s nature as a communion of persons in Christ.

From its very first recorded decision at the Council of Jerusalem, the apostolic Church exercised its authority collegially, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Fathers of the Church – Clement, Ignatius, Cyprian, Basil, Augustine, Gregory the Great – consistently taught that the episcopate is a college, that bishops govern in synod, and that no individual bishop possesses authority over the others except through conciliar consensus. The seven ecumenical councils of the undivided Church established synodal governance as the normative and mandatory form of Church administration. The Eastern Churches have preserved this tradition without interruption for two thousand years. Even the Western Catholic Church, through *Lumen Gentium* and the subsequent magisterium, has acknowledged the theological necessity of episcopal collegiality and the value of the Eastern synodal tradition.

St Thomas Aquinas provides the philosophical rationale: law is an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by the one who has care of the community. Where the

community is the Church, and the care of the community belongs to the episcopal college, the authority to legislate belongs to the bishops assembled in synod. St Cyprian provides the ecclesiological vision: the episcopate is one, and each bishop holds his share in its totality. St Gregory the Great provides the pastoral model: the first among the bishops is the servant of his brethren, not their lord. Apostolic Canon 34 provides the constitutional formula: neither the first without the consent of all, nor all without the consent of the first.

The AACC's Synod of Bishops, exercising supreme authority with the Primate as *primus inter pares*, is the faithful canonical expression of these convergent theological traditions. It recovers for the twenty-first century the governance model that the Church practised for her first millennium, that the ecumenical councils mandated, that the Fathers and Doctors of the Church taught, and that the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed.

XI. Conclusion: Walking Together

The Greek word *synodos* – from which the English ‘synod’ derives – means literally ‘walking together.’ This etymology captures the deepest theological truth about synodal governance: the bishops of the Church do not stand above the faithful as solitary rulers but walk together with them, and with one another, on the pilgrim way towards the Kingdom. The Primate walks at the head of this procession, but he walks *with* his brother bishops, not apart from them.

The AACC's Code of Canon Law, promulgated by the authority of the Primate with the consent of the Synod of Bishops, is itself the fruit of this synodal process. ‘Each canon was examined, debated, refined, and approved through the collective discernment of the episcopal college, ensuring that our canonical structure reflects both the wisdom of the universal Church and the particular needs of our pastoral mission.’ In this, the AACC follows the ancient model. As the apostles at Jerusalem declared: ‘It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.’ The AACC trusts that the same Spirit who guided the apostolic college guides also the synodal deliberations of its bishops, and that the canonical structures that emerge from those deliberations serve the supreme law of the Church: the salvation of souls.



The Ecclesiology of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church

*A Particular Church Within the One, Holy,
Catholic, and Apostolic Church*

I. Introduction: The Question of Ecclesial Identity

Every Code of Canon Law presupposes an ecclesiology – a theological understanding of what the Church is, how she is constituted, and by what authority she governs herself. The Code of Canon Law of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church is no exception. The AACC’s entire canonical structure rests upon a particular ecclesiological vision: that of a particular Church, possessing valid apostolic succession and sacramental integrity, exercising legitimate episcopal jurisdiction within a communion of faith that transcends the boundaries of any single canonical structure.

This essay sets out the AACC’s ecclesiological self-understanding. It draws upon Sacred Scripture, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the ecumenical councils, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (especially the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*), the theology of *communio* as developed by theologians from both East and West, and the canonical concept of the Church *sui iuris* as articulated in the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO). Its purpose is to demonstrate that the AACC’s existence as an independent Catholic jurisdiction is not an ecclesiological anomaly but the expression of principles deeply rooted in the Church’s own tradition.

As the Primate declares in his introduction to the Code: ‘Throughout Church history, particular Churches, regional councils, and independent Catholic jurisdictions have exercised the authority to establish their own canonical structures whilst maintaining fidelity to apostolic doctrine and sacramental communion.’

II. The Scriptural Foundations of the Church’s Self-Understanding

The Church as the Body of Christ

The New Testament presents the Church not as a merely human institution but as the Body of Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit and ordered by divinely instituted authority. St Paul’s teaching is foundational: ‘For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.’ Christ is the Head of this Body: ‘He is the head of the body, the church.’ The unity of the Church is thus a unity of diverse members within a single organism, not a uniformity that suppresses legitimate difference.

This Pauline ecclesiology has profound implications for the self-understanding of the AACC. If the Church is the Body of Christ, then her unity is fundamentally sacramental and spiritual rather than merely juridical or administrative. The bond that unites the members of the Body is not subordination to a single earthly jurisdiction but incorporation into Christ through baptism and nourishment by the Eucharist. As St Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church, teaches: Christ is the Head of the whole Church in every age and in every place, and the unity of the mystical body is constituted by the Holy Spirit who dwells in all the faithful.

The Diversity of Local Churches in the New Testament

The New Testament itself bears witness to a communion of diverse local churches rather than a single monolithic institution. St Paul writes to the churches of Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Rome – each with its own leadership, its own liturgical customs, and its own pastoral challenges. The Book of Revelation addresses seven distinct churches in Asia Minor, each with its own character and its own relationship with the risen Christ. St Paul’s account of the Council of Jerusalem records that James, Cephas, and John – the ‘acknowledged pillars’ – gave Paul and Barnabas ‘the right hand of fellowship’, agreeing that they should go to the Gentiles whilst the pillars served the circumcised. This is communion in diversity: a single apostolic mission expressed through distinct and legitimately autonomous ministries.

The primitive community at Jerusalem is described in terms that already contain the essential elements of the Church’s later canonical structure: ‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.’ These four marks – apostolic teaching, *koinonia* (communion), the Eucharist, and prayer – constitute the foundations upon which every particular church is built, including the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church.

The Dominical Institution of Apostolic Authority

Christ Himself conferred upon the apostolic college the authority to teach, sanctify, and govern: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.’ To Peter He said: ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.’ This apostolic authority is transmitted through episcopal consecration – the laying on of hands – and constitutes the sacramental foundation of the Church’s governance. Where this succession is maintained and the apostolic faith professed, there the Church of Christ is authentically present.

III. The Patristic Foundations: Communion, Episcopacy, and Legitimate Diversity

Ignatius of Antioch: The Bishop as Centre of Unity

The earliest post-apostolic ecclesiology is found in the letters of St Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–107), who articulated the foundational principle that where the bishop is, there is the Church: ‘Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church.’ Ignatius is the first writer to use the term *ekklēsia katholike* (‘catholic Church’), and his ecclesiology is profoundly episcopal and eucharistic: the bishop, celebrating the Eucharist in the midst of his flock, constitutes the visible centre of the local church’s unity. This Ignatian principle is central to the AACC’s ecclesiology: each bishop, possessing valid apostolic succession and celebrating the Eucharist, is the visible principle and foundation of unity in his particular church.

Irenaeus: Apostolic Succession as Guarantee of Truth

St Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130–202), the great doctor of apostolic tradition, demonstrated that the succession of bishops from the apostles serves as the guarantee of doctrinal fidelity. In his *Adversus Haereses*, he traces the succession at Rome as an example – not to establish Roman jurisdictional supremacy, but to demonstrate that churches founded by apostles and governed by their successors preserve the apostolic faith intact. For Irenaeus, the criterion of authentic catholicity is not submission to a single jurisdiction but fidelity to the apostolic tradition preserved through episcopal succession. The AACC’s claim to possess valid apostolic succession is thus, in Irenaeian terms, a claim to stand within the authentic stream of apostolic tradition.

Cyprian of Carthage: The Episcopate as Collegial Unity

No Father of the Church is more important for the AACC’s ecclesiology than St Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258), whose *De Unitate Ecclesiae* articulated the principle of episcopal collegiality that the AACC has adopted as its governing model:

The episcopate is one; each individual bishop holds his share in its totality.

For Cyprian, the unity of the Church is constituted by the unity of the episcopate – a college of bishops, each possessing the fullness of episcopal authority within his own diocese, bound to one another not by subordination to a single member but by communion in faith and mutual recognition. Cyprian vigorously defended the canonical independence of the African bishops against Roman claims on the question of baptismal discipline, insisting that each bishop was accountable to God alone for the governance of his diocese. This Cyprianic ecclesiology – collegial, episcopal, and recognising legitimate canonical diversity within the bond of communion – is precisely the model that the AACC’s Code enshrines.

The Eastern Patristic Tradition: Eucharistic Ecclesiology

The Eastern Fathers developed what modern theologians have termed ‘eucharistic ecclesiology’ – the conviction that the local church, gathered around its bishop for the celebration of the Eucharist, is not merely a fragment of the universal Church but the whole Church of Christ in that place. St John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, teaches that where the Eucharist is celebrated, there the whole Christ is present, and therefore the whole Church is present. St Basil the Great, Doctor of the Church, writes of the communion between local churches as a bond constituted by shared faith and mutual recognition rather than by submission to a single administrative centre.

This tradition finds its most profound modern expression in the work of the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, whose insight is directly relevant to the AACC’s self-understanding: ‘Each local church is not a part of the Body of Christ. Each local church is the whole Body of Christ.’ When the AACC celebrates the Eucharist through its validly ordained bishops and priests, it is not celebrating a partial or deficient Eucharist. It is celebrating the one Eucharist of the one Church of Christ.

The First-Millennium Model: Pentarchy, Synodality, and Autocephaly

The undivided Church of the first millennium was governed not by a single, centralised jurisdiction but by a communion of autocephalous or autonomous churches, each with its own canonical structure, its own liturgical tradition, and its own synodal governance. The ecumenical councils recognised a system of patriarchal sees – Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem – each exercising jurisdiction within its own territory. The Council in Trullo (692) explicitly recognised the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus, confirming that a church with apostolic foundation possesses the right to govern itself.

This first-millennium model of governance – synodal, collegial, and recognising legitimate canonical autonomy – is the model that the AACC has deliberately recovered. As the Primate declares: the AACC’s governance structure ‘reflects the conciliar model of the undivided Church of the first millennium, with the Synod of Bishops as supreme authority and the Primate serving as first among equals.’

IV. The Second Vatican Council: *Lumen Gentium* and the Theology of *Communio*

Subsistit In: The Church of Christ and Particular Churches

The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, provides the most authoritative modern articulation of the relationship between the one Church of Christ and the diversity of particular churches. Its celebrated eighth paragraph teaches that the Church of Christ, confessed in the Creed as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, ‘subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him’, whilst acknowledging that ‘many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside her structure.’

The choice of *subsistit in* rather than the simple *est* (‘is’) of earlier magisterial teaching represents, as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has clarified, a development of doctrine that preserves the Church’s self-understanding whilst recognising the ecclesial reality present in other communities. The Council itself explicitly recognised that separated Eastern Churches ‘possess true sacraments, above all by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are linked with us in closest intimacy.’ If Churches possessing apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist are recognised as ‘true particular Churches’ even when separated from communion with Rome, then the AACC – which possesses these same elements – participates authentically in the ecclesial reality of the one Church of Christ.

The Particular Church: In and From Which the One Church Exists

The most important single paragraph of *Lumen Gentium* for the AACC’s ecclesiology is paragraph 23, which teaches that the individual bishops are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal

Church, and that from such individual churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church.

This text establishes that the relationship between particular churches and the universal Church is not one of subordination but of mutual interiority. The universal Church does not exist apart from or above the particular churches; she exists *in* them and *from* them. Every particular church that possesses the essential elements of ecclesiality – the apostolic faith, valid sacraments, apostolic succession, and episcopal governance – is a genuine realisation of the one Catholic Church in a particular time and place. The AACC Canon 235 echoes this teaching directly: ‘Particular churches are the local communities in which – and from which – the one, Holy, catholic and apostolic Church truly lives and acts.’

The Ecclesiology of *Communio*

The 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops identified *communio* as the central and fundamental concept of the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiology. Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) gave this concept its most influential theological articulation, demonstrating that the Church is constituted as a communion through the Eucharist: ‘The Eucharist builds the Church. The more profound unity it creates is not that of a sociological association, but that of a body, the Body of Christ.’

Henri de Lubac SJ, whose work profoundly influenced the Council, demonstrated that the expression *corpus mysticum* originally referred to the Eucharist itself, and that the Church’s unity is therefore fundamentally eucharistic rather than juridical. The Dominican theologian Jean-Marie Tillard developed this eucharistic ecclesiology into a comprehensive theology of communion, showing that every local church celebrating the Eucharist in apostolic faith is in full communion with every other such church – even when juridical or administrative communion has been impaired.

This *communio* ecclesiology has profound implications for the AACC. If the bond that constitutes the Church’s unity is fundamentally sacramental – rooted in baptism and the Eucharist – rather than merely juridical, then a community possessing valid baptism, valid Eucharist, valid apostolic succession, and fidelity to the apostolic faith participates authentically in the *communio ecclesiarum* even when it is not in administrative communion with every other particular church. The AACC confesses one faith, celebrates one baptism, offers one Eucharist, and maintains unbroken apostolic succession. These are the constitutive elements of *communio*.

V. The Church *Sui Iuris*: A Canonical Model for Ecclesial Diversity

The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO), promulgated by Pope St John Paul II in 1990, introduced into universal Catholic canonical legislation a concept of the highest significance for the AACC’s self-understanding: the Church *sui iuris* (‘of its own right’). Canon 27 of the CCEO defines this as a grouping of the Christian faithful joined to a hierarchy according to the norms of law and recognised as self-governing. Canon 28 further specifies

that each Church *sui iuris* possesses its own rite – its own liturgical, theological, spiritual, and disciplinary patrimony.

The significance of this canonical concept is that it formally recognises what the first millennium took for granted: that the one Catholic Church can legitimately be composed of multiple self-governing churches, each with its own hierarchy, its own liturgical tradition, its own canonical structure, and its own theological patrimony, united in communion of faith and sacraments. As the canonist George Nedungatt SJ observes, the CCEO represents a fundamental shift in Catholic canonical thinking, moving from a model of centralised uniformity to one of legitimate diversity within communion.

The AACC, whilst not a Church *sui iuris* within the meaning of the CCEO (which applies specifically to churches in communion with Rome), draws upon the theological and canonical principles that the concept embodies. The AACC is a community of the faithful, joined to a hierarchy possessing valid apostolic succession, governing itself according to its own Code of Canon Law, celebrating the sacraments in forms recognised as valid by the wider Catholic tradition, and professing the apostolic faith received from the undivided Church. These are precisely the elements that constitute a Church *sui iuris* in the CCEO's canonical understanding. The AACC's canonical independence is thus not an innovation but the exercise of a principle formally recognised by the universal Church's own most recent canonical legislation.

VI. Apostolic Succession and the Foundation of Ecclesial Identity

The AACC's claim to be a particular Church within the one Catholic Church rests upon a foundation that the entire Catholic tradition – Eastern and Western, patristic and modern – recognises as essential: valid apostolic succession transmitted through the sacrament of Holy Orders. The Second Vatican Council teaches that 'by episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred, that fullness of power which both in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry.'

Apostolic succession is not merely a historical curiosity or an organisational convenience. It is a sacramental reality: the transmission, through the laying on of hands, of the power to sanctify, teach, and govern that Christ conferred upon the apostles and that the apostles transmitted to their successors. St Clement of Rome, writing to the Corinthians at the end of the first century, articulated the principle of orderly succession from the apostles through the bishops to the present day. St Irenaeus made this succession the criterion of doctrinal authenticity. The Council of Trent solemnly defined that the sacrament of Order imprints an indelible character and cannot be repeated.

The AACC possesses valid apostolic succession through unbroken sacramental transmission. This succession is not contingent upon communion with any particular see; it is a sacramental reality conferred in episcopal consecration. As St Augustine, Doctor of the Church, taught: 'The baptism of Christ belongs to Christ, no matter who administers it.' The same principle

applies to Holy Orders: the sacrament belongs to Christ, and its validity depends upon the proper matter, form, and intention, not upon the administrative relationship between the ordaining bishop and any particular ecclesiastical structure.

VII. Catholicity Without Absorption: The Theology of Legitimate Independence

The Vincentian Canon and the Marks of Catholicity

The AACC's claim to catholicity rests upon fidelity to the apostolic faith as expressed in the Vincentian Canon: 'What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.' St Vincent of Lerins (d. c. 445) articulated this principle as the criterion of authentic Catholic belief, and it remains the touchstone against which every church's claim to catholicity must be measured. The AACC professes the faith of the seven ecumenical councils, celebrates the sacraments instituted by Christ, maintains apostolic succession through the laying on of hands, and orders its life according to the canonical tradition of the universal Church. These are the marks of authentic catholicity.

The Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky has argued persuasively that catholicity is not primarily a geographical or quantitative concept but a qualitative one: it denotes the fullness of truth and life that is present wherever the Church of Christ exists in the integrity of her faith, sacraments, and apostolic ministry. By this criterion, the AACC's catholicity is constituted not by its size or geographical reach but by the integrity of its faith, the validity of its sacraments, and the authenticity of its apostolic succession.

Gregory the Great and the Limits of Jurisdictional Claims

St Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church (d. 604), provides a crucial patristic precedent for the AACC's insistence on legitimate canonical independence. When the Patriarch of Constantinople assumed the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch', Gregory vigorously protested, insisting that no bishop should claim a title that implied universal jurisdiction over other bishops. Gregory's protest was not directed against the dignity of the see of Constantinople but against the principle that any single bishop could exercise jurisdiction over the entire Church. This Gregorian principle – that episcopal authority is collegial and territorial rather than monarchical and universal – is central to the AACC's ecclesiology.

The Witness of John Paul II

Even within the Roman Catholic tradition, the possibility of rethinking the exercise of primacy has been acknowledged at the highest level. In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), Pope St John Paul II made the extraordinary invitation to leaders and theologians of other Churches to engage with him in a patient and fraternal dialogue on the forms in which the Petrine ministry might be exercised whilst being open to a new situation. This remarkable acknowledgement that the current form of papal jurisdiction is not the only possible form confirms the theological principle upon which the AACC's independence rests: that the essential unity of the Church can be maintained through diverse forms of governance and mutual recognition, as was the case in the first millennium.

VIII. The AACC's Ecclesiological Self-Understanding: A Synthesis

What the AACC Is

Drawing together the scriptural, patristic, conciliar, and theological foundations explored in this essay, the AACC understands herself as a particular Church within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ. She possesses the four essential elements that constitute authentic ecclesiality: the apostolic faith professed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed; valid sacraments celebrated through ordained ministers in apostolic succession; the fullness of the episcopate conferred through the laying on of hands; and canonical structures ordered to the pastoral care of the faithful and the proclamation of the Gospel.

The AACC's canonical independence does not signify isolation or rejection of the broader Catholic communion. As the Primate declares: 'Our independence does not signify isolation or rejection of the broader Catholic communion. Rather, it represents the exercise of that legitimate autonomy which has always existed within the Catholic Church for particular Churches to govern themselves according to their proper law whilst maintaining communion in faith and sacraments.'

What the AACC Is Not

The AACC does not claim to be the universal Church, nor does she claim that the universal Church subsists exclusively within her canonical boundaries. She acknowledges the ecclesial reality present in every community that possesses apostolic succession, valid sacraments, and fidelity to the apostolic faith. She recognises the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and other communities possessing valid orders as sister churches within the broader Catholic communion, albeit separated by canonical rather than sacramental or doctrinal divisions.

Neither does the AACC embrace an ecclesiological relativism that would deny any meaningful difference between communities. The essential elements of ecclesiality – apostolic faith, valid sacraments, episcopal succession, and canonical order – are not optional accessories but constitutive marks of the Church's nature. Communities that lack one or more of these elements may possess genuine elements of sanctification and truth, but they do not possess the fullness of ecclesial life that the Catholic tradition has always understood as essential.

The Conciliar Governance of the AACC

The AACC's governance structure embodies her ecclesiology. The Synod of Bishops, as the supreme authority of the Church, reflects the conciliar principle that has governed the Church since the Council of Jerusalem. The Primate, as *primus inter pares*, exercises a ministry of unity, coordination, and representation that corresponds to the first-millennium model of patriarchal primacy rather than the monarchical model that developed in the second millennium. Every canon of the AACC's Code has been examined, debated, and approved through the collective discernment of the episcopal college, ensuring that the Church's law reflects not the will of a single prelate but the collegial wisdom of the bishops gathered in synod.

IX. Conclusion: A Church Ancient and Apostolic

The ecclesiology set out in this essay is not a novel construction but the recovery of principles that animated the Church's self-understanding for her first thousand years. The AACC stands within a tradition that includes the Pauline churches of the New Testament, the episcopal communities of Ignatius and Cyprian, the autocephalous churches of the first-millennium East, the patriarchal structure of the undivided Church, and the theological vision of the Second Vatican Council. Her claim to catholicity rests not upon size, antiquity, or administrative alignment with any single see, but upon the presence within her of those essential elements that constitute the Church of Christ: the apostolic faith, the apostolic sacraments, the apostolic ministry, and the apostolic mission.

St Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), that great theologian of unity in diversity, taught that the Church's unity is constituted not by uniformity of governance but by the common confession of the apostolic faith and the common celebration of the one Eucharist. The Dominican theologian Yves Congar articulated the same principle in modern terms: authentic communion permits and indeed requires diversity in canonical expression, liturgical tradition, and theological formulation, so long as the essential bond of faith and sacramental life is maintained.

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church claims no more and no less than what the Catholic tradition itself provides: the right of a community possessing valid orders, professing the apostolic faith, and celebrating the sacraments in integrity to govern itself through its own bishops gathered in synod, ordering its life according to its own proper law, and serving the salvation of souls – which is, and must always be, the supreme law of the Church.

As the Primate concludes his introduction to the Code: 'We recognise one baptism, confess one faith, celebrate one Eucharist, and revere the same sacred Tradition. Our canonical independence serves not separation but rather the fuller expression of Catholic diversity within apostolic unity.'



Safeguarding and the Canonical Obligation of Care

*The Church's Duty to Protect the Vulnerable
in Canon Law, Theology, and Pastoral Practice*

I. Introduction: The Millstone and the Mandate

The words of Christ are among the most severe in the Gospels:

If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.

These words are not a metaphor. They constitute a divine mandate of the most binding kind: those who hold authority in the Church bear a sacred obligation to protect the vulnerable – children, adults at risk, and all those whose circumstances render them susceptible to harm. This obligation is not an invention of the modern age. It is rooted in the very nature of pastoral authority as understood by Christ, the apostles, the Fathers of the Church, and the entire canonical tradition.

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church recognises safeguarding as both a canonical and a moral obligation of the highest order. This essay demonstrates that the AACC's Code of Canon Law embeds the duty of care throughout its legislative framework – not as an afterthought appended to existing structures, but as a principle woven into the very fabric of its canonical governance. As Pope Francis has declared: 'Crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual harm to the victims and harm the community of the faithful.'

II. The Scriptural Foundation: God's Preferential Care for the Vulnerable

The duty to protect the vulnerable is not a modern pastoral development grafted onto an ancient tradition. It stands at the heart of divine revelation, running from the Mosaic legislation through the prophets to the teaching of Christ Himself.

The Old Testament: The Cry of the Defenceless

The Psalmist commands those in authority:

Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

The prophet Ezekiel delivers one of the most devastating indictments in all of Scripture against those shepherds who exploit rather than protect the flock entrusted to their care:

Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ... You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not

brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.

The offence of the false shepherd, in the prophetic tradition, is not merely negligence but a fundamental betrayal of the office of care. The shepherd exists for the sake of the flock, not the flock for the shepherd.

The New Testament: Christ's Special Protection of the Little Ones

Christ's teaching intensifies the prophetic tradition. His welcome of children is not sentimental but theological: the child becomes the model of the Kingdom. 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.' His warning against causing scandal to the vulnerable is absolute, admitting of no qualification: the millstone saying permits no exception, no mitigation, and no defence of institutional reputation at the expense of the innocent.

Christ further commands: 'Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.' The identification of Christ Himself with the vulnerable – 'just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' – means that every act of abuse committed against a vulnerable person is an act committed against Christ.

St James gives the practical criterion: 'Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.' Religion which does not protect the defenceless is no religion at all.

III. The Patristic Tradition: The Pastor as Guardian

The Good Shepherd and the Duty of Vigilance

The Fathers of the Church understood pastoral authority as essentially protective in character. St John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, commenting on Christ's words in Matthew 18, insisted that those who hold authority in the Church bear a heightened obligation precisely because of the trust placed in them by the vulnerable. In his treatise *De Sacerdotio (On the Priesthood)*, Chrysostom described the pastoral office as the most demanding of all responsibilities, requiring not merely learning but a constant watchfulness over the welfare of those in one's care.

St Augustine of Hippo, Doctor of the Church, in his great series of sermons *De Pastoribus (On the Shepherds)*, drew extensively on Ezekiel 34 to insist that the bishop's primary duty is the welfare of the flock: the pastor who feeds himself at the expense of the sheep is the false shepherd whom God Himself will judge. Augustine further argued that those in authority have a duty not merely to refrain from causing harm but actively to restrain those who would harm others. In a celebrated letter to the Roman official Macedonius, he wrote that the correction of wrongdoing is itself an act

of mercy, not cruelty: true kindness to the victim requires firmness toward the perpetrator.

Protection of the Weak as a Mark of True Authority

St Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church, in his *Regula Pastoralis* (*Pastoral Rule*) – the most influential treatise on the pastoral office in the Latin tradition – taught that no one should presume to exercise pastoral authority who has not first learnt the responsibilities it entails. Gregory insisted that the pastor must be ‘a near neighbour to everyone in sympathy, and exalted above all in contemplation’ – combining compassion for the vulnerable with the courage to confront those who would harm them.

St Ambrose of Milan, Doctor of the Church, in his treatise *De Officiis Ministrorum* (*On the Duties of Ministers*), established the principle that the exercise of Church office creates a fiduciary duty: the minister holds his authority in trust for the benefit of those served, not for his own advantage. Commenting on the parable of the Good Samaritan, Ambrose declared that the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side were guilty not merely of indifference but of a dereliction of their sacred office: the very act of passing by constituted a betrayal of their calling.

St Basil the Great, Doctor of the Church, addressed the practical question of how communities should care for those who are unable to care for themselves. In his *Long Rules*, Basil insisted that care for children, the sick, and the dependent is not an optional work of supererogation but a binding obligation that flows from the nature of Christian community itself.

Clement of Alexandria, writing in the late second century, described the Church’s educational and pastoral mission in explicitly protective terms, likening the role of the Christian teacher to that of a *paidagogos* – a guardian responsible for the moral and physical safety of those in his charge.

IV. Theological Foundations: Human Dignity and the Obligation of Care

The Inviolability of Human Dignity

The theological foundation of all safeguarding is the doctrine of *imago Dei*: every human person is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore possesses an inviolable dignity that no circumstance can diminish or destroy. The Second Vatican Council articulated this principle with particular force in *Gaudium et Spes*:

Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the

integrity of the human person ... all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed.

The Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, affirmed that the dignity of the human person has been 'impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man' and that this dignity is the foundation of every system of rights and obligations. The AACC's Code reflects this teaching in Canon 106, which establishes that every baptised person shares the same fundamental dignity: no one is more or less a member of God's people.

The Thomistic Framework: Authority as Service

St Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church, provides the philosophical framework within which safeguarding must be understood. For Aquinas, authority exists for the common good, and the good of those in one's care always takes precedence over the interest of the one who exercises authority: 'The care of souls is not committed to anyone for his own benefit, but for the benefit of those committed to his charge.'

Aquinas further teaches that the law's purpose is not merely to punish wrongdoing but to form persons in virtue: 'The purpose of human law is to lead people to virtue, not suddenly, but gradually.' Applied to safeguarding, this means that the canonical framework must serve not only a reactive function – punishing offences after they occur – but a formative one: creating structures, habits, and cultures that prevent abuse from occurring in the first place.

In his treatment of justice, Aquinas argues that the innocent possess a natural right to protection and that those in authority bear a correspondingly graver obligation to ensure that right is honoured. The Angelic Doctor further insists that fraternal correction must always be exercised with charity and prudence, but that the obligation to correct is not optional: to remain silent when the vulnerable are at risk is itself a moral failure.

St Alphonsus Liguori, Doctor of the Church and patron of moral theologians, developed these Thomistic principles in his practical moral theology. Alphonsus taught that those who hold authority in the Church are bound by strict justice – not merely by charity – to protect those committed to their care, and that failure to exercise this duty constitutes a sin against justice as well as against charity.

V. The Canonical Tradition: From Nicaea to the Modern Reforms

The Early Canons: Standards for Clergy

From the earliest period, the canonical tradition recognised that those who exercise pastoral authority must be held to the highest standards of conduct. The Council of Nicaea (325), Canon 18, addressed the proper order of ministry and the requirement that those who serve at the altar must not exploit their position. The Council of Chalcedon (451), Canon 3, prohibited clergy from engaging in exploitation or the pursuit of unjust gain.

The Medieval Reforms

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the most comprehensive reform council of the medieval Church, required prelates to administer their pastoral charge with diligence, attending not only to spiritual but also to temporal concerns affecting the welfare of those in their care. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) mandated the establishment of seminaries for the formation of clergy, requiring that candidates be assessed for moral character, maturity, and fitness for pastoral ministry. Trent's requirement of episcopal residence ensured that bishops would be physically present to exercise their duty of pastoral oversight and protection.

The Modern Canonical Reforms

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries witnessed a painful but necessary transformation of the Church's canonical response to abuse. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Normae de Gravioribus Delictis* (2010) reserved the most serious offences against minors to the competence of the Holy See, signalling that such offences constituted the gravest category of canonical crime.

Pope Francis's Motu Proprio *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (2019, definitive text 2023) established mandatory reporting obligations, created formal procedures for investigating allegations against bishops and superiors, extended protection to vulnerable adults, and removed the pontifical secret from abuse cases. In promulgating the revised Book VI of the Code of Canon Law in 2021 through the Apostolic Constitution *Pascite Gregem Dei*, Francis insisted that 'charity and mercy require that a father commit himself also to straightening what sometimes grows crooked.'

The Jesuit safeguarding expert Hans Zollner has described this evolution as a movement from mere risk management to a comprehensive culture of care: not content simply to punish offences after they occur, but determined to create environments in which abuse cannot take root. The canonist Gianfranco Ghirlanda SJ has noted that the

2021 revisions transformed the Church's penal framework from one that treated sanctions as discretionary to one that made their application mandatory in cases involving the abuse of vulnerable persons.

VI. Safeguarding in the AACCC's Code of Canon Law

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church's Code embeds safeguarding not in a single section but throughout the entire canonical framework. This integrated approach reflects the conviction that the protection of the vulnerable is not a discrete administrative function but a dimension of every aspect of the Church's life and governance.

Canon 1014: Sexual Offences against Vulnerable Persons

The Code's most explicit safeguarding provision is Canon 1014, which creates three distinct offences:

First, a cleric who engages in sexual acts contrary to the sixth commandment with a minor, with a person who habitually lacks the use of reason, or with a person whom civil or canonical law recognises as entitled to equivalent protection. **Second**, a cleric who grooms, induces, or coerces a minor or equivalent person to expose themselves for pornographic purposes or to participate in pornographic performances, whether real or simulated. **Third**, a cleric who acquires, possesses, displays, or distributes pornographic material depicting minors or persons who habitually lack the use of reason, by any means or technology.

The penalty is mandatory: removal from office and other appropriate penalties, up to and including dismissal from the clerical state. The canonical language 'is to be punished' (*puniri debet*) admits of no discretion: the competent authority is **required** to impose sanctions. This reflects the shift, described by Ghirlanda, from a permissive to a mandatory penal framework.

Canon 1013: Violence and Harm

Canon 1013 addresses the broader category of offences against human life, dignity, and liberty. Any person who by force or deception abducts, imprisons, mutilates, or inflicts grievous bodily harm on another is liable to canonical penalties, with aggravated sanctions when the victim is a person who enjoys special protection in law – including minors and vulnerable adults.

Canon 259: The Bishop's Duty of Vigilance

Canon 259 establishes a comprehensive framework for the bishop's safeguarding obligations. It requires the diocesan bishop to:

Watch carefully for abuses, giving particular attention to the conduct of clergy and lay ministers. **Establish and publish procedures** for receiving complaints, conducting inquiries, and protecting the rights of all parties, including timely fact-finding and confidentiality where required. **Cooperate with civil authorities**, including compliance with civil law obligations concerning the reporting of offences. **Keep accurate records** of investigations, decisions, and remedial measures, and make such records available to competent ecclesiastical authorities as required by law.

The emphasis on cooperation with civil authorities and mandatory compliance with civil reporting obligations represents a deliberate canonical commitment. The AACC does not claim any exemption from the requirements of the law of the land. Rather, it recognises that cooperation between ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction is essential to the protection of the vulnerable – a principle St Augustine articulated when he argued that the Church and civil authority serve complementary functions in the ordering of human society.

Formation and Prevention

The Code addresses safeguarding not only through its penal provisions but through its requirements for the formation and selection of clergy. Canon 247 §6 requires that in selecting candidates for formation, the bishop shall apply prudential judgement, protecting vulnerable persons and observing norms for safeguarding and background checks. This preventive dimension reflects the teaching of Aquinas that law should form persons in virtue, not merely punish vice.

The Council of Trent's mandate for seminary formation was itself born of the recognition that unsuitable persons admitted to the clergy posed a threat to the faithful. The Second Vatican Council's Decree *Optatam Totius* on priestly training further emphasised that candidates must demonstrate not only intellectual capacity but human maturity and moral integrity. Pope St John Paul II's *Pastores Dabo Vobis* devoted extensive attention to the human formation of seminarians, insisting that pastoral charity requires the capacity for genuine self-giving without exploitation.

Visitation and Accountability

The Code's provisions for episcopal visitation (Canon 262 §4) require that visitations be attentive to the needs of the vulnerable and conducted in conformity with safeguarding norms. The quinquennial report to the Primatial See (Canon 265 §2) requires bishops to report on safeguarding compliance as a mandatory element. These

provisions ensure that safeguarding is not left to the discretion of individual bishops but is subject to regular, systematic oversight.

VII. Seven Principles of Canonical Safeguarding

Drawing together the scriptural, patristic, theological, and canonical sources examined above, the following seven principles define the AACC's approach to safeguarding.

i. The Inviolable Dignity of Every Person

Every human person, created in the image of God, possesses an inherent and inviolable dignity. No institutional interest, no concern for reputation, and no consideration of convenience may override the protection of this dignity. Canon 106 of the AACC's Code enshrines this principle as the foundation of all canonical rights and obligations.

ii. The Preferential Protection of the Vulnerable

Children, persons who habitually lack the use of reason, and adults rendered vulnerable by circumstance are entitled to a heightened standard of protection. This preferential protection is commanded by Christ Himself and embedded in the Code's definitions of minority and incapacity. Canon 1014 reflects this principle in its mandatory penal provisions.

iii. Authority as Fiduciary Trust

Pastoral authority is held in trust for the benefit of those served. The pastor who exploits this trust commits a sin against justice as well as charity. As Aquinas teaches, the care of souls exists for the benefit of the faithful, not for the advantage of the minister.

iv. Prevention Over Reaction

The canonical framework must serve a formative and preventive function, not merely a reactive one. Background checks, appropriate formation, transparent procedures, and a culture of accountability are the first lines of defence. As St Gregory the Great insisted, no one should exercise pastoral authority who has not first been trained in its responsibilities.

v. Mandatory Reporting and Cooperation with Civil Authority

The AACC recognises a binding canonical obligation to comply with all civil law requirements for the reporting of abuse. Canon 259 §4 makes this cooperation mandatory, not discretionary. The Church does not constitute a law unto itself in matters of criminal conduct; it cooperates fully with the lawful authorities of the State.

vi. Justice for Accusers and Accused

Canonical safeguarding must protect both the rights of the vulnerable person who brings a complaint and the rights of the person accused. The presumption of innocence, the right to a fair hearing, and the protection of the good name and privacy of all parties are canonical requirements that serve the cause of justice. As Pope St John Paul II wrote: ‘The Code is not intended as a substitute for faith, grace, charisms, and above all charity in the life of the Church.’

vii. Salus Animarum Suprema Lex

The supreme law of the Church is the salvation of souls. Every safeguarding provision, every canonical penalty, every reporting procedure, and every act of pastoral vigilance exists ultimately to serve this end. The protection of the vulnerable is not a bureaucratic necessity imposed upon the Church from without; it is an intrinsic demand of the Gospel itself. As St Paul writes: ‘Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.’

VIII. Practical Obligations: What the Code Requires

The Code’s safeguarding provisions create specific, enforceable obligations for every member of the Church. The following summary sets out what is required of each category of person.

Obligations of the Diocesan Bishop

The diocesan bishop must establish and publish safeguarding procedures, ensure that complaints are received and investigated promptly, cooperate with civil authorities, maintain accurate records, conduct regular visitations attentive to the welfare of the vulnerable, report on safeguarding compliance to the Primatial See, and apply mandatory canonical penalties in proven cases of abuse. Failure to discharge these obligations is itself a canonical offence.

Obligations of Parish Priests and Chaplains

Parish priests and chaplains must be familiar with the safeguarding policies of their diocese, ensure that their parishes and institutions implement these policies, report any allegation or suspicion of abuse to the diocesan bishop and to the civil authorities as required by law, and cooperate fully with any investigation. The pastoral duty of care extends to all those within the priest’s ministry, with particular vigilance toward children, young people, and adults at risk.

Obligations of Religious Superiors

Religious superiors bear the same obligations as diocesan bishops in respect of safeguarding within their institutes. They must ensure that their members are properly screened, formed, and supervised, and that allegations are reported and investigated in accordance with both canonical and civil law.

Obligations of the Lay Faithful

The lay faithful have both a right and a duty to report abuse or suspected abuse to the competent ecclesiastical and civil authorities. No obligation of silence may be imposed upon any person who makes a report in good faith. The Code protects whistleblowers from retaliation. As the Second Vatican Council taught in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the laity share in the Church's mission of service and are called to contribute to the building of a just and safe community.

IX. Conclusion: No Place for the Wolves

St Gregory the Great, in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, warned that the shepherd who fails to protect the flock from wolves is guilty of the wolves' violence. This is the conviction that animates the AACC's approach to safeguarding. The Church cannot claim to proclaim the Gospel of Christ while tolerating the abuse of those whom Christ commanded His Church to protect.

The canonical obligation of care is not a modern invention. It is rooted in the commandment of Christ, attested by the Fathers, developed by the Doctors, canonised by the Councils, and now embodied in the AACC's Code. It is a moral obligation before it is a legal one, a demand of justice before it is a matter of policy. Every canon that addresses safeguarding, every penalty that sanctions abuse, every procedure that ensures accountability, exists to serve one purpose: the protection of those whom Christ called 'the least of these.'

St Robert Bellarmine, Doctor of the Church, wrote that those who govern the Christian community must consider themselves the servants of those they govern, and that the exercise of authority without the care of the governed is tyranny, not governance. Benedict XVI, addressing the Catholics of Ireland in the wake of devastating revelations of abuse, acknowledged the Church's failures with searing honesty: 'You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry. I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured.'

The AACC's Code, promulgated in 2026, is written in the light of this painful history. It does not claim perfection. It does claim seriousness of purpose. Its safeguarding provisions are mandatory, not discretionary. Its penal canons require action, not permit inaction. Its reporting obligations extend to civil as well as canonical authorities. Its accountability structures reach from the parish to the Primatial See.

The final canon of the Code speaks the axiom that governs everything that precedes it:

Salus animarum suprema lex. – The salvation of souls is the supreme law.

There can be no salvation of souls where there is not first the protection of bodies. There can be no Gospel proclaimed where there is abuse concealed. There can be no Church worthy of the name where the vulnerable are not safe.

*Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. – Matthew
18:5*

Volume I

Book of General Rules

Section I

Subsection I Ecclesiastical Laws

Canon 1 – Applicability

These laws apply only to the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church.

Canon 2 – Approved Liturgical Rites and Books

§1. Primary Liturgical Books

The approved sacramental rites and principal liturgical books of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church are:

- a. The Roman Missal (in its typical forms);
- b. The Primatial Romanum (Primatial);
- c. The Rituale Romanum (Roman Ritual);
- d. The Liturgy of the Hours (Breviary);
- e. The Lectionary;
- f. The Martyrology;
- g. The General and Particular Calendars;
- h. The Caeremoniale Episcoporum (Ceremonial of Bishops);
- i. Other approved liturgical books and supplements.

These books and rites are the standard forms to be used for all public sacramental and ceremonial celebrations in the Church.

§2. Forms of the Mass

The Mass may be celebrated according to:

- a. The modern form (Novus Ordo); or
- b. The traditional Latin form (Tridentine Mass).

The Tridentine Mass may be offered in Latin or in the vernacular language where pastoral need requires it. The Primatial and the Roman Ritual remain the standard books for administering the other sacraments.

§3. Private Use of Other Rites

Other ancient, local, historical or particular rites may be used in private devotion. These include, but are not limited to:

- a. The Braga Rite;
- b. The Stowe Rite;
- c. The Celtic Rite;
- d. The Sarum Rite;
- e. The Gallican Rite;
- f. The Byzantine Rite;
- g. The St Germain Rite;
- h. The St James Rite;
- i. Other authenticated rites and their corresponding books.

§4. Permission for Public Use of Other Rites

The local ordinary may, by special dispensation and upon written request from a parish priest, permit the public celebration of the rites listed in §3. Any dispensation granted shall:

- a. Be limited in scope and duration as the local ordinary determines; and
- b. Be subject to conditions prescribed by the ordinary to preserve liturgical unity, safeguard doctrinal integrity, and maintain pastoral good order.

§5. Consistency in Traditional Forms

When the Tridentine Mass is celebrated within other sacramental rites (such as matrimony, baptism or funerals), the traditional (pre-Vatican II) editions of the Roman Ritual or Primatial are to be used, so as to preserve the doctrinal expression and liturgical coherence characteristic of that tradition.

§6. Continuity of Existing Norms

Existing liturgical norms, rubrics and customs remain in force except where they directly and irreconcilably conflict with the provisions of this Code.

Canon 3 – Existing Rights and Privileges

Any rights or privileges that the Primatial See has already granted to individuals or church organisations continue to be valid, provided they are still in use and haven't been revoked.

They remain in force unless this Code specifically says they are cancelled.

Canon 4 – When a Church Law Begins

A Church law officially exists the moment it is made public. Until that happens, the rule has no legal force.

Canon 5 – How Laws Are Published and When They Take Effect

§1. Universal laws (those that apply to the whole Church) are published on the official website of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church [apostlechurch.org]. By default, they only become

obligatory one month after publication—unless the law itself says it takes effect sooner or later, or its subject matter requires immediate force.

§2. Particular laws (those made for a specific country, region or community) must be published in whatever way the bishop’s conference prescribes. They usually begin to bind everyone one month after publication, unless the law specifies a different period.

This waiting period gives people time to learn and prepare for the new rules.

Canon 6 – Laws Apply to the Future

Church laws look forward, not backward. They govern actions from the moment they start to apply; they do not automatically change or invalidate what happened before their publication, unless the law explicitly says so.

Canon 7 – Which Laws Truly Invalidate or Disqualify

Only those laws that clearly state “this act is null” or “this person loses a right or office” actually invalidate actions or disqualify individuals.

Canon 8 – Who Must Obey Ecclesiastical Laws

§1. An ecclesiastical law binds anyone who:

- a. Has been baptised in, or received into, the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church; and;
- b. Possesses the use of reason;
- c. Is at least seven years old (unless the law explicitly sets a different age).

§2. Even a simple rule—such as a parish requirement—counts as a binding law for all eligible members.

§3. All deacons, priests, bishops and religious.

Canon 9 – Where Universal and Particular Laws Apply

§1. Universal laws bind everywhere all those for whom they were issued.

§2. Particular laws (those made for a region or community) bind everyone for whom they were issued.

Canon 10 – Doubts about Laws and Facts

§1. If it is uncertain whether a law actually exists or applies, the law does not bind until clarified.

§2. If it is uncertain whether a fact (e.g. a canonical status) is true, the local bishop (ordinary) may grant a dispensation—unless the dispensation is reserved to a higher authority.

Canon 11 – Ignorance of the Law

§1. Not knowing about a law that nullifies acts or disqualifies individuals does not prevent its effect, unless the law itself says ignorance is excused.

§2. Ignorance of one's own canonical status, penalties, or a well-known fact about another is not presumed.

Canon 12 – Interpreting Church Laws

§1. The Synod of Bishops—or someone entrusted with this power, such as the Primate—provides the authentic interpretation.

§2. If an interpretation is issued in the form of law, it has the same authority as the original law:

- a. If it merely clarifies clear language, it applies retroactively.
- b. If it adds, narrows or explains doubtful parts, it takes effect from the day it is published.

§3. Administrative decisions interpreting canon law apply only to the parties and the specific case—they do not create binding law for everyone.

Canon 13 – Understanding What Laws Mean

Laws must be read according to the plain meaning of their words in context. If still unclear, one looks at:

- a. Other canons on the same topic
- b. The law's purpose and circumstances
- c. The legislator's intention

Canon 14 – Limits on Broadening Sanctions and Exceptions

Any law that imposes penalties, limits rights, or creates exceptions must be read narrowly. We do not broaden laws that restrict freedom or impose sanctions.

Canon 15 – Filling Gaps in the Law

When no custom or explicit law addresses a situation, one must decide by:

- a. Looking at similar laws by analogy
- b. Applying general principles of law with fairness
- c. Considering official practice and past decisions of the Synod of Bishops
- d. Respecting expert theological and canonical opinion

Canon 16 – New Laws Replacing Old Ones

A later law may repeal or modify an earlier law only if it:

- a. Says so explicitly;
- b. Directly contradicts the older law;
- c. Completely reorganises the subject matter.
- d. A universal law does not override a particular law unless it expressly says so.

Canon 17 – Avoid Assuming Repeal

If it is unclear whether a new law has revoked an old one, we presume the earlier law still stands. Laws should be harmonised whenever possible.

Canon 18 – Respecting Civil Law

Where civil laws govern matters to which the Church defers—and provided they do not conflict with divine law—those civil laws have the same effect in Church law, unless canon law expressly provides otherwise.

Subsection II

Customs

Canon 19 – Custom Requires Legislative Approval

A custom introduced by a community of the faithful acquires the force of law only when the competent legislator has given it approval in accordance with the following canons. The recognition of custom as law depends on both the community's consistent practice and on lawful confirmation by the proper authority.

Canon 20 – Supremacy of Divine Law Over Custom

§1 No custom that contradicts divine law can ever acquire the force of law.

§2 A custom that is contrary to or outside the scope of canon law cannot acquire the force of law unless it is reasonable; a custom that the law expressly rejects is not reasonable and therefore cannot acquire legal force.

Canon 21 – When Custom Becomes Law

No custom acquires the force of law unless it has been actually observed with the deliberate intention of introducing a binding practice by a community that is at least capable of receiving a law. The existence of settled use combined with the subjective intention to establish a norm and the juridical capacity of the community are essential prerequisites.

Canon 22 – Thirty Year Rule of Custom

Unless it has been specifically approved by the competent legislator, a custom that contradicts the canon law in force, or that lies apart from canon law, acquires the force of law only after lawful observance for thirty continuous and complete years. Only a custom of centennial duration or immemorial usage can prevail against a canonical law that expressly forbids subsequent customs.

Canon 23 – Role of Custom in Applying Law

Custom is a principal and authoritative guide for interpreting the meaning and practical application of laws. Where the meaning of a law is doubtful, established custom that illustrates how the law has been understood and implemented provides the best indication of its legitimate interpretation.

Canon 24 – When a Custom is Revoked

Subject to canon 5, a custom, whether contrary to or apart from law, is abrogated either by a contrary custom or by a law. However, unless a law explicitly states otherwise, centennial or immemorial customs are not revoked by ordinary legislation, nor does a universal law automatically revoke particular customs unless the law makes explicit mention of them.

Section II

Administrative Acts

Subsection I

Dispensations

Canon 25 – Nature and Scope of Dispensations

A dispensation is the relaxation of a merely ecclesiastical (Church-made) law in a particular case. Those who exercise executive power, and others who by law or lawful delegation hold power to dispense, may grant dispensations—but only within the competence granted to them. A dispensation is case-specific: it does not change the law generally, but allows an exception for a particular person or situation.

Canon 26 – Limits on Dispensations

Laws that define the essential nature of a canonical institute or juridical act (that is, rules that constitute the very identity or existence of an office, sacrament or juridical structure) cannot be dispensed. Dispensations cannot touch the elements that make something what it is in law.

Canon 27 – Ordinary’s Power to Grant Dispensation

§1 The diocesan Bishop may dispense the faithful from disciplinary laws – both universal laws and particular laws made for his territory – whenever he judges that such a dispensation will promote their spiritual good. He may not, however, dispense from procedural or penal laws, nor from matters reserved specifically to the Primatial See or to another higher authority.

§2 If it is very difficult to get a timely decision from the Primatial See and there is a real danger of serious harm from delay, a local Ordinary may grant a dispensation even for cases ordinarily reserved to the Primatial See, but only when the dispensation is of the kind the Primatial See commonly grants in those circumstances. This power is exercised sparingly and subject to limits established by law and by norms governing recourse to Rome.

Canon 28 – Diocesan Dispensing Authority

The local Ordinary may dispense from diocesan laws and, when he judges this will serve the spiritual welfare of the faithful, from laws enacted by a plenary or provincial council or by the Episcopal Conference, always observing the limits of his competence.

Canon 29 – Limits on Dispensing Authority

Parish priests and other priests or deacons do not have a general power to dispense from universal or particular law unless an express delegation of that power has been given to them. Dispensing authority is a special competence and is not assumed by lower ministers without explicit grant.

Canon 30 – Just Cause Required for Dispensations

§1 A dispensation must be grounded on a just and reasonable cause. The competent authority should weigh the circumstances, the importance of the law in question, and whether lifting the obligation in this case will genuinely assist spiritual welfare; without such cause the dispensation is unlawful and, if not granted by a proper legislator or superior, it may also be invalid.

§2 If there is reasonable doubt about the sufficiency of the cause, the dispensation is still valid: doubt about motives does not automatically invalidate a lawful dispensation.

Canon 31 – Loss of Dispensations

A dispensation that can be applied repeatedly (capable of successive applications) ends in the same ways a privilege does. It also ceases when the motivating reason is certainly and completely removed: if the particular circumstance that justified the dispensation no longer exists, the basis for the exception disappears and the law resumes ordinary force.

Subsection II

Statutes and Ordinances

Canon 32 – Statutes: Purpose, Scope and Application

§1 Statutes are formal written regulations adopted in accordance with canonical law for an organised group – either an aggregate of persons (for example, a religious institute, a parish council, a charity or a diocesan tribunal) or an aggregate of things (for example, an ecclesiastical fund, a building or an institutional programme). Statutes set out the group's purpose, its internal constitution, the way it is governed, and the practical rules by which it acts day to day.

§2 Who is bound by statutes:

- a. Where statutes govern a community of persons, they bind only those who are legitimately and lawfully members of that community. Membership, rights and obligations must be clearly determined according to the group's constituting documents and the law.

- b. Where statutes govern an aggregate of things (such as a foundation, an endowment, or an office), they bind those who direct, administer or exercise authority over that entity.

§3 When statutes are created by virtue of legislative power (that is, when they are established under proper authority and with the force of law), they are subject to the same legal principles that govern other laws. This means they must respect higher norms, follow correct procedures for promulgation and interpretation, and may be challenged or reviewed according to ordinary canonical processes.

§4 Statutes function as the constitution and operating manual for the entity: they define offices and duties, governance procedures, financial oversight, decision-making processes and disciplinary expectations. They should always be read in light of universal and particular law and the legitimate rights of members and third parties.

Canon 33 – Regulations for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

§1 Ordinances are specific rules or norms designed to regulate the conduct of assemblies and other celebrations. They can apply to gatherings called by ecclesiastical authority (for example, diocesan synods, chapter meetings, liturgical celebrations) or to assemblies freely convoked by the faithful (such as parish meetings or lay associations).

§2 Ordinances typically cover practical matters: how an assembly is convened, how it is chaired, what may be placed on the agenda, rules of order, roles for participants, and norms for public worship or ceremonial protocol.

§3 Everyone who legitimately participates in the specified assembly or celebration is bound to observe these ordinances. They function as the expected code of conduct for orderly, reverent and lawful proceedings, and ensure that assemblies fulfil their purposes without disorder or confusion.

§4 Ordinances help safeguard decorum and legal regularity: they assist moderators, protect the rights of participants, and provide predictable procedures for decision-making, speaking turns, voting, and liturgical celebration. They are practical instruments to ensure that assemblies serve the good of the Church and the rights of those present.

Canon 34 – Incorporation into the Church by Baptism

§1 By baptism a person is incorporated into the Church of Christ and thereby constituted a person in the Church; this incorporation creates a canonical identity that confers duties and rights proper to Christians according to each one's status.

§2 These duties and rights operate while the person remains in ecclesial communion and are exercised unless a lawful canonical sanction or juridical impediment intervenes.

§3 For the purposes of pastoral care, records, and juridical effects, the fact of baptism and the resulting incorporation should be duly recorded in the appropriate sacramental registers and notified to the competent pastor or Ordinary where required by law.

Canon 35 – Majority, Minority and Use of Reason

§1 A person who has completed the eighteenth year of age attains majority in canonical law; a person below that age is a minor.

§2 A minor who has not completed the seventh year of age is called an infant and is considered incapable of personal juridical responsibility; on completion of the seventh year the minor is presumed to have the use of reason for those acts appropriate to age and development.

§3 The distinctions of infancy, minority and majority affect capacity to give consent, to be bound by obligations, and to acquire or exercise certain rights; civil law provisions concerning majority and emancipation are to be taken into account where canon law refers to them.

Canon 36 – Exercise of Rights and Guardianship

§1 A person who has attained majority ordinarily has the full exercise of canonical rights and obligations.

§2 In exercising rights, a minor remains subject to the authority of parents or to a lawful guardian, except in matters where divine or canonical law expressly exempts the minor from such authority.

§3 In matters concerning the appointment of guardians and the determination of their powers, the norms of civil law are to be observed unless canon law explicitly provides otherwise or, in a particular case for a just reason, the diocesan Bishop decides that the appointment of another guardian is warranted for the good of the minor.

Canon 37 – Habitual Lack of Use of Reason

§1 Whoever habitually lacks the use of reason is regarded in law as incapable of personal juridical responsibility and is treated as an infant for the purposes of canonical capacity.

§2 The juridical consequences of such incapacity affect the validity and efficacy of consent, certain acts, and the exercise of rights; appropriate pastoral care and protective measures must be provided, and where necessary a curator or guardian is to be appointed according to law.

Canon 38 – Pastoral Effects of Domicile and Quasi-Domicile

§1 Every person has the right to their own parish priest and proper Ordinary for the exercise of pastoral care and canonical jurisdiction.

§2 The proper parish priest or Ordinary of a vagus is the parish priest or Ordinary of the place where the vagus is actually residing at the time.

§3 The proper parish priest of one who has only a diocesan domicile or quasi-domicile is the parish priest of the place where that person is actually residing.

§4 These rules determine responsibility for sacramental ministry, registration of ecclesiastical acts, and the exercise of various pastoral and juridical duties.

Canon 39 – Consanguinity: Lines and Degrees

§1 Consanguinity is reckoned by lines and degrees for juridical purposes, including marriage impediments and certain rights.

§2 In the direct line there are as many degrees as there are generations between the persons, not counting the common ancestor.

§3 In the collateral line there are as many degrees as there are persons in both lines together, not counting the common ancestor.

§4 Accurate reckoning of degrees is necessary when determining impediments to marriage or rights that depend on kinship.

Canon 40 – Divine Foundation of the Church and Juridical Persons in the Church

§1 The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church and the Primatial See possess the status of a moral person by divine constitution; this status entails an inherent public personality in moral and spiritual matters that underpins the Church's capacity to act as a single subject in divine mission and public governance.

§2 In the Church, alongside individual human persons, there exist juridical persons: constituted subjects in canon law that hold rights and obligations fitting their nature and purpose, enable corporate action in the Church's mission, and receive recognition, protection and regulation by ecclesiastical law.

Canon 41 – Constitution of Juridical Persons

§1 Aggregates of persons or of things that are directed to an end suited to the Church's mission, an end which transcends the individual purposes of members, are constituted as juridical persons either by operation of law itself or by a special concession granted in the form of a decree by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

§2 The purposes referred to in §1 include works properly directed to piety, the apostolate or charity, whether these are spiritual or temporal in character; a juridical personality is meant to serve such public or private goods of the Church.

§3 The competent ecclesiastical authority must not confer juridical personality on a grouping unless it judges, after appropriate examination, that the aggregate pursues a genuinely useful ecclesial purpose and that, taking all circumstances into account, it possesses or can obtain the means reasonably foreseen to achieve that purpose.

Canon 42 – Types and Composition of Juridical Persons

§1 Juridical persons in the Church take the form of either aggregates of persons (councils or subcommittees) or aggregates of things (autonomous foundations).

§2 An aggregate of persons must consist of at least three persons to qualify; it is collegial when its members, in accordance with law and the statutes, participate together in the making of decisions that govern the body, whether by equal vote or by established roles; where decision-making is not collectively exercised, the aggregate is non-collegial.

§3 An aggregate of things, or autonomous foundation, comprises goods or patrimonial rights (spiritual or temporal) and is directed in accordance with law and the statutes by one or more physical persons or by a college; its juridical existence attaches to the patrimony and the purpose assigned to it.

Canon 43 – Public and Private Juridical Persons and Their Origination

§1 Public juridical persons are aggregates of persons or of things established by competent ecclesiastical authority so that, within the limits allotted to them and in the name of the Church, and in conformity with the law, they may fulfil the specific public tasks entrusted to them for the common good of the Church. Other juridical persons are private, pursuing more particular or individual ends.

§2 Public juridical personality may be conferred either by the law itself or by a special decree of the competent authority that expressly grants it. Private juridical personality is conferred only by a special decree of the competent authority expressly granting such status.

Canon 44 – Statutes Required for Juridical Personality

§1 No aggregate of persons or of things seeking juridical personality may acquire it unless its statutes have been submitted to and approved by the competent authority.

§2 The statutes submitted must clearly define the purpose, governance structures, competencies of officeholders, rules for admission and dismissal of members (if applicable), patrimonial arrangements, financial accountability, and provisions for amendment, suppression and succession to ensure conformity with canon law and protection of ecclesial rights and obligations.

Canon 45 – Representation of Juridical Persons

§1 Persons who represent and act in the name of a public juridical person are those whose competence to do so is recognized by universal or particular law or is established in the juridical person's statutes; their acts in representation bind the juridical person to the extent and within the limits of the authority conferred.

§2 Persons who represent a private juridical person derive their power of representation from the statutes of that private person or from a lawful mandate; their competence and duties must be specified so that third parties may rely upon their public acts with legal certainty.

Canon 46 – Collegial Acts: Elections and Decisions

§1 In matters of collegial action, unless law or the statutes provide otherwise, the following rules apply:

- a. For elections, provided a majority of the persons who must be summoned are present, a choice decided by an absolute majority of those present has the force of law.
- b. If two successive ballots are inconclusive, a third ballot is between the two candidates with the greatest number of votes (or, if more than two, between the two senior by age); after a third inconclusive ballot the person senior by age is deemed elected.

§2 In other collegial matters, provided a majority of those summoned are present, a decision adopted by an absolute majority of those present has the force of law; if votes are equal after two ballots, the presiding officer may exercise a casting vote to break the tie.

§3 Matters that affect all members as individuals (for instance, individual obligations or rights) require the unanimous consent of those affected unless the law or statutes provide otherwise.

Canon 47 – Perpetuity and Extinction of Juridical Persons

§1 A juridical person is in principle perpetual by its nature; it ceases to exist, however, if it is lawfully suppressed by the competent authority, if it has remained inactive for one hundred years, or, in the case of a private juridical person, if the association dissolves according to its statutes or if, in the judgment of the competent authority, the foundation has in accordance with its statutes ceased to exist.

§2 If a collegial juridical person is reduced to a single surviving member and the statutes have not provided that the aggregate ceases to exist, all rights and functions of the aggregate devolve upon that sole remaining member until lawful reconstitution or suppression occurs.

Canon 48 – Amalgamation and Successor Liability

§1 When public juridical persons are amalgamated into a single juridical entity that itself receives juridical personality, the new juridical person acquires the patrimonial goods and rights of the former aggregates and accepts their liabilities.

§2 In arranging patrimonial and legal transitions the competent authority must safeguard the wishes of founders and benefactors, respect any acquired rights, and provide for the equitable distribution and assumption of debts and obligations, following the statutes and in conformity with law.

Subsection III

The Power of Governance

Canon 49 – Who Holds Governance Power

§1 In Church law, anyone who has received sacred orders is qualified to exercise the power of governance. This power, also called jurisdiction, comes from divine institution and is regulated by the Church's laws.

§2 Lay members of the Christian faithful may assist in exercising this same power, provided they follow the norms set by law.

Canon 50 – External and Internal Forums

§1 External Forum: This is the public sphere of Church life: official decrees, canonical trials, parish registers, published decisions and any act recorded in the Church's legal books. Actions

here are visible to the faithful and often have civil effects (for example, a marriage entered into the register).

§2 Internal Forum: This is the private, spiritual domain: the seal of confession, private spiritual counsel, personal dispensations or absolutions given in confidence. Decisions made here remain strictly confidential and carry no public, legal effect—unless a specific law says otherwise. By distinguishing these, the Church safeguards both the public order of its communities and the confidentiality due in personal, conscience-based matters

Canon 51 – Ordinary vs Delegated Power

§1 Ordinary power of governance is attached by law to a particular office; delegated power is granted to a person without conferring an office.

§2 Ordinary power may be proper (inherent to the office) or vicarious (exercised on behalf of another).

§3 Anyone claiming delegated power bears the burden of proving that the delegation exists.

Canon 52 – Habitual Faculties

§1 Habitual faculties follow the same rules that govern delegated power.

§2 Unless the delegation explicitly states otherwise, or unless the person was chosen solely for their own qualities, a habitual faculty granted to an ordinary does not end when that person’s authority does. Instead, the faculty passes to whoever succeeds them in governance.

Canon 53 – Staying Within the Mandate

§1 A delegate who goes beyond the mandate in terms of either subject matter or persons performs no valid act.

§2 A delegate does not exceed the mandate merely by carrying out the assigned duties in a manner different from that specified—unless the manner of execution was prescribed by the delegating authority as essential for validity.

Canon 54 – Who Is an “Ordinary” and Who Is a “Local Ordinary”

§1 In Church law, the term ordinary refers to those who hold general governing authority over a diocese or an equivalent ecclesial community. This includes:

The Primate of the Church.

Diocesan bishops and anyone lawfully appointed—even if only temporarily—to oversee a diocese or a comparable local Church (see Canon 368 for details).

Vicars general and episcopal vicars, who exercise the bishop’s executive power on his behalf.

Within their own communities, the major superiors of Primatial-right clerical religious institutes and of Primatial-right clerical societies of apostolic life, so long as they possess ordinary executive authority.

§2 The designation local ordinary applies to all of the above except the major superiors of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. In other words, a local ordinary is the Primate, a diocesan bishop (or someone temporarily in that role), vicars general and episcopal vicars—not the heads of religious institutes.

§3 Whenever a canon specifically entrusts an act of executive governance to the diocesan bishop by name, that act belongs only to the diocesan bishop (or to those made equivalent under Canon 381 §2). Vicars general or episcopal vicars may carry out such acts only if they have been given a special mandate to do so.

Canon 55 – The Three Branches of Church Authority

The Church’s governing power is divided into three parts:

- a. Legislative (making laws)
- b. Executive (implementing laws)
- c. Judicial (interpreting laws and resolving disputes)

Any law-making power given to a synod or a bishop below the Primate may only be delegated if the Code explicitly allows it. A lower authority may never pass a law that conflicts with one issued by a higher authority.

Canon 56 – Delegating Executive Power

§1. A holder of ordinary executive authority may delegate that power either for a single action or for all matters, unless a law forbids it.

§2. Authority granted by the Synod of Bishops may likewise be sub-delegated for one task or for all tasks, unless it was given for personal reasons or expressly forbids sub-delegation.

§3. No one who holds sub-delegated authority may further pass it on, unless the original delegator specifically gave permission.

Canon 57 – Collegial Delegation

When several people are appointed collegially (as a body) to handle a matter, they must act according to the rules for joint decision-making (Canon 47), unless their mandate says otherwise.

Canon 58 – When Delegated Power Ends

§1. A delegation of authority comes to an end when any of the following occurs:

- a. The assigned task is completed
- b. The time limit or number of cases for the delegation expires
- c. The reason for the delegation no longer exists
- d. The original grantor revokes the delegation in a direct communication
- e. The delegate resigns and that resignation is accepted

§2. It does not lapse automatically simply because the grantor has lost office, unless the delegation agreement stated otherwise.

Canon 59 – When Ordinary Power Ends

An ordinary's executive authority ends the moment he loses the office to which that authority was attached.

Canon 60 – Supplying Authority in Doubt

If a case is affected by a widely held mistake of fact or law, or by a serious, credible doubt, the Church provides the necessary executive power for both public and private forums so that ministry can continue without delay.

Section III

Subsection I

Provision of Ecclesiastical Office

Canon 61 – Duties and Rights Defined by Law or Decree

The duties and rights of each church office are set out either in the law that creates the office or in the decree from the competent authority that both establishes and grants it.

Canon 62 – Validity of Offices

An ecclesiastical office cannot be held validly unless it has been provided for in church law.

Canon 63 – Establishing an Ecclesiastical Office

An ecclesiastical office comes about in one of three ways:

- a. A competent church authority freely appoints someone
- b. If a person has been formally presented, the same authority installs them
- c. If a person has been elected or postulated, the same authority confirms or admits them

Canon 64 – Office Creation and Provision

The same authority that has the power to create, modify or suppress an office also has the power to provide it.

Canon 65 – Qualifications for Office

To be promoted to a church office, a person must:

- a. belong to the Church, and
- b. have the qualities required by universal law, particular law or the founding statutes.

If someone lacks those required qualities, the appointment is only invalid when the law explicitly states those qualities are essential for validity. Otherwise, the appointment is valid but can be overturned by a competent authority or an administrative tribunal.

Any appointment obtained through simony (buying or selling spiritual things) is automatically invalid.

Canon 66 – Requirement of Ordination

You cannot validly appoint someone to an office that requires full pastoral care and priestly ministry if they are not already a priest.

Canon 67 – Timely Pastoral Provision

Filling a pastoral office (one that involves care of souls) should not be delayed except for a very serious reason.

Canon 68 – Single Office Rule

Do not confer on one person two or more offices that are incompatible—that is, offices that cannot both be carried out at the same time by the same individual.

Canon 69 – Appointment Timing

§1. Appointing someone to an office that is not yet vacant is invalid and remains invalid even if the office later becomes vacant.

§2. If an office is for a set term, you may appoint someone up to six months before that term ends; the appointment then takes effect on the day the office actually becomes vacant.

§3. A mere promise of an office—no matter who makes it—has no legal force.

Canon 70 – Registration of Offices

Every provision of an ecclesiastical office must be recorded in writing and recorded to the relevant office, including the Primate's See.

Canon 71 – Diocesan Appointments

It is for the diocesan bishop to provide for ecclesiastical offices in his own particular church.

Subsection II

Presentation of a Church Office

Canon 72 – Nominations Sent to Primate's Office

If you have the legal right to nominate someone for an office, you must send your nomination to the Primate's See to formalise that appointment.

Canon 73 – Replacement Nominations and Deadlines

If your first nominee is judged unsuitable, you may present one further candidate—but only once and within one month of being notified.

If your nominee withdraws or dies before appointment, you have one month from the date of that withdrawal or death to submit a replacement.

Canon 74 – Loss of Presentation Rights and Primate Appointment

You lose your right to present if you fail to nominate within the required timeframe or if you propose two unsuitable candidates.

Once that right is lost, the Primate See may choose someone freely, but must still obtain the consent of the proper bishop (or equivalent ordinary) of the person appointed.

Canon 75 – Selection and Installation of Presented Candidates

The Primate must select and install a legitimately presented candidate who is found suitable and who accepts the office. If several presented candidates are suitable, the authority must choose one of them, in consultation with Synod.

Subsection III Election Of Church Offices

Canon 76 – Applicability of Election Rules

Unless a law says otherwise, all elections to church office must follow the rules set out in these canons.

Canon 77 – Timely Elections and Filling Vacancies

If a college or recognised group has the right to elect someone, they must complete the election within three months of the office becoming vacant. If no election is held within that period, the authority responsible for confirming the election (or, failing that, for making the appointment) may fill the vacancy by its own choice.

Canon 78 – Summons, Notice, and Annulment for Non-Notification

The person in charge must summon every member of the electing body. A notice is valid if delivered to each member's home or usual place of residence.

If a member was accidentally left off the list and misses the election, the result still stands. However, if that person protests within three days of learning of the election, and it is proven they were overlooked, the election must be annulled—even if it has already been confirmed.

If more than one third of the electors were not notified, the election is automatically null and void—unless it can be shown they were actually present.

Canon 79 – Presence and Voting Procedures

Anyone who is properly summoned and present at the time and place fixed in the notice may vote.

Postal or proxy votes are not allowed.

If an elector is in the building but is too ill to come to the voting place, the tellers must obtain their written vote.

Canon 80 – One Person, One Vote

Even if someone holds several roles entitling them to vote, they may cast only one ballot.

Canon 81 – Who May Vote

Only those actually belonging to the electing body may be admitted to vote.

Canon 82 – Invalid Vote

Any election tainted by coercion or undue influence is invalid.

Canon 83 – Voting Disqualifications and Null Ballots

§1. The following persons may not vote:

- a. Those incapable of making a valid human act (for example, through mental incapacity).
- b. Anyone under censure of excommunication.
- c. Anyone who has openly broken communion with the Church.

§2. If any of these do vote, their ballot is null, but the election remains valid unless excluding that vote means the winner would no longer have the required majority.

Canon 84 – Free, Secret and Determined Vote

§1. A vote must be:

- a. Free: not coerced by fear or malicious pressure;
- b. Secret: cast without others knowing;
- c. Certain, Absolute and Determined: a clear choice for one candidate.

§2. Any condition attached to a vote beforehand (e.g. “I’ll only vote if...”) is ignored.

Canon 85 – Person Voting

§1. Before voting begins, at least two tellers must be appointed from among the electors.

§2. Tellers collect and count the ballots, check that the number of votes matches the number of voters present, and announce the result.

§3. If there are more votes than voters, the entire voting is void and must be repeated.

§4. The secretary records every step of the process in writing. The record must be signed by the secretary, the presiding officer, and the tellers, and then securely archived.

Canon 86 – Untitled

§1. Where possible, all votes are to be carried out online, using a valid online form

§2. Links to the vote must be provided to all electors

§3. In the event of electors being unable to vote online, confirmation of their voting intention can be given in writing (via email)

§4. Results are recorded by providing a screen capture of each vote

Canon 87 – Election by Compromise

§1. Where neither statute nor law forbids it, an elective body may unanimously agree in writing to hand over the right to choose to one or more individuals (whether they are members of that body or not). Those individuals then vote on everyone's behalf, using the authority given to them.

§2. If the body is made up solely of clergy, any delegate must be a duly ordained cleric; otherwise, the election is void.

Canon 88 – Declaring the Winner

As soon as someone has achieved the two thirds number of votes, the presiding officer must announce that person as elected.

Canon 89 – Acceptance of Election

§1. The newly elected person must be told of the result straight away. They then have eight clear days to confirm whether they accept the office. If they do not reply within those eight days, the election is treated as if it never happened.

§2. A refusal or a non-reply means the person loses every right that the election would have given. They cannot reclaim those rights by changing their mind later, though they remain eligible to stand again. In that case, the body must hold a fresh election within one month of learning of the non-acceptance.

Canon 90 – Taking Office Immediately

If the office does not require any further confirmation, then once the election is accepted, the person assumes the office at once with full rights and duties. If confirmation is required, acceptance alone gives only the right to be confirmed, not the full exercise of the office.

Canon 91 – Confirmation of Election

§1. Where confirmation by a higher authority is required, the elected person (or their representative) must apply for that confirmation within eight days of accepting. Failure to do

so—unless prevented by a serious and genuine obstacle—means they lose every claim to the office.

§2. The confirming authority must grant confirmation if the candidate meets the suitability requirements of Canon 149 §1 and the election itself complied with all legal procedures.

§3. Confirmation must be given in writing.

§4. Until the elected person has been formally notified of that written confirmation, they may not carry out any duties—spiritual or temporal—of the office, and any acts they perform in that period are void.

§5. Once the written confirmation is notified, the person obtains the office with full legal effect, unless some other law provides otherwise.

Subsection IV

Loss of Ecclesiastical Office

Canon 92 – How an Office Is Lost

§1. An ecclesiastical office ends in any of these ways:

- a. by the lapse of a fixed term;
- b. by resignation;
- c. by transfer;
- d. by removal;
- e. by privation (as a penalty).

An office does not lapse simply because the authority who appointed it has ceased to have power.

Once an office is lost, that fact must be communicated as soon as possible to everyone who has a right in its provision.

Canon 93 – Title of Emeritus

Anyone who leaves an office may be granted the title “emeritus.”

Canon 94 – Effective Date for Certain Losses

When an office ends by reason of a fixed term, the loss takes effect only from the moment the competent authority issues written notice.

Clause I: Resignation

Canon 95 – Resignation for Just Cause

Any competent person (*sui compos*) may resign from an ecclesiastical office for a just cause.

Canon 96 – Resignation: Form and Effect

§1. For validity, a resignation (whether it needs acceptance or not) must be addressed to the authority that normally appoints to that office. It must be made either:

in writing; or orally in the presence of two witnesses.

§2. Once it has taken effect it cannot be revoked, although the person may later obtain that office by some other title.

Clause II: Transfer

Canon 97 – Transfer of Officeholders

§1. Only the person who has the right to appoint to both the losing office and the gaining office may make a transfer.

§2. If the transfer is against the office-holder's will, there must be a grave cause and the proper legal procedure, always allowing the person to present contrary arguments.

§3. A transfer takes effect only when communicated in writing.

Canon 98 – Vacancy of Office

§1. On transfer, the former office becomes vacant when the new office is canonically taken up, unless the law or a competent authority decides otherwise.

Clause III: Removal

Canon 99 – Who Can Remove Someone from Office

A person is removed from office either by a legitimate decree of competent authority (without prejudice to contractual rights) or by operation of law as set out in Canon 101.

Canon 100 – Removal of Officeholders

§1. An office held for an indefinite term may be ended only for grave causes and by the legal process.

§2. A person appointed at the discretion of a competent authority may be removed by that authority for just cause.

§3. A removal decree takes effect only when communicated in writing.

Canon 101 – Loss of Office

§1. The following lose their office automatically:

- a. someone who has lost the clerical state;
- b. someone who has publicly defected from the Catholic faith or from communion with the Church;

§2. Removal for public defection takes effect immediately.

Volume II

The People of God

Section I

Subsection I

The Christian Faithful

Canon 102 – Who Are the Christian Faithful?

§1. The Christian faithful are all those who, through baptism, have been united with Christ and so become members of God’s own people. In baptism they share in Christ’s threefold work—priestly, prophetic and kingly—in a way that fits their own vocation. By virtue of this gift, they are each called to take part in the Church’s mission in the world according to their particular state in life.

§2. The People of God exists in visible society on earth and truly “subsists” in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the Primate in union with the Synod of Bishops.

Canon 103 – Full Communion in the Catholic Church

A baptised person is fully incorporated into the Catholic Church on earth when three bonds unite them visibly to Christ and to the community:

- a. The profession of the one, shared faith;
- b. Participation in the sacraments;
- c. Submission to the Church’s lawful governance.

Canon 104 – Catechumens

§1. Catechumens are those who, moved by the Holy Spirit, have explicitly asked to join the Church and are preparing for baptism. Even before they receive the sacraments, their sincere desire and the faith, hope and love they already practise unite them in a special way to the Church, which already holds them as its own.

§2. The Church cares especially for catechumens by:

- a. Inviting them to live according to the Gospel;
- b. Gradually introducing them to the celebration of sacred rites;
- c. Granting them certain privileges proper to the baptised, such as participating in some liturgical prayers and gatherings.

Canon 105 – Clerics, Lay People, and Consecrated Persons

§1. By divine institution, some members of the Christian faithful are chosen as sacred ministers—those who receive Holy orders and are called clerics under Church law. All other baptised members are known as lay persons.

§2. Within both clerics and lay persons, there are those who make a special commitment to God by professing the evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity and obedience) in vows or other sacred bonds approved by the Church. Although this consecrated life does not form part of the hierarchical structure, it belongs fully to the life and holiness of the Church and powerfully serves its saving mission.

Subsection II

Obligations and Rights of All the Christian Faithful

Canon 106 – Equality in Dignity and Service

From the moment we are baptised into Christ, every Christian shares the same fundamental dignity. No one is “more” or “less” a member of God’s people. Each person also contributes to building up the Body of Christ in their own way, according to their particular vocation or role.

Canon 107 – Keeping Communion with the Church

§1. In everything they do, all Christians must remain in communion with the Church.

§2. They must diligently fulfil the duties they owe:

- to the universal Church (the whole Catholic community);
- and to their own local Church (diocese or parish),
in accordance with the law.

Canon 108 – Striving for Holiness and Growth

Every Christian is called to:

- a. lead a Holy life;
- b. help the Church grow;
- c. and work for the ongoing sanctification of the community,
each according to their own state in life.

Canon 109 – Proclaiming the Gospel

All the faithful have both the duty and the right to ensure that the saving message of Christ reaches as many people as possible, throughout every era and in every corner of the world.

Canon 110 – Obedience and Speaking Up

§1. Believers owe Christian obedience to their pastors (bishops and priests) when they teach the faith or govern the Church, for they represent Christ.

§2. At the same time, every Christian is free—and indeed encouraged—to share their spiritual needs and aspirations with those pastors.

§3. Faithful men and women may also, in a spirit of reverence and concern for the common good, offer their advice or express opinions on matters affecting the Church’s welfare. They do so:

- respectfully towards their pastors;
- mindful of the integrity of faith and morals;
- and attentive to the dignity of all.

Canon 111 – Right to Spiritual Assistance

Every Christian has the right to receive from the Church’s ministers:

- the Word of God in preaching and teaching;
- the sacraments that nurture the spiritual life.

Canon 112 – Freedom of Worship and Spiritual Life

Christians may:

§1. worship God according to the liturgical rite approved by their legitimate pastors;

§2. adopt personal forms of prayer or devotion, provided these remain in harmony with Church teaching.

Canon 113 – Forming Associations

The faithful are free to establish and direct groups or associations for:

- a. works of charity;
- b. prayer and piety;
- c. promoting Christian vocations;
and to meet regularly to pursue these objectives.

Canon 114 – Engaging in Apostolic Action

Because all share in the Church’s mission, Christians may initiate or support missionary and apostolic endeavours, appropriate to their own state and condition. However, no organisation or activity may claim the title “Catholic” without the consent of the proper Church authority.

Canon 115 – Right to Christian Education

Baptised Christians are entitled to a Christian formation that:

- a. guides them towards full human maturity;
- b. deepens their understanding of salvation;
- c. and helps them live out the gospel in daily life.

Canon 116 – Freedom in Theological Inquiry

Those engaged in theological or sacred disciplines enjoy a rightful freedom to investigate questions and express learned opinions. This freedom must always be exercised with fidelity to the teaching authority (*magisterium*) of the Church, ensuring that inquiry strengthens faith, deepens understanding and remains within the bounds of ecclesial communion.

Canon 117 – Freedom in Choosing a State of Life

No one may be subject to coercion when deciding whether to marry, enter religious life, seek ordination, or live as a lay person. Every choice of state must be made freely, reflecting the dignity of human freedom and the personal vocation given by God. The Church safeguards this freedom so that each person may respond authentically to their calling.

Canon 118 – Respect for Reputation and Privacy

It is forbidden to harm a person’s good name or to intrude unjustly into their private affairs. All must respect the rights and dignity of others in these matters, recognising that reputation and privacy are integral to human dignity. Any violation of these rights is contrary to Christian charity and justice.

Canon 119 – Defending One’s Rights

§1. Christians may legitimately assert and defend their rights in Church courts and proceedings, in accordance with canon law, ensuring that justice is accessible to all.

§2. If summoned to trial, they have the right to a fair hearing under laws applied with equity, so that truth and justice prevail.

§3. No one may be penalised except by those penalties and procedures established in canon law, safeguarding against arbitrary judgment and ensuring due process.

Canon 120 – Supporting the Church and the Poor

§1. All the faithful are obliged to contribute to the material needs of the Church. This duty ensures:

- a. Worthy celebration of divine worship, with proper provision for liturgical needs.
- b. Support for apostolic and charitable works, enabling the Church’s mission of evangelisation and service.
- c. Decent sustenance for ministers, so that they may devote themselves fully to pastoral care.

§2. The faithful must also work for social justice and, mindful of Christ's command, aid the poor from their own resources. This obligation reflects the Gospel call to solidarity, mercy and the preferential option for the poor.

Canon 121 – Exercising Rights for the Common Good

§1. When Christians exercise their rights—individually or in groups—they must do so with responsibility, considering:

- a. The common good of the Church, ensuring that personal actions strengthen rather than weaken ecclesial unity.
- b. The rights of others, respecting justice and charity in all interactions.
- c. Their own duties towards their neighbour, recognising that rights are balanced by obligations of love and service.

§2. For the sake of the Church's common good, legitimate ecclesiastical authority may regulate how these rights are exercised. Such regulation ensures harmony, prevents abuse and safeguards the mission of the Church.

Subection III

The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful

Canon 122 – Additional Duties and Rights for Lay People

In addition to the duties and rights shared by all Christians, lay men and women have specific responsibilities and entitlements listed in this section.

Canon 123 – Sharing in the Apostolate

§1. By virtue of baptism and confirmation, lay Christians are called to share in the Church's mission. Individually or through groups, they must work to spread the message of Christ so that everyone, everywhere, can hear and accept the Gospel. This duty is especially pressing in places or situations where only lay people can reach certain individuals.

§2. Lay Christians must also strive to bring Gospel values into everyday life—into work, politics, culture and society—so that their actions bear witness to Christ.

Canon 124 – Marriage, Family and Education

§1. Those who live in marriage have a special role: through their married life and family, they help build up God's people.

§2. Parents also have both a grave responsibility and a right to educate them. Christian parents in particular must ensure their children receive a proper faith education in line with the Church's teaching.

Canon 125 – Freedom and Responsibility in Society

Lay Christians enjoy all the civil freedoms of any citizen. When they exercise those freedoms in public or private life, they should:

- a. Let Gospel values guide their decisions and actions;
- b. Respect the Church's teaching authority (the Magisterium);
- c. Avoid presenting personal opinions as if they were official Church doctrine.

Canon 126 – Participation in Church Offices and Councils

§1. Qualified lay people may be admitted by Church leaders to those offices and roles that the law allows them to hold.

§2. Lay experts—those with the necessary knowledge, prudence and integrity—may serve as advisors or experts to bishops and councils, offering their wisdom on matters affecting the Church.

Canon 127 – Right and Duty to Learn and Teach

§1. Lay Christians must make an effort to learn the essentials of Christian teaching in a way suited to their abilities so they can live the faith, share it with others and defend it when necessary.

§2. They also have a right to pursue advanced studies in theology or other sacred sciences at Church-approved institutes and universities.

§3. If they meet the Church's requirements, lay scholars may receive an official mandate to teach these subjects

Canon 128 – Lector, Acolyte and Other Liturgical Functions

§1. Lay people, both men and women, who meet the age and qualification requirements set by each local bishops' conference, may be instituted as servers, lectors or acolytes for stable ministry. This institution provides a recognised and enduring role in the liturgical life of the parish, conditional on the provisions of §2.

§2. The diocesan bishop may establish particular rules for male and female servers in each parish, taking into account pastoral needs and the request of the parish priest. These norms ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for local circumstances.

§3. At the request of the priest or deacon, any lay person may be temporarily appointed to assist in liturgical functions. Such roles include:

- a. Reading Scripture as a lector.
- b. Leading responses as a commentator.

- c. Singing as a cantor.
These temporary appointments allow the faithful to contribute actively to the liturgy when needed.

§4. When there is a genuine pastoral need and no ordained minister is available, lay Christians—even if not formally instituted—may be authorised to:

- a. Proclaim the Word of God.
- b. Lead certain liturgical prayers.
- c. Administer baptism.
Such authorisations are granted to ensure that the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church continues without interruption, always in fidelity to canonical norms.

§5. In all these functions, lay ministers are to serve with reverence, humility and fidelity to the liturgical norms of the Church, recognising that their ministry flows from baptism and is exercised in communion with ordained ministers.

Canon 129 – Preparation for Lay Ministers

§1. Anyone who serves the Church in a stable or specialised role must receive proper training, so that they may carry out their duties faithfully, conscientiously and competently.

§2. This preparation shall include:

- a. **Doctrinal formation**, ensuring a sound understanding of the faith and the teaching of the Church.
- b. **Liturgical instruction**, so that ministers act with reverence and fidelity to the rubrics.
- c. **Pastoral training**, equipping them to serve the needs of the community with charity and prudence.
- d. **Practical skills**, appropriate to their ministry, such as public speaking, organisation, or catechetical methods.

§3. The diocesan bishop shall establish norms for the training and ongoing formation of lay ministers, ensuring consistency across parishes and fidelity to ecclesiastical tradition.

§4. Parish priests and deacons shall support lay ministers in their preparation, offering guidance, encouragement and opportunities for practice, so that their service strengthens the life of the Church.

§5. Lay ministers are obliged to continue their formation throughout their service, deepening their knowledge of the faith and their competence in ministry, so that their witness remains fruitful and effective.

Subsection IV

The Formation of Clerics

Canon 130

The Church alone has both the duty and the exclusive right to train those who are called to serve as deacons and priests. In practice, this means only the Church can set up, govern and oversee seminaries and formation programmes for sacred ministers.

Canon 131

§1. Everyone in the Christian community shares responsibility for encouraging men to consider priesthood or the diaconate.

1. Families, teachers and especially parish priests should speak about how vital these ministries are.
2. Bishops must highlight the need for new ministers, teach about their importance, and back any local or diocesan initiatives to foster vocations.

§2. When older or more mature men feel God is calling them to ordained service, priests, and in particular the bishop, should give them wise advice, practical help and solid preparation for their new life.

Canon 132

§1. Where they exist, minor seminaries or similar schools for boys and young men should be maintained and supported. These institutions combine normal secondary schooling in humanities and sciences with a special introduction to prayer, community life and basic Church teaching.

§2. If a diocese does not yet have such a school, the bishop should consider founding one so that local youth who feel called to the priesthood begin their formation close to home.

Canon 133

After secondary studies, candidates for priesthood enter a major seminary for full priestly formation—spiritual life, academic studies, pastoral training and community living. The period of formation required is dependent on the prior educational background of the candidate. The bishop will determine any credit to be taken into account when determining length of training required.

Canon 134

§1. The St Thomas Aquinas Seminary (online) is the major seminary and serves as the principal institute of clerical formation. Additionally, every diocese has its own satellite seminary, guided by the Academic Dean of the online seminary.

§2. Creating a new inter-diocesan seminary requires the approval of the Primate, which also must approve its statutes.

Canon 135

§1. A satellite seminary that is lawfully established automatically becomes a juridical person in the Church, able to own property and enter into contracts.

§2. The rector—unless another authority is specified—represents the seminary in all its external affairs.

Canon 136

§1. Every seminary must have:

1. A Rector to lead it
2. An Academic Dean
3. A Finance Officer
4. Qualified teachers of philosophy, theology and other disciplines

§2. There must be at least one appointed spiritual director, though seminarians may also seek guidance from any priest designated by the bishop.

§3. Seminary statutes should encourage shared responsibility: staff and students work with the rector to maintain discipline, prayer life and community harmony.

Canon 137

When decisions are made about admitting someone to Holy orders or dismissing a candidate from seminary, the bishop must not seek the opinion of the candidate's confessor or spiritual director.

Canon 138

§1. The bishop admits to major seminary only those whose personal qualities, human, moral, spiritual and intellectual, as well as physical and psychological health and genuine intention, indicate they can commit for life to ordained ministry.

§2. Before entry, candidates submit proof of baptism and confirmation and any other documents required by the seminary's formation programme.

§3. The bishop may impart the responsibility of admitting candidates to seminary, or incardination, to a subcommittee of the Diocesan Council known as a Formation Council. The bishop may act alone, on his own authority, however for large diocese or where it is prudent, a Formation Council made up of at least one bishop, priest and lay member of the church.

§4. The recommendations of the Formation Council to the bishop has the weight of a recommendation only, unless the bishop gives it definite powers of appointment.

Canon 139

The Office of Primate provides the *programme of priestly formation*, reflecting universal norms.

Canon 140

Every seminary also adopts its own *statutes*—rules approved by the diocesan bishop (or Primate, in an inter-diocesan seminary)—to adapt the national programme to daily life: liturgy, timetable, pastoral activities and community discipline.

Canon 141

Spiritual life and academic study in seminary must be balanced and well-coordinated so that each seminarian, according to his temperament and gifts, grows:

1. In personal friendship with Christ
2. In Gospel values
3. In human maturity

Canon 142

§1. Through prayer, retreats and pastoral experiences, seminarians learn:

1. To serve the faithful effectively
2. To evangelise with missionary zeal
3. That living faith and charity leads to their own holiness
4. To develop human virtues—kindness, patience and respect—that build healthy relationships

§2. Formation fosters in them a deep love for the Church, a humble loyalty to the Primate, a collaborative spirit with their bishop, and a fraternal bond with fellow seminarians, preparing them for life together as a diocesan priestly team.

Canon 143 – Prayer at the Heart of Seminary Life

§1. The celebration of the Eucharist is at the very centre of seminary life. By joining, ideally where possible, daily in the Mass, seminarians share in Christ's love and draw spiritual strength for both their own prayer lives and for future apostolic work.

§2. Seminarians are formed in the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church's official prayer of psalms, readings and intercessions prayed at fixed times each day. This practice teaches them to pray constantly for the people entrusted to their care and for the needs of the whole world.

§3. Devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary—especially the Marian rosary—along with mental prayer and other pious exercises are encouraged. These practices help seminarians develop a rich prayer life and sustain their vocation.

§4. Frequent reception of the sacrament of penance is fostered so that students learn true self-examination and repentance. Each seminarian is encouraged to choose a spiritual director of his own free will, someone in whom he can confidently confide.

§5. Every year, seminarians make a retreat. This dedicated time away from studies and routine offers an opportunity for deeper prayer, personal reflection and renewal of commitment.

Canon 144 – Understanding Priestly Life

They are fully informed about the duties and challenges of ordained ministry. Nothing is hidden: seminarians learn about the burdens and responsibilities of parish leadership, pastoral care, community life and the personal sacrifices required of priests.

Canon 145 – Solid Doctrinal and Cultural Instruction

Doctrinal teaching in the seminary seeks to give seminarians both a deep understanding of the Church's sacred disciplines and a broad cultural background. This balanced formation ensures they can explain the faith clearly and adapt their preaching to the needs and mentalities of contemporary society.

Canon 146 – Proficiency in Languages

The formation programme requires seminarians to master their mother tongue thoroughly so they can teach and preach effectively.

Canon 147 – Structure of Philosophical and Theological Studies

Philosophical and theological courses may be taken one after the other or at the same time, according to the national formation programme. In total, these studies must span at least six full years: two years dedicated to philosophy and four years to theology.

Canon 148 – Philosophy as Foundation for Theology

Philosophical instruction rests on the timeless wisdom of past thinkers while also engaging with developments in the history of philosophy. It is taught in a way that sharpens seminarians' minds, deepens their human maturity, and prepares them for the rigours of theological study.

Canon 149 – Theological Studies under the Light of Faith

§1. Theology courses are taught “in the light of faith” and guided by the Church's teaching office. Seminarians learn the full scope of Catholic doctrine revealed by God, nourishing their own spiritual life and equipping them to defend and proclaim the faith faithfully.

§2. Sacred Scripture is studied with special care so that seminarians gain a comprehensive grasp of the Bible as a unified whole.

§3. The curriculum includes dogmatic theology rooted in Scripture and tradition (with St Thomas Aquinas as a primary teacher), as well as courses in moral theology, pastoral theology, canon law, liturgy, Church history and other supporting disciplines.

Canon 150 – Appointment and Oversight of Seminary Teachers

§1. Only those priests who are outstanding in virtue and hold advanced degrees may teach philosophy, theology or canon law.

§2. Care is taken to appoint distinct experts for each field—Scripture, dogma, moral theology, liturgy, philosophy, history and so on—so that each discipline is taught according to its proper methods.

§3. Any teacher who fails gravely in their duties must be removed by the appointing authority.

Canon 151 – Integration of the Academic Programme

§1. Teachers coordinate to ensure that all courses form a single, harmonious body of knowledge rather than isolated subjects. The Rector oversees the integration and flow of the entire curriculum.

§2. Seminarians are trained in scholarly research methods. They undertake supervised projects and assignments to learn how to investigate questions independently and with academic rigour.

Canon 152 – Pastoral Training with a Clear Purpose

While all seminary formation has a pastoral aim, there are specific programmes that teach the principles and practical skills needed for ministry. These cover how to teach the faith, lead liturgy, offer pastoral counselling and govern a parish, always tailored to the local context and needs.

Canon 153 – Practical Skills for Ministry

§1. Seminarians receive hands-on training in tasks central to priestly ministry: catechesis, preaching, sacramental celebration, pastoral visitation, parish administration and other parish functions.

§2. They also study the broader needs of the universal Church—vocations, missionary activity, ecumenism and urgent social issues—so that they develop a global vision and a missionary heart.

Canon 154 – Fostering Concern for the Universal Church

§1. The formation encourages seminarians to care not only for the local diocese but also for the universal Church.

§2. If a seminarian is to be incardinated into a diocese other than his own, the bishop ensures he learns the local language and understands the region’s social, cultural and institutional realities before ordination.

Canon 155 – Obedience to the Rector

All members of the seminary community—teachers, staff and students—must obey the rector, who is responsible for daily supervision in line with the national formation programme and the seminary’s own statutes.

Canon 156 – Ensuring Discipline and Quality Teaching

§1. The rector, aided by moderators and teachers, ensures seminarians abide strictly by the rules of formation and community life.

§2. The rector and the director of studies oversee that instructors fulfil their teaching duties faithfully and competently according to the approved programmes.

Canon 157 – Seminary Exemption from Parochial Authority

A seminary operates independently of parish structures. The rector or his delegate acts as the pastor for those enrolled in the seminary, always respecting the norms of canon law.

Canon 158 – Financial Provision for the Seminary

The bishop—or bishops, in an inter-diocesan setting—must ensure the seminary’s establishment, upkeep, student support, and all other needs are properly funded.

Canon 159 – Seminary Funding through Diocesan Taxation

§1. Beyond the regular offerings, a bishop may impose a diocesan levy to cover seminary expenses.

§2. All ecclesiastical entities in the diocese—with few exceptions—contribute to this tax according to their revenues. The rate is set to meet the seminary’s financial requirements and must be general and proportional and are to be reviewed bi-annually by the Primate’s See.

Subsection V

The Enrolment, or Incardination, of Clerics

Canon 160 – Every Cleric Belongs Somewhere

§1. Every man ordained as a deacon or priest must be formally attached – incardinated – to one of the following:

- a. A diocesan parish (a “particular church”) or a personal prelature
- b. A religious institute or society of apostolic life that has permission to enrol clerics

§2. No cleric may remain unattached or move around without a stable home in the Church.

Canon 161 – Incardination by Ordination

§1. When a man is ordained a deacon, he automatically becomes a cleric and is incardinated in the diocese or personal prelature that sponsored his ordination.

§2. A perpetually professed religious or a permanently incorporated member of a clerical society of apostolic life becomes incardinated in his own institute or society—unless that society’s constitutions say otherwise.

§3. A member of a secular institute, unless the Primate’s See has granted otherwise, is incardinated in the diocese that advanced him to the diaconate.

Canon 162 – Moving from One Diocese to Another

§1. To transfer incardination from Diocese A to Diocese B, a cleric needs:

1. A formal letter of excardination (release) from his current bishop
2. A formal letter of incardination (acceptance) from the bishop of the new diocese

§2. The release only takes effect once acceptance by the new diocese is secured.

Canon 163 – Conditions for Accepting a Cleric from Elsewhere

A bishop may only accept a cleric from another diocese if:

- a. His own diocese truly needs or benefits from that cleric
- b. He has proof of lawful excardination and confidential testimonials on the cleric's life, conduct and studies
- c. The cleric has expressed in writing his desire to serve permanently in the new diocese

Canon 164 – Fair Grounds for Release

Excardination may only be granted for good reasons, such as the cleric himself. It cannot be denied without serious cause. A cleric who believes he was unfairly refused may appeal to the Synod of Bishops, provided he has a bishop ready to accept him.

Canon 165 – Temporary Assignments Elsewhere

§1. A bishop can permit his clerics to work in another diocese for a fixed period, renewable as needed. During that time, they remain incardinated in their home diocese and retain all their rights when they return.

§2. For just reasons, either bishop may recall or refuse further residence to a cleric under these arrangements, always respecting the original agreement and natural justice.

Canon 166 – Limits on Diocesan Administrators

If the bishop's seat is vacant and an administrator runs the diocese, he may not grant excardination, incardination or permission to transfer unless the Bishop's Synod has given its consent.

Subsection VI

The Obligations and Rights of Clerics

Canon 167 – Reverence and Obedience

Clerics must show special respect and obedience to the Primate, to their own bishop, the Declaration and the canons, recognising their role in guiding the Church.

Canon 168 – Holding Church Offices and Accepting Duties

§1. Only ordained clerics may occupy roles that require the power of orders (for example, celebrating sacraments) or Church governance.

§2. Unless they have a valid reason, clerics are obliged to undertake and faithfully fulfil any ministry or office entrusted to them by their bishop.

Canon 169 – Brotherhood and Collaboration

§1. All clerics share the same mission of building up Christ's Body. They should cultivate bonds of brotherhood, support one another in prayer, and cooperate under any local rules set by the bishop.

§2. Clerics must honour and promote the role of the laity in the Church's mission, recognising how lay people bring Christ's message into the world.

Canon 170 – Striving for Holiness

Because clerics serve as stewards of God's mysteries, they must pursue personal holiness by:

- a. Faithfully carrying out every duty of pastoral ministry.
- b. Nourishing their spiritual life at the table of Scripture and the Eucharist. Priests are encouraged to celebrate Mass daily; deacons to participate in it every day.
- c. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours: all clerics do so daily.
- d. Making regular spiritual retreats.
- e. Engaging in mental prayer, frequent confession, Marian devotions, and other personal practices of sanctification.

Canon 171 – Clerical Associations

§1. Secular (diocesan) clerics may form or join associations aimed at supporting their life and ministry.

§2. The Church especially values groups officially recognised by ecclesiastical authority that foster holiness, fraternal support and unity with the bishop.

§3. Clerics must not join or establish any association whose purpose conflicts with their priestly or diaconal obligations.

Canon 172 – Lifelong Learning

§1. Even after ordination, clerics must deepen their understanding of Scripture, Tradition, Church councils and Primatial teaching, avoiding untested novelties and pseudo-sciences.

§2. Local law may require priests to attend ongoing pastoral lectures, theological conferences and other training to enhance their ministry skills.

§3. They should also study other fields—such as communications, psychology or social sciences—when it benefits their pastoral work.

Canon 173 – Support and Remuneration

§1. Clerics will exercise a secular profession to support their ministry, or for those who are full time can do so through reception of fees according to sacramental ministry.

§2. They must also have suitable social provisions—healthcare, pension and support during illness or old age.

Canon 174 – Simplicity and Generosity

Any goods or income received beyond their reasonable personal support should be used for the Church's needs and for works of charity.

Canon 175 – Residency and Rest

§1. Clerics may not be absent from their diocese for a significant period without their bishop's permission (or longer only if local law provides otherwise).

§2. They are entitled to a proper annual vacation.

Canon 176 – Clerical Attire

§1. Clerics are to wear appropriate ecclesiastical dress that reflects the dignity of their office and the unity of the Church. The following norms apply:

a. Principal dress

- House cassock, cincture and clerical collar with black shirt, suitable for daily use.
- All clerics may wear a black clerical shirt as ordinary attire.
- Bishops: black cassock with purple cincture, trim and zucchetto, signifying episcopal dignity.
- Primate: black cassock with red cincture, trim and zucchetto, signifying Primate authority.

b. Choir cassock colours

- Priests: black cassock.
- Bishops: purple cassock.
- Primate: red cassock.

c. Alternative dress

- A black or dark-coloured morning suit may be worn where appropriate, particularly in civic or academic settings.
- In equatorial or tropical regions, white cassocks may be worn, with trim matching one's clerical rank, ensuring practicality while maintaining ecclesiastical decorum.

d. Pectoral cross

- Bishops, archbishops and primates shall wear the pectoral cross over the clerical shirt or cassock, signifying their office and pastoral responsibility.

§2. Clerical attire shall be worn with dignity, simplicity and consistency, avoiding excess ornamentation or deviation from established norms.

§3. The diocesan bishop may issue particular directives regarding clerical dress in his diocese, provided these remain faithful to universal law and ecclesiastical tradition.

§4. Clerics are obliged to maintain their attire in good condition, ensuring that it reflects reverence for their office and the witness of the Church in public life.

Canon 177 – Conduct and Public Office

§1. Clerics must avoid anything deemed unbecoming to their state under local law. They are called to live in a manner that reflects the dignity of their vocation, avoiding scandal and maintaining a public witness that is consistent with the Gospel.

§2. Clerics should refrain from activities that, while not improper in themselves, do not fit the clerical life. This includes occupations, entertainments or social engagements that may diminish respect for their office or distract from their pastoral responsibilities.

§3. The diocesan bishop may issue particular norms to guide clerics in discerning what activities are appropriate, ensuring that their conduct remains in harmony with ecclesiastical tradition and the expectations of the faithful.

§4. Clerics are encouraged to cultivate simplicity, integrity and moderation in their public and private lives, so that their example strengthens the faith of the community.

Canon 178 – Military Service and Civil Exemptions

§1. Because military duty is generally incompatible with their spiritual role, clerics and candidates for ordination must not volunteer for the armed forces without the explicit permission of their diocesan bishop. This ensures that their primary commitment to pastoral ministry is safeguarded.

§2. Where civil law imposes obligations such as military service, clerics may seek exemptions in accordance with canonical and civil provisions, recognising the unique nature of their vocation.

§3. If a cleric is required to serve in some capacity, the diocesan bishop shall determine whether such service can be reconciled with the clerical state, ensuring that the priest's spiritual mission is not compromised.

§4. Clerics are encouraged to contribute to the common good through non-combatant roles, pastoral care for military personnel or other forms of service that align with their vocation, provided these are authorised by the bishop.

Subsection VII

Loss of the Clerical State

Canon 179 – How a Cleric Loses His Status

Although the sacramental mark of ordination can never be undone, a man who has been validly ordained can nonetheless lose the rights and duties of the clerical state in one of three ways:

- a. A formal Church court decision or administrative decree declares that the ordination was invalid (for example, if a required rite or intention was seriously defective).

- b. The cleric is lawfully dismissed from the clerical state as a penalty, typically for grave wrongdoing.
- c. The Primate issues a rescript granting laicisation – he may do so for very serious reasons in the case of priests, and for serious reasons in the case of deacons.

Canon 180 – Consequences of Losing the Clerical State

Once a cleric is laicised:

- a. He immediately loses every right and privilege proper to ordained ministry in the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church.
- b. He is no longer bound by the obligations of the clerical state.
- c. He may not exercise any power of orders—he cannot validly celebrate sacraments (except in the narrow case of danger of death, to baptise).
- d. He is stripped of all offices, functions and any delegated authority he once held.

Canon 181 – Returning to the Clerical State

A cleric who has been laicised cannot re-enter the clerical state without a special rescript (decree) from the Primatial See.

Section II

Subsection I

Associations of The Christian Faithful

Canon 182 – Nature and Purpose of Associations

§1. In the Church there exist groups—distinct from religious institutes and apostolic societies—whose members (whether clergy, laity or both) unite to:

- a. Grow in Christian holiness
- b. Encourage public worship and sound teaching
- c. Carry out works of the apostolate (evangelisation, devotions, charity)
- d. Bring a Gospel spirit into everyday life

§2. Christians are especially encouraged to join those associations that have been formally established, praised or commended by the appropriate Church authority.

Canon 183 – Private Associations

The faithful may freely form associations by private agreement to pursue the aims of Canon 298, subject to Canon 301 §1. Even if recognised or commended by Church leaders, these remain private associations until their statutes have been reviewed and approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Canon 184 – Public Associations

§1. Only the competent Church authority may establish associations that act in the Church's name—teaching doctrine, promoting worship or carrying out tasks reserved to that authority.

§2. When private initiatives prove insufficient, that same authority may found public associations to pursue other spiritual objectives.

§3. Such officially erected groups are called public associations.

Canon 185 – Clerical Associations

Associations directed by clerics, exercising functions proper to ordained ministry and recognised by Church authority, are known as clerical associations.

Canon 186 – Third Orders and Related Groups

Lay faithful who live out the spirit of a religious institute while remaining in the world—leading an apostolic life under that institute's guidance—are typically organised as third orders or under a similar title.

Canon 187 – Statutes and Name of an Association

§1. Every public or private association must adopt statutes that clearly state its purpose, headquarters, governance structure, membership criteria and method of operation, adapted to local needs.

§2. Each association chooses a name suitable to its mission and cultural context.

Canon 188 – Oversight and Inspection

§1. All associations answer to the Primate See, which safeguards faith and morals and prevents any abuse of discipline. This authority may inspect them in accordance with Church law and their own statutes.

§2. The Primate See oversees associations worldwide; diocesan associations (and all groups active in a diocese) additionally answer to the local bishop.

Canon 189 – Membership Rights and Spiritual Favours

A person validly received into an association—who has not been lawfully dismissed—automatically enjoys its rights, privileges, indulgences and any spiritual favours granted to the group.

Canon 190 – Admission and Multiple Memberships

§1. Reception into an association follows Church law and that group's statutes.

§2. Individuals may belong to more than one association simultaneously.

§3. Members of religious institutes may join other associations in accordance with their own institute's law and with their superior's consent.

Canon 191 – Dismissal of Members

Once lawfully enrolled, a member may be removed only for a just cause and in accordance with Church law and the association's statutes.

Canon 192 – Internal Governance

Legitimately established associations have the right to:

- a. Issue their own internal norms
- b. Convene meetings
- c. Elect or appoint moderators, officers and administrators of their goods
All in conformity with Church law and their statutes.

Canon 193 – Private Associations and Legal Personality

A private association without juridical personality cannot itself hold rights or obligations. However, its members may jointly:

- a. Enter contracts
- b. Acquire and own property as co-owners or co-holders
They exercise these rights through an authorised agent or proxy.

Canon 194 – Associations Linked to Religious Institutes

Members of religious institutes who oversee or support associations connected to their community must ensure these groups assist existing diocesan apostolates, cooperating with them under the local bishop's direction.

Subsection II

Public Associations of the Christian Faithful

Canon 195 – Who May Erect Public Associations

§1. The following authorities can establish public associations:

- The Primatial See for associations with universal or international scope.
- The bishops' conference in its territory for national associations active throughout a single country.

- The diocesan bishop (not an administrator) for diocesan associations, unless another authority has exclusive rights by special privilege.

§2. Even when founded by higher privilege, any public association or its local branch needs the written consent of the diocesan bishop.

§3. When a diocesan bishop consents to the founding of a religious house, that consent also covers forming an affiliated association in the same church or premises.

Canon 196 – Juridical Personality and Mission

A public association (or federation of them) becomes a juridical person by the same decree that erects it. At the same time, it receives the mandate—if required—to pursue its mission in the name of the Church.

Canon 197 – Approval of Statutes and Amendments

The statutes of every public association, along with any revisions or amendments, must be approved by the authority that erected the association.

Canon 198 – Initiative and Oversight

Public associations may undertake activities fitting their character on their own initiative, in accordance with their statutes, but always under the supervisory authority of the body that erected them.

Canon 199 – Exclusion and Dismissal for Schism or Excommunication

§1. Anyone who has publicly rejected the Catholic faith, broken ecclesial communion, or been lawfully excommunicated cannot be validly admitted to a public association.

§2. A member who falls into such a situation, after receiving due warning, must be dismissed according to the statutes, with a right of appeal to the authority of the Primate, episcopal conference or diocesan bishop.

Canon 200 – Appointment and Removal of Moderators and Chaplains

§1. Unless the statutes say otherwise, the authority of the Primate, episcopal conference or diocesan bishop:

- a. Confirms or institutes the moderator elected by the association, or appoints one directly.
- b. Appoints the chaplain or ecclesiastical assistant after consulting the association’s senior officers.

§2. For associations founded by religious institutes outside their own houses, the same external authority applies. Within their own church or house, the institute’s superior names or confirms these officials per the statutes.

§3. In non-clerical associations, laypersons may serve as moderators; a clerical chaplain acts only if the statutes permit.

§4. Individuals holding political-party leadership may not serve as moderators of apostolic public associations.

Canon 201 – Temporary Trusteeship and Removal of Officials

§1 In exceptional cases, the authority of the Primate, episcopal conference or diocesan bishop may appoint a trustee to govern the association on its behalf for a limited time. This measure is reserved for situations in which the association cannot function according to its statutes or when serious irregularities require temporary external oversight. The trustee exercises governance only within the limits defined by the appointing authority and solely for the duration necessary to restore proper order.

§2 That same authority may remove a moderator or chaplain for just cause, after hearing the person concerned and the association’s principal officers, following the statutes or canons. This ensures that removal is neither arbitrary nor punitive, but grounded in justice, transparency and the good of the association.

Canon 202 – Financial Accountability

§1 Unless the statutes provide otherwise, a public association administers its own assets in line with its statutes, under the higher direction of the authority of Canon 312 §1, to whom it must render an annual account. This oversight safeguards ecclesial stewardship, ensuring that temporal goods are used faithfully for the association’s mission.

§2 It must also give a faithful report of offerings and alms collected. Such transparency protects the integrity of charitable work and maintains the trust of the faithful who contribute to the association’s apostolate.

Canon 203 – Suppression of Public Associations

§1 Only the Primatial See may suppress associations it has erected. This preserves hierarchical order and ensures that suppression is undertaken only with full ecclesial authority.

§2 For grave reasons, a bishops’ conference may suppress associations it founded; a diocesan bishop may suppress those he erected and those founded by religious-institute privilege with his consent. The gravity of reasons must be proportionate to the seriousness of suppression, which affects the rights of the faithful and the continuity of apostolic works.

§3 Before suppression, the competent authority must hear the association’s moderator and senior officers. This guarantees procedural fairness, allows the association to present its position, and ensures that the decision is made with full knowledge of the circumstances.

Subsection III

Private Associations of the Christian Faithful

Canon 204 – Internal Governance

Private associations of the faithful govern themselves according to their own statutes, under the guidance of their members.

Canon 205 – Obtaining Juridical Personality

§1. A private association may become a juridical person by formal decree of the authority of the Primate, diocesan bishop or episcopal conference.

§2. Such recognition requires prior approval of its statutes but does not alter its private character.

Canon 206 – Oversight and Good Order

§1. Although private associations enjoy autonomy, they remain under the vigilance and, when necessary, the governance of Church authority, to protect faith and morality and prevent disorder.

§2. That authority ensures associations direct their apostolic work towards the common good and avoid dissipating their energies.

Canon 207 – Moderators and Spiritual Advisors

§1. A private association freely chooses its moderator and officers in line with its statutes.

§2. It may select a priest as spiritual advisor, subject to confirmation by the local bishop.

Canon 208 – Administration of Goods

§1. Private associations manage their own property according to their statutes, while Church authority ensures these assets serve the association's purpose.

§2. The local bishop oversees the administration and distribution of goods donated or bequeathed for pious causes (Canon 1301).

Canon 209 – Cessation and Distribution of Assets

§1. A private association ceases to exist as specified in its statutes; the competent authority may also suppress it for grave harm to doctrine, discipline or scandal.

§2. The disposition of its remaining goods follows its statutes, respecting donors' intentions and any acquired rights.

Subsection IV

Special Norms for Associations of the Laity

Canon 210 – Value of Lay Associations

Lay faithful should prize associations that aim, above all, to animate the secular world with Christian values and to foster unity between faith and daily life.

Canon 211 – Cooperation with Other Apostolates

Leaders of lay associations—even those founded by special privilege—must ensure their groups collaborate with other Christian associations in the area and support diocesan works under the bishop’s direction.

Canon 212 – Formation for the Lay Apostolate

Moderators of lay associations are responsible for ensuring members receive proper formation to carry out the unique apostolate entrusted to the laity.

Section III

Hierarchy of the Church

Subsection I

The Primate

Canon 213 – Primatial See

For the purposes of these canons, the term “Primatial See” denotes:

- a. The episcopal see whose archbishop bears the title of Primate and enjoys precedence of honour over all bishoprics.
- b. The curial offices and defined ecclesiastical territory through which the Primate fulfils his ceremonial, pastoral and administrative functions.

Canon 214 – Petrine Ministry

§1. St Peter and the other Apostles form one apostolic college. In the same way, the Primate (as a successor to the ministry of St Peter) and all bishops (as the Apostles’ successors) form a single college united in mission and authority. By virtue of their episcopal consecration and communion with the Primate, all bishops share in the Petrine office, each participating in the pastoral governance of the universal Church and thus manifesting its apostolic unity.

§2. The apostolic college is seen today in the governance of the Church, in the form of the Synod of Bishops, the ecclesial body of bishops that governs the church and confers executive authority to the Primate.

Canon 215 – Authority of the Primate

§1. A newly elected Primate gains authority immediately upon accepting his election. His acceptance alone confers the fullness of Primatial jurisdiction, without the need for further confirmation.

§2. If the Primate resigns, that resignation becomes valid by his free and clear declaration. No external approval or ratification is required, ensuring that the office is entered and vacated by the Primate's own consent.

Canon 216 – Scope of Primatial Authority

§1. The Primate's authority extends over the entire Church and holds first place above every local diocese. His office is exercised not to diminish but to enhance and safeguard each bishop's own authority, ensuring unity of faith and discipline while respecting the legitimate autonomy of local governance.

§2. The Primate remains in communion with all bishops, acting as a visible sign of unity. He may choose to act alone in matters requiring decisive leadership, or together with the bishops when collegiality best serves the Church. This balance preserves the collaborative nature of episcopal ministry while affirming his unique Primatial responsibility as supreme pastor.

§3. Only a special convocation of the Synod of Bishops may reverse a decision of the Primate, and such reversal requires a unanimous vote. This safeguard underscores the stability, gravity and weight of Primatial authority, ensuring that his decisions are not lightly overturned and that the unity of the Church is preserved.

§4. The Primate shall exercise his authority with pastoral charity, prudence and fidelity to the Gospel, always mindful that his Primatial See exists to strengthen communion, safeguard doctrine and promote the mission of the Church throughout the world.

Canon 217 – Episcopal Support of the Primate

Bishops, through various bodies such as the Synod of Bishops, support the Primate in his universal ministry. Acting in his name and under his authority, they assist him for the good of the entire Church, always within the bounds set by law. Their collaboration ensures that Primatial governance is exercised in communion with the episcopate.

Canon 218 – Governance During Vacancy or Impediment

When the Primatial See is vacant or impeded, the ordinary governance of the Church continues unchanged through the authority of the Synod of Bishops. This provision ensures stability, continuity and the uninterrupted exercise of ecclesiastical governance until the See is filled or restored.

Subsection II

The Synod of Bishops

Canon 219 – The Synod of Bishops as a College

§1. Together with the Primate as their head, all bishops form one college called the Synod of Bishops. This college expresses the unity of the episcopate under the Primatial See, manifesting the communion of bishops in the governance of the Church.

§2. By virtue of their consecration and communion with the Primate, bishops share supreme authority over the universal Church—always in union with the Primate, never apart from him. This ensures that episcopal authority is exercised collegially, safeguarding unity while affirming the Primatial role.

Canon 220 – Exercise of Synodal Authority

§1. The Synod of Bishops exercises its highest authority through regular meetings, which provide a structured forum for collegial deliberation and discernment.

§2. It also acts collegially through decisions or statements made by the bishops, once the Primate has recognised or accepted those as genuine collegial acts, thereby ensuring their binding character.

§3. The Primate works together with the bishops, acting in communion for the good of the universal Church, ensuring that synodal authority strengthens unity, mission and fidelity to the Gospel.

Canon 221 – Convocation and Governance of Synod

§1. Only the Primate can call, preside over, transfer, suspend or dissolve a meeting of the Synod of Bishops, ensuring that synodal gatherings remain under Primatial authority.

§2. Only the Synod of Bishops may approve changes to canons, doctrine or church governance, ensuring that such matters are treated with collegial authority and discernment.

§3. The Primate alone decides the council's topics and order of business. Bishops may propose additional questions, but these require the Primate's approval to be considered, safeguarding order and coherence in synodal deliberations.

Canon 222 – Membership and Participation in Synod

§1. All bishops who belong to the synod have the right and duty to vote in synod, reflecting their responsibility in governing the Church.

§2. The Primate may also invite other non-bishops and assign them roles, according to the needs of the Church.

§3. Non-bishop attendees to synod are observers only, with no voting privileges, ensuring clarity of authority while allowing broader consultation.

Canon 223 – Binding Force of Synodal Decrees

§1. No synod decree binds the Church unless it is approved by the Primate along with the synod fathers, confirmed by him and promulgated at his instruction.

§2. The same process applies to any other truly collegial act of the bishops authorised by the Primate, ensuring that all binding acts are exercised in communion with Primatial authority.

Canon 224 – Nature and Purpose of the Synod of Bishops

A Synod of Bishops is a consultative assembly formed of all diocesan bishops in ordinary. It meets periodically to:

- a. Strengthen unity between the Primate and the bishops, ensuring communion in governance and mission.
- b. Advise the Primate on matters of faith, morals and discipline, offering collective wisdom for the safeguarding of doctrine.
- c. Consider practical questions concerning the Church's mission, so that pastoral strategies remain effective and responsive to contemporary needs.

Canon 225 – Deliberations and Recommendations of Synod

The Synod of Bishops may discuss issues, make recommendations and vote on matters that are brought to its attention by the Primate. Its consultative role ensures that episcopal wisdom informs Primalial governance, while decisions remain rooted in communion with the Primate's authority.

Canon 226 – Primalial Authority in Synod Governance

The Primate operates under his own authority when he:

- a. Calls the synod together in convocation, ensuring its proper assembly.
- b. Supervises the election and appointment of its members, safeguarding legitimacy and fairness.
- c. Sets its questions and agenda, directing deliberations toward matters of genuine ecclesial importance.
- d. Presides over, concludes, transfers, suspends or dissolves the synod, exercising Primalial oversight to maintain order and continuity.

Canon 227 – Types of Synodal Sessions

§1. Sessions of the Synod of Bishops may be convened in different forms, according to the needs of the Church:

- a. Ordinary General – addressing matters of the universal Church, providing regular consultation and guidance on faith, discipline and mission.
- b. Extraordinary General – convened for urgent universal concerns, allowing the bishops to respond swiftly to crises or pressing issues affecting the whole Church.
- c. Special – focused on one or more regions, addressing particular pastoral or doctrinal needs, and ensuring that local circumstances are considered within the wider communion of the Church.

§2. The Primate determines the type of session to be held, ensuring that the synod responds appropriately to the pastoral and doctrinal needs of the Church.

§3. Each session, whether ordinary, extraordinary or special, shall be conducted with fidelity to the Gospel, respect for episcopal collegiality and in communion with the Primate, so that the synod strengthens the unity and mission of the Church.

Canon 228 - Composition, Convocation and Procedures of the Synod of Bishops

§1 Participation

§1.1 All bishops who are ordinaries and who remain in full communion with the Primate have the right to participate in meetings of the Synod of Bishops and to take part in its deliberations on matters that concern the universal Church.

§1.2 Participation carries both the right to be heard and the duty to collaborate for the good of the Church; those who attend are bound to act in fidelity to doctrine, charity and the disciplinary norms of the Church.

§2 Convocation.

§2.1 The Primate convokes the Synod of Bishops and is responsible for receiving proposals, petitions or matters submitted for consideration by any bishop.

§2.2 Upon receiving submissions, the Primate reviews them and determines whether a subject properly falls within the competence of the Synod of Bishops or whether it more appropriately belongs to a bishops' conference, a provincial council, a diocesan synod, or some other local forum.

§3 Types of Session.

3.1 Ordinary General Session – Convened at regular intervals to address ongoing or recurring concerns of the universal Church and to provide stable guidance. The Ordinary General Session may be conducted wholly or partly by secure digital means (for example, approved e-mail channels, encrypted video conference platforms, or authorised messaging systems), provided that such methods preserve confidentiality, the integrity of deliberation, and the capacity to authenticate participants.

§3.2 Extraordinary General Session

1. Called at the Primate's discretion to address urgent doctrinal, disciplinary or other matters that require prompt assembly and resolution. The convocation for an extraordinary session should explain the urgency, the limited agenda, and the expected procedural adaptations to ensure prompt and careful consideration.
2. Convened to evaluate recommendations from ordinaries who nominate the elevation of one of their own as bishop. Also to discuss and interrogate the application of incardination.

§3.3 Special Session – Assembled to consider questions that are particular to one or more specified regions, cultural areas or particular pastoral situations; attendance and the agenda are adjusted to ensure representation and expertise relevant to the topic.

§4 Voting Procedures.

§4.1 Binding votes on matters that affect law, doctrine or theology shall be conducted by a secure, authenticated and anonymous platform accessible to all eligible bishops; the technical system employed must guarantee the identity of voters, preserve secrecy of the ballot, protect

against manipulation, and produce a certified record of participation while keeping individual votes confidential.

§4.2 The timeframe for each vote (opening and closing dates and times) must be announced in writing at least forty-eight hours in advance, except in truly exceptional circumstances where a shorter notice is justified for urgent matters and is authorised by the Primate.

§4.3 Ballots submitted after the declared closing time are not counted; the Synod secretariat is charged with certifying the results immediately after the close of voting and issuing an official report that records participation and outcome without disclosing individual choices.

§4.4 Where canonical law requires a particular majority for validity (absolute majority, two-thirds, unanimity, or other), the required majority is to be clearly stated in advance and computed in accordance with the Synod's statutes.

§5 Eligibility to Vote and Advisory Participation.

§5.1 Only bishops who possess ordinary powers (diocesan ordinaries or those who legitimately exercise equivalent ordinary jurisdiction) have the right to vote in the Synod of Bishops; this voting competence is tied to the ordinary jurisdiction vested in the bishop and to full communion with the Primate.

§5.2 Suffragan and auxiliary bishops, while normally excluded from voting, may be invited to attend in an advisory capacity; such advisers have the right to address the Synod, to pose questions, to present material and to participate in debate, but they do not cast binding votes unless they have been lawfully assigned ordinary voting rights under specific provisions of the Synod's statutes.

§5.3 Where a bishop with ordinary voting rights is impeded (for example by illness or by incapacity), the statutes must indicate whether a proxy, a designated substitute, or an alternative method of representation is permissible and, if so, under what conditions and with what formalities.

§6 Quorum, Majorities and Certification.

§6.1 The Synod's statutes shall determine the quorum necessary for deliberation and for valid voting; unless otherwise provided, a majority of those who are lawfully summoned constitutes the ordinary quorum for business.

§6.2 The secretariat certifies the validity of any vote and the attainment of the required majorities and reports the certified results to the Primate and to the assembly in accordance with the Synod's procedural rules. Certified outcomes, when they concern matters of doctrine or law, are communicated to the competent authorities for any subsequent steps required by universal or particular law.

§7 Integrity, Security and Archival of Decisions.

§7.1 All procedures, whether in-person or digital, must honour the integrity of synodal deliberation, preserve confidentiality where required, and comply with applicable canonical and civil norms on data protection and record-keeping.

§7.2 Final acts, decrees, or binding conclusions of the Synod, and the official certified record of votes, are to be preserved in the Synod archives under the custody of the secretariat and made available to competent authorities in accordance with canonical norms.

Canon 229

If the Primatial See becomes vacant before or during a session, the synod pauses until the new Primate either continues or dissolves it.

Subsection III

Legates of the Primate

Canon 230 – Appointment and Recall of Legates

The Primate has the right to appoint, send, transfer and recall his own legates to:

- a. Particular churches in different nations or regions
- b. States and public authorities (in which case international law governing diplomatic missions must be observed)

Canon 231 – Office and Representation of Legates

A Primatial legate permanently represents the Primate before the local churches or civil authorities to which he is sent.

Any cleric or official sent by the Primatial See as a delegate or observer to international councils, conferences or similar gatherings likewise represents the Primatial See.

Canon 232 – Principal Duties of a Primatial Legate

A Primatial legate's chief task is to strengthen the bonds of unity between the Primatial See and the particular churches. In his assigned territory, he will:

- a. Report regularly to the Primatial See on the state of the local Church and the welfare of the faithful.
- b. Assist local bishops with advice and support, without infringing their proper authority.
- c. Foster close collaboration with the national bishops' conference, offering every form of assistance.
- d. Participate in the process for naming bishops by transmitting or proposing candidates' names to the Primatial See and overseeing the necessary inquiries.
- e. Promote peace, social progress and cooperative endeavour among peoples.

- f. Work alongside bishops to cultivate constructive relations with other Churches, ecclesial communities and non-Christian religions.
- g. Jointly with local bishops, defend the Church's rights and interests before civil authorities.
- h. Exercise any additional faculties or carry out other tasks assigned by the Primate.

Canon 233 – Exemptions and Liturgical Privileges

Because of his unique commission:

- a. The premises of a Holy legation are exempt from the jurisdiction of the local ordinary.
- b. After notifying the local bishops in advance where possible, a Primate legate may preside at liturgical ceremonies in any church within his legation, even employing the liturgical rites reserved to episcopal authority.

Canon 234 – End of the Legate's Mandate

A Holy legate remains in office even if the Primate See becomes vacant, unless his commission letter provides otherwise. His authority does, however, cease when:

- a. He has fulfilled the purpose of his mandate.
- b. He has been officially recalled.
- c. The Primate accepts his resignation.

Section IV

Subsection I

Grouping of Particular Churches

Canon 235 – What Is a Particular Church?

Particular churches are the local communities in which—and from which—the one, Holy, catholic and apostolic Church truly lives and acts. The most common form of a particular church is a diocese. Unless it is clearly otherwise, the following are treated as equivalent to a diocese:

- a. **Territorial prelatore**: a region entrusted to a prelate (not necessarily a bishop) for special pastoral or historical reasons.
- b. **Territorial abbacy**: a territory placed under an abbot instead of a bishop, with similar pastoral structures.
- c. **Episcopal vicariate**: a territory not yet organised as a diocese, overseen by an episcopal vicar acting in the name of the Primate.

- d. **Episcopal prefecture:** like an episcopal vicariate but led by an episcopal prefect.
- e. **Episcopal administration:** a territory permanently governed by an episcopal administrator for particular grave or exceptional reasons.

Canon 236 – Diocese Defined

A diocese is a defined portion of the People of God entrusted to a diocesan bishop. Together with his presbyterium (the body of priests assigned to that diocese), the bishop shepherds the faithful. By remaining close to their pastor and gathering around him in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, the diocese becomes a genuine local or particular church in which Christ's one, Holy, catholic and apostolic Church is truly present and at work.

Canon 237 – Territorial Prelature and Territorial Abbacy

§1. A territorial prelature or territorial abbacy is a geographically defined area whose pastoral care, for special reasons, is entrusted to:

- A prelate (in a territorial prelature)
- An abbot (in a territorial abbacy)

§2. In both cases, that prelate or abbot governs the territory as its proper pastor, exercising authority comparable to that of a diocesan bishop.

Canon 238 – Episcopal Vicariate, Prefecture and Administration

§1. An episcopal vicariate or episcopal prefecture is a territory not yet erected as a diocese because of special circumstances (often missionary or developing regions). It is entrusted to an episcopal vicar or episcopal prefect, who governs it in the name of the Primate.

§2. An episcopal administration is a territory that, for particularly grave or exceptional reasons, the Primate has not erected as a diocese. Its pastoral care is entrusted to an episcopal administrator, who likewise governs in the name of the Primate.

Canon 239 – Territorial Boundaries of Particular Churches

§1. As a general rule, each diocese or other particular church covers a definite geographical territory and includes all the faithful living there.

§2. However, if the Primate—after consulting the relevant bishops' conferences—judges it pastorally advantageous, more than one particular church may be established within the same territory, provided there is a genuine distinction (for example, different liturgical rites or other real pastoral needs).

Canon 240 – Who Can Erect a Particular Church

Only the Primate has the authority to establish (erect) a new particular church. Once lawfully erected, a particular church automatically acquires juridical personality, meaning it can hold property, enter into contracts and carry out legal actions in its own name.

Canon 241 – Parishes and Vicariates Forane

§1. Every diocese or other particular church must be subdivided into parishes, each under the care of a parish priest. This ensures that the faithful can more readily receive the sacraments and pastoral care.

§2. To promote joint pastoral activity and mutual support, neighbouring parishes may be grouped into clusters known as **vicariates forane** (or deaneries). Each cluster is overseen by a vicar forane (also called a dean), who fosters collaboration among the priests.

Subsection II

Bishops In General

Canon 242 – The Office of a Bishop

§1. By divine institution, bishops succeed the Apostles through the gift of the Holy Spirit. They are constituted pastors in the Church, exercising a threefold ministry:

- a. Teaching doctrine
- b. Celebrating sacred worship
- c. Governing the faithful

§2. Through episcopal consecration, a bishop receives the spiritual power to sanctify, teach and govern. These ministries must always be exercised in hierarchical communion with:

- a. The Primate (as head of the Synod of Bishops)
- b. The other members of the Synod of Bishops

§3. Hierarchical communion refers to the unity and mutual collaboration among the Primate and all bishops as successors of the Apostles.

Canon 243 – Diocesan and Titular Bishops

§1. Diocesan bishops are entrusted with the pastoral care of a specific diocese, exercising full authority there.

§2. Titular bishops hold the title of an ancient or defunct diocese but do not govern a territorial Church; they often serve as auxiliaries, in diplomatic service or in curial roles.

§3. A diocese is an active local Church, whereas a titular see no longer functions as a territorial diocese.

Canon 244 – Appointment of Bishops

§1. Only the Synod of Bishops, through convocation of the Primate, freely appoints bishops. The Primate confirms those legitimately chosen.

§2. The Primatial See is responsible for issuing the faculties and mandates of all new bishops, whether through laying on of hands or through incardination.

§2. Each archdiocese can nominate a list of bishops of each ecclesiastical province (a group of neighbouring dioceses under a metropolitan archbishop) or, when appropriate, each conference of bishops, meet to draw up a list of three priests (a terna)—secular or religious—most suited for the episcopate. Each diocesan bishop may also submit names independently to the Primate.

§3. When a Primatial legate is involved in proposing a terna, he must:

- a. Consult the metropolitan and suffragan bishops of the province (or episcopal grouping) and the president of the bishops' conference
- b. Seek the advice of the local Synod of Bishops
- c. If judged necessary, confidentially consult other clergy and laypersons of notable wisdom

§4. Should a diocesan bishop request an auxiliary, he forwards to the Primate a list of at least three suitable priests.

§5. No civil authority has any right to elect, nominate, present or designate bishops.

Canon 245 – Qualifications for the Episcopate

§1. A candidate for the episcopacy must be:

- a. Outstanding in faith, morals, piety, zeal for souls, wisdom, prudence and other human virtues
- b. Of good reputation
- c. Ordained first as a deacon and then priest
- d. Holder of a masters or licentiate in sacred scripture, theology or canon law, or at least truly expert in these disciplines
- e. Be a priest ordained for at least five years
- f. The Primate may issue dispensation for cases of need where a priest has served less than five years as a priest, depending on the need of a given diocese

§2. The final judgment on a candidate's suitability rests solely with the Primate. The final list of names put to the Synod of Bishops will be presented by the Primate.

Canon 246 – Timeframe for Episcopal Consecration

Unless prevented by a legitimate impediment, a bishop-elect must receive episcopal consecration:

- a. Within six months of receiving the Primatial mandate of appointment
- b. And before taking possession of his office

Canon 247 – Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity

§1. Before taking canonical possession, the bishop-elect must:

- a. Make the profession of faith (the Nicene Creed)
- b. Swear the oath of fidelity to the Primatial See, using the formula approved by the Primate

§2. These acts affirm his communion with the universal Church and his unwavering loyalty to its supreme authority.

Subsection III

Diocesan Bishops

Canon 248 – Authority in the Diocese

§1. Scope of Power: Within his diocese, the diocesan bishop possesses all the ordinary (attached to his office), proper (belonging personally to him) and immediate (exercised directly) power required to carry out his pastoral ministry.

§2. Exceptions: This authority extends to everything except those matters that canon law or a Primatial decree specifically reserves to the Primate or to another Church authority.

§3. Equivalent Ordinaries: Leaders of other stable local Churches such as territorial prelaties, territorial abbeys, episcopal vicariates or prefectures, and episcopal administrations, enjoy the same canonical standing as diocesan bishops unless the law or nature of the office indicates otherwise.

Canon 249 – Taking Canonical Possession

§1. No Exercise Before Possession: A bishop-elect may not exercise his new office until he has taken canonical possession of the diocese. He may continue in any roles he already held there (e.g. as vicar) during the transition.

§2. Time Limits: If not yet consecrated, he must take possession within four months of receiving his Primatial mandate.

§3. If already a bishop, he must do so within two months.

§4. Formal Procedure: The consecration of a new bishop cannot continue until the Primatial mandate is read out by the principal consecrating bishop during ordination rite.

§5. Liturgical Celebration: It is highly recommended that the act of taking possession be incorporated into a liturgical ceremony—ideally a Mass with priests and laity gathered.

Canon 250 – Pastoral Care of All

§1. Universal Concern: The bishop cares for every baptised person in his territory—of any age, status or nationality, whether resident or visitor—and reaches out to those who cannot access ordinary pastoral care or who have fallen away.

§2. Ecumenical Charity: He treats Christians not in full communion with humanity and charity, promoting ecumenical dialogue as the Church teaches.

§3. Outreach to the Non-baptised: He regards non-baptised persons as entrusted to his care, witnessing Christ's love to all.

Canon 251 – Pastoral care of priests

§1. The bishop, with special attention to his priests, shall treat them as collaborators in the episcopal ministry and shall foster a climate of fraternal trust and mutual counsel.

- a. Listen as collaborators and counsellors. The bishop shall provide regular, structured opportunities for priests to offer counsel, to share pastoral experience, and to participate in consultative bodies, giving due weight to their informed judgment in matters that affect pastoral life.
- b. Safeguard canonical rights. The bishop shall respect and protect the canonical rights of priests, ensuring fair process in matters of assignment, discipline, remuneration, and benefits, and guaranteeing access to the rights of recourse and canonical defense.
- c. Ensure proper spiritual and intellectual support. The bishop shall provide for ongoing spiritual formation, regular opportunities for retreat and spiritual direction, and for intellectual and pastoral formation suited to contemporary needs; he shall ensure that priests have access to resources, supervision, and collegial support necessary to fulfil their priestly duties faithfully.

§2. Formation and wellbeing. The bishop shall promote programs of continuing formation, health and wellbeing, and clergy care, including measures for prevention, early intervention, and rehabilitation where needed.

§3. Assignments and oversight. In making and reviewing assignments the bishop shall balance pastoral needs with the legitimate rights and personal circumstances of priests, provide clear mandates and expectations, and offer appropriate oversight and mentoring.

§4. Transparency and accountability. The bishop shall act with pastoral prudence and transparency in matters affecting priests, keep records of decisions affecting their status, and ensure that any restrictions or sanctions are proportionate, documented, and subject to canonical remedies.

§5. Cooperation with presbyteral bodies. The bishop shall work in close cooperation with the presbyteral council, clergy conferences, and other consultative structures to implement these duties and to foster a shared responsibility for the pastoral care of priests.

Canon 252 – Cultivating Vocations

§1. Obligation of the bishop. The bishop shall actively foster vocations to all forms of ministry and consecrated life, giving particular emphasis to priestly and missionary vocations; he shall

promote a pastoral culture in which vocation is recognised, encouraged, and accompanied from first awareness through lifelong formation.

§2. Pastoral initiatives. The bishop shall establish and support concrete programs for vocation promotion, including:

- a. parish and diocesan vocation ministries;
- b. regular vocation awareness events and retreats;
- c. collaboration with schools, universities, and youth ministries to present Christian vocations attractively and faithfully.

§3. Discernment and accompaniment. The bishop shall ensure that those who sense a vocation receive careful spiritual discernment and accompaniment:

- a. qualified spiritual directors and vocation directors shall be available;
- b. clear, accessible pathways for inquiry, discernment, and admission to formation shall be published;
- c. discernment processes shall respect the freedom, conscience, and pastoral needs of candidates.

§4. Formation and preparation. The bishop shall provide for sound initial and ongoing formation appropriate to each state of life and ministry:

- a. theological, pastoral, and spiritual formation for candidates to the diaconate, priesthood, and consecrated life;
- b. missionary preparation for those called to evangelisation beyond the local church;
- c. continuing education and spiritual renewal for clergy and consecrated persons.

§5. Support for families and communities. The bishop shall promote family and communal environments that foster vocations by:

- a. encouraging parents, catechists, and parish communities to nurture vocational sensitivity;
- b. offering resources and formation for families to accompany young people in discernment;
- c. recognizing and supporting lay movements and associations that cultivate vocational fruitfulness.

§6. Selection, prudence and safeguards. In selecting candidates for formation the bishop shall apply prudential judgment and canonical norms, safeguarding the integrity of the Church and the welfare of candidates by:

- a. ensuring psychological, moral, and pastoral suitability assessments;
- b. protecting vulnerable persons and observing norms for safeguarding and background checks;
- c. providing remedial or alternative pastoral pathways when a candidate is not admitted to or does not complete formation.

§7. Collaboration and missionary outreach. The bishop shall work with the bishops' conference, religious institutes, seminaries, and missionary societies to coordinate vocation promotion, share resources, and respond to local and global needs for ministers and missionaries.

§8. Evaluation and accountability. The bishop shall periodically evaluate vocation programs, formation outcomes, and pastoral strategies, reporting to the competent ecclesiastical authority and adapting initiatives to changing pastoral circumstances.

Canon 253 – Ministry of the Word

§1. Preaching duty. By frequent preaching the bishop proposes, explains, and applies the truths of faith and morals. He shall:

- a. Promote fidelity. Ensure that preaching and catechesis faithfully transmit the Church's doctrine and moral teaching.
- b. Regulate practice. See to the strict observance of norms governing preaching, homilies, and catechetical instruction, so that the faithful receive coherent and authentic formation.
- c. Model proclamation. Preach regularly himself and encourage priests and deacons to preach with doctrinal soundness, pastoral charity, and pastoral effectiveness.

§2. Defending doctrine. The bishop safeguards the integrity and unity of the faith while respecting a legitimate freedom for scholarly study of its mysteries. He shall:

- a. Correct error. Address public or persistent doctrinal error with clarity and pastoral charity, using correction, instruction, and, where necessary, canonical remedies.
- b. Foster theological inquiry. Encourage legitimate theological and scholarly research, ensuring that such inquiry is pursued in communion with the Church and under appropriate ecclesiastical oversight.
- c. Balance freedom and unity. Permit academic freedom within the bounds of fidelity to the Magisterium and the common good of the Church.

§3. Implementation and oversight. The bishop shall provide formation, guidelines, and review mechanisms for preachers and catechists, including programs of homiletic formation, theological updating, and periodic evaluation, and shall coordinate these efforts with the presbyteral council, the diocesan office for catechesis, and other competent bodies.

Canon 254 – Example of Holiness and Sacramental Ministry

§1. Personal holiness. The bishop shall model charity, humility, and simplicity of life, fostering by word and example the call to holiness proper to each state of life. He shall:

- a. Live a life of prayer and penance, cultivating personal devotion, regular sacramental practice, and spiritual direction;
- b. Witness pastoral charity, showing special care for the poor, the sick, and the marginalized;
- c. Avoid scandal and ostentation, exercising stewardship of goods with prudence and transparency;
- d. Encourage the faithful, promoting spiritual disciplines, works of mercy, and the pursuit of holiness in families, parishes, and ecclesial movements.

§2. Sacramental nourishment. As chief dispenser of the sacraments the bishop shall ensure that the faithful grow in grace through frequent celebration of the Eucharist and a deepened appreciation of the paschal mystery. He shall:

- a. Preside and promote the Eucharist, celebrating and fostering frequent, reverent, and well-prepared liturgies in which the paschal mystery is clearly proclaimed and lived;
- b. Guarantee access to the sacraments, providing for regular celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrament of reconciliation, and other sacraments appropriate to the needs of the faithful;
- c. Foster liturgical and catechetical formation, ensuring clergy, liturgical ministers, and the laity receive ongoing instruction in the theology and practice of the sacraments and the paschal mystery;
- d. Promote Eucharistic devotion, encouraging adoration, processions, and pastoral initiatives that deepen eucharistic faith while safeguarding liturgical norms and unity.

§3. Pastoral presence and accompaniment. The bishop shall be visibly present among the faithful, visiting parishes, schools, hospitals, and institutions, accompanying clergy and laity in their spiritual life, and supporting pastors in their sacramental ministry.

§4. Oversight and formation. The bishop shall provide for the formation, supervision, and support of priests and liturgical ministers so that sacramental celebrations are conducted with reverence, doctrinal fidelity, and pastoral charity; he shall correct abuses and promote continual improvement in liturgical life.

§5. Witness to unity and mission. By personal holiness and faithful stewardship of the sacraments the bishop shall strengthen communion within the local Church and inspire missionary zeal, that the faithful may live the paschal mystery in service to the Gospel and the world.

Subsection IV

Liturgical Obligations

Canon 255 – Sunday and Primatial Day Masses

§1. Obligation to apply Mass. After taking canonical possession of his office, the bishop shall apply (offer) a Mass for his people every Sunday and on other Primatial days of obligation.

§2. Personal celebration and legitimate delegation. The bishop should celebrate these Masses personally; if legitimately impeded, he may delegate another priest to celebrate or may apply the Mass on another suitable day. Any delegation or change of day must be made for a just cause and recorded in the diocesan acts.

§3. Multiple jurisdictions. A bishop who is entrusted with more than one particular church may satisfy this obligation by applying one Mass that is offered for all the faithful entrusted to him, provided the intention and public notice make clear that the Mass is applied for the people of each jurisdiction.

§4. Making up missed obligations. Any obligation under this canon that is not fulfilled through no fault of the faithful must be made up promptly; the competent authority shall determine the manner and timing of such make-up in accord with pastoral prudence.

§5. Implementation and oversight. The diocesan chancery shall keep a register of Masses applied by the bishop under this canon and shall report as required to the competent ecclesiastical authority to ensure observance and pastoral accountability.

Canon 256 – Frequent Celebration

§1. Obligation to preside. The bishop shall preside frequently at the Eucharist, giving particular priority to Primatial days and major solemnities, so that by his visible ministry the paschal mystery is proclaimed and the unity of the local Church is strengthened.

§2. Personal celebration and pastoral presence. The bishop should ordinarily celebrate these liturgies personally and be visibly present among the faithful; his presence at the Eucharist is a primary means of pastoral accompaniment, liturgical leadership, and sacramental teaching.

§3. Legitimate delegation. If legitimately impeded, the bishop may delegate another priest to preside at a Mass applied for his people; such delegation must be made for a just cause, be clearly announced when appropriate, and preserve the intention that the celebration is offered for the faithful entrusted to him.

§4. Frequency, solemnity and pastoral planning. The bishop shall ensure that celebrations for Primatial days and major solemnities are reverent, well prepared, and accessible to the faithful; he shall coordinate with pastors and liturgical officers to provide suitable times, catechetical preparation, and pastoral accompaniment.

§5. Record keeping and accountability. The diocesan chancery shall record the bishop's applied and celebrated Masses and any delegations, and shall report as required to the competent ecclesiastical authority to ensure observance of this canon and to assist pastoral planning.

Canon 257 – Primatial Functions within and beyond the Diocese

§1. Scope within the diocese. A diocesan bishop may lawfully perform Primatial liturgical and governance functions anywhere within his own diocese; such functions include presiding at solemn liturgies, conferring sacramental ministries entrusted to him, and exercising those governance acts proper to his office.

§2. Permission outside the territory. To exercise Primatial liturgical or governance functions outside his own territory, the bishop must obtain the explicit permission of the local ordinary. When explicit permission cannot reasonably be obtained in advance, the bishop may act only where the permission of the local ordinary can be reasonably presumed from custom, prior agreement, or clear pastoral necessity; in such cases the bishop shall inform the local ordinary without delay and give an account of the pastoral reasons for his action.

§3. Respect for the competence of the local ordinary. In exercising Primatial functions outside his territory the bishop shall respect the legitimate rights and pastoral competence of the local ordinary, avoid actions that would cause pastoral confusion or division, and observe the

liturgical and disciplinary norms of the local Church unless a just cause and the permission of the local ordinary justify otherwise.

§4. Delegation and representation. The bishop may delegate Primatial liturgical or governance acts to another cleric only with the consent of the local ordinary when the act is to be performed outside his territory; any delegation shall be clearly documented and communicated to the competent chancery.

§5. Emergencies and urgent pastoral need. In cases of grave and urgent pastoral necessity, where delay would cause serious harm to souls and where neither explicit nor reasonably presumed permission is available, the bishop may act provisionally; he shall notify the local ordinary and the competent authority as soon as possible and shall submit to any remedial measures the competent authority may lawfully prescribe.

§6. Record keeping and accountability. Acts performed under §§2–5 shall be recorded in the appropriate diocesan registers and reported to the competent ecclesiastical authority when required; the bishop remains accountable for his exercise of Primatial functions and for maintaining communion and good order among the local Churches.

Subsection V

Diocesan Bishop's Duties and Responsibilities

Canon 258 – Governing the Diocese

§1. Nature of authority. The diocesan bishop governs his local Church with three distinct types of authority: legislative, executive and judicial, each exercised in accordance with canon law and in service of the salvation of souls.

§2. Legislative power. The bishop, within the limits of universal and particular law, issues, approves and promulgates local laws, decrees and regulations necessary for the good ordering of the local Church. In exercising legislative power he shall consult the presbyteral council and other competent consultative bodies as required by law and by pastoral prudence.

§3. Executive power. The bishop carries out and administers the laws and pastoral decisions of the local Church. He may act personally or through his vicars general, episcopal vicars and other legitimately delegated agents. He shall ensure that diocesan offices, curial structures and pastoral programmes operate effectively, transparently and in conformity with canonical and civil obligations.

§4. Judicial power. The bishop is the principal judge of the local Church in matters within his competence. He may adjudicate cases personally or by delegation to the judicial vicar and other judges established according to law. He shall guarantee due process, the rights of all parties, and access to canonical remedies and recourse.

§5. Integration and accountability. The bishop shall exercise these three powers in a manner that fosters communion, respects the rights of the faithful and of clerics, and promotes the

common good. He shall keep proper records of legislative, executive and judicial acts and shall submit to the oversight and procedures required by universal and particular law.

Canon 259 – Safeguarding Church Discipline

§1. Promotion of common discipline. To preserve the unity of the Church the bishop promotes and sustains the Church's common discipline and ensures that all ecclesiastical laws and legitimate particular norms are observed. He shall foster a culture of canonical awareness among clergy and laity, provide clear guidance on obligations and rights, and take prudent measures to prevent disorder.

§2. Vigilance against abuses. The bishop shall watch carefully for abuses, giving particular attention to the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of sacraments and sacramentals, the conduct of divine worship, the honouring of the saints, and the stewardship of Church property. He shall investigate credible reports of abuse, correct irregularities with pastoral charity and canonical firmness, and apply appropriate remedial or disciplinary measures in conformity with law.

§3. Procedures and safeguards. The bishop shall establish and publish procedures for receiving complaints, conducting inquiries, and protecting the rights of all parties. These procedures shall include timely fact finding, confidentiality where required, pastoral care for victims, and safeguards against arbitrary action. Where specialised competence is required the bishop shall appoint qualified delegates or commissions to assist in investigation and adjudication.

§4. Cooperation and reporting. The bishop shall cooperate with neighbouring ordinaries, the bishops' conference, and competent dicasteries in matters that transcend his local Church. He shall also comply with civil law obligations concerning reporting and the protection of vulnerable persons and shall ensure that canonical processes do not impede civil responsibilities.

§5. Prevention and formation. The bishop shall promote ongoing formation in liturgy, preaching, sacramental theology, canonical practice and ethical stewardship for clergy, liturgical ministers and those who exercise responsibility for Church goods. He shall encourage audits, pastoral reviews and periodic inspections to prevent abuses and to strengthen pastoral integrity.

§6. Records and accountability. The bishop shall keep accurate records of investigations, decisions and remedial measures and shall make such records available to competent ecclesiastical authorities as required by law. He remains accountable for the faithful and lawful exercise of his duty to safeguard discipline and to protect the common good of the Church.

Canon 260 – Legal Representative of the Diocese

§1. Official representation. The diocesan bishop is the official legal representative of his local Church and, in juridical matters, speaks and signs on its behalf. This representation extends to contracts, legal claims, property transactions and other acts that affect the rights and obligations of the diocese.

§2. Scope and limits. The bishop shall exercise this representation within the limits established by universal and particular law and by legitimate delegations. He shall not undertake acts that exceed his competence or that prejudice the rights of the faithful, clerics or third parties.

§3. Delegation and proxies. The bishop may delegate representation to others, including the chancellor, the vicar general or other officials, by written mandate. Delegations shall be specific as to scope and duration and shall be recorded in the diocesan archives.

§4. Safeguards and oversight. In matters involving significant patrimonial value, long term commitments or potential litigation the bishop shall obtain appropriate counsel, ensure adequate safeguards are in place and, where required by law, secure the consent of the diocesan finance council or other competent consultative body.

§5. Civil law and canonical conformity. The bishop shall ensure that acts of representation comply with applicable civil law and with canonical norms governing juridic persons, contracts and the administration of Church goods.

§6. Records and accountability. All juridical acts performed in the name of the diocese shall be documented, dated and preserved in the diocesan chancery. The bishop remains accountable to competent ecclesiastical authority for the lawful and prudent exercise of his representative functions.

Canon 261 – Coordinating the Apostolate

§1. Promotion and coordination. The bishop shall cultivate every form of apostolic work within the diocese and shall ensure that all ministries and charitable initiatives, whether at diocesan level or in smaller districts, are harmonised under his pastoral guidance while respecting the proper character and autonomy of each work. He shall promote collaboration among parishes, movements, associations and institutions so that efforts are complementary and directed to the common good.

§2. Obligation of the faithful. The bishop shall remind the faithful of their duty to participate in the apostolate according to their state of life and abilities, and shall encourage them to support, sustain and join these various works as local needs arise.

§3. Structures and oversight. The bishop shall establish or designate offices, councils or coordinators to plan, review and assist apostolic initiatives; he shall set norms for cooperation, accountability and the prudent stewardship of resources, and shall require periodic evaluation of programmes to ensure pastoral effectiveness.

§4. Formation and resourcing. The bishop shall provide formation, training and resources for lay leaders, clergy and volunteers engaged in the apostolate, fostering missionary competence, ethical practice and ongoing spiritual renewal.

§5. Respect for charisms and subsidiarity. In coordinating the apostolate the bishop shall respect legitimate charisms, the principle of subsidiarity and the rights of juridic persons; he shall promote subsidiarity by supporting local initiative and by intervening directly only when necessary for unity, charity or the protection of the faithful.

Canon 262 – Pastoral Visitation

§1. Obligation and periodicity. Each year the bishop shall visit the people and parishes of his diocese, either in whole or in part, in person or online, so that within every five year period he has covered the entire territory entrusted to him. If legitimately impeded he may delegate this visitation to his coadjutor, an auxiliary, a vicar general, an episcopal vicar or another suitable priest.

§2. Forms and methods. Visitations may be conducted by traditional parish visits, by diocesan or deanery workshops and assemblies that involve as many of the faithful as practicable, and by private one to one meetings between the bishop and individual clergy or lay faithful. Online visitations are permitted where they can effectively facilitate pastoral oversight, formation, consultation and fraternal encounter; such virtual meetings shall be planned, publicised and conducted with the same pastoral seriousness and confidentiality as in person visitations.

§3. Companions and assistants. The bishop may choose any priests he prefers as his companions and assistants on visitation; no local privilege or custom may override this right. He may also invite deacons, religious, lay pastoral workers and experts to assist in workshops, consultations and specialised sessions, provided their participation respects the proper roles and rights of the local Church.

§4. Accessibility, safeguarding and pastoral follow up. The bishop shall ensure that visitations, whether in person or online, are accessible to the faithful, attentive to the needs of the vulnerable, and conducted in conformity with safeguarding norms. He shall provide opportunities for public consultation and for private conversation, keep appropriate records of proceedings and decisions, and ensure timely pastoral follow up, including measures for formation, correction, support and the prudent resolution of difficulties revealed by the visitation.

§5. Documentation and accountability. The results of each visitation shall be recorded in the diocesan archives and reported to the competent ecclesiastical authority as required by law; any delegation, provisional arrangements or exceptional use of online methods shall be documented and justified in the visitation report.

Canon 263 – Scope of Visitation

§1. Subjects of visitation. All persons, Catholic institutions, sacred places and sacred objects within the diocesan territory are subject to the bishop's ordinary visitation and inspection. This ordinary visitation extends to parishes, schools, hospitals, charitable works, juridic persons and any other ecclesial realities established or operating within the diocese.

§2. Religious institutes of Primatial right. The bishop may visit members of religious institutes of Primatial right and their houses only in those cases explicitly provided for by law; in such cases he shall act in conformity with the norms that govern relations between diocesan ordinaries and institutes of consecrated life, respecting the proper autonomy and rights of the institutes and the competence of their superiors.

Canon 264 – Conduct of Visitation

§1. Charity and diligence. In carrying out pastoral visitations the bishop shall act with diligence, pastoral charity and prudence, mindful of the spiritual good of the faithful and of the rights of those visited.

§2. Avoiding undue burden. The bishop shall take care not to impose unnecessary expense, administrative burden or disruption on persons or communities; visitations shall be planned and conducted so as to be proportionate, efficient and pastorally sensitive.

§3. Procedures and safeguards. Visitations shall observe fair procedures, protect confidentiality where required, provide opportunities for hearing and response, and include appropriate pastoral care for those affected. Where specialised competence is needed the bishop shall appoint qualified delegates or commissions to assist.

§4. Cooperation and respect. The bishop shall cooperate with local pastors, religious superiors and lay leaders in arranging visitations, give reasonable notice when possible, and respect legitimate customs and rights unless a just cause requires otherwise.

Canon 265 – Annual Report to the Primate

§1. Obligation to report. Each year the diocesan bishop shall submit a formal report to the Primate on the state of his diocese, observing the format and timetable prescribed by the Primatial See.

§2. Content of the report. The report shall address pastoral, liturgical, sacramental, educational and charitable activity; the condition of clergy and religious; the status of formation and vocations; the administration of Church goods; safeguarding measures; and any matters of special concern or proposed reform.

§3. Confidentiality and follow up. The report shall be prepared with due regard for confidentiality and for the protection of persons. The Primate may request further information, offer guidance, or require appropriate follow up measures in the light of the report.

Canon 266 – Resignation of the Bishop

§1. Obligation to offer resignation. When a diocesan bishop reaches the age of seventy five he is requested to present his resignation to the Primate. The Primate shall determine when to accept the resignation after due consideration of all relevant circumstances, including the good of the local Church and the personal condition of the bishop.

§2. Resignation for incapacity. If a bishop becomes unable to fulfil his office because of ill health or for another serious reason he is earnestly encouraged to submit his resignation to the Primate so that the needs of the faithful may be properly served.

§3. Procedure and interim governance. Pending the Primate's decision the bishop remains in office unless the Primate decides otherwise for grave cause. The Primate may, where

appropriate, appoint a coadjutor, an apostolic administrator or other provisional arrangements to ensure continuity of governance.

Canon 267 – Emeritus Status

§1. Title and dignity. Once his resignation has been accepted the bishop retains the title Bishop Emeritus of his former diocese and shall be treated with the honour due to his former office.

§2. Rights and obligations. A Bishop Emeritus retains those rights and obligations that are compatible with his state and with the legitimate needs of the local Church; he shall respect the authority of the diocesan bishop and shall refrain from exercising governance unless lawfully authorised.

§3. Pastoral role and residence. The Primate, in consultation with the diocesan bishop, shall determine a suitable residence and a modest pastoral role for the Bishop Emeritus, taking into account his health, abilities and the needs of the diocese.

§4. Support and provision. The conference of bishops shall ensure that a retired bishop receives suitable and dignified support, including appropriate provision for housing, healthcare and sustenance, and shall adopt norms for pensions and material assistance in conformity with universal and particular law.

§5. Accountability and confidentiality. The Bishop Emeritus shall observe obligations of confidentiality and shall cooperate with the diocesan bishop and competent authorities in matters that concern the good order and reputation of the Church.

Subsection VI

Coadjutor And Auxiliary Bishops

Canon 268 – Appointment of Coadjutor and Auxiliary Bishops

§1. Request and nomination. When the pastoral needs of a diocese so require the diocesan bishop may petition the Primatial See for the appointment of one or more auxiliary bishops. The Primatial See shall assemble and forward suitable nominations to the Synod of Bishops for formal consideration and approval.

§2. Role of auxiliary bishops. An auxiliary bishop assists the diocesan bishop in the exercise of his pastoral, liturgical and administrative duties. An auxiliary bishop does not possess the right of succession to the diocesan see unless that right is expressly granted by law and by the Synod.

§3. Special faculties. In cases of particular gravity or of serious personal difficulty affecting the diocesan bishop the Primatial See, with the consent of the Synod where required, may grant an

auxiliary bishop special faculties to assist the diocesan bishop. Any such faculties shall be defined in writing, limited in scope and duration, and recorded in the diocesan archives.

§4. Appointment of a coadjutor. Where it is judged pastorally appropriate the Primate See may propose the appointment of a coadjutor bishop to a diocesan bishop, granting him special faculties and the right of succession. The proposal shall be submitted to the Synod of Bishops for approval and shall be effected only in conformity with universal and particular law.

§5. Primate and the Synod. The Synod of Bishops alone elects the Primate and selects him from among their brethren. There is no provision for a coadjutor to the Primate; matters of assistance to the Primate are to be arranged by the Synod and by canonical delegation in accordance with law.

§6. Procedures, documentation and accountability. All nominations, approvals, grants of faculties and appointments shall follow established canonical procedures, be documented in writing and preserved in the appropriate registers. The Primate See and the diocesan chancery shall ensure transparency, respect for the rights of the persons concerned and accountability to competent ecclesiastical authority.

Canon 269 – Rights and Obligations

§ 1. The rights and duties of the coadjutor and auxiliary bishops are set out in subsequent canons and are detailed in their respective letters of appointment from the Primate See.

§ 2. Both the coadjutor bishop and any auxiliary bishop endowed with special faculties under Canon 403 § 2 assist the diocesan bishop in all aspects of governance and act in his place whenever he is absent or impeded.

Canon 270 – Vicar General and Episcopal Vicars

§ 1. The diocesan bishop is to appoint both the coadjutor bishop and any specially-mandated auxiliary bishop as his vicars general. He should entrust them, above others, with those matters that by law demand a special mandate.

§ 2. Unless the Primate mandate says otherwise—and without prejudice to § 1—the diocesan bishop must name his auxiliary bishops as vicars general or, at minimum, as episcopal vicars, all dependent solely on his authority (or on that of the coadjutor or specially-mandated auxiliary).

Canon 271 – Mutual Consultation

§ 1. To promote the diocese's present and future welfare, the diocesan bishop, his coadjutor, and any specially-mandated auxiliary bishop are to consult one another on all matters of principal importance.

§ 2. In questions of significant pastoral concern, the diocesan bishop should first seek the counsel of his auxiliary bishops.

§ 3. Because coadjutor and auxiliary bishops share in the diocesan bishop's concern, they must carry out their duties in harmony with his intentions and efforts.

Canon 272 – Performance of Episcopal Functions

§ 1. Unless legitimately impeded, the coadjutor and auxiliary bishops are obliged to carry out all Primatial and other episcopal functions that belong to the diocesan bishop, at his request.

§ 2. The diocesan bishop must not habitually delegate to others those episcopal rights and duties that a coadjutor or auxiliary bishop is competent to exercise.

Canon 273 – Vacancy of the See

§ 1. When the episcopal see becomes vacant, the coadjutor bishop immediately succeeds as diocesan bishop—provided he has validly taken possession.

§ 2. After the see becomes vacant, unless a competent authority decides otherwise, an auxiliary bishop retains only the powers and faculties he had as vicar general or episcopal vicar while the see was filled. He exercises these same powers under the authority of the diocesan administrator, unless he has already been designated to serve as that administrator.

Canon 274 – Resignation

The provisions of Canons 401 and 402 § 2 regarding resignation for age or grave reason apply equally to coadjutors and auxiliary bishops.

Subsection VII

The Impeded See and the Primatial See

Canon 275 – Definition of an Impeded See

An episcopal see is considered impeded when, because of captivity, banishment, exile or incapacity, the diocesan bishop is plainly unable to carry out his pastoral duties and cannot communicate with his people even by letter.

Canon 276 – Governance in an Impeded See

§ 1. When a see is impeded, governance falls first to the coadjutor bishop—unless the Primatial See has provided otherwise. If there is no coadjutor or he too is impeded, care of the diocese passes, in order, to, in the following order:

- a. an auxiliary bishop
- b. the vicar general
- c. an episcopal vicar
- d. another priest

§2. This order must come from a list the diocesan bishop prepares promptly after taking possession. The list is sent to the metropolitan, updated every three years and kept in strict confidence by the administrator.

§ 3. If there is neither a coadjutor nor an available list, the college of consultors chooses a priest to govern the diocese.

§ 4. Whoever assumes governance under §§ 1 or 2 must inform the Primate as soon as possible of the impeded see and the office he has taken.

Canon 277: Status and Powers of the Temporary Pastor

Anyone appointed under Canon 413 to oversee the diocese during the impediment has the obligations and authority of a diocesan administrator for the duration of the impeded see.

Canon 278: Recourse in Case of Penalty

If an ecclesiastical penalty bars a diocesan bishop from office, the metropolitan—or, if he is absent or concerned, the senior suffragan—must immediately petition the Primate for guidance and provision.

Subsection VIII

The Vacant See

Canon 279: Vacancy of a See

A see becomes vacant upon a diocesan bishop's death, when the Primate accepts his resignation, by his transfer, or when he is deprived of office and this is communicated to him.

Canon 280: Validity of Acts until Notice

All acts performed by a vicar general or episcopal vicar remain valid until they receive certain notice of the bishop's death. Likewise, acts by the bishop, vicar general or episcopal vicar remain in force until they are informed of transfer, resignation acceptance, or privation.

Canon 281: Interim Governance until an Administrator

When a see is vacant, governance passes to the senior auxiliary bishop. If there is no auxiliary, it falls to the college of consultors unless the Primate directs otherwise. Whoever assumes this role must promptly summon the consultors to elect a diocesan administrator.

Canon 282: Episcopal Vicariate or Prefecture

In an episcopal vicariate or prefecture, the pro-vicar or pro-prefect, appointed immediately after the incumbent takes possession, governs during the vacancy, unless the Primate has provided otherwise.

Canon 283: Election of a Diocesan Administrator

§ 1. The college of consultors must elect a diocesan administrator within eight days of notice of vacancy, observing the rules of Canons 165–178 and Can. 502 § 3.

§ 2. If the consultors fail to elect within eight days, the metropolitan makes the appointment. If the metropolitan see is also vacant, the senior suffragan bishop in order of promotion does so.

Canon 284: Notification to the Primatial See

An auxiliary bishop, or, if none, the consultors, must inform the Primatial See of the bishop's death without delay. The newly elected diocesan administrator likewise reports his own election.

Canon 285: Single Administrator and Finance Officer

§ 1. Only one diocesan administrator may serve; any custom to the contrary is invalid.

§ 2. The finance officer cannot serve simultaneously as diocesan administrator.

Canon 286: Election Norms

A diocesan administrator is to be elected in accordance with Canons 165–178.

Canon 287: Qualifications for Administrator

§ 1. Only a priest, not previously elected or appointed to the same vacant see, may validly serve as diocesan administrator.

§ 2. He should be outstanding in doctrine and prudence.

§ 3. If these conditions are not met, the metropolitan—or, if his see is vacant, the senior suffragan—after verifying the facts, appoints the administrator. Any acts by an improperly elected administrator are null.

Canon 288: Powers before Administrator is Appointed

Until a diocesan administrator is designated, the person in charge of the vacant see holds the authority granted by law to a vicar general.

Canon 289: Authority and Limits of the Administrator

§ 1. A diocesan administrator has the rights and duties of a diocesan bishop, except for matters inherently excluded or forbidden by law.

§ 2. Upon accepting election, the administrator immediately obtains his powers; no further confirmation is required (see Can. 833, n. 4).

Canon 290: Preservation of Rights and Records

§ 1. Nothing may be altered in a vacant see.

§ 2. Those governing temporarily may not do anything harmful to the diocese or episcopal rights. They—and everyone else—are forbidden to remove, destroy or alter any curial documents.

Canon 291: Residence and Celebration of Mass

A diocesan administrator must reside in the diocese and celebrate Mass for the people according to Canon 388.

Canon 292: End of the Administrator's Office

§ 1. The administrator's term ends when the new bishop takes possession of the diocese.

§ 2. Only the Primatial See can remove a diocesan administrator. If he resigns, he submits that resignation formally to the consultors; acceptance is not required. Should an administrator be removed, resign or die, a new administrator is elected following Canon 421.

Section V

Subsection I

Ecclesiastical Provinces and Ecclesiastical Regions

Canon 293 – Ecclesiastical Provinces

§1. Purpose. The establishment of ecclesiastical provinces fosters joint pastoral action among neighbouring dioceses and strengthens fraternal relations and co-operation among their bishops for the good of the Church and the salvation of souls.

§2. Composition. A province consists of a cluster of adjacent particular churches within a defined territory, which may include dioceses, territorial prelatures, abbeys nullius, apostolic vicariates, apostolic prefectures and other equivalent ecclesial administrations. The composition of a province shall be determined with regard to pastoral needs, historical ties and effective governance.

§3. Reform of exempt dioceses. As a general rule no diocese or equivalent church should remain exempt from provincial structure; every diocese and equivalent church ought to belong to a province unless a just cause and the common good require otherwise. Where exemption is maintained temporarily the competent authority shall propose a plan and timetable for integration into a province.

§4. Authority to erect, suppress or alter provinces. Only the Primate may erect, suppress or alter ecclesiastical provinces. Before taking such action the Primate shall consult the bishops concerned, the bishops' conference where appropriate, and other competent consultative bodies, and shall give due weight to pastoral, juridical and cultural considerations.

§5. Extra-diocesan parishes, missions and foundations. All parishes, missions, associations and religious foundations that are not part of any diocese because no official diocese exists in their country or territory shall fall under the episcopal and ordinary authority of the Primatial See. As Primate, the Primate See of the East Angles is his own jurisdiction and shall be the home for such parishes, missions, associations and religious foundations, and shall provide for their

pastoral care, canonical oversight and integration into the life of the Church in a manner respectful of local circumstances and of the rights of institutes and persons.

§6. Procedures, records and review. Acts erecting, suppressing or altering provinces and arrangements under §5 shall be effected in writing, recorded in the appropriate registers and communicated to the competent dicasteries. The Primate shall periodically review provincial structures and extra-diocesan arrangements and shall adapt them as pastoral needs and circumstances require.

Canon 294 – Authority and Legal Personality

§1. Metropolitan and provincial council. The metropolitan council and the provincial council derive their limited powers from canon law. Their competence is consultative and co-operative; they assist the metropolitan and the bishops of the province in coordinating pastoral initiatives, in advising on matters of common concern and in promoting fraternal collaboration among the particular churches. The statutes of each council shall specify its membership, procedures and the scope of its functions.

§2. Juridic personality of the province. An ecclesiastical province is a juridic person capable of acquiring, holding and alienating property, entering into legal acts and contracting obligations in its own name, subject to the norms of canon law and to any particular law of the Primate See. The Primate shall ensure that each province has appropriate statutes, governance structures, financial safeguards and a competent body to oversee patrimonial affairs.

§3. Safeguards and accountability. Acts undertaken by a province in its juridic capacity shall observe principles of transparency, subsidiarity and stewardship. Significant patrimonial transactions, long term commitments or matters affecting the rights of the faithful shall require the consent of the competent consultative bodies and shall be recorded in the proper registers. The Primate shall provide oversight and may issue norms to secure the lawful exercise of provincial juridic personality.

§4. Extra-diocesan parishes and missions. All parishes, missions, associations and religious foundations that are not part of any diocese because no official diocese exists in their country or territory shall fall under the episcopal and ordinary authority of the Primate See. The Primate See of the East Angles shall be the jurisdictional home for such parishes, missions, associations and religious foundations and shall provide for their pastoral care, canonical oversight and integration into the life of the Church in a manner respectful of local circumstances and of the rights of institutes and persons.

Canon 295 – Ecclesiastical Regions

§1. Purpose. Where many provinces exist, often in large nations, the Primate may, at the request of the bishops' conference, group adjacent provinces into ecclesiastical regions to encourage cooperation, to coordinate pastoral planning and to foster mutual support among bishops.

§2. Establishment and criteria. The Primate shall establish regions with regard to pastoral effectiveness, historical ties, cultural affinities and practical considerations. The bishops' conference and the provinces concerned shall be consulted before a region is erected or altered.

§3. Legal status. A region may be granted juridic personality by the Primate. Where juridic personality is conferred the Primate shall determine the region's statutes, its organs of governance, its financial arrangements and the limits of its competence, always respecting the proper authority of the Primate and of the constituent provinces.

§4. Subsidiarity and respect for provincial autonomy. Regions shall operate in a manner that respects the autonomy of provinces and the principle of subsidiarity. Regional structures shall support, not supplant, provincial and diocesan initiatives and shall act only within the competence assigned to them by the Primate.

Canon 296 – Meetings of an Ecclesiastical Region

§1. Function of regional meetings. Bishops of a region may meet to coordinate pastoral initiatives, to share resources and expertise, to plan joint programmes of formation and charity and to provide mutual support in matters of common concern. Such meetings may establish working groups, commissions and temporary bodies to carry forward agreed projects.

§2. Nature of decisions. Regional gatherings do not possess binding legislative power unless the Primate has explicitly granted such authority. The ordinary effect of regional decisions is to produce recommendations, pastoral guidelines and coordinated plans which require implementation by the competent provincial or diocesan authorities.

§3. Delegated powers and limits. Where the Primate has expressly conferred specific powers on a regional body those powers shall be exercised in conformity with the statutes approved by the Primate and within the limits set by canon law. Any exercise of delegated authority shall be documented and reported to the Primate.

§4. Transparency and accountability. Regional meetings shall keep records of proceedings and decisions, communicate outcomes to the bishops' conference and to the Primate as appropriate and ensure that any financial or juridical acts are conducted with proper oversight and in accordance with the statutes granted by the Primate.

Subsection II

Metropolitans

Canon 297 – Who Is a Metropolitan

§1. Definition and office. A metropolitan is the archbishop of the principal see, commonly called the archdiocese, within an ecclesiastical province. The metropolitan exercises the honour and limited responsibilities proper to his office in service of the communion and co-operation of the particular churches of the province.

§2. Attachment of title. The office and title of metropolitan are attached to that episcopal see by the decision of the Primate; the title belongs to the holder of the see and passes with the canonical possession of the archdiocese.

§3. Rights and duties. The metropolitan has the rights and duties assigned by universal and particular law, including the duty to promote fraternal collaboration among the suffragan bishops, to call and preside at provincial councils when required, and to take such measures as lawfully assist in preserving ecclesial unity and discipline.

§4. Limits of authority. The metropolitan's authority is limited by canon law and by the rights of the suffragan bishops; he does not exercise ordinary governance in the suffragan dioceses but acts in ways expressly provided by law or by legitimate delegation from the Primate.

§5. Succession and vacancy. The title of metropolitan is tied to the office of the archbishop of the principal see; in the event of vacancy the rights and obligations attached to the metropolitanate remain with the see and are exercised or safeguarded in accordance with canonical norms until a new metropolitan takes canonical possession.

§6. Documentation and recognition. Acts by which a metropolitan exercises functions that affect the province shall be documented in the appropriate registers and communicated to the Primate and to the suffragan ordinaries as required by law.

Canon 298 – Metropolitan Competences

§1. Competences in suffragan dioceses. In the suffragan dioceses of his province the metropolitan may, within the limits established by canon law and with due respect for the rights of the suffragan ordinaries:

- a. Monitor faith and discipline. Ensure careful observance of doctrine and ecclesiastical discipline; receive and examine credible reports of abuse or doctrinal error and, where appropriate, report such matters to the Primate and take or recommend corrective measures in conformity with law.
- b. Conduct visitations. Undertake a canonical visitation of a suffragan diocese when the suffragan ordinary has neglected to fulfil this duty, provided the metropolitan first obtains the prior approval required by law or by the Primate; any visitation shall be conducted with pastoral charity, due process and respect for local customs.
- c. Appoint an administrator. Name a diocesan administrator in a vacant see in accordance with Canons 421 §2 and 425 §3, observing the procedures, consultations and safeguards prescribed by universal and particular law.

§2. Limits and respect for suffragans. The metropolitan shall exercise these competences in a manner that preserves the ordinary governance of the suffragan bishops, avoids undue interference and promotes fraternal cooperation; actions taken under §1 shall be documented and reported to the Primate as required.

§3. Delegation and assistance. The metropolitan may delegate specific tasks to qualified delegates or commissions when appropriate, and may invite assistance from the Primate See or from neighbouring ordinaries in matters requiring specialised competence.

§4. Further functions by particular law. The Primate may, by particular law, grant additional special functions to a metropolitan; any such grants shall be made in writing, be limited in scope and duration, and be recorded in the proper registers.

Canon 299 – The Pallium

§1. Obligation: Within three months of consecration (or canonical appointment), a metropolitan must request the pallium from the Primate.

§2. Significance: The pallium symbolises his shared pastoral authority in communion with the Primate.

§3. Usage: He may wear it only within his own province and according to liturgical norms.

§4. Transfer: A new pallium is required if he moves to another metropolitan see.

Canon 300 – Patriarchs and Primates by Title

§1. Recognition and purpose. The Church recognises and accepts the historic honours of Patriarch and Primate as legitimate titles that signify honour, liturgical precedence and a special place in the order of the Church. These titles express respect for ancient traditions, regional identity and the bonds of communion among particular churches.

§2. Meaning and use. The titles Patriarch and Primate denote ceremonial precedence, liturgical distinction and a role of moral and symbolic leadership. They are used in public and liturgical settings to indicate honour and to facilitate fraternal relations among bishops, without implying ordinary governance in other particular churches except where law or a specific grant provides otherwise.

§3. Conferment. Only the Primate may bestow the titles of Patriarch or Primate within the Latin Church. Such conferment shall be made in writing, with clear specification of the honour conferred and of any accompanying privileges or limitations, and shall be communicated to the bishops concerned and to the competent dicasteries.

§4. Limits and exceptions. Where an apostolic privilege, particular law or an approved custom explicitly grants jurisdictional rights or other proper faculties to a Patriarch or Primate those rights shall be respected and exercised only within the precise scope and conditions defined by the grant. Any exercise of jurisdiction beyond ceremonial honour requires a clear legal mandate.

§5. Respect for local authority. Holders of the titles shall exercise their honours with due respect for the ordinary governance of local bishops and for the rights of the faithful. The ceremonial precedence attached to these titles is to be used to promote communion, cooperation and the common good rather than to assert authority beyond what is lawfully granted.

§6. Documentation and oversight. Grants of the titles and of any associated privileges shall be recorded in the appropriate registers. The Primate shall ensure transparency, proper documentation and periodic review of honours and privileges to safeguard the unity and good order of the Church.

Subsection III

Particular Councils

Canon 301 – Plenary Councils

- §1. Definition: A plenary council includes all dioceses in a bishops' conference.
- §2. Convocation: Called by the conference (with Primate's approval) whenever deemed necessary.
- §3. Equivalent: If a single province coincides with a national territory, its provincial council follows the same norms.

Canon 302 – Provincial Councils

- §1. Convocation: A metropolitan may call a provincial council whenever a majority of suffragan bishops agree.
- §2. Vacancy: No provincial council may meet if the metropolitan see is vacant.

Canon 303 – Competences of Bishops' Conferences

A conference of bishops alone may:

- a. Convoke a plenary council.
- b. Choose the council's location within its territory.
- c. Elect a president (subject to Primate's approval).
- d. Set the agenda, dates, duration, transfers, extensions and dissolution.

Canon 304 – Competences of Metropolitans

- §1. A metropolitan, with a majority of suffragan consent, may:
- a. Convoke a provincial council.
 - b. Choose its location within the province.
 - c. Determine the agenda, dates, duration, transfers, extensions and dissolution.
- §2. If impeded, a suffragan selected by his peers presides.

Canon 305 – Participants and Voting Rights

§ 1 Full voting rights:

- a. Diocesan, coadjutor and auxiliary bishops
- b. Titular bishops with special functions from the Primate or conference
- c. Other titular or retired bishops living in the territory

§ 2 Consultative vote only:

- a. Vicars general and episcopal vicars
- b. Major superiors of religious institutes (men and women), in numbers set by conference or province
- c. Rectors of ecclesiastical universities and deans of theology and canon law faculties
- d. Rectors of major seminaries, elected by their peers

§3. Lay Participation: Presbyters and lay faithful may attend with consultative votes, not exceeding half the number above.

§4. Additional Invitees: Cathedral chapters, presbyteral and pastoral councils each send two consultative delegates; others may join as guests if deemed useful.

Canon 306 – Attendance and Proxies

§1. All called must attend unless excused by a serious reason, which they must notify to the president.

§2. Those with deliberative votes may appoint a proxy if impeded; proxies have consultative votes only.

Canon 307 – Powers of a Particular Council

Within its territory, a council:

- a. Addresses the pastoral needs of the faithful
- b. Exercises governance—especially to legislate
- c. May issue decisions for faith formation, joint pastoral programmes, moral regulation and discipline
- d. Always in harmony with universal Church law.

Canon 308 – Acts and Promulgation

§1. Submission: After adjournment, the president sends all acts to the Primate.

§2. Review: Council decrees bind only after Primate’s examination and approval.

§3. Promulgation: The council itself sets how and when its decrees will take effect, following Primate’s confirmation.

Subsection IV

Conferences of Bishops

Canon 309 – Definition and Purpose

§1. Nature and purpose. A conference of bishops is a permanent collegial body composed of the bishops of a particular nation or territory. Together they exercise certain pastoral responsibilities for the faithful of that region, promoting the Church's mission to humanity through coordinated apostolic programmes, pastoral planning and common initiatives adapted to local time, place and circumstances.

§2. Membership. The conference comprises diocesan bishops, coadjutor bishops and auxiliary bishops who exercise ministry in the territory. Other bishops with a stable pastoral assignment in the territory, and bishops emeriti, may participate according to the statutes of the conference, with emeriti normally having consultative status. The conference may invite qualified clerics, religious and lay experts to serve on commissions and working groups.

§3. Competences and functions. The conference shall:

- a. Coordinate pastoral action, formation and evangelisation; plan joint programmes for catechesis, vocations, clergy formation, social charity and missionary outreach.
- b. Promote liturgical and doctrinal unity; issue pastoral guidelines and recommendations that foster coherent practice while respecting the legitimate diversity of local churches.
- c. Address social and public matters; represent the Church in relations with civil authorities and public institutions on matters of common concern, always safeguarding the rights of individual ordinaries.
- d. Provide mutual support; assist bishops in times of difficulty, arrange shared resources and offer specialised services such as tribunals, formation centres and safeguarding structures.

§4. Meetings and decision making. The conference shall meet regularly as provided in its statutes. Decisions shall be taken according to the rules established in those statutes, including provisions on quorum, voting and the nature of binding acts. The conference's normative acts are binding only within the competence lawfully assigned to it and must respect the ordinary governance of each diocesan bishop; matters that affect the rights or governance of a particular diocese require the consent of the diocesan ordinary or the authorisation of the Primate or other competent authority.

§5. Statutes and relation to the Primate. The conference shall adopt statutes that define its membership, organs, procedures, financial arrangements and competencies. The statutes require the approval of the Primate and shall be consistent with universal and particular law. The Primate may convene or preside at plenary sessions when the common good requires and shall be kept informed of matters of special importance.

§6. Transparency, accountability and records. The conference shall keep accurate records of its meetings, decisions and financial affairs. It shall publish pastoral guidelines and reports as appropriate, while observing confidentiality where required for the protection of persons. The conference remains accountable to the Primate and to competent ecclesiastical authority for the lawful and prudent exercise of its responsibilities.

Canon 310 – Membership by Territory

§1. Ordinary composition. As a rule a conference of bishops comprises all bishops who legitimately govern particular churches within the same nation or defined territory; membership is determined by canonical assignment to those particular churches.

§2. Adaptation to circumstances. Where pastoral, historical or practical circumstances warrant, the Primate may establish a conference for a larger or smaller territory or for bishops drawn from different nations. In such cases the Primate shall issue special norms that define membership, competence, procedures and the relationship of the conference to the Primate and to the constituent particular churches.

§3. Statutes and approval. The statutes of any conference shall specify its territorial scope, membership categories, organs and procedures and require the approval of the Primate. Changes to territorial composition or membership shall be effected only after consultation with the bishops concerned and in conformity with the statutes approved by the Primate.

Canon 311 – Authority to Create or Suppress

§1. Primate's competence. Only the Primate has the authority to erect, suppress or alter a conference of bishops. Before taking such action the Primate shall consult the bishops concerned, the bishops' conference where appropriate, and other competent consultative bodies, giving due weight to pastoral needs and the common good.

§2. Juridic personality. Once lawfully established a conference becomes a juridic person by operation of law. As a juridic person the conference may acquire and hold property, enter into contracts, receive donations and undertake legal acts in its own name, subject to the statutes approved by the Primate and to applicable canonical and civil norms.

§3. Safeguards and oversight. The Primate shall ensure that each conference has appropriate statutes, financial safeguards, accountability mechanisms and competent officers. Significant juridical acts, patrimonial transactions or long-term commitments shall observe the consent and oversight provisions set out in the statutes and in particular law.

Canon 312 – Members and Voting

§1. Members by law. The following are members of a conference by law:

- a. Diocesan bishops.
- b. Those equivalent to diocesan bishops in law.
- c. Coadjutor and auxiliary bishops.
- d. Titular bishops who exercise special functions in the territory by mandate of the Primate or by stable appointment of the conference.

§2. Non-members and invited participants. Other titular bishops, the Primate's legate and bishops without a stable pastoral assignment in the territory are not members by law but may be invited to participate with consultative or observer status as provided in the statutes.

§3. Voting rights and representation. Voting rights, the exercise of voice and the modalities of representation or delegation shall be determined by the conference statutes approved by the Primate. Statutes shall address:

1. Quorum requirements;
2. Majority thresholds for ordinary and extraordinary decisions;
3. Permitted use of proxies or written votes;
4. Procedures for secret ballot where required.

§4. Statutory consistency and respect for ordinaries. Any act of the conference that affects the rights or governance of a particular diocese requires the consent of the diocesan ordinary or the authorisation of the Primate. The conference shall exercise its competence in a manner that respects the ordinary governance of each bishop and the principle of subsidiarity.

§5. Records and accountability. The conference shall keep accurate records of membership, attendance, decisions and votes, and shall make such records available to the Primate and to competent ecclesiastical authorities in accordance with the statutes and with law.

Canon 313 – Statutes and Organisation

§1. Obligation to adopt statutes. Each conference of bishops shall draft and adopt statutes that govern its life, organs and procedures. The statutes require the review and approval of the Primate and must conform to universal and particular law.

§2. Required provisions. The statutes shall, at minimum, regulate the following matters:

- a. Plenary meetings – convocation, frequency, agenda, notice, quorum, voting procedures and the form of acts (ordinary, extraordinary, binding or recommendatory).
- b. Permanent council – composition, term of office, competences, meeting frequency and procedures for decision making.
- c. General secretariat – functions, staffing, duties, reporting lines and administrative procedures.
- d. Offices and commissions – establishment, mandate, membership, reporting and review for commissions on liturgy, doctrine, education, social action, safeguarding, finance and other pastoral needs.

§3. Additional statutory content. The statutes shall also address:

- a. Eligibility and terms for officers and members of organs;
- b. Rules for elections, appointments and removals;
- c. Financial management including budgets, audits, oversight bodies and the role of the finance committee;
- d. Transparency and records including minutes, archives and public reporting consistent with confidentiality obligations;
- e. Conflict of interest rules and safeguards to protect the rights of the faithful and the integrity of the conference.

§4. Review, amendment and publication. Statutes shall be submitted to the Primate for review before coming into force. Amendments require the same review. The conference shall publish its statutes and any subsequent amendments in a manner accessible to the faithful, while observing necessary confidentiality for sensitive matters.

Canon 314 – President and Officers

§1. Officers and election. The conference shall elect from among its members a president, a pro-president to act when the president is impeded, and a general secretary, in accordance with the procedures and term limits set out in the statutes. Elections shall be by secret ballot unless the statutes provide otherwise.

§2. Duties of the president. The president represents the conference, convokes and presides at plenary meetings and at meetings of the permanent council, ensures the execution of conference decisions, and fosters communion among the bishops. The president acts in close collaboration with the Primate and reports to the conference on matters of common concern.

§3. Duties of the pro-president. The pro-president exercises the functions of the president when the latter is impeded or when the statutes so provide, and assists the president in carrying out his responsibilities.

§4. Duties of the general secretary. The general secretary directs the general secretariat, prepares agendas, keeps records and minutes, coordinates the work of commissions and offices, manages communications and ensures the proper administration of the conference under the authority of the president and the permanent council.

§5. Terms, re-election and vacancy. The statutes shall determine the length of terms, conditions for re-election, and procedures to fill vacancies. Interim arrangements shall be provided to ensure continuity of governance.

§6. Accountability and oversight. Officers shall act with transparency, prudence and fidelity to their duties. The conference shall establish mechanisms for oversight, including financial review, performance evaluation and procedures for addressing complaints or alleged misconduct. Records of elections, mandates and official acts shall be preserved in the conference archives.

Canon 315 – Frequency of Meetings

§1. Plenary meetings. Plenary meetings of the conference shall be held at least once each year and more frequently when pastoral necessity or the statutes require.

§2. Extraordinary sessions. The president, the permanent council or a specified proportion of members as set out in the statutes may convoke extraordinary plenary sessions for urgent matters; notice, agenda and procedural rules for such sessions shall be provided in the statutes.

§3. Remote participation. Members may participate and vote by secure remote means where the statutes permit; remote meetings shall observe the same standards of notice, confidentiality and record-keeping as in-person meetings.

Canon 316 – Voting Rights

§1. Deliberative members. Diocesan bishops, those equivalent to diocesan bishops in law, and coadjutor bishops possess a deliberative vote in the conference.

§2. Auxiliary and titular bishops. Auxiliary and titular bishops may have either deliberative or consultative vote as determined by the statutes; the statutes shall specify which categories of titular bishops, if any, hold deliberative vote.

§3. Statute amendments. Only those with deliberative vote under §1 may vote on the creation or amendment of the conference statutes; any change to voting rights shall itself require the procedure for amending statutes.

§4. Quorum and majorities. Quorum, voting procedures and the majorities required for ordinary and extraordinary decisions shall be set out in the statutes; where the law requires special majorities (for example for decrees) those thresholds shall be observed.

Canon 317 – Issuing Decrees

§1. Authority to issue decrees. The conference may issue general decrees only when universal law permits or when the Primate grants a specific mandate, either on his own initiative or at the request of the conference.

§2. Validity requirements. For a decree to be valid it must:

- a. Receive the approval of at least two-thirds of the voting members entitled to vote on the matter;
- b. Be submitted to the Primate for review and receive his written approval;
- c. Be duly promulgated in the manner prescribed by the statutes and by law.

§3. Effect and implementation. The conference shall determine, in conformity with the statutes and with the Primate's approval, the time and manner in which decrees take effect; decrees bind only within the competence lawfully assigned to the conference and do not derogate from the ordinary governance of diocesan bishops.

§4. Respect for diocesan authority. In the absence of a Primate mandate or where a decree would affect the rights or governance of a particular diocese, each diocesan bishop retains full authority in his own diocese; the conference or its officers may not act on behalf of all bishops without the consent required by law.

Canon 318 – Reporting to the Primate

§1. Obligation to report. After each plenary meeting the president shall transmit to the Primate a concise report of the acts, decisions and decrees adopted, together with the minutes and any documents the Primate may reasonably request.

§2. Timing and form. Reports shall be sent within the period fixed by the statutes or, if none is fixed, within a reasonable time; the form and content shall enable the Primate to review conformity with law and to offer guidance where appropriate.

§3. Follow up. The conference shall implement any observations or directives the Primate issues in response to the report and shall record such follow-up measures in its archives.

Canon 319 – Role of the Permanent Council

§1. Functions. The permanent council prepares the agenda for plenary meetings, supervises the execution of conference decisions between plenary sessions and performs other tasks assigned by the statutes.

§2. Composition and authority. The composition, term of office, quorum and decision-making procedures of the permanent council shall be defined in the statutes; its acts are subject to review by the plenary and to the oversight of the Primate where required by law.

§3. Coordination and oversight. The permanent council shall coordinate the work of commissions and offices, monitor financial and pastoral projects, and report regularly to the plenary and to the Primate.

Canon 320 – Role of the General Secretariat

§1. Administrative duties. The general secretariat prepares and distributes reports of plenary meetings and permanent council sessions, maintains the conference archives, manages official correspondence and ensures proper record-keeping.

§2. External communication. Under the direction of the president and the permanent council, the general secretariat transmits documents, statements and agreed materials to neighbouring conferences, to the Primate and to other competent bodies as directed by the statutes.

§3. Support for commissions. The general secretariat provides administrative and logistical support to commissions, working groups and special projects, and ensures compliance with statutes, financial rules and confidentiality obligations.

Canon 321 – Inter-Conference Relations

§1. Collaboration. Conferences, especially neighbouring ones, shall collaborate to promote the Church's mission, to share resources and expertise and to coordinate pastoral responses to matters that cross territorial boundaries.

§2. International programmes. Where conferences undertake international programmes or actions they must consult the Primate in advance; the Primate shall advise, approve or require modifications to ensure conformity with universal and particular law and with the common good.

§3. Agreements and accountability. Joint initiatives between conferences shall be governed by written agreements that specify competence, funding, accountability and reporting; such agreements require the approval of the competent authorities as set out in the statutes and in law.

Subsection V

The Internal Ordering of Particular Churches

Canon 322 – Nature and Purpose of the Synod

§1. A diocesan synod is a formal assembly of selected clergy and lay members convened to assist the diocesan bishop in discerning and promoting the spiritual, pastoral and administrative welfare of the diocesan community. It functions as a consultative body, governed by the norms that follow. It is a gathering where the bishop brings together representatives from across the diocese to discuss important matters affecting the Church's life and mission.

§2. The synod helps the bishop address three key areas:

- a. Spiritual welfare: prayer life, sacramental practice and spiritual growth
- b. Pastoral welfare: caring for people's needs, evangelisation and community service
- c. Administrative welfare: diocesan structures, policies and resources

§3. The synod offers advice and recommendations to the bishop rather than making binding decisions independently. The bishop listens carefully to the synod's wisdom but retains authority to make final decisions.

Canon 323 – When and Where Synods Are Held

§1. A diocesan synod is to be celebrated when the bishop, having consulted the presbyteral council, judges that the circumstances warrant it.

§2. A bishop who oversees multiple dioceses, whether as ordinary or administrator, may convene a single synod encompassing all dioceses under his care.

§3. Synods are convened when needed, not on a regular schedule. The bishop, after consulting the presbyteral council, determines when holding a synod would benefit the diocese.

§4. A synod might be called when:

- a. The diocese faces significant pastoral challenges or opportunities
- b. Major changes require a Church response
- c. Long-range planning is needed
- d. A new bishop wishes to establish priorities
- e. Serious issues affecting clergy or faithful require consultation

§5. When one bishop oversees multiple dioceses, he may hold a single synod for all of them, promoting unity and efficient use of resources.

Canon 324 – Authority to Convene and Preside

§1. The diocesan bishop alone has the authority to convoke a synod. This power does not extend to those temporarily administering a diocese.

§2. The bishop presides over the synod. However, he may delegate a vicar general or episcopal vicar to preside over individual sessions.

§3. Only the diocesan bishop can convoke a synod. Diocesan administrators, auxiliary bishops and vicars cannot do so, as a synod shapes long-term diocesan direction requiring permanent episcopal authority.

§4. The bishop presides over the synod, setting the agenda, guiding discussions and making final decisions. He may delegate the vicar general or episcopal vicars to chair individual sessions, but only the bishop can sign synodal decrees.

Canon 325 – Composition of the Synod

§1. The following must be summoned and are obliged to participate:

1. Coadjutor and auxiliary bishops
2. Vicars general, episcopal vicars and the judicial vicar
3. Members of the presbyteral council

4. Lay faithful, including members of religious institutes, chosen by the pastoral council or, where none exists, by the bishop
5. Rector of the diocesan major seminary
6. Vicars forane (deacons of local regions)
7. At least one priest from each vicariate forane, with an alternate in case of impediment
8. Superiors of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life with houses in the diocese, selected as the bishop determines

§2. The bishop may also invite additional clerics, religious or lay faithful as synodal members.

§3. These individuals must be summoned and are obliged to attend, ensuring essential voices from across the diocese are present.

§4. Lay members are chosen by the pastoral council (if one exists) or by the bishop, representing the diocese's diversity in age, background and experience.

§5. The bishop may invite others whose expertise or perspective would enrich the synod, such as young adults, ministry leaders or representatives of particular communities.

Canon 326 – Legitimate Impediments

§1. If a synodal member is prevented from attending due to a legitimate reason, they may not appoint a substitute. They must notify the bishop of the impediment.

§2. Synodal membership is personal. Members are chosen for their specific role or representation and cannot send substitutes.

§3. Members prevented by legitimate impediment must notify the bishop as soon as possible, explaining the reason.

Canon 327 – Freedom of Discussion

§1. All matters proposed during the synod are to be freely and openly discussed by its members, fostering genuine consultation and discernment.

§2. Members must be able to express honest opinions, raise difficult questions, disagree respectfully, propose alternatives and speak from experience without fear of repercussion.

§3. Freedom of discussion requires charitable speech, honesty, avoidance of personal attacks and respect for Church teaching.

§4. The bishop and synod leadership should encourage diverse viewpoints, protect minority voices and ensure equal opportunity to speak regardless of rank.

Canon 328 – Legislative Authority

§1. The diocesan bishop is the sole legislator within the synod. All other members have only a consultative vote. Only the bishop may sign and authorise the publication of synodal declarations and decrees.

§2. The bishop alone makes final decisions, issues binding norms and exercises legislative power for the diocese. Only the bishop may sign synodal documents and authorise their publication, making them officially binding.

§3. All synod members except, the bishop, have a consultative vote, meaning they advise but don't decide. The bishop should take their advice seriously but holds final responsibility.

Canon 329 – Communication of Synodal Acts

§1. The bishop is to transmit the synodal declarations and decrees to the Primate, the metropolitan and the national conference of bishops, ensuring ecclesial transparency and communion.

§2. After the synod concludes, the bishop must send copies of synodal declarations and decrees to:

- a. The Primate
- b. The Metropolitan
- c. The national conference of bishops

This ensures the diocese maintains communion with the broader Church, enables learning across dioceses and allows appropriate review to verify alignment with Church law.

Canon 330 – Suspension or Dissolution of the Synod

§1. The bishop may suspend or dissolve the synod at his prudent discretion.

§2. If the episcopal see becomes vacant or impeded, the synod is automatically interrupted. It may only resume or be concluded at the discretion of the succeeding bishop.

§3. The bishop may suspend (temporarily pause) or dissolve (permanently end) the synod when circumstances warrant, such as unexpected crises, inadequate preparation or changed circumstances requiring reassessment.

§4. If the bishop dies, resigns, is transferred or becomes incapacitated, the synod automatically stops. The diocesan administrator cannot resume it. Only the succeeding bishop may decide whether to resume, conclude or allow it to lapse.

Subsection VI

The Diocesan Curia

Canon 331 – Definition and Role

§1. The diocesan curia comprises the offices, institutions and personnel who assist the bishop in the governance of the diocese.

§2. Its functions include pastoral coordination, administrative oversight, judicial authority and the provision of services that enable the bishop to exercise his office effectively and for the spiritual good of the faithful.

§3. The curia shall operate in a manner that promotes transparency, accountability and pastoral collaboration, respecting the rights of the faithful and the authority of the bishop.

Canon 332 – Episcopal Appointments

§1. The diocesan bishop is responsible for appointing all individuals who serve in curial offices.

§2. Appointments shall be made in writing, specifying the office, duties and term of service, and shall be recorded in the diocesan archives.

§3. The bishop shall ensure that appointees are suitably qualified, formed and competent for their responsibilities.

Canon 333 – Obligations of Curial Officials

All curial officials must:

- a. Make a formal promise to faithfully carry out their duties in accordance with law and episcopal directives.
- b. Maintain appropriate confidentiality as defined by law or by the bishop, safeguarding sensitive information and respecting the dignity of persons.
- c. Exercise diligence, integrity and pastoral sensitivity in the performance of their office.
- d. Submit to regular review and evaluation of their work as directed by the bishop or moderator of the curia.

Canon 334 – Applicable Norms

Administrative matters of the diocesan curia are regulated by the canons that follow, together with the statutes and particular norms issued by the diocesan bishop and the Primate.

Canon 335 – Coordination of Diocesan Administration

§1. The bishop must ensure that all diocesan administrative affairs are properly coordinated and directed toward the spiritual good of the faithful.

§2. He personally oversees the pastoral work of vicars general and episcopal vicars, ensuring their ministry is aligned with diocesan priorities.

§3. He may appoint a moderator of the curia—a priest who coordinates administrative matters and ensures that curial officials fulfil their responsibilities.

§4. Ordinarily, the vicar general (or one of them) serves as moderator, unless local circumstances suggest otherwise.

§5. The bishop may establish an episcopal council, composed of vicars general and episcopal vicars, to enhance pastoral collaboration, strategic planning and unity of action across the diocese.

§6. The episcopal council shall meet regularly, keep records of its deliberations and advise the bishop on matters of governance, pastoral priorities and diocesan planning.

Canon 336 – Validity of Curial Acts

To be legally valid, curial acts must:

- a. Be signed by the bishop (or other competent ordinary).
- b. Also bear the signature of the chancellor, who attests to their authenticity and proper recording.
- c. Be reported by the chancellor to the moderator of the curia for oversight and coordination.
- d. Be preserved in the diocesan archives in accordance with law and diocesan norms.

Subsection VII

Vicars General And Episcopal Vicars

Canon 337 - Appointment of the Vicar General

§1. In every diocese the diocesan bishop shall appoint a vicar general. This priest is entrusted with ordinary executive power under the law and assists the bishop in the governance of the entire diocese, ensuring unity of pastoral direction, administrative oversight and effective pastoral coordination.

§2. Ordinarily only one vicar general is appointed. However, if the diocese is particularly large, densely populated or presents other pastoral complexities, the bishop may appoint more than one vicar general. In such cases the bishop shall clearly define their respective responsibilities, territorial scope or spheres of action to avoid duplication or confusion.

§3. The appointment shall be made in writing, specifying the scope of authority, the duties entrusted and the duration of office where applicable. All appointments shall be recorded in the diocesan archives and communicated to the clergy and faithful as appropriate.

§4. The vicar general shall act in close collaboration with the bishop, ensuring that diocesan governance reflects the bishop's pastoral vision and the unity of the diocesan mission.

Canon 338 - Appointment of Episcopal Vicars

§1. When effective governance of the diocese requires it, the bishop may appoint one or more episcopal vicars. These priests exercise the same ordinary executive power as a vicar general, but only within the scope defined in their appointment.

§2. Episcopal vicars may be appointed for:

- a. A specific region of the diocese.

- b. A particular category of affairs such as education, liturgy, social action or safeguarding.
- c. A distinct group of the faithful such as a particular rite, language community or cultural group.

§3. The appointment shall specify the scope of competence, the duration of office and the reporting obligations of the episcopal vicar. The appointment shall be made in writing, communicated to the faithful concerned and recorded in the diocesan archives.

§4. Episcopal vicars shall collaborate with the vicar general and other diocesan officials to ensure coherence of governance and pastoral unity.

Canon 339 - Free Appointment and Removal

§1. The diocesan bishop freely appoints and may freely remove both vicars general and episcopal vicars, subject to the provisions of Canon 406. If an episcopal vicar is not an auxiliary bishop, his appointment must specify a fixed term of office.

§2. If a vicar general or episcopal vicar is absent or impeded, the bishop may appoint another priest to act in their stead, with the same authority for the duration of the impediment.

§3. All appointments and removals shall be made in writing, communicated to the persons concerned and recorded in the diocesan archives. The bishop shall ensure that transitional arrangements are in place so that diocesan governance continues smoothly during periods of vacancy or impediment.

Canon 340 - Qualifications for Office

§1. Vicars general and episcopal vicars must be priests who are suitably qualified for the responsibilities entrusted to them. They shall be:

- a. Holding an advanced degree or licentiate in canon law or theology, or possessing genuine expertise in these disciplines through study and pastoral practice.
- b. Known for sound doctrine, moral integrity, prudence and pastoral experience, so that they may exercise governance with wisdom and fidelity.

§2. These offices may not be held by:

- a. Blood relatives of the diocesan bishop up to the fourth degree of consanguinity, in order to safeguard impartiality, transparency and the avoidance of conflicts of interest.

§3. The diocesan bishop shall ensure that candidates for these offices are properly discerned, vetted and prepared, and that their appointments reflect the pastoral needs of the diocese and the good of the faithful.

Canon 341 - Scope of Authority

§1. The vicar general, by virtue of office, exercises the diocesan bishop's ordinary executive power throughout the diocese. His competence extends to all matters of governance unless the bishop has expressly reserved certain matters to himself or unless the law requires a special mandate. The vicar general acts in the name of the bishop and ensures that diocesan administration remains unified and effective.

§2. The episcopal vicar possesses the same ordinary executive power as the vicar general, but only within the scope of his appointment. This may be limited to a specific territory of the diocese, a particular category of affairs such as education, liturgy or social action, or a distinct group of the faithful such as a particular rite, language community or cultural group. His authority is subject to the same reservations and mandates as those of the vicar general.

§3. Both vicars may exercise faculties granted to the diocesan bishop by the Primatial See and may execute rescripts, unless these are explicitly restricted or personally tied to the bishop. They act as extensions of the bishop's governance, ensuring that the pastoral and administrative life of the diocese is carried out in conformity with law and episcopal directives.

§4. The bishop shall provide clear written documentation of the scope of authority for each vicar, and such acts shall be recorded in the diocesan archives.

Canon 342 - Accountability and Unity of Intention

§1. Vicars general and episcopal vicars must report faithfully to the diocesan bishop on significant matters of governance, pastoral initiatives and administrative decisions. They are bound to maintain transparency in their actions and to provide regular updates as directed by the bishop.

§2. They must never act contrary to the bishop's intentions or directives. Their ministry is to be exercised in unity with the bishop's pastoral vision, ensuring that diocesan governance reflects a coherent and consistent direction.

§3. Where differences of interpretation arise, vicars shall seek clarification from the bishop and shall defer to his judgment. Their role is one of collaboration and support, not independence from episcopal oversight.

§4. Records of reports and directives shall be preserved in the diocesan archives to ensure accountability and continuity of governance.

Canon 343 - Cessation of Office

§1. The authority of vicars general and episcopal vicars ceases in the following circumstances:

- a. At the conclusion of their mandate as specified in their appointment.
- b. Upon resignation accepted by the diocesan bishop or lawful removal by him.
- c. When the episcopal see becomes vacant, subject to the provisions of Canons 406 and 409.
- d. In any other case provided by law or particular norms.

§2. If the bishop's function is suspended, the vicars' authority is likewise suspended, unless they themselves are bishops. In such cases their faculties continue according to law, ensuring that diocesan governance is not left without oversight.

§3. Acts of cessation, resignation or removal shall be made in writing, communicated to the persons concerned and recorded in the diocesan archives.

§4. The diocesan bishop shall ensure that transitional arrangements are in place so that governance continues smoothly during periods of vacancy, suspension or impediment.

Subsection VIII

The Chancellor And The Archives

Canon 344 - The Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor

§1. Every diocesan curia must have a chancellor. The primary duty of the chancellor is to ensure that curial acts are properly collected, organised and preserved in the diocesan archive. The chancellor shall also attest to the authenticity of documents, oversee the proper recording of decrees and maintain the integrity of diocesan records.

§2. A vice-chancellor may be appointed if needed. The vice-chancellor assists the chancellor in fulfilling these responsibilities and may act in his stead when the chancellor is absent or impeded.

§3. The appointment of the chancellor and vice-chancellor shall be made in writing, specifying their duties and responsibilities, and shall be recorded in the diocesan archives.

Canon 345 - Removal from Office

§1. The diocesan bishop may freely remove the chancellor from office when pastoral necessity or the good of the diocese requires it.

§2. A diocesan administrator may remove the chancellor only with the consent of the college of consultors, ensuring that such a decision is made with prudence and accountability.

§3. Acts of removal shall be made in writing, communicated to the person concerned and recorded in the diocesan archives.

Canon 346 - The Diocesan Archive

§1. All diocesan and parochial documents must be safeguarded with utmost care, ensuring their preservation and protection against loss, damage or unauthorised access.

§2. A secure diocesan archive must be established to house documents related to spiritual and temporal affairs. The archive shall be properly maintained, organised and protected by appropriate physical and electronic safeguards.

§3. An inventory of archived documents must be maintained, with brief summaries of each item, to ensure accessibility and accountability. The inventory shall be updated regularly and preserved in both physical and electronic formats.

Canon 347 - Access to the Archive

§1. The diocesan archive must be secured at all times. Only the bishop and the chancellor may hold the key. Others may enter only with permission from the bishop or with the joint consent of both the moderator of the curia and the chancellor.

§2. An electronic duplicate of all archives must be established for all records, using secure Cloud storage. This duplicate shall be regularly updated and protected by appropriate security measures.

§3. Individuals may request authentic copies of public documents that pertain to their personal status. Such requests shall be processed promptly, with due regard for confidentiality and the rights of the faithful.

Canon 348 - The Secret Archive

§1. A secret archive must be maintained, either separately or within a locked cabinet in the main archive, or on a separate and password-protected folder in cloud storage.

§2. The secret archive shall contain all private, confidential and criminal records, including sensitive matters that require restricted access.

§3. Each year, documents from moral criminal cases involving deceased persons or cases older than ten years must be destroyed. A summary and the final sentence must be retained to preserve the historical and juridical record without compromising confidentiality.

Canon 349 - Access to the Secret Archive

§1. Only the diocesan bishop has access to the secret archive.

§2. During a vacancy of the see, the diocesan administrator may access the secret archive only in cases of true necessity and must act with prudence and respect for confidentiality.

§3. Documents may not be removed from the secret archive. They must remain secured and preserved in their designated location, with access strictly controlled.

Canon 350 - Preservation of Ecclesiastical Records

§1. The diocesan bishop must ensure that records from cathedral, collegiate, parochial and other churches are preserved. Duplicate inventories shall be maintained, with one copy kept locally and the other stored securely in the diocesan Cloud archive.

§2. A historical archive must be maintained for documents of enduring value, ensuring that the heritage of the diocese is preserved for future generations.

§3. Access to these records must follow norms established by the bishop, balancing transparency and historical research with the need to protect confidentiality and the dignity of persons.

Subsection IX

Parishes, Pastors and Parochial Vicars

Canon 351 - What Is a Parish and Who Leads It

§1. A parish is a stable, local community of Christians within a particular diocese. It is entrusted to a pastor, who leads it under the authority of the diocesan bishop, ensuring that the faithful are taught, sanctified and governed in accordance with the mission of the Church.

§2. Only the diocesan bishop may create, close or alter a parish. Such acts must be made in writing, recorded in the diocesan archives and communicated to the faithful concerned.

§3. Once formally established, a parish is automatically recognised as a juridic person under Church law, capable of holding property, entering contracts and acting in legal matters in its own name.

§4. The diocesan bishop shall ensure that each parish is provided with sufficient resources, pastoral support and structures to sustain its mission and to integrate it into the wider life of the diocese.

Canon 352 - Shared Leadership in Parishes

§1. Where there are not enough priests, the diocesan bishop may assign pastoral responsibility to a deacon, layperson or community of persons.

§2. In such cases, a priest must be appointed to oversee and guide the parish with the authority of a pastor, ensuring sacramental integrity, doctrinal fidelity and pastoral unity.

§3. The arrangement shall be made in writing, specifying responsibilities, reporting obligations and the scope of authority, and shall be recorded in the diocesan archives.

§4. The diocesan bishop shall provide ongoing support and formation for those entrusted with shared leadership, ensuring that their ministry is exercised in communion with the pastor and the wider Church.

Canon 353 - Territorial and Personal Parishes

§1. Normally, a parish serves all the faithful living within a specific territorial boundary.

§2. However, parishes may also be established for particular groups of the faithful based on language, culture or ritual tradition. These are known as personal parishes and are erected by the diocesan bishop when pastoral necessity requires.

§3. The statutes of personal parishes shall specify their scope, membership and relationship to the wider diocesan structures, ensuring that they remain integrated into the unity of the diocese.

Canon 354 - The Pastor's Role

§1. The pastor is responsible for teaching, sanctifying and governing the parish, acting in collaboration with the diocesan bishop.

§2. He may work with other clergy, religious and laypeople to fulfil this mission, always in accordance with Church law and diocesan norms.

§3. The pastor shall ensure that parish life reflects the unity of the diocese and the universal Church, fostering communion among the faithful and promoting the mission of the Church in society.

§4. He shall exercise his ministry with pastoral charity, prudence and fidelity, ensuring that the Word of God, the sacraments and the works of charity are central to parish life.

Canon 355 - Religious Institutes Serving Parishes

§1. A juridical person may not be appointed as a parish priest. However, the diocesan bishop, but not the diocesan administrator, may, with the consent of the competent superior, entrust a parish to a clerical religious institute or to a clerical society of apostolic life. This may include establishing the parish in the church of the institute or society. In every case, one priest must be designated as the parish priest, or, if pastoral care is entrusted to several priests jointly, a moderator must be appointed in accordance with Canon 517 §1.

§2. The entrustment of a parish, as described in §1, may be either permanent or for a specified period of time. In both cases, the arrangement must be formalised by means of a written agreement between the diocesan bishop and the competent superior of the institute or society.

§3. This agreement must expressly and accurately define the scope of pastoral work to be undertaken, the priests or personnel to be assigned, and the financial arrangements to be observed. It shall also specify the responsibilities of the institute or society in relation to diocesan structures, the rights of the faithful, and the accountability of the appointed pastor or moderator.

§4. The written agreement shall be preserved in the diocesan archives and reviewed periodically to ensure that the pastoral needs of the parish are being met and that the arrangement continues to serve the good of the faithful and the unity of the diocese.

Canon 356 - Who Can Be a Pastor

§1. Only those ordained as priests may validly be appointed as pastors. The office of pastor requires the sacramental character of priestly ordination, ensuring that the one entrusted with this responsibility can fully exercise the ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing in the name of the Church.

§2. The candidate must be doctrinally sound, morally upright and possess qualities suited for pastoral care. He should demonstrate prudence, pastoral sensitivity, zeal for souls and the ability to work collaboratively with clergy, religious and laity.

§3. The diocesan bishop must ensure the candidate is suitable for the office. This discernment may include examination, consultation with clergy and faithful, review of academic and pastoral qualifications and consideration of the priest's prior ministry. The bishop shall act with prudence and transparency, ensuring that the appointment serves the good of the parish and the wider diocese.

§4. The appointment shall be made in writing, specifying the parish entrusted, and recorded in the diocesan archives.

Canon 357 - Length of Appointment

§1. A pastor is normally appointed indefinitely, reflecting the stability and continuity of pastoral care required for the faithful.

§2. A limited-term appointment is permitted only if the bishops' conference has approved this practice and the diocesan bishop judges it pastorally appropriate.

§3. Where a limited-term appointment is made, the duration must be specified in writing, together with provisions for renewal, review and transition.

§4. The diocesan bishop shall ensure that pastoral continuity is maintained during transitions, so that the faithful are not deprived of proper care.

Canon 358 - Who Appoints Pastors

§1. The diocesan bishop typically appoints the pastor freely, exercising his authority to provide for the pastoral needs of the faithful.

§2. If another person or body has the right of nomination or election under law, the diocesan bishop shall respect that right, but retains the authority to confirm or reject the candidate in accordance with canonical norms.

§3. All appointments shall be made in writing, specifying the parish entrusted, and preserved in the diocesan archives.

§4. The diocesan bishop shall exercise this responsibility with prudence, consultation and pastoral concern, ensuring that the appointment of pastors strengthens the unity of the diocese and the mission of the Church.

Canon 359 - Selecting the Right Pastor

§1. The diocesan bishop must carefully consider all relevant pastoral, doctrinal and personal factors before appointing a pastor. He shall discern the candidate's suitability in light of the needs of the parish, the wider diocese and the mission of the Church.

§2. The bishop should consult with local clergy, especially those who have direct knowledge of the parish community. He may also include lay members of the faithful where appropriate, ensuring that their insights contribute to a fuller understanding of the pastoral situation.

§3. The appointment must be made with prudence, transparency and pastoral concern, and shall be recorded in the diocesan archives.

Canon 360 - Number of Parishes per Pastor

§1. Typically, a pastor leads one parish, ensuring stability and continuity of pastoral care. However, if pastoral necessity requires, he may oversee multiple neighbouring parishes. In such cases, the bishop shall provide clear guidance on how responsibilities are to be shared and coordinated.

§2. Each parish must have only one pastor or moderator, overriding any contrary customs or privileges. This ensures clarity of governance, accountability and unity of pastoral direction.

§3. Where a pastor oversees multiple parishes, he shall ensure that each community receives proper pastoral care, with adequate provision for liturgy, catechesis and charitable outreach.

Canon 361 - Beginning Pastoral Duties

§1. A pastor begins his duties once he takes canonical possession of the parish, according to the norms established by the diocesan bishop.

§2. The bishop shall set a deadline for taking possession. If the deadline passes without action and there is no valid reason, the parish may be declared vacant again, and another appointment may be made.

§3. The act of possession shall be recorded in the parish and diocesan archives, ensuring transparency and continuity of governance.

Canon 362 - Pastoral Responsibilities

§1. The pastor must ensure that the Word of God is fully proclaimed within the parish. His duty is to make the Gospel present and alive in the community through preaching, catechesis and pastoral initiatives. This includes:

- a. Teaching the faith through homilies, catechetical programmes and ongoing formation for children, youth and adults.
- b. Promoting Gospel values, especially justice, peace, charity and the dignity of human life, encouraging the faithful to live these values in society.
- c. Supporting Catholic education, ensuring that schools and catechetical centres are strengthened and that young people are formed in the faith.
- d. Reaching out to those who have lapsed from the practice of the faith or who do not share it, fostering dialogue, evangelisation and reconciliation.

§2. The Holy Eucharist must be the heart of parish life. The pastor shall ensure that the Eucharist is celebrated with reverence and that it nourishes the spiritual life of the faithful. He must:

- a. Encourage frequent reception of Holy Communion and the Sacrament of Confession, promoting devotion and proper preparation.
- b. Foster both individual and family prayer, strengthening Christian life in the home and encouraging domestic spirituality.
- c. Guide the faithful in participating meaningfully in the liturgy, ensuring active, conscious and reverent engagement.
- d. Oversee liturgical celebrations, ensuring they are conducted with fidelity to the rubrics, reverence in practice and freedom from misuse or innovation contrary to law.

§3. The pastor shall ensure that parish life is centred on the sacraments, the proclamation of the Gospel and the works of charity. He shall promote unity among the faithful, encourage participation in the mission of the Church and ensure that the parish community reflects the fullness of Christian life.

§4. In fulfilling these responsibilities, the pastor shall collaborate with clergy, religious and lay leaders, fostering co-responsibility and communion, so that the parish becomes a living witness of the Church's mission in the world.

Canon 363 - Personal Care and Parish Communion

§1. A pastor must know those entrusted to his care and exercise his ministry with personal dedication and pastoral charity. To fulfil this responsibility, he should:

- a. Visit families regularly, sharing in their joys, cares, anxieties and grief, and offering gentle correction when needed, so that the Gospel may be lived in daily life.
- b. Support the sick, especially those near death, by administering the sacraments, offering prayer for their souls and ensuring they are accompanied with compassion and dignity.
- c. Seek out and aid the poor, afflicted, lonely, displaced and anyone facing special hardship, ensuring that the parish community becomes a place of welcome, solidarity and practical assistance.
- d. Help spouses and parents fulfil their duties, encouraging them to nurture Christian life in the home and to build families that reflect the love of Christ.

§2. A pastor must foster the role of the laity, recognising their baptismal dignity and encouraging their active participation in the mission of the Church. He shall:

- a. Encourage lay associations for religious, charitable and social work, supporting their initiatives and guiding them in fidelity to the Gospel.
- b. Cooperate with his bishop and fellow priests in the presbyterium, ensuring that parish life is integrated into the wider diocesan mission and that pastoral action is coordinated.
- c. Help parishioners feel part of both the local diocese and the universal Church, inviting them to sustain that communion through prayer, participation in liturgy, charitable works and support for the wider mission of the Church.

§3. In all these responsibilities, the pastor shall act as a shepherd who knows his flock, fostering unity, compassion and faith, so that the parish becomes a living witness of the communion of the Church.

Canon 364 - Principal Liturgical and Sacramental Duties

§1. A pastor is especially responsible for the faithful administration of the sacraments and the conduct of liturgical rites within the parish. His duties include:

- a. Administering baptism, ensuring proper preparation of parents and godparents, and safeguarding the dignity of the sacrament.
- b. Confirming those in danger of death, in accordance with canon 883 §3, so that they may be strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- c. Giving Viaticum, anointing the sick in accordance with canons 1003 §§2–3, and imparting the apostolic blessing, thereby accompanying the faithful in their final journey with pastoral care and sacramental grace.
- d. Assisting at marriages, imparting the nuptial blessing and ensuring that couples are properly prepared for the sacrament of matrimony.

- e. Conducting funeral rites, offering prayers for the deceased and consolation for the bereaved, and ensuring that the rites are celebrated with reverence and hope in the resurrection.
- f. Blessing the baptismal font at Easter, leading processions and solemn blessings outside the church, thereby fostering the devotional life of the parish.
- g. Celebrating the more solemn Eucharist on Sundays and Primatial days of obligation, ensuring that the liturgy is conducted with reverence, fidelity to the rubrics and pastoral sensitivity.

§2. In fulfilling these duties, the pastor shall act as the principal liturgical leader of the parish, ensuring that the sacraments are celebrated worthily and that the faithful are drawn into deeper communion with Christ and the Church.

Canon 365 - Collections and Clergy Remuneration

§1. When anyone other than the pastor performs a parish function, offerings received must be deposited into the parish account, unless the donor's contrary intention is absolutely clear. This ensures transparency, accountability and the proper stewardship of parish resources.

§2. The diocesan bishop, with the advice of the presbyteral council, may issue norms governing how such collections are to be shared and how clergy are to be remunerated. These norms shall ensure fairness, consistency and the proper support of clergy and parish ministries.

§3. The pastor shall oversee the administration of parish funds, ensuring that offerings are used for their intended purpose and that financial records are properly maintained.

§4. All financial transactions shall be recorded in the parish archives and subject to inspection by the diocesan bishop or his delegate, safeguarding the integrity of parish finances and the trust of the faithful.

Canon 366 - Legal Representation and Asset Management

§1. The pastor represents the parish in all legal matters, acting as its juridical authority under Church law. He is responsible for safeguarding the parish's rights and ensuring that its interests are properly defended in both ecclesiastical and civil contexts.

§2. The pastor must ensure that the goods of the parish are administered in accordance with canons 1281–1288. This includes:

- a. Exercising prudent stewardship of parish assets, ensuring they are used for the good of the faithful and the mission of the Church.
- b. Observing canonical norms regarding contracts, alienation of property and financial transactions.
- c. Maintaining accurate records of income, expenditures and property holdings.
- d. Ensuring transparency and accountability in financial administration, subject to diocesan oversight.

§3. The pastor shall collaborate with parish finance councils and diocesan authorities to ensure that administration of goods reflects both canonical requirements and pastoral priorities.

Canon 367 - Masses for the Parish

§1. After taking possession of the parish, the pastor must apply one Mass for his people every Sunday and Primatial day of obligation. This Mass, known as the *Missa pro populo*, expresses the pastor's spiritual responsibility for the faithful entrusted to him.

§2. If the pastor serves multiple parishes, only one such Mass is required for all his people on those days, ensuring that the obligation is fulfilled without duplication.

§3. Any missed Masses must be applied as soon as possible, preserving the integrity of the obligation and ensuring that the faithful are remembered in prayer.

§4. The pastor shall keep a record of these Masses in the parish register, subject to inspection by the diocesan bishop or his delegate.

Canon 368 - Parish Registers and Archives

§1. Parishes must keep official registers of baptisms, marriages, deaths and any others required by the bishops' conference or the diocesan bishop. The pastor must ensure that these registers are accurately maintained, securely preserved and regularly updated.

§2. The baptismal register must also record confirmations, marriages for canonical status, adoptions, ordinations, perpetual religious professions and changes of rite. These entries must be noted on the baptismal certificate to ensure canonical accuracy.

§3. Every parish must have its own seal. All documents of canonical importance must be signed by the pastor or his delegate and sealed, ensuring authenticity and legal validity.

§4. Parishes must maintain an archive, protected from outsiders, containing registers of all sacramental services, episcopal mandates, pastoral letters and other essential documents. These archives are open to inspection by the diocesan bishop or his delegate, ensuring accountability and transparency.

§5. Historic registers must be preserved according to particular law, ensuring that the heritage of the parish and the diocese is safeguarded for future generations.

§6. The pastor shall ensure that archives are properly organised, indexed and, where possible, duplicated electronically for secure preservation.

Canon 369 - Pastoral Council

§1. When the diocesan bishop deems it appropriate, each parish may establish a pastoral council. The council is presided over by the pastor and includes clergy, religious and lay representatives. Its purpose is to assist in pastoral planning, to foster collaboration among the faithful and to strengthen the parish's mission in communion with the diocese.

§2. The pastoral council has only a consultative vote. It operates under norms set by the diocesan bishop, who determines its composition, frequency of meetings and scope of responsibilities.

§3. The council shall provide advice on matters such as evangelisation, catechesis, liturgy, charitable outreach and financial stewardship, always respecting the authority of the pastor and the bishop.

§4. Records of the council's deliberations shall be preserved in the parish archives, ensuring transparency and continuity of pastoral planning.

Canon 370 - Conclusion of Pastoral Service

§1. A pastor leaves office in the following circumstances:

- a. Removal or transfer by the diocesan bishop in accordance with law, when pastoral necessity or the good of the faithful requires.
- b. His own resignation for just cause, accepted by the bishop, such as health concerns or other serious reasons.
- c. Expiry of a fixed-term appointment, where such appointments are permitted by law.

§2. Religious priests or those incardinated in a society of apostolic life leave office under the provisions of canon 682 §2, ensuring that their departure respects both diocesan and religious norms.

§3. Upon reaching the age of seventy-five, a pastor must submit his resignation to the diocesan bishop. The bishop, considering all circumstances and diocesan norms, may accept the resignation immediately or defer acceptance for a suitable period.

§4. The diocesan bishop must arrange appropriate support and housing for a pastor whose resignation has been accepted, ensuring that his dignity and welfare are safeguarded in retirement.

§5. All acts of resignation, removal or transfer shall be made in writing, communicated to the person concerned and recorded in the diocesan archives.

Subsection X

Vicars Forane – Deans

Canon 371 - Definition and Appointment

§1. A vicar forane, also called a dean, is a priest placed over a group of neighbouring parishes known as a vicariate forane. His role is to foster unity among the parishes, encourage collaboration among clergy, and support the pastoral mission of the diocese in that region.

§2. Unless particular law provides otherwise, the diocesan bishop appoints the vicar forane after consulting the priests who serve in that area. This consultation ensures that the appointment reflects the needs of the local community and the suitability of the candidate.

§3. The appointment shall be made in writing, specifying the responsibilities of the office, and recorded in the diocesan archives.

Canon 372 - Term and Removal

§1. The diocesan bishop selects a priest he considers suitable for the office of dean, taking account of the pastoral needs of the vicariate forane. The office of dean is distinct from any parish appointment and is exercised in addition to the priest's ordinary pastoral duties.

§2. The dean serves for the period specified by local law or diocesan norms. The bishop may also establish particular statutes governing the length of service, renewal of appointment and responsibilities of the dean.

§3. The diocesan bishop may remove the dean at any time for a just cause, using his own prudent judgment. Removal shall be made in writing, communicated to the priest concerned and recorded in the diocesan archives.

§4. In the event of removal or vacancy, the bishop shall ensure that the pastoral needs of the vicariate forane are met without interruption, either by appointing a new dean or by temporarily entrusting the responsibilities to another suitable priest.

Canon 373 - Duties of the Vicar Forane

§1. In addition to any rights granted by local law, the vicar forane (dean) must exercise pastoral leadership across the vicariate forane, ensuring unity and fidelity in ministry. His responsibilities include:

- a. Promoting and coordinating common pastoral activity across the vicariate, fostering collaboration among parishes and clergy.
- b. Ensuring that clergy in his district live according to their vocation, maintain discipline and carry out their duties diligently.
- c. Overseeing liturgical practice, ensuring that celebrations are conducted reverently and in conformity with law. He must also maintain the beauty and care of churches and furnishings, safeguard the Blessed Sacrament, ensure parish registers are correctly kept, manage parish assets responsibly and see that rectories are properly maintained.

§2. The dean must also:

- a. Ensure that clergy attend required lectures, theological meetings or conferences, as prescribed in canon 279 §2, thereby promoting ongoing formation and theological growth.
- b. Provide spiritual support for priests, especially those facing difficulties, offering encouragement, counsel and fraternal assistance.

§3. The dean must care for pastors who are seriously ill, ensuring they receive both spiritual and practical aid. He shall also see that funerals of deceased clergy are conducted with dignity and reverence, and must safeguard parish records, furnishings and assets so that nothing is lost or neglected during illness or after death.

§4. The dean is obliged to visit each parish in his district according to the schedule set by the diocesan bishop. These visits shall be recorded and reported to the bishop, ensuring accountability and pastoral oversight.

§5. In fulfilling these duties, the dean acts as a link between the diocesan bishop and the local clergy, fostering communion, pastoral effectiveness and the unity of diocesan life.

Subsection XI

Chaplains

Canon 374 – Definition of a Chaplain

A chaplain is a priest entrusted in a stable way with the pastoral care, in whole or in part, of a specific community or group. He exercises this care under both universal and particular law, ensuring that the spiritual needs of those entrusted to him are met with fidelity and consistency.

Canon 375 – Appointment of a Chaplain

Unless otherwise provided by law or by special rights, the local ordinary—usually the diocesan bishop—appoints the chaplain. The bishop also installs or confirms anyone lawfully proposed or elected, thereby safeguarding the legitimacy and stability of the chaplain’s ministry.

Canon 376 – Faculties of a Chaplain

§1. A chaplain must possess all the faculties necessary for his ministry. By virtue of office he may:

- a. Hear confessions of those entrusted to him, providing reconciliation and spiritual healing.
- b. Preach the Word of God, ensuring the faithful receive sound teaching and encouragement.
- c. Administer Viaticum and anoint the sick, offering sacramental comfort in times of illness and at the approach of death.
- d. Confirm those in danger of death, ensuring they receive the fullness of sacramental grace.

§2. In hospitals, prisons and at sea, a chaplain may also absolve certain censures (*latae sententiae*) that are neither reserved nor declared, without prejudice to Canon 976. This provision ensures that those in exceptional circumstances are not deprived of sacramental reconciliation.

Canon 377 – Chaplains of Lay Institutes

§1. Before appointing a chaplain to a lay religious institute, the diocesan bishop must consult the institute’s superior. The superior, after hearing the community, may propose a priest for appointment, ensuring that the chaplain is chosen with respect for the institute’s life and discernment.

§2. The chaplain may conduct liturgies and provide sacramental ministry for the community, but he must not involve himself in the internal governance of the institute. His role is pastoral and sacramental, not administrative, thereby safeguarding the autonomy of the lay institute.

Canon 378 – Chaplains for Special Groups

Where possible, chaplains should be appointed to serve those unable to access ordinary pastoral care. This includes migrants, exiles, refugees, nomads and seafarers, who often live in circumstances of displacement or isolation. Chaplains for these groups ensure that the Church's pastoral presence reaches all the faithful, especially those most in need of spiritual support.

Canon 379 – Military Chaplains

Military chaplains are governed by their own special laws. These laws regulate their appointment, faculties and pastoral responsibilities, ensuring that the unique circumstances of military life are met with appropriate pastoral care. Their ministry provides sacramental and spiritual support to members of the armed forces, while respecting both ecclesiastical and civil provisions.

Volume III

Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

Section I

Subsection I

General Rules Common to All Institutes of Consecrated Life

Canon 380 – Nature and Entry of Consecrated Life

§1. By taking special vows, chastity, poverty and obedience, faithful individuals give themselves wholly to God, dedicating themselves to His honour, to the building up of the Church and to the salvation of the world; they strive for perfect charity in the service of God's kingdom and, as a visible sign in the Church, foretell heavenly glory.

§2. Those called to this way of life freely enter institutes of consecrated life erected by competent Church authority and, in accordance with each institute's own laws, profess the evangelical counsels through vows or other sacred bonds, thereby growing in charity and binding themselves closely to the Church and its mystery.

§3. The Three Evangelical Counsels

1. Chastity A vow of celibate chastity, freely embracing a life without marriage or sexual relations, dedicating one's capacity for love entirely to God and service of others.
2. Poverty A vow renouncing personal ownership and material security, living simply and sharing goods in common according to the institute's rule.
3. Obedience A vow submitting one's will to legitimate authority within the institute and the Church, trusting God's guidance through superiors.

§4. Consecrated life involves giving oneself wholly to God through these vows. This is not partial commitment but complete dedication of one's life, freedom and future to God's service.

§5. Those in consecrated life dedicate themselves to:

1. God's honour: giving glory to God through a life wholly devoted to Him

2. Building up the Church: strengthening the Church's mission and witness
3. Salvation of the world: serving humanity's deepest spiritual needs

§6. Sign of Heavenly Glory: Consecrated persons serve as visible reminders that earthly life is not ultimate, pointing to the eternal life where there is no marriage and all are united perfectly with God.

§7. Free Entry Entry: into consecrated life must be entirely voluntary. No one may be coerced, pressured or manipulated into religious profession.

§8. Church Authority Required: Only institutes properly erected by competent Church authority (bishop, or Primate) are legitimate. Private associations without Church approval cannot offer true consecrated life.

§9. Profession According to Proper Law: Each institute has its own constitutions and rules approved by the Church. Members profess vows according to these specific laws, which govern formation, governance and apostolate.

§10. Sacred Bonds: Whilst vows are the typical form, some institutes use other sacred bonds (promises, oaths, consecrations) to embrace the evangelical counsels.

§11. Growth in Charity: The purpose of vows is not restriction but liberation for love—removing obstacles to loving God and neighbour more completely.

§12. Ecclesial Bond: Through profession, members bind themselves closely to the Church's mystery and mission, becoming especially dedicated to the Church's life and work.

Canon 381 – Role and Divine Call of Consecrated Life

§1. The consecrated life of those who profess the evangelical counsels is integral to the Church's life and holiness and must be recognised, supported and fostered by all. This way of life belongs fundamentally to the Church's holiness and should be promoted by every member of the faithful.

§2. Certain Christian faithful are specially called by God to embrace this state so that, by the unique gift of their vows, they contribute to the Church's saving mission in harmony with their institute's founding spirit and purpose.

§3. Consecrated life is not optional or peripheral but essential to the Church's full life. The Church without religious communities would lack something fundamental to its nature.

§4. All members of the Church, bishops, clergy and laity, must recognise the value and importance of consecrated life, neither ignoring nor marginalising those who embrace it.

§5. The entire Church has responsibility to:

1. Encourage vocations to consecrated life
2. Support religious communities materially and spiritually

3. Respect the distinctive charisms of different institutes
4. Promote understanding of consecrated life's value

§6. Consecrated life demonstrates that the Church's ultimate purpose is holiness—union with God. Religious communities embody this call in a particularly visible way.

§7. Every member of the faithful should promote consecrated life through:

1. Prayer for vocations
2. Encouraging those discerning this call
3. Supporting religious communities
4. Defending the dignity and autonomy of consecrated life

§8. The vocation to consecrated life comes from God, not from human choice alone. God specially calls certain individuals to this way of life.

§9. Not everyone is called to consecrated life. It is a particular vocation for those whom God chooses and who freely respond to that call.

§10. Each person's profession of vows brings a unique gift to the Church. The diversity of persons and charisms enriches the Church's mission.

§11. Those in consecrated life contribute to the Church's saving mission through:

1. Prayer and intercession
2. Witness to Gospel values
3. Service to the poor, sick and marginalised
4. Teaching and formation
5. Works of mercy and justice

§12. Each religious institute has a distinctive charism and founding spirit given by God through its founder. Members live out their vows according to this particular spirit, whether:

1. Contemplative (focused on prayer)
2. Active (engaged in apostolic works)
3. Mixed (combining prayer and apostolate)
4. Specific ministries (education, healthcare, social service)

§13. Members' service should align with their institute's founding purpose, not contradicting or abandoning the charism that defines their community's identity and mission.

Canon 382 – Origin and Preservation of the Evangelical Counsels

The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are rooted in the teaching and example of Christ. They are a divine gift entrusted to the Church by the Lord and are preserved through His grace in every age. These counsels serve as a living witness to the kingdom of God, calling the faithful to a deeper union with Christ and to a life of holiness. Those who embrace them do so not merely by human effort but by reliance on divine assistance, ensuring that the counsels remain a perpetual source of renewal within the Church.

Canon 383 – Church Authority over Counsels and Institutes

§1. It belongs to the competent authority of the Church to interpret the evangelical counsels and to regulate their observance by universal and particular law. Through canonical approval, the Church establishes stable forms of consecrated life, ensuring that the counsels are lived authentically and fruitfully. That same authority must safeguard the flourishing of institutes, guiding them to remain faithful to the spirit of their founders and to sound traditions. In this way, the Church preserves the diversity of consecrated life whilst maintaining unity in doctrine and discipline.

§2. Interpretive Authority: The Church, through its competent authorities (Primate, bishops, conferences), has the right and duty to:

1. Interpret what the evangelical counsels mean in practice
2. Determine how chastity, poverty and obedience should be lived
3. Clarify authentic from inauthentic expressions of consecrated life

§3. Regulatory Power: The Church regulates consecrated life through:

1. Universal law: canons applying to all institutes throughout the Church
2. Particular law: norms specific to regions, dioceses or individual institutes

§4. Canonical Approval: New institutes of consecrated life require formal Church approval to be legitimate. This approval:

1. Verifies the institute's authenticity and soundness
2. Grants canonical status and rights within the Church
3. Establishes the institute as a stable, recognised form of consecrated life

§5. Ensuring Authentic Practice: Church oversight ensures that:

1. The evangelical counsels are truly lived, not merely claimed
2. Vows are taken seriously and observed faithfully
3. Community life reflects genuine Gospel values
4. The institute bears authentic spiritual fruit

§6. Safeguarding Flourishing: Church authority has responsibility to protect and promote the wellbeing of institutes by:

1. Monitoring their spiritual and material health
2. Intervening when serious problems arise
3. Providing guidance during difficulties
4. Supporting their mission and apostolate

§7. Fidelity to Founding Spirit: The Church guides institutes to remain faithful to:

1. The charism given by their founder
2. The original vision and purpose
3. The spiritual heritage and traditions proper to the institute

§8. Sound Traditions: Institutes must maintain:

1. Authentic spiritual practices established over time
2. Proven methods of formation and governance
3. Customs that embody their distinctive charism
4. Traditions that have borne good fruit

§9. Balancing Diversity and Unity: The Church's authority preserves:

1. Diversity: respecting the unique charisms of different institutes
2. Unity: ensuring all remain faithful to Catholic doctrine and discipline

§10. Practical Exercise: Competent authority exercises this responsibility through:

1. Approving constitutions and rules
2. Conducting canonical visitations
3. Resolving internal disputes
4. Authorising foundations and closures
5. Granting or withdrawing canonical status

§11. Levels of Authority: Different authorities have responsibility:

- Primate: institutes of Primatial right (throughout the Church)
- Bishop: diocesan institutes (within a single diocese)

- Conference of Bishops: institutes spanning multiple dioceses nationally

§12. Protection from Abuse: Church oversight protects against:

1. Exploitation of members
2. Deviation from authentic consecrated life
3. Financial mismanagement
4. Loss of religious character
5. Harmful innovations

§13. When Intervention Is Needed: Church authority may intervene when:

1. An institute deviates from its founding charism
2. Serious abuses occur
3. Vocations cease and the institute is no longer viable
4. Internal governance fails
5. The institute's mission is compromised

§14. Suppression of Institutes: In grave circumstances, competent authority may suppress an institute that:

Has lost its religious character

Cannot sustain itself

Has irreparably departed from its founding purpose

No longer serves the Church's mission

§15. Goal of Church Authority: The ultimate purpose is ensuring that consecrated life:

1. Remains a genuine gift to the Church
2. Bears authentic spiritual fruit
3. Serves the salvation of souls
4. Glorifies God through faithful witness

Canon 384 – Diversity of Charisms in Institutes

Within the Church there exists a wide variety of institutes of consecrated life, each endowed with a distinct charism. Some follow Christ principally in prayer and contemplation, others in announcing the kingdom through preaching and teaching, others in serving the poor and those in need, and still others by living among the world as a leaven of the Gospel. All of these

charisms, though diverse in expression, fulfil the will of the Father and contribute to the sanctification of the Church. This diversity is a sign of the richness of the Spirit's gifts and a source of vitality for the mission of the Church.

Canon 385 – Preservation of Founders' Spirit and Traditions

Every member of an institute must faithfully uphold the founder's intention regarding its nature, purpose, spirit and character, as sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority. Alongside this, the institute's sound customs form part of its patrimony and must be preserved intact. Fidelity to the founder's vision and traditions ensures continuity of charism and strengthens the identity of the institute. Members are therefore bound to safeguard this heritage, transmitting it faithfully to future generations so that the institute remains a living witness to the Gospel and a stable presence within the Church.

Canon 386 – Diocesan Erection of Institutes

A diocesan bishop, within his own territory and after consultation with the Primate See, may erect new institutes of consecrated life by formal decree. This ensures that new foundations are established with proper discernment, ecclesial oversight and fidelity to the wider communion of the Church. The bishop must verify that the proposed institute possesses a sound charism, a clear purpose and the capacity to sustain its mission before granting approval.

Canon 387 – Aggregation and Autonomy of Institutes

An institute may be aggregated to another by the competent authority of the aggregating institute, provided that the canonical autonomy of the aggregated institute remains fully intact. Aggregation fosters communion and mutual support between institutes, while safeguarding the distinct identity, governance and patrimony of each. This provision ensures collaboration without compromising legitimate independence.

Canon 388 – Internal Organisation and Division of Institutes

The competent authority of an institute may divide it into regions or provinces, erect new houses or communities, unite existing ones or redefine their boundaries, always in accordance with its constitutions. Such organisational adjustments allow institutes to respond to pastoral needs, demographic changes and missionary opportunities, while maintaining fidelity to their founding charism and canonical norms.

Canon 389 – Mergers, Unions and Confederations Reserved to the Primate See

Only the Primate See may authorise complete mergers or unions of institutes of consecrated life, as well as their confederations and federations. This central oversight ensures that such significant changes are undertaken with proper discernment, safeguarding the integrity of consecrated life and preserving the diversity of charisms within the Church.

Canon 390 – Apostolic Permission for Changes to Approved Elements

No institute may alter any aspect previously approved by the Primate See without obtaining its express permission. This requirement guarantees that approved constitutions, charisms and structures remain faithful to the Church's discernment and that any modifications are made in

communion with apostolic authority. It protects the stability of consecrated life and ensures continuity with the Church's tradition.

Canon 391 – Suppression of Institutes and Their Goods by the Primate See

Only the Primate See may suppress an institute of consecrated life or determine the disposition of its temporal goods. This ensures that such grave decisions are made with universal oversight, safeguarding the patrimony of consecrated life and maintaining justice in the administration of ecclesiastical property. The Primate See must act with discernment, preserving the dignity of the institute's members and ensuring that its goods are directed to purposes consistent with the Church's mission.

Canon 392 – Suppression of Parts by Institute Authority

An institute's competent authority may suppress or close its individual communities or branches in accordance with its constitutions. This provision allows institutes to adapt to pastoral realities, demographic changes or financial constraints, while remaining faithful to their charism. Such decisions must be made prudently, with respect for the members affected and in conformity with canonical norms.

Canon 394 – Autonomy of Institutes and Episcopal Safeguard

§1 Each institute is acknowledged to possess its own legitimate autonomy, especially in governance, and to preserve its patrimony intact. This autonomy is essential for maintaining the integrity of its charism and mission.

§2 Local ordinaries are charged with respecting and safeguarding this autonomy within their territories. Bishops must support the institute's life and mission without infringing upon its rightful independence, ensuring harmony between diocesan structures and consecrated communities.

Canon 395 – Essential Constitutions and Norms

§1 Every institute's fundamental code or constitutions must include the founder's intention regarding its nature, purpose, spirit and character (cf. Canon 578), together with norms on governance, member discipline, incorporation, formation and the proper object of the sacred bonds. These elements form the foundation of the institute's identity and mission.

§2 These fundamental norms require approval by the Church's competent authority and may be amended only with its consent, ensuring fidelity to ecclesial oversight and safeguarding the institute's patrimony.

§3 Constitutions are to integrate spiritual insights and juridical norms suitably, avoiding unnecessary complexity, so that they remain accessible and practical for members.

§4 Other rules established by an institute's authority should be collected in supplementary codes. These may be reviewed and adapted to meet the needs of different places and times, allowing flexibility while preserving the stability of the constitutions.

Canon 396 – Classification of Institutes: Clerical and Lay

§1 By its very nature, the state of consecrated life is distinct from both clerical and lay states.

§2 An institute is deemed clerical if, by the intention of its founder or by legitimate tradition, it is directed by clerics, includes the exercise of sacred orders and is so recognised by the Church.

§3 An institute is considered lay if, recognised by the Church, its nature, character and purpose, as defined by its founder or tradition, do not include the exercise of sacred orders.

Canon 397 – Institutes of Primatial or Diocesan Right

An institute of consecrated life is recognised as of Primatial right if the Primatial See has erected or formally approved it by decree. It is considered of diocesan right if it was erected by a diocesan bishop but has not obtained such approval from the Primatial See. This distinction safeguards the proper relationship between local and universal authority, ensuring that institutes are founded with legitimacy and discernment.

Canon 398 – Special Subjection to the Supreme Authority

§1 Because institutes of consecrated life are dedicated in a special way to the service of God and the whole Church, they are subject to the supreme authority of the Church in a particular manner. This subjection guarantees fidelity to the Church's mission and communion with its highest authority.

§2 Individual members, by reason of the sacred bond of obedience, are likewise bound to obey the Primate as their highest superior. Their consecration thus unites them not only to their own institute but also to the wider communion of the Church under Primatial oversight.

Canon 399 – Primatial Exemption from Local Governance

By virtue of his primacy and for the common good, the Primate may, in view of the needs of institutes and their apostolate, exempt any institute of consecrated life from the governance of the local ordinary. Such institutes may be accounted immediately subject either to the Primate himself or to another ecclesiastical authority designated by him. This provision ensures flexibility in governance, allowing institutes to flourish in their mission while remaining firmly rooted in ecclesial communion.

Canon 400 – Reports and Promotion of Primatial See Documents

§1 To foster communion with the Primatial See, each supreme moderator must send a concise report on the institute's state and life to the Primatial See, in the form and at the times prescribed by that See. These reports ensure accountability, transparency and mutual support between institutes and the universal authority of the Church.

§2 Moderators of every institute are to promote awareness of and ensure observance of any documents issued by the Primatial See that concern their members. This obligation guarantees that institutes remain faithful to the Church's teaching and discipline, and that their members are guided by the directives of the supreme authority.

Canon 401 – Exclusive Governance of Primatial Institutes

Institutes of Primatial right are subject immediately and exclusively to the power of the Primatial See in matters of internal governance and discipline. This provision ensures that such institutes remain directly accountable to the supreme authority of the Church, safeguarding their universal mission and preserving unity across diocesan boundaries. The Primatial See alone determines their internal organisation, discipline and oversight, thereby protecting their autonomy from local interference.

Canon 402 – Diocesan Institutes under Episcopal Care

An institute of diocesan right remains under the special care and authority of its diocesan bishop. The bishop ensures that the institute remains faithful to its charism, observes its constitutions and contributes fruitfully to the mission of the local Church. Episcopal care provides stability and guidance, while respecting the legitimate autonomy of the institute in its internal life.

Canon 403 – Episcopal Approval of Constitutions and Dispensations

§1 The bishop of the principal seat approves an institute's constitutions and confirms any legitimate amendments, except for those matters reserved to the Primatial See. He also handles issues of major importance affecting the whole institute that exceed its internal authority, consulting other diocesan bishops if the institute extends into multiple dioceses. This ensures that governance remains consistent and collaborative across wider territories.

§2 A diocesan bishop may grant dispensations from the constitutions in particular cases, providing pastoral flexibility while maintaining fidelity to the institute's approved norms.

Canon 404 – Powers of Superiors and Chapters

§1 Superiors and chapters exercise authority over members as defined by universal law and by their own constitutions. This authority governs daily life, discipline and mission within the institute, ensuring order and fidelity to its charism.

§2 In clerical religious institutes of Primatial right, superiors and chapters also exercise ecclesiastical power of governance in both the external and internal forum. Their authority therefore carries juridical weight within the wider Church, extending beyond the internal life of the institute.

Canon 405 – Admission to an Institute

§1 Any Catholic of right intention who meets the universal and proper legal requirements and is free from impediments may be admitted to an institute of consecrated life. This provision safeguards the integrity of consecrated life by ensuring that candidates are suitable and prepared.

§2 No one may be admitted without suitable preparation for the institute's way of life. Proper formation is essential so that candidates understand the demands of consecrated life and can embrace them freely and responsibly.

Canon 406 – Observance of the Evangelical Counsels

§1 Each institute, mindful of its own character and purpose, must define in its constitutions how the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are to be observed in its form of life. This ensures that the counsels are lived in harmony with the institute's charism and mission.

§2 All members must observe these counsels faithfully and fully, ordering their lives according to the institute's proper law, and thus striving for the perfection of their state. The counsels are not optional but integral to consecrated life, guiding members towards holiness and service.

Canon 407 – Counsel of Chastity

The evangelical counsel of chastity, embraced for the sake of the kingdom of heaven as a sign of the world to come and a source of greater fruitfulness, entails the obligation of perfect continence in celibacy. This counsel is a witness to the eternal kingdom, freeing the heart for undivided love of God and service to His people. It is both a gift and a discipline, sustained by grace and lived as a sign of total dedication to Christ.

Canon 408 – Counsel of Poverty

The evangelical counsel of poverty, imitating Christ who, though rich, became poor for us, requires a life that is truly and spiritually poor. It must be lived soberly, without attachment to earthly riches, and entails dependence on and limitation in the use and disposal of goods according to each institute's proper law. Poverty is not merely external deprivation but a spiritual disposition, freeing the heart for God and for service to others.

Canon 409 – Counsel of Obedience

The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in a spirit of faith and love following Christ obedient unto death, requires the submission of one's will to legitimate superiors acting in the person of Christ, whenever they command according to the institute's constitutions. This obedience is a participation in Christ's own self-offering, fostering unity within the community and strengthening the witness of consecrated life.

Canon 410 – Community Life as Family in Christ

Each institute's proper life of brothers or sisters unites all members as a special family in Christ. This communal life must be defined so as to support every member in fulfilling their vocation. By charity-rooted communion, the community serves as a visible example of universal reconciliation in Christ, showing the world the power of fraternal love and shared mission.

Canon 411 – Eremitic or Anchoritic Life

§1 In addition to institutes of consecrated life, the Church recognises the eremitic or anchoritic vocation as a distinct and venerable path of holiness. In this form of life, the faithful devote themselves more strictly to God through withdrawal from the world, embracing solitude, silent prayer and penance. The eremitic vocation is a radical witness to the primacy of God, showing that communion with Him is the highest good. By renouncing ordinary social ties and worldly pursuits, hermits manifest the call to interior conversion and the unceasing search for union

with Christ. Their hidden life becomes a source of spiritual strength for the wider Church, reminding all the faithful of the eternal destiny to which they are called.

§2 A hermit is lawfully recognised as living consecrated life if they publicly profess the three evangelical counsels—by vow or other sacred bond—in the hands of the diocesan bishop, and observe a proper programme of life under his guidance. This profession places the hermit’s solitary vocation firmly within the communion of the Church, ensuring that it is not an isolated endeavour but a consecrated witness lived under ecclesiastical authority. The diocesan bishop provides oversight, discernment and pastoral care, safeguarding the authenticity of the hermit’s vocation and ensuring fidelity to the evangelical counsels. Though solitary in practice, the hermit remains ecclesial in identity, rooted in the life of the Church and contributing to her mission through prayer, penance and hidden intercession.

§3 The eremitic vocation, while rare, is a precious gift to the Church. It recalls the ancient traditions of the desert fathers and mothers, whose lives of solitude and asceticism became fountains of wisdom and holiness. In every age, hermits serve as a sign of the transcendent, pointing beyond the temporal order to the eternal kingdom of God. Their silence and withdrawal are not acts of abandonment but of deeper communion, lived in solidarity with the Church and in service to the world through hidden sacrifice.

Canon 412 – Order of Virgins

§1 Distinguished from other forms of consecrated life, the order of virgins comprises those who, by an approved liturgical rite performed by the diocesan bishop, consecrate themselves to God, are mystically betrothed to Christ and dedicate themselves to the service of the Church. Their consecration is both personal and ecclesial, manifesting the bridal love of the Church for Christ.

§2 To live out their resolution more faithfully and to assist one another in serving the Church, virgins may associate together in bodies or societies. Such associations provide mutual support while respecting the personal nature of their consecration.

Canon 413 – Approval of New Forms of Consecrated Life

Only the Primate may approve new forms of consecrated life. Diocesan bishops, however, must discern new charisms granted by the Holy Spirit, assist those promoting such forms to express their proposals clearly, and protect them by establishing appropriate statutes in accordance with the general norms of this section. This ensures that authentic charisms are nurtured while maintaining communion with the universal Church.

Canon 414 – Application to Both Sexes

All norms established for institutes of consecrated life and their members apply equally to either sex, unless the context or nature of a matter clearly indicates otherwise. This provision affirms the equal dignity of men and women in consecrated life, ensuring that canonical norms are applied without discrimination while respecting the particularities of different vocations.

Subsection II

Religious Institutes

Canon 415 – Consecration, Nature, and Public Witness

§1 As a consecration of the whole person, religious life manifests in the Church a wonderful marriage brought about by God, a sign of the future age. Thus the religious brings to perfection a total self-giving as a sacrifice offered to God, through which his or her whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity.

§2 A religious institute is a society in which members, according to proper law, pronounce public vows, either perpetual or temporary which are to be renewed when the period of time has elapsed, and lead a life of brothers or sisters in common. Such a society may gather either in person or through legitimate online means, provided that its unity, discipline and common life are preserved under lawful authority.

§3 The public witness to be rendered by religious to Christ and the Church entails a separation from the world proper to the character and purpose of each institute.

Canon 416 – Legitimate House and Oratory

§1 A religious community is to live in a legitimately established house under the authority of a superior designated according to the norm of law. Each house must have at least an oratory in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved, so that it remains the true centre of the community's life.

§2 In addition to traditional houses, monastic communities may also be dispersed and gathered through legitimate online means. Such communities, though geographically spread across different regions, are recognised as forming a single house when united under lawful authority and common discipline.

§3 Members may meet in physical locations globally, but the inability to attend a physical community is not in itself a reason to reject someone who requests membership. Admission is to be judged according to vocation, suitability and fidelity to the community's way of life, rather than physical proximity.

§4 Online gatherings must be conducted with reverence and order, ensuring that the bonds of fraternity, obedience and prayer are preserved. The superior remains responsible for safeguarding unity, maintaining discipline and ensuring that the dispersed community remains faithful to its charism.

§5 In all cases, whether gathered physically or virtually, the Eucharist celebrated and reserved in the oratory of the house remains the spiritual centre of the community, binding members together in communion with Christ and His Church.

Canon 417 – Episcopal Consent and Apostolic Permission

Houses of a religious institute are erected by the Primate authority, with the approval and written consent of the diocesan bishop.

Canon 418 – Erection Considerations and Prudence

§ 1. The erection of houses takes place with consideration for their advantage to the Church and the institute and with suitable safeguards for those things which are required to carry out properly the religious life of the members according to the proper purposes and spirit of the institute.

§ 2. No house is to be erected unless it can be judged prudently that the needs of the members will be provided for suitably.

Canon 419 – Rights Conferred by Diocesan Consent

The consent of the diocesan bishop to erect a religious house of any institute entails the right:

1. to lead a life according to the character and proper purposes of the institute;
2. to exercise the works proper to the institute according to the norm of law and without prejudice to the conditions attached to the consent;

Canon 420 – Conversion to Apostolic Works

For a religious house to be converted to apostolic works different from those for which it was established, the consent of the diocesan bishop is required, but not if it concerns a change which refers only to internal governance and discipline, without prejudice to the laws of the foundation.

Canon 421 – Autonomy of Houses

§ 1. A religious house of canons regular or of monks under the governance and care of its own moderator is autonomous unless the constitutions state otherwise.

§ 2. The moderator of an autonomous house is a major superior by law.

Canon 422 – Associated Monasteries of Nuns

Monasteries of nuns associated to an institute of men maintain their own way of life and governance according to the constitutions. Mutual rights and obligations are to be defined in such a way that spiritual good can come from the association.

Canon 423 – Diocesan Vigilance

An autonomous monastery which does not have another major superior besides its own moderator and is not associated to another institute of religious in such a way that the superior of the latter possesses true power over such a monastery as determined by the constitutions is entrusted to the special vigilance of the diocesan bishop according to the norm of law.

Canon 424 – Suppression of Religious Houses

§ 1. The Primate can suppress a legitimately erected religious house according to the norm of the constitutions, after the diocesan bishop has been consulted. The proper law of the institute is to make provision for the goods of the suppressed house, without prejudice to the intentions of the founders or donors or to legitimately acquired rights.

§ 2. The suppression of the only house of an institute belongs to the Primatial See, to which the decision regarding the goods in that case is also reserved.

§ 3. To suppress an autonomous monastery of nuns belongs to the Primatial See, with due regard to the prescripts of the constitutions concerning its goods.

Canon 425 – Norms for Exercise of Authority

Superiors are to fulfil their function and exercise their power according to the norm of universal and proper law.

Canon 426 – Authority as Service

Superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service. Therefore, docile to the will of God in fulfilling their function, they are to govern their subjects as sons or daughters of God and, promoting the voluntary obedience of their subjects with reverence for the human person, they are to listen to them willingly and foster their common endeavor for the good of the institute and the Church, but without prejudice to the authority of superiors to decide and prescribe what must be done.

Canon 427 – Pastoral Care and Example

Superiors are to devote themselves diligently to their office and together with the members entrusted to them are to strive to build a community of brothers or sisters in Christ, in which God is sought and loved before all things. Therefore, they are to nourish the members regularly with the food of the word of God and are to draw them to the celebration of the sacred liturgy. They are to be an example to them in cultivating virtues and in the observance of the laws and traditions of their own institute; they are to meet the personal needs of the members appropriately, solicitously to care for and visit the sick, to correct the restless, to console the faint of heart, and to be patient toward all.

Canon 428 – Definition of Major Superiors

Those who govern an entire institute, a province of an institute or part equivalent to a province, or an autonomous house, as well as their vicars, are major superiors. Comparable to these are an abbot primate and a superior of a monastic congregation, who nonetheless do not have all the power which universal law grants to major superiors.

Canon 429 – Definition of Province

A province is a grouping of several houses which constitutes an immediate part of the same institute under the same superior. It must be canonically erected by legitimate authority, ensuring that its establishment is recognised within the Church's legal framework. Provinces provide structure and organisation, allowing institutes to govern more effectively across wider territories.

Canon 430 – Authority of the Supreme Moderator

The supreme moderator holds power over all the provinces, houses and members of an institute. This authority is to be exercised according to proper law, ensuring that governance remains faithful to the constitutions and charism of the institute. Other superiors possess power within the limits of their function, maintaining order and responsibility at each level of governance.

Canon 431 – Eligibility to Be Superior

For members to be appointed or elected validly to the function of superior, a suitable time must elapse after perpetual or definitive profession. The length of this period is determined by proper law, or, in the case of major superiors, by the constitutions. This requirement ensures that superiors have sufficient experience, maturity and formation before assuming responsibility for governance.

Canon 432 – Tenure and Removal of Superiors

§1 Superiors are to be constituted for a certain and appropriate period of time according to the nature and need of the institute, unless the constitutions determine otherwise for the supreme moderator and for superiors of an autonomous house. This provision balances stability with renewal in leadership.

§2 Proper law is to provide suitable norms so that superiors, constituted for a definite time, do not remain too long in offices of governance without interruption. This prevents excessive concentration of authority and promotes healthy rotation of leadership.

§3 Nevertheless, superiors can be removed from office during their function or be transferred to another role for reasons established in proper law. This ensures accountability and provides mechanisms for addressing difficulties or safeguarding the institute's welfare.

Canon 433 – Appointment and Election of Superiors

§ 1. The supreme moderator of an institute is to be designated by canonical election according to the norm of the constitutions.

§ 2. The bishop of the principal seat presides at the elections of a superior of the autonomous monastery and of the supreme moderator of an institute of diocesan right.

§ 3. Other superiors are to be constituted according to the norm of the constitutions, but in such a way that, if they are elected, they need the confirmation of a competent major superior; if they are appointed by a superior, however, a suitable consultation is to precede.

Canon 434 – Appointments and Elections

Superiors in the conferral of offices and members in elections are to observe the norms of universal and proper law, are to abstain from any abuse or partiality, and are to appoint or elect those whom they know in the Lord to be truly worthy and suitable, having nothing before their eyes but God and the good of the institute. Moreover, in elections they are to avoid any procurement of votes, either directly or indirectly, whether for themselves or for others.

Canon 435 – Superiors’ Councils

§ 1. According to the norm of the constitutions, superiors are to have their own council, whose assistance they must use in carrying out their function.

§ 2. In addition to the cases prescribed in universal law, proper law is to determine the cases which require consent or counsel to act validly; such consent or counsel must be obtained.

Canon 436 – Canonical Visitations

§ 1. The superiors whom the proper law of the institute designates for this function are to visit the houses and members entrusted to them at stated times according to the norms of this same proper law.

§ 2. It is the right and duty of a diocesan bishop to visit even with respect to religious discipline:

- a. autonomous monasteries;
- b. individual houses of an institute of diocesan right located in his own territory.

§ 3. Members are to act with trust toward a visitor, to whose legitimate questioning they are bound to respond according to the truth in charity. Moreover, it is not permitted for anyone in any way to divert members from this obligation or otherwise to impede the scope of the visitation.

Canon 437 – Penance and Conscience

§ 1. Superiors are to recognise the due freedom of their members regarding the sacrament of penance and direction of conscience, without prejudice, however, to the discipline of the institute.

§ 2. According to the norm of proper law, superiors are to be concerned that suitable confessors are available to the members, to whom the members can confess frequently.

§ 3. In monasteries of nuns, in houses of formation, and in more numerous lay communities, there are to be ordinary confessors approved by the local ordinary after consultation with the community; nevertheless, there is no obligation to approach them.

§ 4. Superiors are not to hear the confessions of subjects unless the members request it on their own initiative.

§ 5. Members are to approach superiors with trust, to whom they can freely and on their own initiative open their minds. Superiors, however, are forbidden to induce the members in any way to make a manifestation of conscience to them.

Canon 438 – General Chapter Authority

§ 1. The general chapter, which holds supreme authority in the institute according to the norm of the constitutions, is to be composed in such a way that, representing the entire institute, it becomes a true sign of its unity in charity. It is for the general chapter principally: to protect the patrimony of the institute mentioned in can. 578; promote suitable renewal according to that

patrimony; elect the supreme moderator; treat affairs of greater importance; and issue norms which all are bound to obey.

§ 2. The constitutions are to define the composition and extent of the power of a chapter; proper law is to determine further the order to be observed in the celebration of the chapter, especially in what pertains to elections and the manner of handling affairs.

§ 3. According to the norms determined in proper law, not only provinces and local communities, but also any member can freely send wishes and suggestions to a general chapter.

Canon 439 – Other Chapters

Proper law is to determine accurately what is to pertain to other chapters of the institute and to other similar assemblies, namely, what pertains to their nature, authority, composition, way of proceeding and time of celebration.

Canon 440 – Participation and Consultation Bodies

§ 1. Organs of participation or consultation are to fulfil faithfully the function entrusted to them according to the norm of universal and proper law and to express in their own way the concern and participation of all the members for the good of the entire institute or community.

§ 2. In establishing and using these means of participation and consultation, wise discretion is to be observed and their procedures are to conform to the character and purpose of the institute.

Subsection III

Temporal Goods And Their Administration

Canon 441 – Capacity for Temporal Goods

§ 1. Institutes, provinces and houses are capable of acquiring, possessing, administering and alienating temporal goods unless this capacity is excluded or restricted in the constitutions.

§ 2. Nevertheless, they are to avoid any appearance of excess, immoderate wealth and accumulation of goods.

Canon 442 – Finance Officers

§ 1. In each institute and likewise in each province which is governed by a major superior, there is to be a finance officer, distinct from the major superior and constituted according to the norm of proper law, who is to manage the administration of goods under the direction of the respective superior. Insofar as possible, a finance officer distinct from the local superior is to be designated even in local communities.

§ 2. At the time and in the manner established by proper law, finance officers and other administrators are to render an account of their administration to the competent authority.

Canon 443 – Annual Financial Reporting

Once a year, the autonomous monasteries are to render an account of their administration to the local ordinary and the Primate of the Ssee.

The local ordinary also has the right to be informed about the financial reports of any religious house of diocesan right.

Canon 444– Collective Witness of Charity and Poverty

Taking into account local circumstances, institutes are to strive to bear a communal testimony of charity and poverty and to contribute, according to their ability, something from their own goods to meet the needs of the Church and the relief of the poor.

Subsection IV

The Admission of Candidates and the Formation of Members

Canon 445 – Right of Admission to the Novitiate

The right to admit candidates to the novitiate belongs to the major superiors, according to the norms of proper law.

Canon 446 – Criteria for Admission

Superiors are to exercise vigilant care and admit only those candidates who meet all the following:

- a. Required age
- b. Sufficient health
- c. Suitable character
- d. Adequate maturity to embrace the institute's way of life

These qualities may be verified by experts if necessary, without prejudice to the prescript of canon 220.

Canon 447 – Invalid Admissions

§ 1. The following admissions are invalid:

- a. One who has not yet completed seventeen years of age

- b. One bound by a sacred bond to another institute of consecrated life or incorporated in a society of apostolic life
- c. One who enters under force, grave fear, or deceit, or whom a superior accepts under such influences
- d. One who conceals prior incorporation in another institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life

§ 2. Proper law may establish additional impediments to validity or attach conditions.

Canon 448 – Admission of Secular Clerics and Indebted Candidates

Superiors may not admit secular clerics without consulting their proper ordinary, nor admit those burdened by debts they cannot repay.

Canon 449 – Proofs for Admission

§ 1. Before admission, candidates must present proof of:

- a. Baptism
- b. Confirmation
- c. Free status

§ 2. Admission of clerics or those previously admitted to another institute, society of apostolic life, or seminary additionally requires testimony of:

- a. The local ordinary (for clerics)
- b. The major superior of the former institute or society
- c. The rector of the seminary

§ 3. Proper law may demand further proofs of suitability and freedom from impediments.

§ 4. Superiors may seek other information, even confidentially, if deemed necessary.

Subsection V

The Novitiate and Formation of Novices

Canon 450 – Purpose of the Novitiate

The novitiate, through which life in an institute begins, is arranged so that novices:

1. Deepen their understanding of their divine vocation proper to the institute
2. Experience the institute's manner of life
3. Form their minds and hearts in its spirit

4. Have their intention and suitability tested

Canon 451 – Novitiate Houses

§ 1. Erection, transfer, and suppression of a novitiate house require a written decree of the supreme moderator, with the consent of the council.

§ 2. For validity, the novitiate must take place in a house designated for that purpose. By exception and with the supreme moderator's consent and council approval, a candidate may make the novitiate in another institute house under an approved religious acting in place of the director of novices.

§ 3. A major superior may permit a group of novices to reside temporarily in another designated house.

Canon 452 – Duration and Structure

§ 1. A valid novitiate includes twelve months spent within the novitiate community.

§ 2. Constitutions may prescribe one or more periods of apostolic exercises outside the novitiate community in addition to the twelve months.

§ 3. The novitiate must not exceed two years.

Canon 453 – Absences and Anticipation of First Profession

§1 Any absence from the novitiate house exceeding three months, whether continuous or interrupted, invalidates the novitiate. Absences over fifteen days must be made up in order to preserve the integrity of formation. This norm applies equally to novitiates conducted in physical houses and to those legitimately recognised as online religious communities, where formation and common life are maintained through approved digital means.

§2 With permission of the competent major superior, first profession may be anticipated by up to fifteen days. This provision applies in both physical and online communities, provided that the novitiate has been completed in accordance with proper law and the candidate has demonstrated readiness for profession.

Canon 454 – Formation and Governance

§ 1. Novices are to be formed under the guidance of a director according to a formation programme defined in proper law.

§ 2. Governance of the novices is reserved to one director under the authority of the major superiors.

Canon 455 – Director of Novices and Assistants

§ 1. The director of novices must be a professed member legitimately designated to the office.

§ 2. If necessary, assistants may be appointed, subject to the director, to supervise novices and the formation programme.

§ 3. Assistants should be carefully prepared members, unimpeded by other duties, capable of stable and fruitful service.

Canon 456 – Duties of Directors and Formation of Novices

§ 1. Directors and assistants are to discern and test novices' vocations and gradually form them to live the perfection proper to the institute.

§ 2. Novices are to be led:

1. To cultivate human and Christian virtues
2. Through prayer and self-denial toward deeper perfection
3. To contemplate the mystery of salvation and meditate on sacred Scripture
4. To prepare for worship in the sacred liturgy
5. To learn a life consecrated through the evangelical counsels
6. To be instructed in the institute's character, spirit, purpose, discipline, history, and life
7. To be imbued with love for the Church and its pastors

§ 3. Novices, aware of their responsibility, are to collaborate actively with their director in responding faithfully to divine grace.

§ 4. Members of the institute are to support formation by example of life and prayer.

§ 5. The novitiate period is devoted solely to formation; novices must not engage in studies or duties that do not directly serve this formation.

Canon 457 – Novice's Freedom and Dismissal

§ 1 A novice may freely choose to leave the institute at any time; likewise, the authority designated by the institute may dismiss a novice from formation.

§ 2 At the end of the novitiate, a novice judged suitable is to be admitted to temporary profession; if judged unsuitable, the novice is to be dismissed. If there is any doubt about readiness, the major superior may extend the probationary period—according to the institute's proper law—but by no more than six additional months.

Subsection VI

Religious Profession

Canon 458 – Effect of Religious Profession

By making religious profession, a member publicly vows to observe the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience before the Church's minister. In doing so, they are consecrated to God and become full members of the institute, with all associated rights and duties.

Canon 459 – Duration of Temporary Profession

Temporary profession is to be made for a term defined by the institute's proper law; this period must be no less than two years and no more than six years, during which the member lives fully in community under the evangelical counsels.

Canon 460 – Conditions for Valid Temporary Profession

For temporary profession to be valid, the candidate must satisfy all of the following:

1. Be at least eighteen years of age
2. Have completed a valid novitiate
3. Be freely admitted by the competent superior with the council's vote, as prescribed by law
4. Make the profession explicitly and without force, grave fear or deceit
5. Have the vows received by a legitimately authorised superior, personally or by delegation

Canon 461 – Renewal, Extension and Anticipation of Profession

§ 1 When the term of temporary vows expires, a religious who freely petitions and is judged suitable is to be admitted to renewal of profession or to perpetual profession; otherwise, they must depart the institute.

§ 2 If deemed opportune, the competent superior may extend the temporary profession in line with proper law, provided the total time bound by temporary vows does not exceed nine years.

§ 3 For a just cause, perpetual profession may be anticipated by up to three months before the scheduled date.

Canon 462 – Requirements for Perpetual Profession

In addition to the conditions of Canon 656 (numbers 3, 4 and 5) and any additional stipulations in proper law, perpetual profession requires:

1. Completion of at least twenty-one years of age
2. Previous temporary profession of at least three years, unless perpetual profession has been lawfully anticipated

Canon 463 – Ongoing Formation After First Profession

§ 1 After first profession, each institute must continue to form its members so that they live ever more fully according to its particular charism and carry out its mission effectively.

§ 2 The institute's proper law is to define the content and duration of this ongoing formation, taking account of the needs of the Church and the circumstances of the times.

§ 3 Those preparing for holy orders follow both universal Church norms and the institute's own programme of studies.

Canon 464 – Structure and Protection of Formation

§ 1 Formation must be systematic and adapted to each member's capacity, encompassing spiritual growth, apostolic zeal, doctrinal study and practical skills. Where appropriate, members should obtain recognised ecclesiastical and civil qualifications.

§ 2 During this formation period, members must not be entrusted with offices or duties that would impede their progress.

Canon 465 – Lifelong Formation

Throughout their lives, religious are to pursue continuous growth in prayer, doctrine and ministry. Superiors must ensure that members have the necessary time, guidance and resources to support this lifelong formation.

Subsection VII

The Obligations and Rights of Institutes and Their Members

Canon 466 – Supreme Rule of Life

Religious take as their highest guide the way of Christ revealed in the Gospels and set forth in their own institute's constitutions, so that every decision and action reflects that Gospel model.

Canon 467 – Prayer, Sacraments and Devotions

§1 The primary duty of every religious is to contemplate divine things and remain in constant union with God through prayer. This vocation to prayer is not merely an obligation but the heart of consecrated life, shaping every aspect of the religious's existence. In silence, meditation and liturgical worship, the religious seeks continual communion with the Lord, offering their life as a living sacrifice of praise.

§2 Each day they should strive to attend Mass, receive the Body of Christ, and adore Our Lord truly present in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the source and summit of consecrated life, nourishing the religious with divine grace and binding them more closely to Christ and His Church. Daily participation in the Eucharistic mystery strengthens their fidelity, deepens their charity, and sustains their mission.

§3 They devote themselves to reading Sacred Scripture, mental prayer, and, according to their proper law, worthily celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as other exercises of piety.

Through Scripture, they encounter the living Word of God; through mental prayer, they cultivate interior dialogue with Christ; and through the Liturgy of the Hours, they join their voices to the prayer of the universal Church. Other devotions, such as novenas, spiritual reading and acts of penance, further enrich their spiritual life and foster perseverance in holiness.

§4 With special reverence they honour the Virgin Mary—the model and protector of consecrated life—often through the Marian Rosary. Mary’s example of humility, obedience and purity provides a pattern for religious to imitate. Her maternal intercession strengthens them in trials, guides them in discernment, and draws them ever closer to her Son. Devotion to Mary is thus integral to consecrated life, ensuring that the religious walk faithfully in the way of Christ.

§5 They faithfully observe an annual retreat for recollection and spiritual renewal. This retreat is a privileged time of silence, prayer and examination of life, enabling the religious to renew their consecration and rekindle their zeal. By withdrawing from ordinary duties for a period of reflection, they rediscover the freshness of their vocation and prepare to serve the Church with renewed strength and joy.

Canon 468 – Ongoing Conversion and Penance

Religious continually seek interior conversion towards God, examine their consciences—even daily—and approach the Sacrament of Penance frequently, recognising that humility and repentance foster growth in holiness.

Canon 469 – Discretion in Communications

In using social media or other communications, religious exercise necessary discretion, avoiding content or contacts harmful to their vocation or dangerous to the chastity and witness of a consecrated person.

Canon 470 – Religious Habit

§1 Members wear their institute’s habit—made according to proper law—as a visible sign of their consecration and a witness to evangelical poverty. The habit expresses identity, unity and testimony, reminding both the religious and the faithful of the call to holiness and simplicity.

§2 While many members live within established houses or communities, others may be dispersed or unable to reside permanently in a physical religious setting. In such cases, they may wear their habit at church services, on pilgrimage, or in other appropriate contexts, thereby maintaining the visible witness of consecrated life.

§3 Clerical religious in institutes without a distinct habit use clerical dress in conformity with Canon 284 §3, ensuring they remain recognisably consecrated. In all circumstances, attire must reflect dignity, modesty and fidelity to the Church’s witness, avoiding excess or vanity.

Subsection VIII

The Apostolate of Institutes

Canon 473 – Primary Apostolate

§1 The principal apostolate of every religious is the witness of consecrated life, nourished above all by prayer and penance. This witness is the foundation of all other ministries, for it proclaims by example the primacy of God and the call to holiness.

§2 Religious serve the Church first by their consecration itself, which is a living testimony of faith, hope and charity. Their life of prayer, sacrifice and fidelity becomes a silent yet powerful proclamation of the Gospel, reminding the faithful of eternal realities and the kingdom to come.

§3 Apostolic works, whether teaching, preaching, serving the poor, or engaging in pastoral ministry, flow from this primary witness. They are fruitful only insofar as they are rooted in prayer and penance, ensuring that action springs from contemplation and service from union with Christ.

§4 This apostolate is not limited to physical presence in a community or institution. Religious who live dispersed, online, or in non-traditional settings remain bound to the same primary duty of witness. Their consecrated life, expressed through fidelity to prayer, penance and the evangelical counsels, continues to serve as a sign of God's kingdom wherever they are.

§5 In every form of consecrated life, the apostolate of witness is indispensable. It sustains the Church, inspires the faithful, and draws the world toward Christ through the quiet strength of lives wholly given to God.

Canon 474 – Contemplative Institutes

Communities entirely dedicated to contemplation hold a unique place in the mystical Body of Christ. Their vocation is marked by silence, prayer and continual offering of self to God, and in this way they:

- a. offer an extraordinary sacrifice of praise to God, sustaining the Church's worship even when hidden from view
- b. inspire the faithful by their holiness and example, reminding all of the primacy of prayer and the eternal kingdom
- c. bear unseen apostolic fruit, interceding for the world and strengthening the mission of the Church through their hidden fidelity

This contemplative witness remains essential whether lived in traditional monasteries or within dispersed communities that gather through legitimate means of communion, including digital or remote forms of shared prayer. The unity of contemplatives does not depend solely on physical proximity but on their common dedication to God and their bond with the wider Church.

Accordingly, these contemplative members are not to be called away for active pastoral ministries, even in urgent need. Their vocation is itself a ministry, serving the Church through

prayer, penance and spiritual intercession. To preserve the integrity of this calling, they must remain free from external demands that would compromise their contemplative witness, ensuring that their hidden life continues to nourish the visible mission of the Church.

Canon 475 – Apostolic Action and Religious Spirit

§ 1 For institutes devoted to apostolic works, action in the world is essential; their entire life is to be suffused with an apostolic spirit, and every apostolic endeavour animated by a religious spirit.

§ 2 Such action must always flow from deep union with God and serve to strengthen that union.

§ 3 Exercised in the Church's name and under its mandate, apostolic action is carried out in communion with the universal Church.

Canon 476 – Lay Institutes and Mercy

Lay institutes, whether of men or women, share in the Church's pastoral mission through works of spiritual and corporal mercy and a variety of services to others. Their vocation is expressed in practical charity—feeding the hungry, teaching, consoling the afflicted, and bearing witness to Christ in daily life. These institutes embody the Church's presence in the world, often reaching places and people inaccessible to clerical or monastic communities. They are to persevere faithfully in the grace of their vocation, drawing strength from prayer and the sacraments, and ensuring that their service remains rooted in the Gospel. This witness may be exercised in traditional houses, dispersed communities, or through legitimate online associations, provided that the spirit of mercy and fidelity to the Church is preserved.

Canon 477 – Fidelity and Adaptation of Mission

§1 Superiors and members preserve unwavering loyalty to their institute's own mission and works. This fidelity safeguards the charism entrusted to them by the Spirit, ensuring that their identity and purpose remain clear and consistent. At the same time, attentive to changing needs of time and place, they may adapt methods and employ new means prudently. Such adaptation allows their mission to remain effective and relevant, whether expressed in traditional ministries, dispersed communities, or through new forms of outreach such as digital apostolates.

§2 When Christian associations are affiliated, the institute supports them with special care, ensuring they remain infused with the institute's genuine spirit. This bond of support strengthens the wider apostolate, extending the reach of the institute's charism while maintaining unity of purpose and fidelity to the Church.

Canon 478 – Subjection in the Apostolate

§1 In matters of pastoral care, public worship and apostolic endeavours, religious are subject to the local bishop's authority, whom they follow in devoted submission. This ensures that their apostolate remains in harmony with diocesan life and the wider mission of the Church.

§2 When carrying out an external apostolate, religious also obey their own superiors and adhere to their institute's discipline; bishops should uphold this obligation. Thus, the apostolate is exercised in a spirit of communion, balancing diocesan oversight with fidelity to the institute's charism.

§3 Diocesan bishops and religious superiors organise apostolic works together, proceeding by mutual consultation. This collaboration fosters unity, avoids duplication of effort, and ensures that apostolic initiatives—whether local, global, or even digitally dispersed—serve the needs of the faithful in a coherent and fruitful manner.

Canon 479 – Coordinated Cooperation

Under the diocesan bishop's direction, institutes and the secular clergy foster organised cooperation and coordinate all apostolic works and activities, respecting each institute's character, purpose and founding law.

Canon 480 – Works Entrusted to Religious

§1 Apostolic works entrusted by the bishop to a religious institute remain under the bishop's authority and direction, without prejudice to the rights of the religious superior. This ensures that such works are carried out in harmony with diocesan pastoral priorities while respecting the internal governance and charism of the institute. The bishop provides oversight for the apostolic mission, while the superior safeguards the integrity of religious life.

§2 In such cases, the bishop and competent superior draw up a written agreement defining precisely the scope of the work, the members involved, and the economic arrangements. This agreement provides clarity, prevents misunderstandings, and ensures accountability. It also recognises the shared responsibility between diocesan authority and religious governance, fostering cooperation for the good of the faithful.

Canon 481 – Ecclesiastical Offices

§1 When a religious is to hold an ecclesiastical office in a diocese, the bishop appoints that person with the presentation or at least the assent of the competent superior. This provision balances episcopal authority with respect for the religious institute's discipline, ensuring that appointments serve both diocesan needs and the integrity of consecrated life.

§2 Removal from office may be effected either by the appointing authority, after informing the religious superior, or by the superior, after informing the appointing authority—neither requiring the other's consent. This dual mechanism ensures flexibility and accountability, allowing both diocesan and religious authorities to act when necessary, while maintaining transparency and mutual respect.

Subsection IX

Dismissal of Members

Canon 482 – Pastoral Visitation and Abuse

§ 1 In pastoral visitation or urgent need, the bishop (personally or by delegate) may visit communities, oratories, schools and charitable works entrusted to religious—excluding those schools solely for institute members.

§ 2 If abuses are found and the religious superior fails to remedy them, the bishop may act on his own authority.

Canon 483 – Automatic Dismissal for Defection or Marriage

§1 A member is *ipso facto* dismissed if they have notoriously defected from the AACC or have attempted marriage, whether civil or religious. Such actions are incompatible with the consecrated state and constitute a public rupture of the sacred bond of vows. The dismissal occurs by the very fact of the act, without the need for further judicial process.

§2 Once proof is gathered, the major superior with council must promptly issue a declaration of fact so that the dismissal is legally established. This declaration ensures clarity, prevents ambiguity, and provides canonical recognition of the member's departure. The act of dismissal is not punitive but declarative, acknowledging that the member has already placed themselves outside the institute by their actions.

Canon 484 – Mandatory Dismissal for Grave Delicts

§1 A member must be dismissed for serious offences, unless restitution can be achieved through mutual agreement and the offence does not irreparably compromise the integrity of consecrated life. Grave delicts include actions that gravely contradict the vows, scandalise the faithful, or undermine the mission of the institute. Dismissal in such cases protects the dignity of consecrated life and the good of the community.

§2 After gathering proof of the fact and imputability, the major superior must notify the accused member of the charges and evidence, allow full self-defence, and then transmit all acts (signed by superior and notary, with the member's signed responses) to the supreme moderator. This process ensures justice, transparency and respect for the rights of the accused, while safeguarding the integrity of the institute. The supreme moderator, acting with council, determines the final dismissal, thereby ensuring that the decision carries the weight of the highest authority within the institute.

Canon 485 – Discretionary Dismissal for Other Grave Causes

§ 1 A member may be dismissed for other causes that are grave, external, imputable and juridically proven—such as habitual neglect of consecrated life, repeated vow-breaking, obstinate disobedience in serious matters, grave scandalous behaviour, adherence to condemned doctrines, public materialism or atheism, six-month illegitimate absence, or similar grave reasons in the institute's law.

§ 2 For members in temporary vows, causes of lesser gravity (as defined by proper law) suffice.

Canon 486 – Procedure for Discretionary Dismissal

Once the major superior decides to begin dismissal:

- a. Collect or complete the proofs.
- b. Warn the member in writing, or before two witnesses, with a clear threat of dismissal unless they reform, stating the cause and granting full self-defence; if ignored, issue a second warning after at least 15 days.
- c. If the second warning is also ineffective and incorrigibility is evident, and after a further 15 days without reform, forward all acts (signed by superior and notary, plus the member's signed replies) to the supreme moderator.

Canon 487 – Right of Defence to the Supreme Moderator

The member always retains the right to communicate with—and submit defences directly to—the supreme moderator.

Canon 488 – Decision by Supreme Moderator or Bishop

§ 1 The supreme moderator with council (at least three members) deliberates collegially on the evidence, arguments and defences. If, by secret vote, dismissal is approved, the supreme moderator issues a decree stating at least summary reasons in law and fact.

§ 2 In autonomous monasteries, the diocesan bishop, not the supreme moderator, decides on dismissal, upon submission of the council-reviewed acts.

Canon 489 – Confirmation and Effect of Dismissal Decree

A dismissal decree has no effect until confirmed by the Primatial See (or, for diocesan-right institutes, by the local bishop). The decree and all acts must be sent for confirmation. It must also inform the dismissed of their right to appeal to the competent authority within ten days of notification; such an appeal has suspensive effect.

Canon 490 – Consequences of Lawful Dismissal

Lawful dismissal terminates vows and all rights and duties from profession automatically. Clerical members lose the right to exercise sacred orders until a bishop, after suitable probation, accepts them or permits ministry.

Canon 491 – No Claims and Charity Toward Separated Members

§ 1 Members who legitimately depart or are lawfully dismissed may claim nothing from the institute for work done.

§ 2 The institute, however, must observe equity and Gospel charity toward any member who has separated.

Canon 492 – Immediate Expulsion for Grave Scandal or Harm

For grave external scandal or imminent serious harm to the institute, the major superior—or, if delay poses danger, the local superior with council consent—may expel a member instantly. The major superior must then initiate the formal dismissal process or refer the matter to the Primatial See.

Canon 493– Reporting of Separated Members

In the annual report to the Primatial See, mention must be made of every member who has separated from the institute in any manner.

Subsection X

Religious Raised to the Episcopate

Canon 494 – Religious Elevated to the Episcopate

§1 A religious who is raised to the episcopate remains a member of his institute, retaining the spiritual bond of consecration and the identity of his religious profession. His vows continue to mark his life, though they are now lived in harmony with the responsibilities of episcopal ministry.

§2 By virtue of his vow of obedience, he is subject only to the Primate, thereby ensuring that his episcopal authority is exercised freely and without conflict with the governance of his institute. This provision safeguards both the dignity of the episcopal office and the integrity of religious consecration.

§3 He is not bound by any obligations which he prudently judges cannot be reconciled with his episcopal condition. In such cases, the episcopal office takes precedence, and the religious adapts his observance in a manner consistent with his pastoral responsibilities. This discernment must be exercised with prudence, charity and fidelity to the spirit of his institute, so that his episcopal ministry remains enriched rather than diminished by his religious vocation.

§4 The religious bishop thus serves as a bridge between consecrated life and episcopal ministry, embodying both the charism of his institute and the pastoral care of the Church. His witness demonstrates that consecration and episcopal service are not opposed but complementary, united in the one mission of Christ.

Canon 495 – Conferences or Councils of Major Superiors

Major superiors may associate in conferences or councils to:

- a. Combine efforts in pursuit of each institute's purpose, strengthening their apostolic and pastoral effectiveness.
- b. Conduct common affairs, fostering unity of vision and mutual support across diverse communities.
- c. Coordinate and cooperate with bishops' conferences or individual bishops, ensuring that their apostolic works remain harmonised with the wider mission of the Church.

Such associations must always respect each institute's autonomy, character and proper spirit. They are not intended to diminish the individuality of each charism but to provide a forum for collaboration, discernment and shared responsibility. In the context of dispersed or digitally connected institutes, these conferences may also gather through legitimate online means, ensuring that distance does not hinder communion or cooperation.

Canon 496 – Statutes and Juridic Personality

Conferences of major superiors must have statutes approved by the Primate See. Only the Primate See can erect them as juridic persons, and they remain under its supreme direction. This ensures that such associations are canonically recognised, governed by clear norms, and remain accountable to the highest authority of the Church.

The statutes must safeguard the proper autonomy of each institute, while providing structures for consultation, decision-making and cooperation. Whether convened in person or through dispersed gatherings, these conferences serve as instruments of unity, enabling religious institutes to act together in fidelity to their charisms and in communion with the Church's hierarchy.

Subsection XI

Secular Institutes

Canon 497 – Nature of Secular Institutes

A secular institute is an institute of consecrated life in which the Christian faithful, living in the world, strive for the perfection of charity and seek to contribute to the sanctification of the world, especially from within. Their vocation is marked by immersion in secular realities, transforming them through the spirit of the Gospel. Members live ordinary lives in society, yet consecrate themselves fully to God, bearing witness that holiness can flourish in the midst of the world.

Canon 498 – Canonical Condition of Members

The consecration of a member of a secular institute does not change the member's proper canonical condition among the people of God—whether lay or clerical—without prejudice to other laws referring to institutes of consecrated life. This ensures that members remain fully integrated into their original state, exercising their secular professions and responsibilities while living out the evangelical counsels. Their consecration is hidden yet real, allowing them to sanctify the world from within without altering their canonical identity.

Canon 499 – Constitutions and Secularity

§1 The constitutions must:

- a. Establish the sacred bonds by which the evangelical counsels are assumed in the institute.

- b. Define the obligations arising from those bonds, ensuring clarity of commitment and fidelity to consecrated life.

§2 The institute's proper secularity must always be preserved in its way of life. Members are to remain immersed in the ordinary structures of society—work, family, civic engagement—while living consecration as a hidden leaven of holiness. This secularity is not a compromise but a distinctive charism: to sanctify the world from within, without withdrawing from it.

Canon 500 – Apostolic Expression of Consecration

§1 Members express and exercise their consecration in apostolic activity, striving like leaven to imbue all things with the spirit of the Gospel for the growth of the Body of Christ. Their presence in the world is not incidental but intentional, serving as a hidden yet powerful witness that consecrated life transforms ordinary realities into channels of grace.

§2 Lay members, in and from the world, participate in the Church's evangelising mission by:

- a. Witnessing to a Christian life and fidelity to their consecration in daily circumstances.
- b. Assisting to order temporal affairs according to God and informing the world by the power of the Gospel.
- c. Cooperating in service of the ecclesial community according to their secular way of life, ensuring that their consecration enriches rather than separates them from the ordinary conditions of society.

§3 Clerical members, by their consecrated life—especially in the presbyterium—and sacred ministry, foster the sanctification of the world. Their priestly service is deepened by consecration, uniting pastoral care with the evangelical counsels and strengthening the Church's mission of holiness.

Canon 501 – Secular Conditions of Life

Members are to lead their lives in the ordinary conditions of the world, whether alone, in their own families, or in groups living as brothers or sisters, according to the norm of the constitutions. This secularity is essential to their vocation: they remain immersed in the structures of society, sanctifying them from within. Their consecration does not remove them from the world but equips them to live as a leaven of holiness in the midst of ordinary life.

Canon 502 – Clerical Members and Episcopal Authority

§1 Clerical members incardinated in a diocese are subject to the diocesan bishop, without prejudice to matters concerning consecrated life in their own institute. This dual accountability ensures harmony between diocesan pastoral needs and the integrity of consecrated life.

§2 Those incardinated in an institute, when appointed to institute works or governance, are subject to the bishop like religious. In this way, clerical members remain fully integrated into the Church's hierarchical structure, while also preserving fidelity to their institute's charism.

Canon 503 – Communion and Participation

§1 All members must participate actively in the life of the institute according to its proper law. Active participation ensures that consecration is not lived in isolation but in communion, strengthening the institute's mission and witness.

§2 Members of the same institute must preserve communion among themselves, fostering unity of spirit and genuine brotherly or sisterly relationships. This communion is vital for dispersed or secular institutes, where members may not share daily life in a common house but remain bound together by prayer, fidelity to their constitutions, and mutual support. Their unity, whether expressed in person or through legitimate dispersed gatherings, is a sign of the Church's wider communion and a safeguard of their vocation.

Canon 504 – Governance of the Institute

§1 The constitutions must prescribe the institute's manner of governance, define the term of office for moderators, and specify how they are designated. Clear structures of leadership safeguard accountability and continuity, ensuring that authority is exercised in service of the charism and mission.

§2 No one may be designated as supreme moderator unless definitively incorporated, thereby guaranteeing that the highest office is entrusted only to those fully committed to the institute's life and spirit.

§3 Those entrusted with governance must ensure the preservation of the institute's unity of spirit and promote the members' active participation. In dispersed or non-traditional communities, this responsibility includes fostering communion across distance, using appropriate means of communication to sustain fraternity and shared mission.

Canon 505 – Administration of Goods

The administration of the institute's goods, which must express and foster evangelical poverty, is governed by:

- a. The norms of Volume V (*The Temporal Goods of the Church*).
- b. The institute's proper law, which also defines the institute's financial obligations toward members who carry on work for it.

Administration must always reflect simplicity, transparency and solidarity, ensuring that resources serve the mission rather than personal gain. In dispersed communities, stewardship may include digital or shared arrangements, but the principle of evangelical poverty remains constant.

Canon 506 – Spiritual Exercises

§1 Members must devote themselves diligently to prayer, fitting reading of Sacred Scripture, an annual spiritual retreat, and other spiritual exercises according to proper law. These practices sustain their consecration and deepen their union with God.

§2 The celebration of the Eucharist, daily if possible, is to be the source and strength of their consecrated life, whether attended in person or, when necessary, united spiritually through legitimate means of participation.

§3 They must approach the sacrament of penance frequently, cultivating continual conversion and reconciliation.

§4 They have the freedom to seek necessary spiritual direction, even from their moderators, ensuring that guidance is accessible and adapted to their circumstances, whether in physical or dispersed settings.

Canon 507 – Admission into the Institute

The right of admission into the institute, for probation or for the assumption of sacred bonds, whether temporary, perpetual, or definitive, to the major moderators with their council, according to the constitutions. This authority safeguards discernment and fidelity to the institute's charism. Admission must be exercised with prudence, ensuring that candidates are properly prepared and suited to the vocation, whether they will live in a physical community or participate in a dispersed form of consecrated life.

Canon 508 – Impediments and Suitability for Initial Probation

§1 Initial probation is invalid if the person:

- a. Has not yet attained majority, since full legal and personal responsibility is required for consecrated commitment.
- b. Is currently bound by a sacred bond in another institute or incorporated in a society of apostolic life, as double incorporation is incompatible with the nature of consecrated life.

§2 The constitutions may establish other impediments or attach conditions to admission, provided these serve the institute's identity, safeguard the seriousness of consecration, and ensure the suitability of candidates.

§3 The person must have the maturity necessary to live the institute's way of life properly. This maturity includes emotional stability, spiritual readiness, and the capacity to live consecration in the secular or dispersed circumstances proper to the institute.

Canon 509 – Nature and Purpose of Initial Probation

§1 Initial probation must be arranged so candidates better understand their divine vocation—especially the one proper to the institute—and are trained in its spirit and way of life. Formation should help them discern whether they can live consecration authentically in the ordinary conditions of the world.

§2 Candidates must be formed to live the evangelical counsels and to transform their entire lives into apostolate, using forms of evangelisation that suit the institute's purpose, spirit and character. This includes learning how to integrate consecration with secular responsibilities, and how to witness to Christ in the environments where they ordinarily live and work.

§3 The constitutions must define the manner and duration of this probation, which must last at least two years. The form of probation may be adapted to the institute's secular or dispersed nature, provided that formation remains substantial, coherent and faithful to the institute's charism.

Canon 510 – Incorporation into the Institute

§1 After probation, a suitable candidate must either assume the three evangelical counsels by sacred bond or depart from the institute. This decision marks the transition from discernment to committed consecration.

§2 This first incorporation is temporary according to the constitutions and must last no less than five years. The period allows the member to deepen their vocation while living fully the institute's secular or dispersed form of consecrated life.

§3 After this period, a judged-suitable member is admitted to perpetual incorporation or to definitive incorporation (renewable temporary bonds). The choice between these forms is determined by the constitutions and the discernment of the institute's moderators.

§4 Definitive incorporation equals perpetual incorporation for the specific juridic effects in the constitutions. This ensures stability of life and clarity of rights and obligations, even when members live in diverse or non-communal circumstances.

Canon 511 – Ongoing Formation

§1 Formation continues uninterrupted after first profession, as set by the constitutions. This ongoing formation deepens the member's consecration and equips them to live the institute's mission faithfully in the ordinary circumstances of the world.

§2 Members must be formed in divine and human matters simultaneously, so that spiritual maturity, professional competence and personal integrity grow together. Moderators must ensure ongoing spiritual formation, providing appropriate means of support even for members who live dispersed or without regular physical contact with others in the institute.

Canon 512 – Associates of the Institute

An institute may associate other members of the Christian faithful by a constitutionally determined bond; these associates strive for evangelical perfection in the institute's spirit and participate in its mission. Their participation must respect the institute's secularity and character, allowing them to share in its spirituality and apostolate without assuming the full obligations of consecrated life.

Canon 513 – Departure After Temporary Incorporation

§1 After temporary incorporation, a member may freely leave, or—after council consultation—the major moderator may exclude a member for just cause from bond renewal. This ensures freedom of conscience and protects the integrity of the institute's life.

§2 For grave cause, a temporarily incorporated member who freely petitions may obtain an indult of departure from the supreme moderator with the council's consent. This provision allows a member to depart peacefully and lawfully when serious circumstances render continuation impossible or unwise.

Canon 514 – Departure After Perpetual Incorporation

§1. A perpetually incorporated member wishing to leave must, after serious reflection before the Lord, petition the Primate through the supreme moderator (for Primate-right institutes) or the diocesan bishop (as defined in the constitutions). This process ensures that such a grave decision is made with due discernment, ecclesial oversight and respect for the solemn nature of perpetual consecration.

Canon 515 – Effects of a Legitimate Indult of Departure

Once a legitimate indult of departure has been granted, all bonds and all rights and obligations deriving from incorporation cease. The member returns fully to their prior canonical condition, free from the commitments of consecrated life in the institute. This cessation is immediate upon the indult's execution and requires no further declaration.

Canon 516 – Dismissal of Members

§1. A member is dismissed according to Canons; constitutions must specify other causes for dismissal that are grave, external, imputable and juridically proven. These causes must be of such seriousness that they clearly contradict the institute's way of life or endanger its integrity.

§2. The institute must always act with justice, charity and due process, safeguarding both the good of the community and the rights of the individual, whether members live in common, dispersed, or in secular circumstances proper to the institute.

Section II

Societies of Apostolic Life

Canon 517 – Nature of Societies of Apostolic Life

§1 Societies of apostolic life resemble institutes of consecrated life. Their members do not take religious vows but pursue the society's apostolic purpose, living in common as brothers or sisters and striving for the perfection of charity in observance of the constitutions. Their fraternal life and shared mission form the heart of their identity, even when communities are small, dispersed or adapted to contemporary pastoral needs.

§2 Some societies bind members to live the evangelical counsels by a bond defined in their constitutions. Such bonds, while distinct from religious vows, express a stable commitment to the society's spirit and deepen the member's dedication to its apostolic purpose.

Canon 518 – Applicable Norms

Canons are to be applied to all societies of apostolic life, with due regard for each society's nature. These norms ensure that societies remain faithful to their founding charism, maintain sound governance, and uphold the dignity of their apostolic mission, while allowing for the diversity proper to their form of life.

Canon 519 – Erection of Houses and Local Communities

§1 A society erects a house and establishes a local community only with the diocesan bishop's prior written consent, and the bishop must also be consulted for its suppression. This ensures that the society's presence harmonises with diocesan pastoral priorities and that its apostolate is exercised in communion with the local Church.

§2 Consent to erect a house carries the right to have at least an oratory where the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved. This oratory serves as the spiritual centre of the community's life and mission, supporting their apostolic work with the grace that flows from the Eucharist.

Canon 520 – Governance of the Society

A society's constitutions determine its governance, observing canons 617–633 as adapted to its particular character. The structures of authority must reflect the society's apostolic purpose, its fraternal life, and the degree to which its members live in common or in dispersed communities. Governance is always exercised in service of the mission and in fidelity to the society's founding spirit.

Canon 521 – Admission, Probation, and Formation

§1 The society's proper law governs admission, probation, incorporation and formation of members. These norms ensure that candidates are discerned and formed according to the society's identity and apostolic purpose.

§2 Proper law must prescribe a doctrinal, spiritual and apostolic programme of probation and formation so candidates recognise their vocation and are prepared for the society's mission and way of life. This programme must be substantial and coherent, equipping candidates to live the society's apostolate faithfully—whether in traditional communal settings or in forms of life adapted to contemporary pastoral needs.

Canon 522 – Incardination and Clerical Formation

§1 In clerical societies, clerics are incardinated into the society itself unless the constitutions state otherwise. This incardination expresses their stable belonging and ensures that their ministry is exercised in harmony with the society's apostolic purpose.

§2 Norms for secular clerics apply to studies and reception of orders, without prejudice to §1. Clerical formation must therefore meet the Church's universal requirements while also integrating the society's particular spirituality and mission.

Canon 523 – Effects of Incorporation

Incorporation brings members the rights and obligations defined in the constitutions and obliges the society to guide them toward the fulfilment of their proper vocation. This mutual commitment ensures that each member is supported in living the apostolic purpose of the

society, while the society itself remains responsible for fostering growth in charity, mission and fraternal life.

Canon 524 – Ecclesial and Internal Subjection

§1 Members are subject to their own moderators in matters of the society’s internal life and discipline. This preserves unity, coherence and fidelity to the society’s spirit.

§2 They are subject to the diocesan bishop in matters of public worship, care of souls and apostolic works. This dual accountability ensures that their apostolate is exercised in communion with the local Church while remaining rooted in the society’s identity.

§3 Constitutions or particular agreements must define the relationship between an incardinated member and his diocesan bishop. Such clarity prevents conflict of jurisdiction and ensures that pastoral responsibilities, rights and expectations are understood by all parties.

Canon 525 – Obligations of Clerical Members

Beyond the obligations of their constitutions, members are bound by the common obligations of clerics unless the nature of things or context indicates otherwise. Their clerical state remains fully operative, and their participation in the society’s life must harmonise with the universal duties of ordained ministry.

Canon 526 – Common Life

Members must live in a lawfully established house or community and observe common life according to proper law, which also governs absences. The form of common life may vary according to the society’s character—some living closely together, others in smaller or more dispersed communities—but all must preserve genuine fraternity, shared mission and fidelity to the society’s way of life.

Canon 527 – Juridic Personality and Temporal Goods

§1 Societies—and, unless the constitutions provide otherwise, their constituent parts and houses—are juridic persons. They can acquire, possess, administer and alienate temporal goods under Volume V (*The Temporal Goods of the Church*). This juridic personality ensures stability and accountability in carrying out apostolic works, whether communities are large, small or dispersed.

§2 Members may also acquire, possess, administer and dispose of temporal goods under proper law, but anything received on behalf of the society is owned by the society. This distinction protects both personal responsibility and the integrity of the society’s mission, ensuring that goods intended for apostolic use remain dedicated to that purpose.

Canon 528 – Departure and Dismissal Before Definitive Incorporation

Each society’s constitutions govern the departure and dismissal of members not yet definitively incorporated. These norms must ensure fairness, clarity and due process, allowing the society to discern suitability while safeguarding the rights of candidates during this formative stage.

Canon 529 – Indult of Departure After Definitive Incorporation

A definitively incorporated member may obtain an indult of departure from the supreme moderator with council consent, unless reserved to the Primate See. Granting the indult ends the rights and obligations of incorporation. The member returns fully to their prior canonical condition, and the society is released from its obligations toward them.

Canon 530 – Transfer Between Societies or Institutes

§1 The supreme moderator with council consent may permit a definitively incorporated member to transfer to another society of apostolic life. During this interim period, the member's rights and obligations in the original society are suspended, and the member retains the right to return before definitive incorporation in the new society. This ensures freedom of discernment and continuity of canonical status.

§2 Transfer to or from an institute of consecrated life requires the Primate See's permission and compliance with its mandates. This oversight ensures that transitions between distinct forms of ecclesial life are made with proper discernment and ecclesial unity.

Canon 531 – Indult to Live Outside the Society

§1 For societies whose proper law presumes stable common life: The supreme moderator with council consent may grant a definitively incorporated member an indult to live outside the society for up to three years. Rights and obligations incompatible with the new condition are suspended, but the member remains under the moderators' care.

§2 If the member is a cleric, the local ordinary's consent is also required, and the cleric remains under that ordinary's care and dependence. This ensures pastoral accountability and safeguards the cleric's ministry while respecting the society's responsibility for its members.

§3 This canon does not apply to members whose form of life is already legitimately dispersed according to the constitutions. For such members, living outside a common house is not an exception but part of their ordinary mode of observance, and therefore no indult is required.

Section III

Subsection I

The Preaching of the Word of God

Canon 532 – The Church's Mission to Proclaim the Gospel and Moral Truth

§1 The Church has both the duty and the God-given right, independent of any government or human authority, to share the Gospel with all people. It may use every suitable means of communication, including modern media, to do this. Christ entrusted the Church with the "deposit of faith" (the truths revealed by God), and with the help of the Holy Spirit, the

Church must carefully protect these truths, grow in understanding of them, and faithfully teach and explain them to the world.

§2 The Church also has the right, at all times and in all places, to speak about moral principles. This includes commenting on social and political matters whenever human dignity, fundamental rights, or the salvation of souls is at stake.

Canon 533 – The Duty to Seek Truth and Freedom of Conscience

§1 Every person has a responsibility to search for the truth about God and His Church. Once someone has discovered this truth, they are bound by God’s law to accept it and live by it.

§2 However, no one may ever be forced to accept the Catholic faith against their conscience. Faith must be embraced freely, not imposed by coercion.

Canon 534 – Definitions of Heresy, Apostasy, and Schism

- **Heresy:** When a baptised person stubbornly denies or doubts a truth that must be believed with Catholic faith.
- **Apostasy:** When a baptized person completely abandons the Christian faith.
- **Schism:** When someone refuses to submit to the authority of the Primate, the Synod of Bishops or breaks communion with the members of the Church who are united with him.

Canon 529 – Religious Submission to Non-Definitive Teachings

Even when the Primate or the bishops (in union with him) teach on faith or morals without making a definitive declaration, members of the Church are still called to give a “religious submission of mind and will.” This means listening with respect, openness, and a readiness to follow their guidance. The faithful should avoid rejecting or contradicting such teachings, even if they are not proclaimed as infallible.

Canon 530 – Bishops as Authentic Teachers of the Faith

Bishops, whether teaching individually in their dioceses, together in Episcopal Conferences, or gathered in councils, are true and authoritative teachers of the faith for the people entrusted to their care. While their teaching is not infallible in the strict sense, it still carries real authority because they teach in communion with the Primate and the whole Synod of Bishops.

The faithful are therefore called to give a “religious submission of mind and will” to their bishops’ teaching. This means listening with respect, taking their guidance seriously, and striving to live in harmony with the faith they hand on.

Canon 531 – Obligation to Follow Church Decrees on Doctrine

All Church members are bound to observe the official constitutions and decrees issued by lawful Church authority when these documents:

- Propose authentic teaching on matters of faith and morals, or

- Condemn errors and false opinions that threaten the faith.

This obligation is especially strong when such decrees come from the Primate or from the Synod of Bishops acting together, since they hold the highest authority in the Church.

Canon 532 – The Church’s Duty to Promote Christian Unity

§1 The responsibility for promoting Christian unity, known as the *ecumenical movement*, belongs especially to the Primate and the Synod of Bishops. Christ himself willed that his followers be one, and so the Catholic Church is bound to work for the restoration of unity among all Christians.

§2 Bishops, and Episcopal Conferences where appropriate, also share in this responsibility. They are to encourage ecumenical efforts in their own regions, taking into account local circumstances and opportunities. They may also issue practical guidelines, provided these are consistent with the broader norms set by the supreme authority of the Church.

Subsection II

Ministry of the Divine Word

Canon 533 – The Primary Responsibility for Preaching the Gospel

§1 The duty of preaching the Gospel to the whole Church belongs above all to the Primate and the Synod of Bishops.

§2 Within their own dioceses, individual bishops carry out this responsibility as the leaders of the ministry of the word. Sometimes, several bishops may work together to exercise this ministry across multiple dioceses, according to the law.

Canon 534 – The Role of Priests and Deacons in Preaching

Priests, as co-workers of the bishops, share in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. This responsibility is especially important for parish priests and others entrusted with the care of souls. Deacons also serve the people of God in this ministry of the word, always in union with the bishop and his priests.

Canon 535 – Witness of Consecrated Religious

Members of religious institutes, by their consecrated life, give a special witness to the Gospel. Because of this, bishops may call upon them to assist in proclaiming the Gospel in a particular way.

Canon 536 – The Role of the Laity in Proclaiming the Gospel

Lay people, by virtue of their baptism and confirmation, are witnesses to the Gospel through both their words and the example of their lives. They may also be invited to cooperate with bishops and priests in the ministry of the word.

Canon 537 – The Content of Preaching

The ministry of the word must faithfully and fully present the mystery of Christ. This preaching must be rooted in Sacred Scripture, Tradition, the liturgy, the teaching authority of the Church (magisterium), and the lived experience of the Church.

Canon 538 – Using All Means to Proclaim the Gospel

While preaching and catechesis are the most important forms of teaching, all suitable means should be used to spread Christian doctrine. These include schools, universities, conferences, public declarations, books, and modern forms of social communication.

Subsection III

Preaching The Word Of God

Canon 539 – The Centrality of Preaching

The people of God are united by the living word of God, and they have the right to hear it from their priests. For this reason, preaching is one of the most important duties of sacred ministers, who must see it as central to their mission.

Canon 540 – Bishops’ Right to Preach Everywhere

Bishops have the right to preach the word of God anywhere, even in churches or chapels belonging to religious institutes of Primatial right, unless the local bishop has specifically forbidden it in a particular case.

Canon 541 – Priests and Deacons’ Faculty to Preach

Priests and deacons may preach anywhere, provided they have at least the presumed consent of the rector of the church. This right can be limited or removed by the competent authority, or particular law may require explicit permission.

Canon 542 – Preaching to Religious Communities

To preach in the churches or chapels of religious communities, permission must be obtained from the competent Superior, according to the constitutions of that institute.

Canon 543 – Lay Preaching in Churches

Lay people may be permitted to preach in a church or chapel when necessary or particularly useful, according to the norms set by the Bishops Conference. However, this must always respect Canon 767 §1, which reserves the homily to clergy.

Canon 544 – The Homily as the Primary Form of Preaching

§1 The homily, which is part of the liturgy itself, is the most important form of preaching. It is reserved to priests and deacons and should explain the mysteries of faith and the principles of Christian living, based on Scripture.

§2 At every Sunday and holy day Mass with a congregation, a homily must be given and may only be omitted for a serious reason.

§3 It is strongly recommended that homilies also be given at weekday Masses, especially during Advent, Lent, feast days, or times of mourning.

§4 The parish priest or rector of the church is responsible for ensuring these rules are followed.

§5 Regular homilies can be published on the church website and social media at any time.

Canon 545 – The Core Content of Preaching

§1 Preachers must first teach the truths necessary for salvation and for living a life that glorifies God.

§2 They must also explain the Church’s teaching on human dignity and freedom, the unity and responsibilities of the family, social obligations, and the proper ordering of society according to God’s plan.

Canon 546 – Adapting Teaching to the Audience

Christian teaching should always be explained in a way that is suited to the listeners’ situation and adapted to the needs and circumstances of the time.

Canon 547 – Special Preaching Events

At certain times, as directed by the diocesan bishop, parish priests are to arrange special preaching events such as retreats, missions, or other forms suited to the needs of the faithful.

Canon 548 – Reaching the Marginalised and Non-Believers

§1 Bishops and parish priests must ensure that the word of God is preached also to those members of the faithful who, because of their life circumstances, cannot easily access ordinary pastoral care, or who are completely deprived of it.

§2 They must also take care that the Gospel is proclaimed to non-believers living in their territory, since they too are entrusted to the Church’s pastoral care.

Section IV

The Ministry of Divine Worship and Especially of the Sacraments

Subsection I

The Sacraments

Canon 549 – Norms for Preaching and Catechesis

§1 Preaching and catechetical instruction must follow the norms set by the Church's authority, so that the message of the Gospel is presented faithfully and in unity with the Church's teaching.

§2 In using the media of social communication (radio, television, internet, etc.), the faithful must observe the norms laid down by the Episcopal Conference, so that the proclamation of the Gospel is carried out with dignity and effectiveness.

Canon 550 – The Duty of Pastors to Catechise

The responsibility of catechesis – that is, teaching the faith in a systematic and complete way – belongs especially to pastors of souls. They must ensure that the faithful grow in knowledge of the faith and in Christian living. –

Canon 551 – Shared Responsibility for Catechesis

§1 The duty of catechesis belongs to the whole Church. Bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and lay people all share in this responsibility according to their role.

§2 Parents, above all, are bound to form their children in the faith and practice of Christian life, both by word and by example.

Canon 552 – Episcopal Conferences and Catechetical Norms

§1 Each diocesan bishop is to issue norms for catechesis in his diocese and to ensure that suitable instruments (like catechisms and programs) are available.

§2 Episcopal Conferences may prepare catechisms for their territory, with approval from the Primatial See.

§3 The Primatial See itself may publish catechisms for the universal Church.

Canon 553 – The Parish Priest's Role in Catechesis

The parish priest has a special duty to provide catechesis for the faithful in his parish. He must ensure that children, young people, and adults are instructed in the faith, and that catechists are properly trained.

Canon 554 – Particular Duties of Parish Priests in Catechesis

Parish priests must:

- Provide catechesis for the celebration of the sacraments (especially baptism, confirmation, and marriage).
- Ensure children are prepared for first confession and first communion.

- Provide ongoing catechesis for young people and adults.
- Support catechesis for those with special needs.
- Promote the faith formation of the entire parish community.

Canon 555 – Religious Superiors and Catechesis

Superiors of religious institutes must ensure that catechesis is diligently provided in their churches, schools, and works entrusted to them.

Canon 556 – Methods of Catechesis

Catechesis must use teaching methods and aids suited to the needs of the faithful, their age, and their circumstances, so that the faith is communicated effectively.

Canon 557 – Training of Catechists

Bishops must ensure that catechists are properly trained, so that they can faithfully and effectively hand on the teaching of the Church.

Subsection II

The Missionary Action of the Church

Canon 558 – The Missionary Nature of the Church

The whole Church is missionary by its very nature. Every member of the Church shares responsibility for spreading the Gospel. Missionary activity is not just the work of a few specialists, but a duty that belongs to all the faithful, according to their role and ability.

Canon 559 – The Primate and Bishops as Leaders of Mission

§1 The Primate, as the supreme pastor of the Church, has the highest authority and direction over missionary activity throughout the world.

§2 Bishops, both individually in their dioceses and together in Episcopal Conferences, are the chief promoters of missionary work. They must encourage, guide, and coordinate missionary efforts among their people.

Canon 560 – Religious Institutes and Mission

Members of religious institutes, by their consecration, are especially dedicated to the service of the Church's mission. They are to play a special role in missionary activity, according to the spirit of their institute.

Canon 561 – Missionaries

Missionaries are those who are sent by competent Church authority to carry out missionary work. They may be clergy, religious, or lay people, but they must be properly prepared and officially sent.

Canon 562 – Catechists in Mission Territories

In mission territories, catechists – lay men and women who are specially trained – play an important role. They teach the faith, lead prayer, and assist in pastoral work under the direction of missionaries.

Canon 563 – The Goal of Missionary Work

The purpose of missionary activity is to establish new local Churches (dioceses or communities) that are firmly rooted in the faith and able to carry on the work of evangelization themselves.

Canon 564 – Dialogue with Non-Believers

§1 Missionaries should seek respectful dialogue with those who do not yet believe in Christ, so that the Gospel may be shared in a way that is sensitive and inviting.

§2 The faithful are to give witness to Christ by their lives and words, so that others may be drawn to the faith freely.

Canon 565 – Catechumenate in Mission Territories

§1 Those who show interest in becoming Christian are to be welcomed and guided through the catechumenate – a period of instruction and preparation for baptism.

§2 Catechumens are to be gradually introduced to the life of faith, liturgy, and charity of the Christian community.

§3 Episcopal Conferences are to issue norms for the catechumenate, adapted to local circumstances.

Canon 566 – Care for the Newly Baptized

Newly baptized Christians in mission territories must be carefully supported, so that they grow in faith, participate fully in the liturgy, and live as active members of the Church.

Canon 567 – The Bishop’s Role in Mission Territories

§1 The diocesan bishop, or ordinaries, in mission territories has special responsibility to:

- Direct and coordinate missionary activity,
- Ensure cooperation among missionaries,
- Oversee catechists and their training.

§2 Missionaries must faithfully follow the bishop’s directives in carrying out their work.

Canon 568 – Promoting Missionary Spirit in Every Diocese

Every diocese must foster missionary awareness and support. This includes:

- Promoting missionary vocations,
- Supporting missionary societies,
- Organizing collections for the missions,
- Encouraging prayer for missionary work.

Canon 569 – Welcoming Missionary Students

Dioceses are to welcome and care for students from mission territories who come to study in their region, so that they receive proper formation and support.

Subsection III

Catholic Education

Canon 570 – Parents’ Rights and Duties in Education

§1 Parents have both the right and the duty to educate their children. They must ensure that their children receive an education that promotes their full human and Christian development.

§2 Catholic parents also have the right to choose schools that will best help them in this task. The Church must support them in exercising this right.

Canon 571 – The Church’s Role in Education

§1 The Church has a duty to educate, since it has been entrusted with the mission of leading people to salvation.

§2 Pastors of the Church must ensure that all the faithful receive a proper Christian education.

Canon 572 – The Goal of Education

True education must aim at the full development of the human person – physically, morally, intellectually, and spiritually. It should prepare people to live responsibly in society and to grow in holiness.

Canon 573 – Schools as Key Partners in Education

§1 Schools are of great importance in education. Parents must work closely with teachers to ensure their children’s proper formation.

§2 Parents should cooperate with teachers and school authorities, and schools should support parents in their role as the primary educators.

Canon 574 – Freedom of Choice in Education

Parents must have the freedom to choose schools for their children. Civil authorities must respect this freedom and provide parents with real options.

Canon 575 – Parents’ Duty to Choose Catholic Schools

Parents should send their children to Catholic schools whenever possible. If this is not possible, they must ensure that their children receive adequate religious education outside of school.

Canon 576 – Civil Laws Supporting Religious Education

Catholics should work to ensure that civil laws recognize and support the right of parents to provide a religious and moral education for their children in schools.

Canon 577 – The Right to Establish Catholic Schools

§1 The Church has the right to establish and run schools of every kind and level.

§2 The faithful should actively support Catholic schools, helping them to fulfill their mission.

Canon 578 – Religious Institutes and Schools

Religious institutes whose mission includes education should dedicate themselves to establishing and running schools, always in harmony with the needs of the Church.

Canon 579 – Oversight of Religious Education

§1 The Church has the right to oversee religious education and catechesis, whether in schools or through other means. This responsibility belongs to the bishops.

§2 Teachers of religion must be faithful to Catholic teaching and live lives consistent with the faith.

Canon 580 – The Bishop’s Authority over Religion Teachers

The diocesan bishop has the right to appoint or approve teachers of religion in his diocese, and also to remove them if necessary for reasons of faith or morals.

Canon 581 – The Bishop’s Oversight of Catholic Schools

§1 The diocesan bishop has the right to oversee Catholic schools in his territory, even those run by religious institutes. He must ensure that they remain faithful to Catholic teaching.

§2 Catholic schools must strive for academic excellence, at least equal to that of other schools in the region.

Canon 582 – The Church’s Right to Universities

The Church has the right to establish and run seminaries, which contribute to the deeper development of human culture and the mission of the Church.

Canon 583 – Use of the Title “Catholic” for Seminaries

No seminary may call itself “Catholic” without the consent of the competent Church authority.

Canon 584 – Episcopal Conferences and Seminaries

Episcopal Conferences should ensure that there are Catholic seminaries in their territory, which can contribute to the development of culture and the Church’s mission.

Canon 585 – Responsibility for Seminaries

§1 Church authorities must ensure that seminaries have teachers who are outstanding in both knowledge and faith. If necessary, they must remove teachers who fail in this duty.

§2 Seminaries must provide education that is faithful to Catholic teaching and that contributes to the Church’s mission.

Canon 586 – Mandate to Teach Theology

Anyone who teaches theological subjects in a seminary must have a mandate (official approval) from the competent Church authority.

Canon 587 – Pastoral Care in Seminaries

The diocesan bishop must ensure that students in seminaries receive proper pastoral care, including chaplaincies and student centres.

Canon 588 – Ecclesiastical Universities

The Church has the right to establish ecclesiastical universities and faculties, which are dedicated to teaching and research in sacred sciences.

Canon 589 – Institutes for Catechetical Formation

Where possible, institutes should be established to train catechists and provide formation in catechetical methods, so that the faithful may be well instructed in the faith.

Subsection IV

The Means of Social Communication and Books

Canon 590 – The Church and the Media

§1 The Church has the duty to use the media of social communication (press, radio, television, internet, etc.) to spread the Gospel and to form people in Christian values.

§2 Pastors of the Church must teach the faithful how to use media responsibly, so that it serves human dignity and the common good.

§3 The faithful are encouraged to support Catholic initiatives in media and to help ensure that Christian values are represented in public communication.

Canon 591 – Oversight of Writings on Faith and Morals

§1 The Church has the right and duty to ensure that writings or publications concerning faith and morals do not harm the integrity of the faith. Bishops and the Primate See may review such works and warn the faithful if errors are found.

§2 The faithful are to submit writings on faith and morals to Church authority when required, so that the truth of the Gospel is safeguarded.

Canon 592 – Permission to Publish

§1 Unless otherwise stated, the diocesan bishop of the author or of the place of publication is the competent authority to grant permission to publish works that require it.

§2 Once permission is granted by one competent authority, it is valid everywhere.

Canon 593 – Publishing Sacred Scripture

§1 Editions of Sacred Scripture may only be published with the approval of the Primate See or the local bishop. Translations must have proper annotations and explanations.

§2 Catholic translations of Scripture may be prepared in cooperation with other Christians, provided they are approved by the Church authority.

Canon 594 – Liturgical Books

§1 For liturgical books (such as the Missal, Breviary, etc.), only editions approved by the Primate See may be used.

§2 Translations of liturgical books must be approved by the Synod of Bishops and confirmed by the Primate See.

§3 New editions of liturgical books must clearly indicate that they conform to the approved text.

Canon 595 – Catechisms and Religious Textbooks

§1 Catechisms and other writings for catechetical instruction require approval from the local bishop or Episcopal Conference.

§2 Books dealing with Scripture, theology, canon law, Church history, or religious or moral subjects may not be used in schools without approval from competent authority.

§3 Books or writings that touch on religion or morals may be recommended by bishops for use in schools.

§4 Periodicals, pamphlets, or other writings that deal with religion or morals are subject to the vigilance of Church authority.

Canon 596 – Collections of Church Documents

Collections of decrees or acts issued by Church authority may not be published without the consent of the same authority.

Canon 597 – Scope of Approval

Approval or permission to publish a work applies only to the original text, not to later editions or translations, unless these also receive approval.

Canon 598 – Censors of Books

§1 Each bishop may appoint censors – qualified persons who review writings on faith and morals.

§2 The censor must give an objective judgment in writing. If the work contains nothing contrary to faith or morals, approval may be granted.

§3 The author retains the right to revise the work before publication.

Canon 599 – Clergy and Religious Writing in Media

§1 Clerics and members of religious institutes may not write in newspapers, magazines, or other media that openly attack the Catholic faith or good morals, unless there is a just and reasonable cause and permission is granted by competent authority.

§2 Episcopal Conferences are to issue norms about the participation of the faithful in media, especially when it concerns faith and morals.

Canon 600 – Religious Institutes and Publishing

Members of religious institutes must obtain permission from their major superior, according to their constitutions, before publishing writings on religion or morals.

Subsection V

The Profession of Faith

Canon 601 – Who Must Make the Profession of Faith

§1 The following people are required to make a formal **Profession of Faith** (a public declaration of belief in the Catholic faith, usually using the Creed and the formula approved by the Primate See) whenever they take up certain offices or responsibilities in the Church:

- The Primate himself (when assuming office).
- Bishops and others equivalent to bishops in law.
- Members of the Synod of Bishops and those taking part in an Ecumenical Council.

- Diocesan bishops (and those equivalent to them in law) when they begin their ministry in a diocese.
- Vicars general and episcopal vicars.
- Rectors of seminaries and professors of theology and philosophy in seminaries.
- Those being promoted to the diaconate (before ordination).
- Superiors in clerical religious institutes (according to their constitutions).

Pastors (parish priests) and others who take on equivalent pastoral responsibility.

§2 Form of the Profession of Faith:

1. The recitation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed
2. Formula of the Profession is said using these words: With firm faith, I believe everything contained in the word of God, whether written in Sacred Scripture or handed down in Sacred Tradition, which the Church—through solemn judgment or through the ordinary and universal teaching office—sets forth as divinely revealed and to be believed as such. I firmly accept and hold each and every truth definitively proposed by the Church regarding faith and morals, recognising that such teachings are intimately connected with divine revelation and necessary for faithfully preserving and expounding the deposit of faith. I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the authentic teachings of the college of bishops united with the Primate, who exercise the teaching office given them by Christ. I honour the ancient Primate See of Rome as holding a primacy of honour among all the Churches, whilst maintaining the canonical independence and legitimate autonomy of this particular Church in accordance with the ancient discipline and traditions of the Catholic faith. I acknowledge the authority of the Seven Ecumenical Councils received by the undivided Church, and I accept the teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church as authentic witnesses to the apostolic faith. I pledge fidelity to the canonical discipline of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church as expressed in its laws, statutes and legitimate customs, and I promise obedience to the Primate and to my diocesan bishop in all things pertaining to my office and state of life. I undertake to fulfil the duties of my office with integrity, to guard the deposit of faith, to promote the unity of the Church and the salvation of souls, and to seek always the glory of God and the building up of the Body of Christ in charity and truth. So help me God, and these holy Gospels which I touch with my hand.

Volume IV

The Sanctifying Office of the Church

Section I

Subsection I

The Sacraments

Canon 602 – The Liturgy as Canonical Sanctification

§1 The Church exercises its sanctifying office most especially in the sacred liturgy, which is the exercise of Christ's priestly office. In the liturgy, by means of signs perceptible to the senses, our sanctification is signified and, in a manner proper to each sign, effected. Through the liturgy a full public worship is offered to God by the head and members of the mystical body of Christ.

§2 This worship is rightly accomplished when offered in the name of the Church, by persons lawfully deputed and through actions approved by ecclesiastical authority.

Canon 603 – Who Exercises the Sanctifying Office

§1 The sanctifying office is exercised principally by bishops, who are the high priests, the chief dispensers of God's mysteries, and the moderators, promoters and guardians of the liturgical life in the Churches entrusted to them.

§2 This office is also exercised by priests; they share in Christ's priesthood and, as ministers under the bishop's authority, are consecrated to celebrate divine worship and to sanctify the people.

§3 Deacons share in the celebration of divine worship according to the provisions of law.

§4 Other members of Christ's faithful also share in the sanctifying office, each according to their state: they actively participate in liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist. Parents have a particular share when they live their married life in the Christian spirit and provide for their children's Christian formation.

Canon 604 – Fostering Faith for Worship

§1 The Foundation of Worship in Faith

Christian worship, in which the baptised exercise their common priesthood, must arise from living faith and be sustained by it. The liturgy is not mere ritual but an authentic encounter with the divine mystery, made possible only through faith nourished by the word of God.

§2 The Sacred Minister's Primary Responsibility

Sacred ministers—bishops, priests, and deacons—bear the essential duty to awaken, deepen, and strengthen the faith of those entrusted to their care. This work requires intentional cultivation, pastoral sensitivity to individual faith journeys, and ongoing formation suited to different stages of spiritual development.

§3 The Ministry of the Word as Primary Instrument

The ministry of the word stands as the essential means through which faith is both born and nourished:

- a. Faith is born through the clear and compelling proclamation of the Gospel, for faith comes from hearing the word of Christ;
- b. Faith is nourished through sustained catechesis that deepens understanding, addresses questions, and integrates belief into daily life;
- c. This ministry encompasses liturgical homilies, systematic instruction, spiritual direction, catechetical programmes, and all legitimate means of communicating divine truth.

§4 Integration of Word and Worship

Sacred ministers must ensure that the ministry of the word prepares for, accompanies, and flows from liturgical celebration:

- a. Before worship, through pre-sacramental preparation that enables conscious and active participation;
- b. During worship, through homilies and liturgical catechesis that illumine the sacred mysteries being enacted;
- c. After worship, through mystagogical reflection that deepens appreciation for the sacraments and strengthens commitment to Christian living.

§5 Practical Obligations of Sacred Ministers

To fulfil this canon, sacred ministers must:

- a. Prioritise preaching and teaching as central to pastoral ministry;
- b. Develop competence in biblical interpretation, theology, and effective communication;
- c. Know their people well enough to address real questions, struggles, and contexts;
- d. Create diverse pathways for faith formation suited to different learning styles and life stages;
- e. Model living faith through personal prayer, study, and witness;
- f. Collaborate with catechists, teachers, and lay leaders, providing them with proper training and support;
- g. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching ministry in producing genuine growth in faith and meaningful liturgical participation.

§6 The Ultimate Goal

The sacred minister's labour to awaken and deepen faith aims at worship that truly glorifies God through the conscious, active, and full participation of believers whose minds and hearts

have been formed by the word of God, so that the liturgy becomes what it is meant to be: the summit toward which the Church's activity is directed and the font from which all her power flows.

Canon 605 – Communal Nature of Liturgical Action

§1 Liturgical actions are not private; they are celebrations of the Church as the “sacrament of unity,” the holy people united and ordered under the bishops. They pertain to the whole body of the Church and affect individual members according to their order, role and participation.

§2 Because liturgical matters by their nature call for communal celebration, they should, as far as possible, be celebrated in the presence of Christ's faithful and with their active participation.

Canon 606 – Authority over the Sacred Liturgy

§1 The ordering and guidance of the sacred liturgy belong solely to the authority of the Church, namely the Primatial See and, as provided by law, the diocesan bishop.

§2 It is the prerogative of the Primatial See to regulate the liturgy of the universal Church, to publish liturgical books, to recognise adaptations approved by the episcopal conference within the norms of law, and to ensure that liturgical norms are faithfully observed everywhere.

§3 It pertains to episcopal conferences faithfully to prepare vernacular versions of the liturgical books, suitably adapted within defined limits, and to approve and publish them for their territories after confirmation by the Primatial See.

§4 Within his competence the diocesan bishop has the authority to establish for the Church entrusted to him liturgical regulations that are binding on all.

Canon 607 – Prayer, Penance and Works of Charity

§1 The Church also fulfils its sanctifying office by prayer, by works of penance and by charity; these practices help to establish and strengthen Christ's kingdom in souls and contribute to the salvation of the world.

§2 Local ordinaries must ensure that the prayers and pious practices of the Christian people are in harmony with the laws of the Church.

Canon 608 – Institution and Purpose of the Sacraments

The sacraments of the New Testament were instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church. As actions of Christ and of the Church they are signs and instruments by which faith is expressed and strengthened, worship is offered to God and our sanctification effected; they therefore most effectively establish, strengthen and make visible ecclesial communion. In celebrating the sacraments both sacred ministers and the faithful must show great reverence and due care.

Canon 609 – Universal Nature and Authority over Sacraments

Because the sacraments are the same throughout the universal Church and form part of the divine deposit of faith, only the supreme authority of the Church can determine what is

required for their validity. That same authority determines what is required for their lawful celebration, administration and reception and for the order to be observed in them.

Canon 610 – Right and Duty to Administer the Sacraments

§1 Sacred ministers may not refuse the sacraments to those who properly request them, are suitably disposed, and are not lawfully prohibited from receiving them.

§2 Pastors and all members of Christ's faithful share the duty to ensure that those who ask for the sacraments are properly prepared, through evangelisation and catechesis, according to norms established by the competent authority.

Canon 611 – Character-Imprinting Sacraments

§1 Because they imprint a character, baptism, confirmation and orders cannot be repeated.

§2 If, after careful enquiry, a reasonable doubt remains whether these sacraments were conferred at all or validly, they are to be conferred conditionally.

§3 Clergy who have been received by incardination only require an ordination sub conditione (under condition) if there is doubt about the validity of their orders and those orders are either in doubt or cannot be proven.

Canon 612 – Observance of Liturgical Books and Rites

§1 The liturgical books approved in Canon 2 must be faithfully followed in celebrating the sacraments; no one may of personal initiative add, omit or alter anything in those books.

§2 Ministers are to celebrate the sacraments according to their own rites approved by the Primate or their bishop.

Canon 613 – Use and Care of Holy Oils

§1 In sacraments requiring holy oils, the minister must use oil from olives that has recently been consecrated or blessed by a bishop. Older oil is to be used only in case of necessity.

§2 The parish priest is to obtain the holy oils from his own bishop and keep them carefully in suitable custody.

§3 Priests are earnestly encouraged to carry a small, properly secured vessel of the Oil of the Sick on their person or among their immediate pastoral supplies, so that in cases of emergency they may promptly administer the sacrament to the dying. This practice is to be exercised with due reverence, discretion and care for the oil's safe keeping.

Canon 614 – Offerings for the Sacraments and Care for the Poor

For administering the sacraments, a minister may not ask for more than the offerings determined by the competent authority, and he must ensure that the poor are not deprived of sacramental assistance through lack of means.

Subsection II

Baptism

Canon 615 – The Nature of Baptism

Baptism is the gateway to the Christian life. Through it, people are freed from sin, reborn as children of God, and incorporated into the Church. Baptism is validly conferred only by washing with real water and using the words prescribed by Christ (“I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”).

Canon 616 – The Rite of Baptism

Baptism is normally celebrated according to the approved liturgical books. In urgent situations, however, it may be performed in a simpler form, provided the essential elements (water and the Trinitarian formula) are used.

Canon 617 – Preparation for Baptism

Before baptism is celebrated, proper preparation must take place:

- **For adults:** They should be instructed in the faith, guided through the catechumenate, and prepared for the sacraments of initiation.
- **For infants:** Parents and godparents must be instructed about the meaning of baptism and their responsibilities in raising the child in the faith.

Canon 618 – Who Is Considered an Adult or Infant

§1 The rules for adult baptism apply to anyone who has reached the use of reason.

§2 Those who are not yet capable of reasoning are considered infants for baptismal purposes.

Canon 619 – The Water of Baptism

Baptism must be celebrated with water that is blessed according to the liturgical books.

Canon 620 – Methods of Baptism

Baptism may be administered either by immersion (placing the person in water) or by pouring water over the head, according to the approved liturgical norms.

Canon 621 – The Name of the Baptised

Parents, godparents, and pastors must ensure that the child is not given a name that is contrary to Christian faith or values.

Canon 622 – The Day of Baptism

Although baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is fitting that it be celebrated on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection, or at the Easter Vigil.

Canon 623 – Place of Baptism

§1 Baptism at a church, oratory, or another suitable venue.

§2 Pastors may choose an alternative venue depending on local custom and necessity. As a missionary church, the clergy may perform baptisms in homes of the faithful or any other venue that is meaningful to the parents.

Canon 624 – Baptismal Fonts

Each parish church should have a baptismal font.

Canon 625 – Baptism Outside the Parish Church

If someone cannot easily go to the parish church, baptism may be celebrated in any suitable place. This can be indoors or outdoors, providing all reverence can be observed.

Canon 626 – Baptism in Private Homes or Hospitals

§1 Baptism can be celebrated in private homes.

§2 Baptism can be celebrated in hospitals, outdoor venues such as gardens or parks or any venue providing it does not deter from the solemnity of the liturgy.

Canon 627 – Ministers of Baptism

§1 The ordinary ministers of baptism are bishops, priests, and deacons.

§2 In cases of necessity, anyone – even a non-baptised person – can baptise, provided they intend to do what the Church does when baptizing, and they use the proper form and matter (water and the Trinitarian formula).

Canon 628 – Adult Baptism and the Bishop

Adult baptism, especially at Easter, should ordinarily be celebrated by the diocesan bishop himself, or at least with his knowledge and approval, so that the bishop is closely connected to the initiation of new members of the Church.

Canon 629 – Who Can Be Baptised

§1 Every person, and only a person who has not yet been baptised, is capable of receiving baptism.

§2 Baptism is only performed once and cannot be repeated.

Canon 630 – Conditions for Adult Baptism

§1 For an adult to be baptised, they must have freely chosen the faith, received proper instruction, and shown evidence of conversion and intention to live as a Christian.

§2 In danger of death, an adult may be baptised if they show some knowledge of the faith, express even a minimal desire for baptism, and promise to live as a Christian if they recover.

Canon 631 – Sacraments Accompanying Adult Baptism

An adult who is baptised should, if possible, immediately receive confirmation and the Eucharist, completing their initiation into the Church.

Canon 632 – Baptism of Infants

§1 Parents are obliged to have their infants baptised within the first weeks after birth. As soon as possible after birth, or even before, they should approach their parish priest to request baptism and prepare for it.

§2 If an infant is in danger of death, they should be baptised without delay.

Canon 633 – Conditions for Infant Baptism

§1 For an infant to be baptised lawfully:

- The parents (or at least one of them, or the person lawfully taking their place) must consent.
- There must be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic faith.

§2 In danger of death, an infant may be baptised even against the will of the parents.

Canon 634 – Doubtful Baptism

§1 If there is doubt whether someone has been baptised, or whether baptism was validly conferred, the sacrament is to be administered conditionally (“If you are not yet baptised, I baptize you...”).

§2 If after careful investigation the doubt remains, conditional baptism is to be given.

§3 Those baptised in non-Catholic communities are not to be baptised again if their baptism is judged valid.

Canon 635 – Foundlings

A child who has been abandoned or whose parents are unknown should be baptised, unless after investigation it is certain that the child has already been baptised.

Canon 636 – Miscarried Foetuses

If aborted or miscarried foetuses are alive, they are to be baptised if possible.

Canon 637 – Role of Godparents

A godparent is to be given to the person being baptised, if possible, to assist the parents in bringing up the child in the faith, or to help the adult newly baptised to live a Christian life.

Canon 638 – Requirements for Godparents

To be admitted as a godparent, a person must:

- a. Be chosen by the parents or the person being baptised.

- b. Be at least 16 years old (unless the bishop sets another age or makes an exception).
- c. Have received confirmation and the Eucharist, and who lives a life consistent with the faith.
- d. Not be bound by any canonical penalty.
- e. Not be the father or mother of the person being baptised

A baptised non-Catholic may serve only as a Christian witness, alongside a Catholic godparent.

Canon 639 – Recording Baptism

If someone is baptised without parents or godparents present, the minister must provide a witness so that the baptism can be properly recorded.

Canon 640 – Proof of Baptism

To prove that baptism has been conferred, a declaration of the baptised person (if an adult), or the testimony of one witness, or the word of the minister is sufficient – unless particular law requires more.

Canon 641 – Baptismal Register

§1 The parish priest must carefully record baptisms in the parish register, noting the names of the baptised, the minister, parents, godparents, and the place and date of baptism.

§2 If the child is born to unmarried parents, the mother's name is to be recorded if publicly known or requested by her. The father's name is recorded only if his paternity is publicly known or proven. Otherwise, the child is recorded without naming the father or with a note of the parents' names according to civil law.

§3 For adopted children, the names of the adoptive parents are recorded, and other details are entered according to norms set by the Episcopal Conference.

Subsection III Confirmation

Canon 642 – The Nature and Effects of Confirmation

§1 Completion of Baptismal Grace

Confirmation brings to completion the grace received in baptism. While baptism incorporates the believer into Christ and the Church, confirmation strengthens and matures that incorporation, empowering the baptised for their mission as witnesses to the Gospel.

§2 The Sacramental Action

Confirmation is conferred through anointing with chrism upon the forehead, accompanied by the laying on of hands and the words prescribed in the approved liturgical books. Through these visible signs, the invisible grace of the Holy Spirit is communicated: the anointing signifies consecration for sacred mission, the laying on of hands represents transmission of spiritual power, and the prescribed words invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit.

§3 The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Through this sacrament the baptised are sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit, receiving the fullness of the Spirit's presence and power for Christian witness, the seven gifts of the Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord), a permanent sacramental character, and special grace to confess the faith boldly and never be ashamed of the Cross.

§4 Strengthening for Witness and Mission

Confirmation strengthens the baptised to live as authentic witnesses of Christ, empowering them to profess their faith publicly and courageously, give reasoned testimony to their hope, live according to Christian values in challenging circumstances, and defend what is true and good against cultural pressures that conflict with the Gospel.

§5 Active Participation in Evangelisation

The confirmed are commissioned and enabled to spread the faith through word and deed, defend it intelligently and charitably against error, catechise others by passing on what they have received, and participate as responsible agents in the Church's evangelising mission rather than merely as recipients of ministry.

§6 Deeper Union with the Church

Confirmation strengthens the bond between the confirmed and the Church, more closely uniting them to the Body of Christ, deepening their awareness of responsibility for the Church's welfare and unity, and strengthening their relationship with the hierarchy, particularly the diocesan bishop who ordinarily confers this sacrament.

§7 Growth in Christian Maturity

This sacrament marks movement from spiritual childhood toward adulthood, calling the confirmed to take greater personal responsibility for their faith, equipping them for discernment and moral courage in Christian decision-making, and preparing them to assume roles of leadership and service within the community according to their state in life.

§8 Permanence of the Sacramental Character

Like baptism and holy orders, confirmation imprints an indelible spiritual mark upon the soul that permanently configures the confirmed to Christ, cannot be lost through sin or apostasy, and therefore cannot be repeated. This permanent character serves as a perpetual call to live according to the grace received, even when that grace is not fully embraced or has been obscured by serious sin.

Canon 643 – The Rite of Confirmation

§1 The Essential Sacramental Form

Confirmation is validly conferred by anointing the forehead with chrism (sacred oil mixed with balsam), accompanied by the laying on of hands and the precise words prescribed in the approved liturgical books listed in Canon 2. These three elements together constitute the essential sacramental sign through which the Holy Spirit is given and must not be separated or omitted.

§2 The Matter: Sacred Chrism

The chrism used in confirmation must be consecrated by a bishop, even when the sacrament itself is administered by a priest. This requirement ensures the connection between confirmation and the fullness of apostolic ministry, maintains the unity of the Church, and guarantees the authenticity and validity of the sacramental matter.

§3 The Anointing of the Forehead

The forehead is anointed with chrism in the form of a cross. This visible location signifies that the confirmed must openly profess their faith without shame, marks them as belonging to Christ, and consecrates them for their mission as witnesses in the world.

§4 The Laying On of Hands

The imposition of hands signifies the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the confirmed, the transmission of spiritual power from the apostolic ministry, and follows the biblical pattern established in the Acts of the Apostles.

§5 The Prescribed Words

The words spoken during the anointing must conform exactly to those in the approved liturgical books. These words make explicit the gift of the Holy Spirit being conferred and may not be altered, paraphrased, or substituted, as the validity of the sacrament depends upon using the Church's prescribed form.

Canon 644 – The Place of Confirmation

Confirmation is normally celebrated in a church, during Mass, so that the connection with the Eucharist is clear. However, for pastoral reasons, it may be celebrated outside of Mass or in another suitable place.

Canon 645 – The Ordinary Minister of Confirmation

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. However, a priest may also confirm if he has been granted this faculty either by law or by special delegation.

Canon 646 – Priests Who May Confirm by Law

The following priests have the faculty to confirm by the law itself:

- Priests who baptise an adult or receive someone into full communion with the Church.
- Priests who confirm someone in danger of death.

- Priests who are given this faculty by law or by the diocesan bishop.

Canon 647 – Delegation of the Faculty to Confirm

§1 The diocesan bishop may personally administer Confirmation or delegate it to one or more priests.

§2 For a large group of candidates, the bishop may grant faculties to several priests so that the sacrament can be administered more easily.

Canon 648 – The Bishop’s and Priest’s Duty

§1 Bishops are obliged to ensure that the faithful in their diocese are confirmed at the proper time.

§2 Priests who have the faculty to confirm must use it for the benefit of those entrusted to their care.

Canon 649 – Who Can Receive Confirmation

§1 Every baptised person who has not yet been confirmed can and should receive Confirmation.

§2 To receive Confirmation lawfully, a person must be properly instructed, suitably disposed, and able to renew their baptismal promises.

Canon 650 – The Obligation to Receive Confirmation

The faithful are obliged to receive Confirmation at the proper time. Parents and pastors must ensure that children are prepared and receive the sacrament.

Canon 651 – The Age for Confirmation

Confirmation should be conferred at about the age of discretion (around 7 years old), unless the Episcopal Conference sets another age, or there is danger of death, or the bishop decides otherwise for a serious reason.

Canon 652 – The Role of Sponsors

As in baptism, a sponsor should be present at Confirmation to help the confirmed person live as a true witness of Christ and to fulfil the promises made at baptism.

Canon 653 – Requirements for Sponsors

§1 A Confirmation sponsor must meet the same requirements as a baptismal godparent: they must be a confirmed Catholic, living in harmony with the faith, and not under any canonical penalty.

§2 It is desirable that the baptismal godparent also serve as the Confirmation sponsor, to highlight the unity of the sacraments of initiation.

Canon 654 – Recording Confirmation

The names of those confirmed, their minister, parents, sponsors, and the place and date of the sacrament must be recorded in the Confirmation register of the parish.

Canon 655 – Proof of Confirmation

If no record exists, proof of Confirmation can be established by the testimony of one reliable witness or by the sworn declaration of the person confirmed.

Section II

The Most Holy Eucharist

Subsection I

The Celebration of the Eucharist

Canon 656 – The Nature of the Eucharist

§1 The Most Holy Sacrament

The Eucharist is the Church's most holy sacrament, in which Christ the Lord himself is truly, really, and substantially present. Through it Christ is offered to the Father and received by the faithful as spiritual food, and by it the Church is continually nourished and grows in holiness and unity.

§2 The Eucharistic Sacrifice

The Eucharist is the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection, in which the saving act of the cross is made present for all time. It is not a mere symbolic remembrance but the actual representation of Christ's one sacrifice, offered now to the Father through the ministry of the Church.

§3 The Summit and Source

The Eucharist is the high point and source of all Christian worship and life. It is the summit toward which all the Church's activity is directed and the font from which all her power flows. All prayer, ministry, and mission find their ultimate meaning and effectiveness in relation to the eucharistic sacrifice.

§4 Unity and Growth of the Church

Through the Eucharist the people of God are made and kept one. By sharing in the one bread and one cup, the faithful are united to Christ and to one another, and the Body of Christ is built up and brought to maturity in faith and love.

§5 The Centre of Sacramental Life

All the other sacraments and the entirety of the Church's mission flow from and are ordered toward the blessed Eucharist. The sacraments of initiation prepare for eucharistic communion, the sacraments of healing restore it, and the sacraments of vocation empower service to the eucharistic community. Every aspect of Christian life finds its center and goal in the Eucharist.

Canon 657 – Reverence for the Eucharist

§1 The Faithful's Obligation of Reverence

The faithful must hold the Eucharist in the highest honour, recognizing it as the most holy sacrament and the true presence of Christ. This reverence must be expressed both in their interior disposition and in their outward conduct toward the Blessed Sacrament.

§2 Devout and Frequent Reception

The faithful are obliged to receive Holy Communion with proper devotion, having prepared themselves spiritually through prayer, self-examination, and when necessary, sacramental confession. They should receive frequently, recognising that regular eucharistic communion is essential for growth in Christian life.

§3 The Pastor's Teaching Responsibility

Pastors must diligently teach the faithful about the central importance of the Eucharist in Christian faith and life. This teaching should include instruction on the Real Presence of Christ, the sacrificial nature of the Mass, proper preparation for reception, and the fruits of worthy communion.

§4 Encouragement of Full Participation

Pastors must actively encourage the faithful to participate fully, consciously, and actively in the eucharistic celebration. This includes promoting regular Mass attendance, fostering understanding of the liturgy, and helping the faithful unite their lives to the sacrifice being offered.

Canon 658 – The Eucharistic Assembly

§1 The Eucharistic celebration (the Mass) is the action of Christ and the Church, in which Christ is made present and the faithful are united with him.

§2 The faithful who gather for Mass form a holy people, offering themselves with Christ.

§3 The priest presides in the person of Christ, leading the assembly and consecrating the Eucharist.

Canon 659 – The Minister of the Eucharist

§1 Only a validly ordained priest can consecrate the Eucharist.

2 Priests should celebrate Mass frequently, and bishops are encouraged to ensure that the Eucharist is offered daily in their dioceses.

Canon 660 – Masses for the Dead and Mass Intentions

§1 The Right to Celebrate for Intentions: Priests and bishops may celebrate Mass for any lawful intention, whether for the living or the dead. This practice allows the faithful to request that the infinite merits of Christ's sacrifice be applied for particular persons, needs, or purposes.

§2 Masses for the Dead: Masses offered for the deceased are a principal work of charity and intercession:

- a. The Church commends the offering of Mass for the repose of the souls of the faithful departed, trusting in God's mercy and the communion of saints;
- b. Such Masses may be offered for named individuals, for all the faithful departed, or for specific groups of the deceased;
- c. Priests should readily accept requests to celebrate Mass for the dead and should encourage the faithful in this practice of filial piety and Christian charity.

§3 Masses for the Living: Masses may be offered for the living for various intentions:

- a. For someone's health, protection, conversion, or spiritual needs;
- b. For special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, marriages, or ordinations;
- c. For those facing particular trials, decisions, or challenges in life.

§4 Masses in Thanksgiving: Mass may be celebrated in thanksgiving for blessings received, such as recovery from illness, safe travel, answered prayers, or any of God's benefits, acknowledging that all good gifts come from the Father of lights.

§5 Masses for General Needs: Intentions may include broader concerns such as peace in the world, vocations to the priesthood and religious life, the needs of the Church, the welfare of the diocese or parish, or other matters affecting the common good.

§6 The Application of Mass: When a priest accepts an intention for Mass, he is bound in justice to apply that particular Mass for the stated intention. The application of Mass means that the priest offers the sacrifice specifically for the person or purpose requested, uniting that intention with Christ's offering to the Father.

§7 Mass Offerings and Stipends: The faithful may offer monetary donations when requesting a Mass intention:

- a. Such offerings contribute to the support of priests and the works of the Church;
- b. A priest is permitted to retain offerings given for Mass intentions as part of his lawful stipend and support;
- c. No appearance of simony (the buying or selling of spiritual things) must be permitted; offerings are voluntary gifts that support the minister, not payments for the sacrament;
- d. No one should be refused a Mass intention due to inability to provide an offering.

§8 Pastoral Sensitivity: Priests should exercise pastoral sensitivity in accepting and fulfilling Mass intentions:

- a. The poor, the bereaved, and those in spiritual need should be given priority in the priest's pastoral charity;
- b. Priests should maintain accurate records of accepted intentions and fulfil them faithfully and promptly;
- c. When offerings are received, priests must ensure complete transparency and accountability in their handling.

§9 The Spiritual Fruit of Mass Intentions: While the infinite value of Christ's sacrifice cannot be increased or diminished, the Church teaches that particular spiritual fruits flow to those for whom Mass is specifically offered, according to God's will and the disposition of those who request and those who receive this intercession.

Canon 661 – Concelebration

Priests may concelebrate Mass together, especially at gatherings of clergy. However, each priest also retains the right to celebrate Mass individually, except on Holy Thursday and at councils or synods where concelebration is prescribed.

Canon 662 – Visiting Priests

A priest who presents a letter of good standing from his bishop or superior, or who is otherwise known to be in good standing, must be allowed to celebrate Mass, even if he is unknown to the local pastor.

Canon 663 – Daily Celebration of Mass

§1 The Encouragement to Daily Celebration: Priests are strongly encouraged to celebrate Mass daily, recognizing that the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life and the primary act of their priestly ministry. This daily celebration nourishes the priest's own spiritual life and makes present Christ's sacrifice for the world.

§2 Mass Without the Faithful Present: Even when no members of the faithful are present to participate, priests should still celebrate Mass. The eucharistic sacrifice is the action of Christ and the Church, offered for the salvation of the entire world, and its value does not depend upon the size of the congregation or the presence of any assembly beyond the celebrating priest.

§3 Spiritual Benefits for the Priest Daily celebration of Mass strengthens the priest in his vocation, deepens his union with Christ, and renews his commitment to serve God's people. Through regular offering of the sacrifice, the priest is spiritually nourished and empowered for his pastoral ministry.

§4 Exceptions and Pastoral Discretion: While daily celebration is strongly encouraged, priests may have legitimate reasons for occasional exceptions, such as illness, necessary travel, or other just impediments. Pastors should exercise prudent judgment in balancing this encouragement with their other duties and circumstances.

Canon 664 – Frequency of Celebration

§1 A priest may celebrate Mass only once a day, except where the law allows otherwise.

§2 For pastoral reasons, a priest may celebrate twice on the same day, or even three times on Sundays and holy days, if the bishop permits.

Canon 665 – Role of Deacons and Laity

Deacons and lay people may not recite prayers or perform actions reserved to the priest during Mass, especially the Eucharistic Prayer.

Canon 666 – Preparation for Mass

§1 The Obligation of Preparation

A priest must not celebrate Mass without proper preparation, both spiritual and liturgical. The celebration of the Eucharist is the most sacred act of Christian worship and demands that the celebrant approach it with reverence and adequate readiness.

§2 Spiritual Preparation

Spiritual preparation requires prayer before celebration, examination of conscience to ensure the priest is in a state of grace, recollection and freedom from distraction, and appropriate fasting according to the norms of the Church.

§3 Liturgical Preparation

Liturgical preparation includes familiarity with the proper texts and readings for the celebration, preparation of the homily, ensuring all necessary liturgical books, vessels, and vestments are ready, and coordination with other ministers to ensure reverent celebration.

§4 Thanksgiving After Mass

Priests should spend time in thanksgiving after celebrating, remaining in prayer to acknowledge the gift received and offered, and to ask God's blessing upon the fruits of the sacrifice.

Canon 667 – Ministers of Holy Communion

The ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are bishops, priests, and deacons.

Canon 668 – Bringing Communion to the Sick

The parish priest, chaplains, and superiors of religious houses are responsible for ensuring that the sick receive Communion.

Subsection II

Participation in the Eucharist

Canon 669 – Right to Receive Communion

Any baptised person may and should be admitted to Holy Communion.

Canon 670 – Communion of Children

§1 Children must have sufficient knowledge and preparation to receive Communion with faith and devotion.

§2 In danger of death, children may receive Communion if they can distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary food.

Canon 671 – Parents and Pastors' Duty

Parents and pastors must ensure that children are properly prepared for first Communion and that they receive it at the right time.

Canon 672 – Frequency of Communion

A person who has already received Communion may receive it again on the same day only within a Mass in which they participate.

Canon 673 – Communion During Mass

It is strongly recommended that the faithful receive Communion during Mass itself, but if necessary, they may receive it outside of Mass.

Canon 674 – Eucharistic Fast

§1 Anyone receiving Communion must fast from food and drink (except water and medicine) for at least one hour beforehand.

§2 Priests who celebrate more than once on the same day need only fast before the first Mass.

§3 The elderly, the sick, and those caring for them are not bound by the Eucharistic fast.

Canon 675 – Easter Duty

§1 Every Catholic must receive Communion at least once a year.

§2 This obligation must be fulfilled during the Easter season, unless fulfilled at another time for a just cause.

Canon 676 – Communion for the Dying

§1 The faithful in danger of death should be strengthened by receiving Communion as Viaticum.

§2 Even if they have already received Communion that day, they may receive it again as Viaticum.

§3 The dying should be encouraged to receive Communion repeatedly on different occasions if possible.

Canon 677 – Timing of Viaticum

Viaticum should not be delayed until the person is at the point of death, but given while they are still able to receive it with devotion.

Canon 678 – Choice of Rite

§1 The faithful may receive Communion in either the Novus Ordo or the Tridentine Mass.

§2 The rites list in Canon 2 §3 may be used in private celebration of the Mass.

Subsection III

The Form and Matter of the Celebration

Canon 679 – Bread and Wine

§1 The Eucharist must be celebrated with bread and wine, to which a small amount of water is to be added.

§2 In the Western tradition, the bread used for the Eucharist is to be unleavened. However, clerics who belong to, or are legitimately received from, Eastern or Orthodox lineages may use leavened bread according to their own venerable tradition, provided the bread meets the Church's requirements for valid matter and the unity of the celebration is respected.

§3 The wine must be natural, fruit of the vine, and not spoiled.

Canon 680 – Method of Communion

Holy Communion can be given under the form of bread alone. However, it may be given under both kinds (bread and wine), or even under the form of wine alone, in cases permitted by liturgical law.

Canon 681 – Invalid Matter

It is absolutely forbidden to consecrate one element without the other (bread without wine, or wine without bread), or to consecrate anything other than wheat bread and grape wine.

Canon 682 – Language of the Mass

The Eucharist may be celebrated in Latin or in another language, provided the liturgical texts have been lawfully approved.

Canon 683 – Reverence of Priests

Priests are to celebrate the Eucharist with deep reverence and devotion, faithfully observing the liturgical norms.

Canon 684 – Mass with Impaired Priests

§1 A priest who is impeded by illness or old age may celebrate Mass with the help of another priest or deacon.

§2 A priest who is blind or otherwise disabled may licitly celebrate Mass, provided he can validly perform the essential parts.

Canon 685 – Time of Celebration

The Eucharist may be celebrated on any day and at any hour.

Canon 686 – Place of Celebration

§1 Mass should be celebrated in a sacred place (church or chapel). For necessity, it may be celebrated elsewhere, provided the place is fitting.

§2 The altar should be dedicated or blessed, and the cloth and vessels used must be worthy.

Canon 687 – Mass in Non-Catholic Churches

For a just cause, and with the bishop's permission, a priest may celebrate Mass in a church or oratory of another Christian community, provided there is no scandal.

Subsection IV Reservation and Veneration of the Eucharist

Canon 688 – Reservation of the Eucharist

§1 The Blessed Sacrament must be reserved:

- In parish churches,
- In churches or chapels attached to religious communities.
- In private oratories run by religious or priests and bishops

§2 The person responsible must ensure that the Eucharist is kept in a secure tabernacle.

Canon 689 – Carrying the Eucharist

No one may keep the Eucharist with them or carry it around, unless by a bishop, priest or deacon and only for the necessity of transporting to the sick or dying.

Canon 690 – Location of the Tabernacle

In a religious house or seminary, the Eucharist is to be reserved only in the church or principal oratory.

Canon 691 – Access to the Blessed Sacrament

Churches where the Eucharist is reserved should normally be open for at least some hours each day, so that the faithful may pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

Canon 692 – The Tabernacle

§1 The Eucharist must be reserved in only one tabernacle in a church.

§2 The tabernacle should be in a prominent, visible, and suitably adorned part of the church.

§3 For grave reasons, the Eucharist may be reserved elsewhere temporarily.

Canon 693 – Quantity of Hosts

Enough consecrated hosts should be reserved to meet the needs of the faithful, but they should be renewed frequently.

Canon 694 – Sanctuary Lamp

A special lamp must burn continuously near the tabernacle, as a sign of Christ's presence.

Canon 695 – Exposition of the Eucharist

§1 In churches where the Eucharist is reserved, exposition may take place, observing the liturgical norms.

§2 Exposition may not occur during the celebration of Mass in the same space.

Canon 696 – Forty Hours Devotion

It is recommended that each year, in churches where the Eucharist is reserved, solemn exposition take place for an extended time (traditionally "Forty Hours"), so that the community may adore Christ in the Eucharist.

Canon 697 – Minister of Exposition

The ordinary minister of exposition and benediction is a priest or deacon.

Canon 698 – Eucharistic Processions

§1 Where possible, a public procession of the Eucharist should be held, especially on the feast of Corpus Christi, as a public witness of faith.

§2 The diocesan bishop regulates such processions.

Subsection V

Stipends and Offerings

Canon 699 – Mass Intentions

§1 Priests may accept offerings to apply Mass for specific intentions.

§2 Even if no offering is made, priests are encouraged to celebrate Mass for the faithful, especially the poor.

§2 A Mass intention may include:

- For the Dead: The most common intention is for the repose of the soul of someone who has died, asking God to grant them eternal rest.
- For the Living: Masses may be offered for someone's health, protection, conversion, or special occasion (e.g., birthday, anniversary, ordination).
- In Thanksgiving: A Mass can be offered in gratitude for blessings received, such as recovery from illness, safe travel, or answered prayers.
- For General Needs: Intentions may include peace in the world, vocations, or the needs of the Church.

Canon 700 – Nature of Offerings

The faithful who give offerings for Mass contribute to the good of the Church and share in its concern for the support of ministers and works.

Canon 701 – Avoiding Abuse

Any appearance of buying or selling spiritual things (simony) must be carefully avoided in relation to Mass offerings.

Canon 702 – One Intention per Mass

A separate Mass must be celebrated for each intention for which an offering has been accepted.

Canon 703 – Obligation of Priests

A priest who accepts an offering for Mass is bound by justice to apply the Mass for that intention.

Canon 704 – Value of Offerings

If a sum of money is given without specifying the number of Masses, the number is determined by the customary offering in the place where the donor lives.

Canon 705 – Multiple Masses in a Day

§1 A priest who celebrates more than one Mass on the same day may apply each for the intention for which an offering has been given, but may retain only one offering; the others must go to the purposes determined by the bishop.

§2 The same applies if a priest concelebrates more than once in a day.

Canon 706 – Amount of Offerings

The amount of the offering for Mass is determined by the Episcopal Conference. Priests may accept a larger or smaller offering, but must not demand more than the set amount.

Canon 707 – Limitation on Accepting Intentions

No one may accept more Mass intentions than can be satisfied within a year.

Canon 708 – Transfer of Intentions

If Masses cannot be celebrated in the place where offerings were given, they may be transferred elsewhere, unless the donor expressly forbids it.

Canon 709 – Responsibility for Transferred Intentions

§1 A priest who transfers Mass intentions to another priest must ensure they are celebrated and must record the transfer.

§2 The receiving priest is bound to celebrate them within the time required.

§3 Both priests must keep accurate records.

Canon 710 – Responsibility of Administrators

Administrators of pious foundations or institutions that receive Mass offerings must ensure that the obligations are fulfilled.

Canon 711 – Oversight of Mass Obligations

The diocesan bishop oversees the fulfilment of Mass obligations in secular churches; religious superiors oversee them in churches of their institutes.

Canon 712 – Registers of Mass Intentions

§1 Every parish and religious house must keep a register of Mass intentions received and fulfilled.

§2 These registers are to be inspected by the local ordinary (bishop) or religious superior.

Section III

Subsection I

Penance and Reconciliation of the Penitent

Canon 713 – The Purpose of Penance

Penance restores baptised people to communion with God and the Church after sin. It offers forgiveness, heals the sinner, strengthens spiritual life, and calls the person to ongoing conversion.

Canon 714 – Elements of the Sacrament of Penance

The sacrament has three essential elements: contrition (a sincere sorrow for sin and a firm purpose of amendment), confession of serious sins to a priest, and satisfaction (penance) that repairs the harm caused by sin.

Canon 715 – Ordinary and Extraordinary Means

Where the sacrament is available, the faithful are to seek reconciliation through confession to a priest. In danger of death, anyone may obtain forgiveness by sincere contrition and, if possible, confession.

Canon 716 – Obligation to Confess Grave Sins

Anyone conscious of grave sin must confess those sins in confession before receiving Communion. Regular confession of lesser faults is strongly recommended as a means of spiritual growth.

Canon 717 – Frequency of Confession

The faithful are encouraged to confess regularly. Pastors should help the faithful understand and keep this practice as part of ongoing conversion.

Canon 718 – Seal of Confession

A confessor must never betray the penitent by word or action. The sacramental seal is absolute; a priest who breaks it incurs the gravest penalties and is forbidden from ministry.

Canon 719 – Home and Public Confessions

Confessions are ordinarily heard in a church, oratory, or other suitable place that ensures privacy and reverence. The confessor must safeguard the penitent's confidentiality and dignity.

Canon 720 – Who May Hear Confessions

Only validly ordained priests and bishops who have proper jurisdiction may validly absolve sins in confession. In cases of necessity, a bishop may grant faculty to other priests.

Canon 721 – Confession of Children

Children must be instructed so they can examine their conscience and confess serious sins when they have the use of reason. Parents and pastors are to prepare them appropriately.

Canon 722 – Examination of Conscience

Before confession, penitents should make an honest examination of conscience, remembering the commandments, the teachings of Christ, and the duties of their state of life.

Canon 723 – Form and Matter of the Sacrament

The essential acts of the sacrament are the penitent's contrition and confession, and the priest's absolution pronounced in the name of Christ and the Church.

Canon 724 – Absolution and Penance

After the penitent confesses and shows contrition, the priest grants absolution and assigns a penance that aids conversion and makes reparation where possible.

Canon 725 – Liturgical Celebration of Reconciliation

Individual confession and absolution is the normal form of the sacrament. Communal services with individual confession and absolution may be celebrated according to liturgical norms.

Canon 726 – Communal Penitential Services

Communal services for penance may include readings, a homily, and general prayers but must not replace the individual confession required for absolution of grave sins.

Canon 727 – General Absolution in Emergencies

General absolution without individual confession may be given only in genuine emergencies where there is no time to hear individual confessions, and only under conditions established by the bishop.

Canon 728 – Records of Absolution

When general absolution is given in danger of death, a record must be kept. Otherwise, records of individual confessions are not to be kept in any form that would violate the seal.

Canon 729 – Private Confession Outside the Parish

A penitent may seek confession from any priest who has the faculty to hear confessions. Priests should accommodate those who seek reconciliation, especially the sick and those in difficulty.

Canon 730 – Confessor’s Discernment

A confessor must judge the penitent’s situation prudently and assign suitable penance. He should offer spiritual counsel while respecting the penitent’s freedom and conscience.

Canon 731 – Reconciliation and Canonical Penalties

Absolution may be withheld only when the penitent persists in manifest grave sin after admonition, or when withholding is necessary for canonical reasons; the confessor must follow law and pastoral charity.

Canon 732 – Restitution and Reparation

Where sin has caused harm, the penitent should make restitution or other forms of reparation as far as possible, as part of genuine conversion and to restore justice.

Canon 733 – Reconciliation and Public Works

Pastors should accompany penitents toward concrete acts of charity and repair, encouraging actions that benefit those harmed and rebuild trust in the community.

Canon 734 – Penitential Pastoral Care

Bishops and pastors must provide formation for confessors and programs to foster a healthy penitential life among the faithful, so confession is a source of healing rather than fear.

Canon 735 – Confession and Civil Authorities

The Church respects civil authority but preserves the confidentiality of confession; ecclesial procedures, not civil courts, govern sacramental matters.

Canon 736 – Priests' Ongoing Formation

Priests must be trained continually in pastoral practice, the moral life, and theology, so they can offer sound guidance and merciful absolution.

Canon 737 – Admission to Reconciliation by Formerly Excommunicated Persons

Those who have been publicly punished or excommunicated and have been reconciled according to law may return to the sacramental life once the required canonical conditions are met.

Canon 738 – Penitential Materials

Pastors should provide suitable prayers, examinations of conscience, and catechesis to help the faithful prepare well for confession.

Canon 739 – Confidentiality of Pastoral Records

Any records kept for pastoral reasons (notations about penances or follow-ups) must protect the penitent's identity and never breach the seal of confession.

Canon 740 – Reconciliation for the Sick and Dying

Pastoral care must make every effort to bring the sacrament to the sick and dying in a timely, reverent manner, ensuring spiritual comfort and reconciliation.

Canon 741 – Cooperation with the Penitent

Pastors must gently but firmly encourage penitents to fulfil penances and to live renewed lives of prayer, charity, and justice.

Canon 742 – Reconciliation and Community Life

Confession is not only personal but has social dimensions; pastors should help penitents restore relationships and reintegrate into parish life.

Canon 743 – The Penitent's Duty

Penitents must be sincere, confess known grave sins, perform the assigned penance, and strive to avoid occasions of sin.

Canon 744 – Rights of the Penitent

Penitents have the right to be treated with respect, to receive compassionate pastoral care, and to expect that their confession will be kept absolutely secret.

Canon 745 – Confessors’ Prudence in Penances

Confessors should assign penances that are appropriate, tailored to the penitent’s situation, and helpful for moral growth rather than punitive.

Canon 746 – Reconciliation and Canonical Process

When reconciliation involves canonical procedures pastors must follow law while seeking pastoral remedies that restore communion.

Canon 747 – Pastoral Oversight

Bishops must see that the sacrament of penance is available and well administered throughout the diocese, ensuring confessors are fit and the faithful are encouraged to seek reconciliation.

Subsection II

Anointing of the Sick

Canon 748 – Purpose and Effect of the Anointing of the Sick

The Anointing of the Sick gives grace to the Christian who is seriously ill or in danger because of age or infirmity. It comforts, strengthens, and, if God wills, restores health. It unites the person more closely to Christ’s suffering and prepares them for eternal life.

Canon 749 – Who May Receive the Sacrament

Those who may lawfully receive the anointing are: the baptised who are seriously ill from sickness or old age; those about to undergo serious surgery; and those whose health is seriously impaired by disease or frailty. It may be repeated if the person’s condition worsens.

Canon 750 – Ministers of the Sacrament

A priest is the ordinary minister of the anointing. In danger of death, any priest available should be called so that the sacrament may be given without delay.

Canon 751 – Pastoral Care and Preparation

Pastors and priests should be attentive to the sick, visiting them, providing the sacrament when needed, and arranging for appropriate pastoral care. They should prepare the person and their family spiritually and explain the sacrament’s meaning.

Canon 752 – Lay Involvement

Lay faithful should assist in caring for the sick, encourage them to receive the sacrament, and support pastoral visits, but they may not anoint in place of a priest or offer Viaticum.

Canon 753 – Viaticum and Anointing

When a person is dying, the anointing is often given together with Viaticum (Communion as food for the journey to eternal life) so the person receives full spiritual support.

Canon 754 – Frequency and Conditions

The sacrament may be administered more than once when a sick person recovers and later again falls ill, or when the condition becomes more serious.

Canon 755 – Record Keeping

The minister should record the anointing in the parish register or in the sick registry so pastoral care is documented and continuity of care is preserved.

Canon 756 – Respect for Persons and Sensitivity

Anointings must be administered with charity, respect, and sensitivity to the sick and their families, preserving dignity and pastoral discretion.

Canon 757 – Coordination with Health Care

Pastors should cooperate with health-care providers for the good of the sick, observing confidentiality and ensuring pastoral care complements medical treatment.

Section IV

Holy Orders

Subsection I

The Celebration of Ordination and The Minister

Canon 758 – The Sacrament of Orders and Its Purpose

By divine institution certain members of Christ's faithful are set apart through the sacrament of Holy Orders. This sacrament marks them with a permanent spiritual character and appoints them as sacred ministers. Each, according to their rank, is consecrated to serve in the name of Christ the Head, teaching, sanctifying, and guiding the people of God. In this way, they help to nourish and build up the Church.

Canon 759 – Degrees of Orders

§1 Holy Orders is conferred in three degrees: episcopate (bishops), presbyterate (priests), and diaconate (deacons). Each degree shares in the apostolic ministry in different ways appropriate to its role.

§2 They are conferred by the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration which the liturgical books prescribe for each grade.

Canon 760 – Timing

An ordination is to be celebrated within Mass and preferably on a Sunday or a holyday of obligation; for pastoral reasons it may also be held on other days, including ordinary weekdays.

Canon 761 – Place and attendance

§1 Ordinations are to take place in any church, oratory or other suitable venue.

§2 Clerics and the faithful should be invited so that as many as possible may be present at the rite.

Canon 762 – Minister

A consecrated Bishop alone is the proper minister of sacred ordination.

Canon 763 – Primate mandate

No one may be consecrated a Bishop unless it is first established that a Primate mandate has been issued.

Canon 764 – Multiple consecrators

Unless dispensed by the Primate See, the principal consecrator at an episcopal ordination must be joined by at least two other consecrating Bishops; it is fitting that all Bishops present share in the consecration.

Canon 765 – Proper ordaining authority

§1 Candidates are to be ordained to the priesthood or Diaconate by their proper Bishop or by a Bishop who holds valid dimissorial letters from that proper Bishop.

§2 A Bishop, unless prevented for a just reason, should ordain his own subjects, but may not lawfully ordain a subject of an Eastern rite without an Primate indult.

§3 A person who lawfully issues dimissorial letters may, if he is a Bishop, also confer the orders himself.

Canon 766 – Determining the proper Bishop

For those entering the secular clergy, the Bishop competent for diaconal ordination is the Bishop of the place where the candidate has domicile or the one to whom he intends to devote himself; for priestly ordination the proper Bishop is the one in whose diocese the candidate was incardinated at the time of his Diaconate.

Canon 767 – Jurisdictional consent

A Bishop may not confer orders outside his own jurisdiction except with the permission of the diocesan Bishop.

Canon 768 – Who issues dimissorial letters

§1 The following may give dimissorial letters for secular clergy:

1. the Primate;
2. a Primatial Administrator; the diocesan Administrator with the college of consultors' consent; the Pro-vicar and Pro-prefect apostolic with the consent of the council in Canon 495.2.

§2 The diocesan Administrator, Pro-vicar and Pro-prefect apostolic must not issue dimissorial letters to persons whom the diocesan Bishop or the Vicar or Prefect apostolic has refused admission to orders.

Canon 769 – Religious superiors

§1 The major Superior of a clerical religious institute or of a clerical society of apostolic life of Primatial right may grant dimissorial letters for the diaconate and priesthood to those permanently or definitively enrolled according to their constitutions.

§2 The ordination of candidates from other institutes or societies follows the law for the secular clergy and any special indults formerly granted to Superiors are revoked.

Canon 770 – Required documents

Dimissorial letters must not be granted until all testimonials and documents required by the law under.

Canon 771 – To whom letters may be sent

Dimissorial letters may be addressed to any Bishop in communion with the Primatial See, but not to a Bishop of a different rite from the ordinand unless an apostolic indult allows it.

Canon 772 – Verify authenticity

A Bishop who has received the required dimissorial letters may proceed to ordain only after verifying their authenticity beyond reasonable doubt.

Canon 773 – Limits and revocation

Dimissorial letters may be limited or revoked by the issuer or his successor; once properly granted they do not lapse merely because the issuer's term of office ends.

Subsection II

Those to be Ordained

Canon 774 – Baptism required

Only a baptised male can validly receive sacred ordination.

Canon 775 – Fitness and proofs

§1 To lawfully confer priestly or diaconal orders it must be shown, by the proofs required by law, that in the judgment of the proper Bishop or competent major Superior the candidate possesses the necessary qualities, is free of irregularity or impediment, and has fulfilled the requirements of these canons.

§2 It is also required that the same lawful Superior judges the candidate to be beneficial to the Church's ministry.

§3 A Bishop who ordains his subject for service in another diocese must be sure that the ordinand will indeed be attached to that other diocese.

Canon 776 – Freedom

A person must have genuine freedom to be ordained; no one may be compelled to receive orders nor may a canonically suitable candidate be unjustly denied admission.

Canon 777 – Formation

Candidates for the diaconate and priesthood are to receive careful formation according to the law.

Canon 778 – Instruction on obligations

Before promotion to any order, the diocesan Bishop or competent Superior must ensure candidates are properly instructed about the nature of the order and its obligations.

Canon 779 – Suitability

Only those whom the proper Bishop or competent major Superior prudently judges to have sound faith, right intention, adequate knowledge, good reputation, moral integrity, proven virtue, and the physical and psychological qualities appropriate to the order are to be advanced to orders.

Canon 780 – Withholding admission

The proper Bishop or competent major Superior may, for a canonical reason forbid admission to the priesthood of a deacon under his authority who was destined for priesthood, without prejudice to recourse under the law.

Canon 781 – Age and intervals

§1 The priesthood may be conferred only on those who have completed their twenty-fifth year and possess sufficient maturity; normally at least six months must elapse between diaconate and priesthood; those for priesthood are to be admitted to the diaconate only after completing their twenty-third year.

§2 A candidate for the permanent diaconate must be at least twenty-five.

§3 Episcopal Conferences may prescribe higher minimum ages for priesthood and permanent Diaconate.

§4 A dispensation exceeding one year from the ages in §1 and 2 is reserved to the Primate of the See.

Canon 782 – Studies and pastoral experience

§1 Aspirants to the priesthood may be promoted to the diaconate only after completing one year of philosophical and theological studies.

§2 After completing their studies and before ordination to the priesthood, deacons must spend an appropriate period, set by the Bishop or competent Superior, exercising the diaconal ministry and engaging in pastoral work.

§3 Candidates for the permanent diaconate must complete the prescribed formation period before promotion.

Article 2: Prerequisites for Ordination

Canon 783 – Confirmation

Only one who has received the sacrament of sacred confirmation may lawfully be promoted to orders.

Canon 784 – Admission

An aspirant to the diaconate or to the priesthood is not to be ordained unless he has first, through the liturgical rite of admission:

§1 Secured enrolment as a candidate, having previously submitted and signed an application form in his own hand and words which has been accepted in writing by that authority.

§2 Submitted all relevant identification documents and certificates of ordination (in the case of clergy requesting incardination).

Canon 785 – Written declaration

For promotion to the diaconate or priesthood, the candidate must present to the proper Bishop or competent major Superior a handwritten and signed declaration in which he testifies that he will freely and willingly receive sacred orders and devote himself permanently to ecclesiastical ministry, and that he petitions to be admitted to the order.

Canon 786 – Refusal and exercise

A deacon who declines promotion to the priesthood may not be forbidden the lawful exercise of the diaconal order he has received, unless a canonical impediment or some other grave reason exists, to be judged by the diocesan Bishop or competent major Superior.

Canon 787 – Retreat

All those to be promoted to any order must make a retreat of at least five days in the place and manner determined by the Ordinary, and the Bishop must satisfy himself that the candidates have duly made the retreat before proceeding to ordination.

Article 3: Irregularities and other Impediments

Canon 788 – Effect of impediments

Those subject to an impediment are to be excluded from receiving orders; an impediment may be simple or perpetual (an irregularity); no impediment is contracted except those listed in the following canons.

Canon 789 – Irregularities

The following are irregular for receiving orders:

1. One suffering any form of insanity or other psychological infirmity which, after expert consultation, renders him incapable of fulfilling the ministry;
2. One who has committed apostasy, heresy or schism;
3. One who has attempted marriage, even civilly, while incapable of marrying because of an existing marriage bond, a sacred order or a public and perpetual vow of chastity, or who attempted marriage with a woman validly married or bound by such a vow;
4. One who has committed wilful homicide, or has actually procured an abortion, and all who have positively cooperated;
5. One who has gravely and maliciously mutilated himself or another, or who has attempted suicide;
6. One who has performed an act of order reserved to those in the episcopal or priestly orders while lacking that order or being barred from its exercise by canonical penalty.

Canon 790 – Simple impediments

The following are simply impeded from receiving orders:

1. A neophyte, unless the Ordinary judges him sufficiently tried.
2. Any clergy seeking incardination who are already under the authority of another jurisdiction

Canon 791 – Duty to disclose

Christ's faithful are obliged before ordination to disclose to the Ordinary or the parish priest any impediments to sacred orders of which they are aware.

Canon 792 – Irregularities and impediments after ordination

§1 Those irregular for reception are irregular for exercise if:

1. They unlawfully received orders while bound by an irregularity;
2. They committed the offence of apostasy, heresy or schism, if the offence is public;

§2 The following are impeded from exercising orders:

1. One who unlawfully received orders while bound by an impediment to reception;
2. One who suffers from insanity or another psychological infirmity until the Ordinary, after expert consultation, permits the exercise of the order.

Canon 793 – Ignorance no excuse

Ignorance of irregularities and impediments does not excuse from them.

Canon 794 – Multiple causes

Irregularities and impediments accumulate when arising from different causes, but not by repetition of the same cause, except in cases of irregularity from wilful homicide or from having actually procured an abortion.

Canon 795 – Dispensation authority

If the matter has been referred to the judicial forum, dispensation from all irregularities is reserved to the Primate's See.

Canon 796 – Urgent occult cases

In urgent occult cases where the Ordinary or the Penitentiary cannot be reached, and where imminent danger of serious harm or loss of reputation exists, a person irregular for exercise may exercise the order, provided he seeks recourse as soon as possible to the Ordinary or the Penitentiary through a confessor without revealing his name.

Canon 797 – Petitioning for dispensation

§1 A petition for dispensation must list all irregularities and impediments; a general dispensation covers those omitted in good faith; it does not cover those concealed in bad faith.

§2 For irregularities from wilful homicide or procured abortion, the number of offences must be stated for validity of the dispensation.

§3 A general dispensation from irregularities and impediments to reception of orders is valid for all orders.

Article 4 Documents Required And The Investigation

Canon 798 – Required documents

For promotion to sacred orders the following are required:

1. Complete the clergy application form, including the submission of all identification documents, certificates of education and prior ordination (for those requesting incardination).
2. For those to be ordained to the priesthood, a certificate of reception of the Diaconate;
3. For those promoted to the Diaconate, certificates of baptism and confirmation.

Canon 799 – Investigation

In investigating the requisite qualities of a candidate, observe:

§1 A certificate from the rector of the seminary or house of formation regarding sound doctrine, genuine piety, good moral conduct, fitness for ministry, and, after proper inquiry, a certificate of physical and psychological health;

§2 The diocesan Bishop or major Superior may employ other means suitable to the circumstances, such as testimonial letters, public notices or other sources of information, including relevant investigations about the candidates police records.

Subsection III

Documents, Investigation, Registration and Evidence

Canon 800 – Verification

§1 For a Bishop to proceed to an ordination he is to confer by his own right, he must be certain that all documents required by canon norms are present and that, following the investigations required by law, the candidate's suitability has been positively established.

§2 For the ordination of one who is not his own subject, it suffices that the dimissorial letters affirm that the necessary documents are at hand, that the lawful investigation has been carried out, and that the candidate's suitability has been established; if the ordinand belongs to a religious institute or society of apostolic life, the letters must also attest that he is definitively enrolled and subject to the Superior who issues them.

§3 If, despite these assurances, the Bishop has clear reasons to doubt the candidate's suitability, he must not proceed with the ordination.

Canon 801 – Register and certificates

§1 After ordination the names of those ordained, the ordaining minister, and the place and date of ordination are to be entered in a special register kept carefully in the curia of the place of ordination, and all related documents are to be preserved accurately.

§2 The ordaining Bishop is to give each ordinand an authentic certificate of the order received; those ordained elsewhere with dimissorial letters must present that certificate to their proper Ordinary for registration in a special archive register.

Section V

Marriage

Subsection I

Canon 802 – Nature of marriage

§1 The marriage covenant in the Catholic tradition, by which a man and a woman establish a lifelong partnership ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and to procreation and upbringing of children, has among the baptised been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament.

§2 Therefore, a valid marriage between baptised persons is, by that very fact, a sacrament.

Canon 803 – Essential properties

The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage are strengthened by the sacrament.

Canon 804 – Consent

§1 Marriage is brought into being by the lawfully manifested consent of persons legally capable; this consent cannot be supplied by any human power.

§2 Matrimonial consent is an act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept one another in an irrevocable covenant to establish marriage.

Canon 805 – Capacity

All may contract marriage who are not prohibited by law.

Canon 806 – Governing law

The marriage of Catholics, even if only one party is baptised, is governed by divine law and by Canon law, without prejudice to civil authorities regarding purely civil effects.

Canon 807 – Presumption in favour

Marriage enjoys the favour of law; in cases of doubt the validity of a marriage is to be upheld until proven otherwise.

Subsection II

Pastoral Care and the Prerequisites for the Celebration of Marriage

Canon 808 – Pastoral duties

Pastors of souls are obliged to ensure their church community provides assistance so the married state is preserved in its Christian character and matures in holiness, principally by:

1. Preaching and catechesis for all ages and use of social communication to instruct the faithful in the meaning of Christian marriage and the role of spouses and parents;
2. Personal preparation for marriage so spouses are disposed to holiness and the obligations of married life;
3. The fruitful celebration of the marriage liturgy so the spouses manifest and share in the mystery of Christ and the Church;
4. Ongoing help to married couples so by faithful observance and protection of their covenant they may grow in a holier and fuller family life.

Canon 809 – Ordinary’s duty

The local Ordinary is responsible to see that this pastoral assistance is properly organised and, where appropriate, to consult men and women of proven experience and competence.

Canon 810 – Confirmation and sacraments

§1 Catholics not yet confirmed are to receive confirmation before admission to marriage when this can be done without grave inconvenience.

§2 To receive the sacrament of marriage fruitfully, spouses are earnestly recommended to approach the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist.

Canon 811 – Pre-marital impediments

Before a marriage is celebrated it must be ascertained that nothing prevents its valid and lawful celebration.

Canon 812 – Inquiry norms

The Episcopal Conference shall issue norms for the questions to be posed to the parties, the publication of banns, and other appropriate enquiries; the parish priest may assist at a marriage only after those norms have been carefully observed.

Canon 813 – Duty to disclose

All the faithful are obliged, before the celebration of marriage, to inform the parish priest or the local Ordinary of any impediments to which they are aware.

Canon 814 – Reporting investigations

If someone other than the parish priest has conducted the required investigations, he must inform the parish priest by an authentic document of the findings as soon as possible.

Canon 815 – Age guidance

Pastors are to discourage young people from marrying before the age customarily accepted in the region by civil law.

Subsection III

Diriment Impediments in General

Canon 816 – Effect of diriment impediment

A diriment impediment renders a person incapable of validly contracting marriage.

Canon 817 – Public and occult impediments

An impediment is public when it can be proved in the external forum; otherwise it is occult.

Canon 818 – Authority to determine impediments

§1 Only the supreme authority of the Church can authoritatively declare what the divine law prohibits or invalidates regarding marriage.

§2 Only that same supreme authority may establish additional impediments for the baptised.

Canon 819 – Custom

A custom that introduces a new impediment or contradicts existing impediments is to be rejected.

Canon 820 – Local prohibition

§1 In a specific case the local Ordinary may forbid a marriage of his subjects wherever they reside or of any person actually present in his territory; such a prohibition may be temporary, for a grave reason, and while that reason exists.

§2 Only the supreme authority in the Church may attach an invalidating clause to a prohibition.

Canon 821 – Dispensation by Ordinary

§1 The local Ordinary may dispense his own subjects, wherever they reside, and all actually present in his territory, from impediments of ecclesiastical law except those reserved to the Primatial See.

§2 No dispensation is ever granted for consanguinity in the direct line or in the second degree of the collateral line.

Canon 822 – Danger of death

§1 When danger of death threatens, the local Ordinary may dispense his own subjects, wherever they reside, and all present in his territory, from the required form and from every impediment of ecclesiastical law, except the impediment arising from sacred orders.

§2 In the same danger, where the local Ordinary cannot be reached, the parish priest, a properly delegated sacred minister, and the priest or deacon who assists at the marriage under Canon 1116.2 possess the same faculty.

§3 In danger of death the confessor may dispense from occult impediments for the internal forum, either within sacramental confession or outside it.

§4 The local Ordinary is considered unobtainable if he can be reached only by telegram or telephone.

Canon 823 – Immediate dispensations and validation

§1 When an impediment is discovered after all preparations and the marriage cannot safely be delayed for a dispensation, the local Ordinary may dispense from all impediments except those in indicated by canon law.

§2 The same power extends to validating a marriage under the same urgency when there is no time to refer to the Primate See or, where applicable, to the local Ordinary.

Subsection IV

Individual Diriment Impediments

Canon 824 – Minimum age

§1 A man or woman may not validly marry before completing his sixteenth year.

§2 The Episcopal Conference may set a higher lawful minimum age.

Canon 825 – Prior bond

§1 One bound by a prior marriage bond, even if unconsummated, invalidly attempts marriage.

§2 Even if the prior marriage is invalid or dissolved for any reason, another marriage may not lawfully be contracted until the nullity or dissolution of the prior union has been lawfully and certainly established.

Canon 826 – Abduction

No marriage exists between a man and a woman who has been abducted or detained to procure marriage with her, unless after separation and placement in a safe free environment she freely chooses marriage.

Canon 827 – Crime

§1 One who, intending to marry a particular person, has killed that person's spouse or his own spouse invalidly attempts marriage.

§2 Those who mutually by deed or moral action caused the death of either's spouse also invalidly attempt marriage with each other.

Canon 828 – Consanguinity

§1 Marriage is invalid between persons related by consanguinity in any degree of the direct line, ascending or descending, legitimate or natural.

§2 In the collateral line marriage is invalid up to and including the fourth degree.

§3 The impediment of consanguinity is not multiplied.

§4 Marriage must never be permitted when doubt exists whether the parties are related in any degree of the direct line or in the second degree of the collateral line.

Canon 829 – Affinity

Affinity in any degree of the direct line invalidates marriage.

Canon 830 – Adoption

Those legally related by adoption cannot validly marry one another if their relationship is in the direct line or in the second degree of the collateral line.

Subsection V

Matrimonial Consent

Canon 831 – Mental and Psychological Capacity

Marriage cannot be validly contracted by:

1. Those who lack adequate use of reason;
2. Those who suffer from a serious deficiency in judgment regarding the essential rights and duties of marriage, which are to be mutually given and received;
3. Those who, due to psychological causes, are incapable of assuming the essential obligations of marriage.

Canon 832 – Basic Knowledge of Marriage

§1 For matrimonial consent to be valid, the parties must at least understand that marriage is a lifelong partnership between a man and a woman, directed toward the procreation of children through sexual cooperation.

§2 After puberty, such ignorance is not presumed.

Canon 833 – Error Concerning the Person

§1 A mistake regarding the identity of the person renders the marriage invalid.

§2 A mistake about a personal quality, even if it motivated the marriage, does not invalidate it unless that quality was directly and principally intended.

Canon 834 – Consent Obtained by Deceit

A marriage is invalid if one party was deceived into giving consent by fraud concerning a quality

Canon 835 – Conditional Consent

§1 Marriage cannot be validly contracted with a condition concerning the future.

§2 A marriage subject to a condition about the past or present is valid or invalid depending on whether the condition is fulfilled.

§3 Such a condition may only be lawfully attached with written permission from the local Ordinary.

Canon 836 – Consent Under Force or Grave Fear

A marriage is invalid if entered into under force or grave external fear—whether intentional or not—when the person has no escape but to marry.

Canon 837 – Personal or Proxy Presence

§1 For a valid marriage, both parties must be present together, either in person or by proxy.

§2 Consent must be expressed verbally; if speech is impossible, equivalent signs may be used.

Canon 838 – Use of Interpreter

Marriage may be contracted through an interpreter, but the parish priest must be certain of the interpreter's reliability before assisting.

Canon 839 – Presumption of Consent

Even if a marriage is invalid due to an impediment or defect of form, the consent given is presumed to persist unless its withdrawal is clearly proven.

Subsection VI

The Form of the Celebration of Marriage

Canon 840 – Canonical Form and Valid Assistance

§1 A marriage is valid only when contracted in the presence of the local Ordinary, parish priest, or a priest or deacon delegated by either, who assists in the presence of two witnesses.

§2 The one who is present, asks the parties to express their consent, and receives it in the name of the Church, is considered to assist at the marriage.

Canon 841 – Territorial Jurisdiction of Clergy

Unless declared excommunicated, interdicted, or suspended by sentence or decree, the local Ordinary and parish priest assist validly at marriages within their territory, whether the parties are their subjects or not, provided at least one party belongs to the Latin Church.

Canon 842 – Personal Jurisdiction of Clergy

A personal Ordinary or personal parish priest assists validly at marriages only of those who are their subjects, provided at least one party falls under their jurisdiction.

Canon 843 – Delegation of Faculty to Assist

§1 While in valid office, the local Ordinary and parish priest may delegate to priests and deacons the faculty to assist at marriages within their territory, including general delegation, without prejudice to canon 1108.3.

§2 For delegation to be valid, it must be expressly granted to specific individuals. A special delegation must be for a particular marriage; a general delegation must be given in writing.

Canon 844 – Prerequisites for Special Delegation

§1 Before granting a special delegation, all legal requirements to establish the freedom to marry must be fulfilled.

Canon 845 – Lawful Assistance Requires Due Diligence

Anyone assisting at a marriage acts unlawfully unless they have verified the parties' freedom to marry according to law. If assisting by general delegation, they must also confirm the parish priest's permission, if possible.

Canon 846 – Liturgical Norms for Marriage

Apart from cases of necessity, the rites prescribed in the Church's approved liturgical books, or those recognized by lawful custom, are to be observed in the celebration of marriage.

Canon 847 – Episcopal Rite of Marriage

The Episcopal Conference may compose its own rite of marriage, reflecting the customs of place and people that align with the Christian spirit. This rite must be reviewed by the Primate's See. This does not alter the requirement that the assisting minister must ask for and receive the consent of the contracting parties.

Canon 848 – Registration of Marriage

§1 As soon as possible after the marriage is celebrated, the parish priest of the place—or his substitute, even if neither assisted at the marriage—is to record in the marriage register the names of the spouses, the assisting minister, the witnesses, and the place and date of the celebration. This is to be done according to the norms set by the Episcopal Conference or the diocesan Bishop.

§2 For a marriage contracted with a dispensation from canonical form, the local Ordinary who granted the dispensation must ensure that both the dispensation and the celebration are recorded in the marriage registers of the curia and the proper parish of the Catholic party whose parish priest conducted the freedom-to-marry inquiry. The Catholic spouse must also notify the same Ordinary and parish priest as soon as possible, indicating the place of celebration and the public form used.

Canon 849 – Entry in Baptismal Registers

§1 A contracted marriage must also be recorded in the baptismal registers where the spouses' baptisms were entered.

§2 If the marriage occurred outside the parish of baptism, the parish priest of the place of celebration must send notification of the marriage to the parish priest of the place of baptism as soon as possible.

Canon 850 – Updates Following Validation or Dissolution

Whenever a marriage is validated for the external forum, declared invalid, or lawfully dissolved other than by death, the parish priest of the place of celebration must be informed so that the appropriate entries can be made in the registers of marriage and baptism.

Section VII

The Effects of the Marriage

Canon 851 – The Bond and Grace of Marriage

From a valid marriage arises a bond between the spouses that is by nature permanent and exclusive. In Christian marriage, this bond is further strengthened and consecrated by a special sacrament, equipping the spouses for the dignity and duties of their state.

Canon 852 – Mutual Rights and Duties

Each spouse holds equal rights and responsibilities in all matters pertaining to the partnership of conjugal life.

Canon 853 – Parental Responsibility

Parents bear the gravest obligation and primary right to do all within their power to ensure the physical, social, cultural, moral, and religious upbringing of their children.

Canon 854 – Legitimacy of Children

Children conceived or born within a valid or putative marriage are considered legitimate.

Canon 855 – Presumption of Paternity and Legitimacy

§1 The father is presumed to be the man identified by a lawful marriage, unless clear evidence proves otherwise.

§2 Children are presumed legitimate if born at least 180 days after the marriage was celebrated, or within 300 days following the end of conjugal life.

Canon 856 – Legitimation of Children

Illegitimate children are legitimated either by the subsequent marriage of their parents—whether valid or putative—or by a rescript from the Primate of the See.

Canon 857 – Canonical Status of Legitimated Children

For canonical purposes, legitimated children are considered equivalent to legitimate children in all respects, unless the law explicitly provides otherwise.

Section VIII

The Separation of the Spouses

Article 1: The Dissolution Of The Bond

Canon 858 – Indissolubility of Consummated Marriage

A marriage that has been ratified and consummated cannot be dissolved by any human authority or for any reason other than death.

Canon 859 – Dissolution of Non-Consummated Marriage

A non-consummated marriage between baptised persons, or between a baptised and an unbaptised person, may be dissolved by the Primate for a just cause, at the request of either or both parties—even if one party is unwilling.

Canon 860 – Pauline Privilege

§1 In virtue of the Pauline privilege, a marriage between two unbaptised persons is dissolved in favour of the faith of the one who receives baptism, by the very act of contracting a new marriage, provided the unbaptised spouse departs.

§2 The unbaptised spouse is considered to have departed if unwilling to live with the baptised party, or to live peacefully without offense to the Creator—unless the baptised party has given just cause for departure after receiving baptism.

Canon 861 – Interpellation of the Unbaptised Spouse

§1 Before the baptised party may validly contract a new marriage, the unbaptised spouse must be asked:

1. Whether they wish to receive baptism;
2. Whether they are at least willing to live peacefully with the baptised party without offense to the Creator.

§2 This inquiry is normally made after baptism. However, for a grave reason, the local Ordinary may permit it to be made beforehand, or dispense from it entirely—either before or after baptism—provided it is established, even by summary extrajudicial means, that the inquiry cannot be made or would be futile.

Canon 862 – Procedure for Interpellation

§1 Ordinarily, the interpellation is conducted under the authority of the local Ordinary of the baptised party. A period for response must be allowed if requested, with a warning that silence will be taken as a negative reply.

§2 A private interpellation by the baptised party is valid, and lawful if the prescribed form cannot be followed.

§3 In both cases, lawful proof must be provided in the external forum that the interpellation occurred and of its outcome.

Canon 863 – Marriage with a Non-Catholic Party

For a grave reason, the local Ordinary may permit the baptised party, using the Pauline privilege, to marry a non-Catholic—whether baptised or unbaptised. In such cases, the norms governing mixed marriages must be observed.

Canon 864 – Baptism and Multiple Spouses

§1 If an unbaptised man who has multiple unbaptised wives receives baptism in the Catholic Church, and it would be burdensome to remain with the first wife, he may retain one and dismiss the others. The same applies to an unbaptised woman with multiple husbands.

§2 After baptism, the marriage must be contracted in canonical form, observing the norms for mixed marriages and other applicable laws.

§3 Considering the moral, social, and economic circumstances, the local Ordinary must ensure just and charitable provision for the dismissed spouses, in accordance with natural equity.

Canon 865 – Favour of the Faith

In cases of doubt, the privilege of the faith is to be interpreted in favour of its application.

Subsection IX

The Separation of the Spouses

Article 1: Separation While the Bond Remains

Canon 866 – Obligation to Maintain Conjugal Life

Spouses have both the right and the duty to maintain their common conjugal life, unless a legitimate reason excuses them.

Canon 867 – Separation on Grounds of Adultery

§1 A spouse, moved by Christian charity and concern for the family's welfare, is earnestly encouraged to forgive an adulterous partner and not to break conjugal life. However, if the innocent spouse has neither explicitly nor implicitly forgiven the offense, and has not consented to or caused the adultery, nor committed adultery themselves, they have the right to separate.

§2 Tacit forgiveness is presumed if, after learning of the adultery, the innocent spouse willingly resumes marital relations. It is also presumed if they continue conjugal life for six months without seeking recourse to ecclesiastical or civil authority.

§3 If the innocent spouse ends conjugal life on their own initiative, they must bring the case before the competent ecclesiastical authority within six months. This authority will assess whether reconciliation is possible or whether separation should continue.

Canon 868 – Separation for Grave Cause

§1 If one spouse causes serious danger to the soul or body of the other or of the children, or makes common life excessively difficult, the other spouse may separate—either by decree of the local Ordinary or, in urgent cases, on their own authority.

§2 Once the cause for separation ceases, conjugal life must be resumed, unless the ecclesiastical authority decides otherwise.

Canon 869 – Care for Children During Separation

Whenever spouses separate, timely and appropriate provision must be made for the maintenance and upbringing of their children.

Canon 870 – Reconciliation and Renunciation of Separation

The innocent spouse may commendably receive the other back into conjugal life, thereby renouncing the right to continued separation.

Section VI

The Other Acts of Divine Worship

Subsection I

Sacramentals

Canon 871 – Nature of Sacramentals

Sacramentals are sacred signs that in some way resemble the sacraments. They signify spiritual effects and bring them about through the Church's intercession.

Canon 872 – Authority and Rites

§1 Only the Primatial See may establish new sacramentals, or authentically interpret, suppress, or modify existing ones.

§2 The rites and formulae approved by ecclesiastical authority must be faithfully observed when celebrating or administering sacramentals.

Canon 873 – Ministers of Sacramentals

Sacramentals are ordinarily administered by clerics with the appropriate faculties. However, in accordance with the liturgical books and subject to the local Ordinary's judgment, certain sacramentals may be administered by lay persons who are suitably qualified.

Canon 874 – Blessings, Consecrations, and Dedications

§1 Consecrations and dedications may be validly performed by those with episcopal character, and by priests authorized by law or legitimate delegation.

§2 Any priest may impart blessings, except those reserved to the Primate or to Bishops.

§3 A deacon may impart only those blessings expressly permitted to him by law.

Canon 875 – Recipients of Blessings

Blessings may be given to any who request them.

Canon 876 – Reverence for Sacred Objects

Sacred objects dedicated or blessed for divine worship must be treated with reverence. They are not to be used for secular or inappropriate purposes, even if privately owned.

Canon 877 – Permission for Exorcism

§1 No one may lawfully perform an exorcism without the express permission of the local Ordinary.

§2 This permission may be granted only to a priest who is known for his piety, knowledge, prudence, and integrity of life.

Subsection II

The Liturgy of The Hours

Canon 878 – Purpose of the Liturgy of the Hours

In fulfilling Christ's priestly office, the Church celebrates the liturgy of the hours, listening to God's word and recalling the mystery of salvation. Through this prayer, the Church continually praises God and intercedes for the salvation of the world.

Canon 879 – Obligation and Invitation

§1 Clerics are bound to recite the liturgy of the hours. Members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life are bound according to their constitutions.

§2 Other members of Christ's faithful are warmly encouraged, as circumstances allow, to participate in the liturgy of the hours as a communal act of the Church.

Canon 880 – Proper Timing of the Hours

Each hour of the liturgy of the hours should, as far as possible, be prayed at its appointed time.

Subsection III

The Church Funerals

Canon 881 – Christian Funeral Rites

§1 Deceased members of Christ's faithful are to be given a Church funeral in accordance with the law.

§2 Church funerals are to follow the liturgical books. In these rites, the Church prays for the dead, honours their bodies, and offers hope and comfort to the living.

§3 The Church strongly recommends the traditional practice of burial. Cremation is not forbidden unless chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine.

Subsection IV

The Celebration of Funerals

Canon 882 – Funeral of a Bishop

The funeral of a diocesan Bishop is to be celebrated in his cathedral church, unless he has chosen another church.

Canon 883 – Funeral of Religious and Apostolic Members

The funerals of religious or members of apostolic societies are normally celebrated in their proper church or oratory: by the Superior if clerical, or by the chaplain otherwise.

Canon 884 – Burial in Parish Cemeteries

§1 If the parish has its own cemetery, the deceased faithful are to be buried there, unless another cemetery was lawfully chosen.

§2 All persons may choose their place of burial unless prohibited by law.

Canon 885 – Offerings and Equity

Offerings made at funerals are governed by canon 1264. Care must be taken to avoid favouritism and to ensure that the poor are not deprived of proper funeral rites.

Canon 886 – Register of the Dead

After burial, an entry must be made in the register of the dead, in accordance with particular law.

Subsection V

The Cult of the Saints, of Sacred Images and of Relics

Canon 887 – Veneration of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints

To promote the sanctification of the people of God, the Church commends to the special and filial veneration of Christ's faithful the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, whom Christ appointed as the Mother of all. The Church also fosters the true and authentic cult of the other Saints, whose example inspires the faithful and whose intercession strengthens them.

Canon 888 – Display of Sacred Images

The custom of displaying sacred images in churches for the veneration of the faithful is to be preserved. However, such images must be presented in moderate quantity and in appropriate manner, so as not to disturb the faithful or encourage unsuitable forms of devotion.

Canon 889 – Sale, Transfer, Custody, and Use of Relics and Highly Venerated Images

§1 The sale of sacred relics is absolutely forbidden.

§2 Relics that are notable or highly venerated may not be transferred or permanently given away in any way without the express permission of the Primate of the See.

§3 The rule in §2 also applies to images that are greatly venerated in any church.

§4 Relics must be kept and used with reverence and care. Relics must be kept in sealed reliquaries in secure, sacred places. Lesser relics should be kept in sealed cases and treated respectfully. Public display, loans, or moves of relics require proper authentication and ecclesiastical approval and must guard against profanation or superstition.

Subsection VI

Vows and Oaths

Canon 890 – Nature and Validity of a Vow

§1 A vow is a deliberate and free promise made to God concerning some possible and better good; the virtue of religion obliges its fulfilment.

§2 All who have appropriate use of reason may validly make a vow, unless lawfully prohibited.

§3 A vow made through grave and unjust fear or by deceit is invalid by the very law.

Canon 891 – Types of Vows

§1 A vow is public if accepted in the name of the Church by a lawful superior; otherwise it is private.

§2 A vow is solemn if so recognised by the Church; otherwise it is simple.

§3 A vow is personal when it obliges an action by the person making it; real when it concerns a thing; mixed when it has both aspects.

Canon 892 – Personal Obligation of Vows

By their nature, vows bind only the person who makes them.

Canon 893 – Cessation of Vows

A vow ceases by the lapse of the time specified for its fulfilment, by a substantial change in the promised matter, by the cessation of the condition or purpose on which it depended, or by dispensation or commutation.

Canon 894 – Suspension by Those with Power over the Matter

A person who has authority over the subject-matter of a vow may suspend its obligation for such time as fulfilment would work serious detriment to that person.

Canon 895 – Who May Dispense from Private Vows

Besides the Primate, the following may dispense from private vows, provided such dispensation does not injure the acquired rights of others:

1. The local Ordinary and the parish priest, regarding all their own subjects and also peregrini;
2. The Superior of a clerical institute or society of apostolic life of Primatial right, regarding members, novices and those who reside day and night in a house of the institute or society;

3. Those to whom the faculty of dispensing has been delegated by the Primatial See or by the local Ordinary.

Canon 896 – Commutation of Promised Things

What was promised by private vow may be commuted into something better or equally good by the one who made the vow. It may be commuted into something less good only by one who has authority to dispense in accordance with canon 1196.

Canon 897 – Vows and Religious Profession

Vows made before religious profession are suspended for as long as the person who made them remains within the religious institute.

Canon 898 – Nature and Requirements of an Oath

§1 An oath is the invocation of the divine Name as witness to the truth; it may be taken only in truth, judgment and justice.

§2 An oath required or accepted by the canons cannot be validly taken by proxy.

Canon 899 – Binding Force and Invalid Oaths

§1 One who freely swears an oath to do something is especially bound by the virtue of religion to fulfil what was sworn.

§2 An oath extorted by deceit, force or grave fear is invalid by the very law.

Canon 900 – Promissory Oaths and Morality

§1 A promissory oath is determined by the nature and condition of the act to which it is attached.

§2 No oath can legitimately strengthen an act that directly harms others, injures the public good, or endangers eternal salvation.

Canon 901 – Cessation of an Oath's Obligation

§1 The obligation of a promissory oath ceases:

1. If the person in whose favour the oath was sworn remits it;
2. If what was sworn is substantially changed or, because of altered circumstances, becomes evil, irrelevant, or obstructs a greater good;
3. If the purpose or condition for which the oath was made ceases;
4. By dispensation or commutation under canon 1203.

Canon 902 – Authority over Promissory Oaths

Those who can suspend, dispense or commute a vow possess the same power over a promissory oath. If dispensation from an oath would harm others and they refuse to remit it, only the Primatial See can dispense the oath.

Canon 903 – Interpretation of Oaths

An oath is to be strictly interpreted according to law and in light of the intention of the one taking it, or, where the oath-taker has acted deceitfully, according to the intention of the person before whom it was sworn.

Section VII

Sacred Places and Times

Subsection I

Sacred Places

Canon 904 – Definition of Sacred Places

Sacred places are those assigned to divine worship or to the burial of the faithful by the dedication or blessing prescribed in the liturgical books for that purpose.

Canon 905 – Who Dedicates

The dedication of a place belongs to the diocesan Bishop and those equivalent to him in law. For a dedication within their territory they may depute any Bishop or, in exceptional cases, a priest.

Canon 906 – Blessing of Sacred Places

Sacred places are blessed by the Ordinary, while the blessing of churches is reserved to the diocesan Bishop. Both may delegate another priest for this purpose.

Canon 907 – Record of Dedication or Blessing

A document recording the dedication or blessing of a church, or the blessing of a cemetery, is to be prepared. One copy is retained in the diocesan curia, the other in the church archive.

Canon 908 – Evidence of Dedication or Blessing

The dedication or blessing of a place is sufficiently established even by the testimony of a single unimpeachable witness, provided no harm results from this.

Canon 909 – Uses Permitted in Sacred Places

In a sacred place only those things that serve to exercise or promote worship, piety and religion are to be permitted. Anything inconsistent with the sacred character of the place is forbidden. The Ordinary may, for individual cases, permit other uses provided they do not contradict the sacred character of the place.

Canon 910 – Desecration and Penitential Repair

Sacred places are desecrated by acts committed within them that are gravely injurious and scandalous to the faithful when, in the judgement of the local Ordinary, those acts are so serious and contrary to the sacred character of the place that public worship must be suspended there until the harm is repaired by the penitential rite prescribed in the liturgical books.

Canon 911 – Loss of Dedication or Blessing

A sacred place loses its dedication or blessing when it has been largely destroyed, or when it has been permanently given over to secular use, whether this occurs by decree of the competent Ordinary or in fact.

Canon 912 – Exercise of Ecclesiastical Authority

Ecclesiastical authority freely exercises its powers and functions in sacred places.

Subsection II

Churches

Canon 913 – Meaning of Church

The term church denotes a sacred building intended for divine worship, to which the faithful have the right of access for the exercise, especially the public exercise, of divine worship.

Canon 914 – Permission to Build a Church

§1 No church is to be erected without the express written consent of the diocesan Bishop.

§2 The diocesan Bishop must first consult the council of priests and the rectors of neighbouring churches, and must be satisfied that the new church will serve the good of souls and that the necessary resources will be available both to build the church and to provide for divine worship.

§3 Religious institutes that have received the diocesan Bishop's consent to establish a new house in a diocese or city must nevertheless obtain the Bishop's permission before building a church on a specific site.

Canon 915 – Advice and Norms in Construction and Restoration

In the building and restoration of churches the advice of experts should be sought, and the principles and norms of liturgy and sacred art must be observed.

Canon 916 – Dedication and Blessing of New Churches

§1 As soon as practicable after completion, a new church is to be dedicated or at least blessed according to the laws of the sacred liturgy.

§2 Churches, especially cathedrals and parish churches, are to be dedicated by a solemn rite.

Canon 917 – Title of a Church

Each church is to have its own title. Once a church has been dedicated, its title is not to be changed.

Canon 918 – Acts of Worship in Dedicated Churches

All acts of divine worship may be celebrated in a church that has been lawfully dedicated or blessed, without prejudice to parochial rights.

Canon 919 – Cleanliness, Ornamentation and Security

§1 Those responsible must ensure that churches possess the cleanliness and ornamentation befitting the house of God, and that anything discordant with the sacred character of the place is excluded.

§2 Ordinary measures for preservation and appropriate security are to be employed to safeguard sacred and precious goods.

Canon 920 – Free Access at Sacred Functions

Entry to a church at the hours of sacred functions is to be open and free of charge.

Subsection III

Oratories and Private Chapels

Canon 921 – Definition of Oratory

An oratory is a place which, by permission of the Ordinary, is set aside for divine worship for the convenience of a community or group of the faithful who assemble there, to which other members of the faithful may have access with the consent of the competent Superior.

Canon 922 – Celebrations in Oratories

All sacred services may be celebrated in a lawfully constituted oratory, except those expressly excluded by law, by provision of the local Ordinary, or by liturgical norms.

Canon 923 – Private Chapels Defined

A private chapel is a place which, by permission of the local Ordinary, is set aside for divine worship for the convenience of one or more individuals.

Canon 924 – Private Chapels for Bishops

Bishops may establish for their own use a private chapel that enjoys the same rights as an oratory.

Canon 925 – Blessing and Reserve of Oratories and Private Chapels

Oratories and private chapels should be blessed according to the rite prescribed in the liturgical books. They must be reserved for divine worship and freed from domestic use.

Subsection IV

Shrines

Canon 926 – Definition of Shrine

A shrine is a church or other sacred place which, with the approval of the local Ordinary, is by reason of special devotion frequently visited by the faithful as pilgrims.

Canon 927 – National and International Shrines

For a shrine to be described as national requires the approval of the Episcopal Conference; for it to be described as international requires the approval of the Primate's See.

Canon 928 – Competence for Approving Statutes

§1 The local Ordinary may approve the statutes of a diocesan shrine; the Episcopal Conference those of a national shrine; the Primate's See those of an international shrine.

§2 The statutes of a shrine are to determine principally its purpose, the authority of the rector, and the ownership and administration of its property.

Canon 929 – Privileges for Shrines

Certain privileges may be granted to shrines when local circumstances, the number of pilgrims and, above all, the good of the faithful make this advisable.

Canon 930 – Pastoral Ministry and Devotions at Shrines

§1 At shrines the means of salvation should be made more abundantly available to the faithful: by diligent proclamation of the word of God, by fostering liturgical life—especially celebration of the Eucharist and penance—and by encouraging approved forms of popular devotion.

§2 In shrines, or in places adjacent to them, votive offerings of popular art and devotion are to be displayed and carefully safeguarded.

Subsection V

Altars

Canon 931 – Fixed and Movable Altars

§1 The altar or table on which the eucharistic sacrifice is celebrated is called fixed when it is attached to the floor and cannot be moved; it is called movable when it can be removed.

§2 It is fitting that every church have a fixed altar. In other places intended for sacred functions an altar may be fixed or movable.

Canon 932 – Dedication, Blessing and Relics

§1 Fixed altars are to be dedicated; movable altars are to be either dedicated or blessed, according to the rites in the liturgical books.

§2 The ancient custom of placing relics of martyrs or other saints within a fixed altar is to be preserved, following the rites prescribed in the liturgical books.

§3 Where a relic cannot be placed within the altar, they may be placed on the top of the altar in a reliquary.

Canon 933 – Reserve for Divine Worship and Burials

§1 An altar, fixed or movable, is to be reserved exclusively for divine worship; secular use is forbidden.

§2 No corpse is to be buried beneath an altar; if a burial has occurred there, Mass may not lawfully be celebrated at that altar.

Subsection VI

Cemeteries

Canon 934 – Church Cemeteries and Blessed Areas

§1 Where feasible, the Church should have its own cemeteries or at least an area in public cemeteries that is duly blessed and set aside for the deceased faithful.

§2 If that is not possible, individual graves are to be blessed properly on each occasion.

Canon 935 – Cemeteries for Parishes and Other Bodies

§1 Parishes and religious institutes may each have their own cemetery.

§2 Other juridical persons or families may have special cemeteries or burial places which, if the local Ordinary so judges, are to be blessed.

Canon 936 – Burials in Churches

Bodies are not to be buried in churches except in the case of the Primate, diocesan bishops in their proper churches, including retired bishops.

Canon 937 – Particular Norms for Cemetery Management

Particular law should establish appropriate norms for the management of cemeteries, especially to protect and foster their sacred character.

Subsection VII

Sacred Times

Canon 938 – Authority over Holydays and Days of Penance

§1 Only the supreme ecclesiastical authority may establish, transfer or suppress holydays or days of penance that bind the universal Church.

§2 Diocesan bishops may proclaim special holydays or days of penance for their dioceses or territories, but only for particular occasions.

Canon 939 - Dispensation from Holydays and Days of Penance

§1 A parish priest may, in individual cases and for a just reason, grant a dispensation from the obligation to observe a holyday or day of penance, or may change this obligation into other pious works. This must be done according to the diocesan bishop's instructions and without prejudice to the bishop's own rights.

§2 The superior of a Primatial clerical religious institute or society of apostolic life has the same authority for:

- a. Members of the institute or society; and
- b. Those who live full-time in a house of the institute or society.

Subsection VIII

Feast Days

Canon 940 – The Lord's Day and Principal Holydays

§1 By apostolic tradition the Lord's Day, on which the paschal mystery is celebrated, is to be observed universally as the primary holyday of obligation. The following holydays are to be observed as well: the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ; the Epiphany; the Ascension; the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ; the feast of Mary, Mother of God; her Immaculate Conception; her Assumption; the feast of St Joseph; the feast of the Apostles SS Peter and Paul; and All Saints.

§2 The episcopal conference may, with prior approval of the Primatial, suppress certain holydays of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday.

Canon 941 – Obligation and Conduct on Sundays and Holydays

On Sundays and other holydays of obligation the faithful are bound to assist at Mass. They are also to abstain from work or business that would impede worship due to God, the proper joy of the Lord's Day, or the legitimate relaxation of mind and body.

Canon 942 – Fulfilment of the Obligation to Assist at Mass

§1 The obligation to assist at Mass is fulfilled wherever Mass is celebrated in a Catholic rite either on the holyday itself or on the evening of the preceding day.

§2 When it is impossible to attend a eucharistic celebration, because no sacred minister is available or for some other grave reason, the faithful are strongly encouraged to take part in a liturgy of the word, if one is celebrated in the parish church or another sacred place in accordance with norms laid down by the diocesan bishop; alternatively, they should spend an appropriate time in prayer, personally, as a family, or in a group of families as circumstances permit.

Subsection IX

Days of Penance

Canon 943 – Obligation of Penance and Common Practice

All Christ's faithful are bound by divine law to do penance in their own way. To foster a shared practice of penance, certain days of penance are prescribed on which the faithful are especially to devote themselves to prayer, to works of piety and charity, and to self-denial, notably by observing the fast and abstinence prescribed in the following canons.

Canon 944 – Days and Seasons of Penance

The days and seasons of penance for the universal Church are every Friday of the year and the season of Lent.

Canon 945 – Abstinence and Fasting

Abstinence from meat, or from some other food determined by the episcopal conference, is to be observed on all Fridays unless a solemnity falls on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Canon 946 – Age Limits and Pastoral Instruction

The law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year. The law of fasting binds those who have attained majority until the beginning of their sixtieth year. Pastors and parents are to ensure that even those not bound by age to fast and abstain are instructed in the true meaning of penance.

Canon 947 – Particular Norms and Substitutes

The episcopal conference may determine more particular norms for observing fasting and abstinence. It may, in whole or in part, substitute other forms of penance—especially works of charity and exercises of piety—in place of abstinence or fasting.

Volume V

The Temporal Goods of the Church

Section I

Subsection I

Temporal Goods

Canon 948 – Church’s Right over Temporal Goods

§1 The Church possesses by its nature the right, independent of secular authority, to acquire, retain, administer and alienate temporal goods in order to pursue its proper ends.

§2 Those proper ends chiefly include the regulation of divine worship, the fitting support of the clergy and other ministers, and the carrying out of works of the sacred apostolate and of charity, especially for the needy.

Canon 949 – Capacity to Hold Temporal Goods

The universal Church, the Primatial See, particular Churches and all other public and private juridical persons in the Church are capable, according to the law, of acquiring, retaining, administering and alienating temporal goods.

Canon 950 – Ownership under the Primatial See

Under the supreme authority of the Primate, ownership of goods belongs to the juridical person which has lawfully acquired them.

Canon 951 – Ecclesiastical and Private Temporal Goods

§1 All temporal goods belonging to the universal Church, to the Primatial See or to other public juridical persons in the Church are ecclesiastical goods and are governed by the following canons and by their own statutes.

§2 Unless otherwise expressly provided, temporal goods belonging to a private juridical person are governed by that person’s own statutes rather than by these canons.

Canon 952 – Meaning of the Term Church in These Canons

In the canons that follow, the term Church denotes not only the universal Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church or the Primatial See but also any public juridical person in the Church, unless the context or the nature of the matter indicates otherwise.

Subsection II

The Acquisition of Goods

Canon 953 – Modes of Acquisition

The Church may acquire temporal goods by any lawful means permitted to others under natural or positive law.

Canon 954 – Right to Require Support

The Church has the inherent right to require from the faithful what is necessary to pursue its proper ends.

Canon 955 – Right to Donate and Episcopal Reminders

The faithful have the right to give temporal goods to the Church.

Canon 956 – Response to Appeals

The faithful are to support the Church in response to legitimate appeals and according to norms established by the episcopal conference.

Canon 957 – Provincial Competence for Certain Fees and Offerings

Unless the law provides otherwise, the provincial bishops may meet to:

1. Determine, subject to approval by the Primate, taxes for acts of executive authority that grant a favour or for executing rescripts of the Primate;
2. Determine offerings for the administration of sacraments and sacramentals.

Canon 958 – Collections and Permission

§1 Except for mendicant religious where law provides otherwise, private juridical persons and private individuals may not make collections for pious or ecclesiastical purposes without the written permission of their proper Ordinary and of the local Ordinary.

§2 The episcopal conference may draw up rules on collections that bind all, including those who are by foundation called 'mendicants'.

Canon 959 – Special Collections in Churches and Oratories

In churches and oratories regularly open to the faithful, including those of religious institutes, the local Ordinary may order a special collection for specified parochial, diocesan, national or universal initiatives; such collections are to be forwarded carefully to the diocesan curia.

Canon 960 – Presumption and Use of Offerings

§1 Unless clearly otherwise stated, offerings given to superiors or administrators of any ecclesiastical juridical person are presumed to have been given to that juridical person.

§2 For public juridical persons such offerings may not be refused except for just cause and, for important matters, only with the Ordinary's permission. The Ordinary's permission is also required for accepting offerings subject to obligations or conditions.

§3 Offerings given for a specified purpose are to be used only for that purpose.

Canon 961 – Prescription and Sacred Objects

Sacred objects in private ownership may be acquired by prescription by private persons, but they may not be used for secular purposes unless they have lost dedication or blessing. Sacred objects belonging to a public ecclesiastical juridical person may be acquired by prescription only by another public ecclesiastical juridical person.

Canon 962 – Periods of Prescription

Immovable goods, precious movables, rights and legal claims of the Primatial See prescribe after one hundred years. For goods belonging to another public ecclesiastical juridical person, the period for prescription is thirty years.

Canon 963 – Assistance to the Primatial See

By reason of unity and charity, and according to diocesan resources, bishops are to contribute together to provide the means the Primatial See may need to carry out its service of the universal Church.

Subsection III

The Administration of Goods

Canon 964 – Supreme Stewardship

By virtue of his primacy, the Primate is the supreme administrator and steward of all ecclesiastical goods. Authority to administer ecclesiastical goods may be delegated at any time to the local ordinary.

Canon 965 – Ordinary Supervision and Regulation

§1 Ordinaries must diligently supervise the administration of goods belonging to public juridical persons subject to them, without prejudice to lawful titles that may grant the Ordinary greater rights.

§2 Taking into account rights, customs and circumstances, Ordinaries are to regulate administration by issuing special instructions within the limits of universal and particular law.

Canon 966 – Consultation for Major and Extraordinary Acts

When undertaking acts of administration of major importance given the diocese's financial situation, the diocesan bishop must consult the finance committee and the college of

consultors. For acts of extraordinary administration, except where universal law or founding documents provide otherwise, the bishop requires the consent of the committee and the college of consultors. The episcopal conference determines what constitutes acts of extraordinary administration.

Canon 967 – Competence for Administration and Appointment of Administrators

§1 The administration of ecclesiastical goods belongs to the one who has direct power of governance over the person to whom the goods pertain, unless particular law, statutes or legitimate custom provide otherwise, and without prejudice to the right of the Ordinary to intervene where the administrator is negligent.

§2 Where no administrators are appointed for a public juridical person by law, by the documents of foundation, or by its statutes, the Ordinary to which it is subject is to appoint suitable persons as administrators for a three-year term. The same persons may be re-appointed by the Ordinary.

Canon 968 – Finance Committee or Counsellors

Every juridical person is to have its own finance committee, or at least two counsellors, to assist in the discharge of the administrator's duties in accordance with the statutes.

Canon 969 – Limits of Ordinary Administration and Invalid Acts

§1 Without prejudice to the statutes, administrators act invalidly when they exceed the limits and manner of ordinary administration, unless they have first received in writing from the Ordinary the faculty to do so.

§2 The statutes are to determine which acts exceed the limits and manner of ordinary administration. If the statutes are silent, it is for the diocesan Bishop, after consulting the finance committee, to determine these acts for those subject to him.

§3 Except insofar as it benefits from them, a juridical person is not held responsible for the invalid acts of its administrators. The juridical person is, however, responsible when such acts are valid but unlawful, without prejudice to its right to take action or have recourse against administrators who have caused it damage.

Canon 970 – Duty of Those Who Administer

All persons, clerics or laity, who lawfully participate in the administration of ecclesiastical goods are bound to fulfil their duties in the name of the Church and in accordance with the law.

Canon 1283 - Requirements Before Taking Office

Before administrators begin their duties, they must:

- a. Take an oath before the Ordinary or his delegate, promising to faithfully perform their office;
- b. Prepare a clear and accurate inventory of all Church property, including:
 - i. Immovable goods (land and buildings);
 - ii. Movable goods that are precious or of high cultural value;

- iii. All other goods.
- c. The inventory must include descriptions and estimated values. Once completed, it must be signed by the administrator and certified as correct;
- d. Keep one copy of the inventory in the administration office and deposit another in the diocesan archive. Any changes to the property must be recorded on both copies.

Canon 1284 - Duties of Administrators

§1. Standard of Care

All administrators must carry out their duties with the diligence of a careful and responsible steward.

§2. Specific Responsibilities

Administrators must:

- a. Protect all goods in their care from loss or damage, arranging insurance where necessary;
- b. Ensure that Church ownership of goods is legally protected under civil law;
- c. Follow the requirements of canon law, civil law, and the instructions of founders, donors or Church authority, taking care to avoid legal problems from non-compliance with civil law;
- d. Collect income from Church goods at the proper time, keep it secure, and spend it according to the founder's wishes or Church regulations;
- e. Pay interest on any loans or debts when due, and ensure the principal is repaid on time;
 - i. With the Ordinary's consent, invest any surplus funds (after expenses) in profitable ways that serve the Church's purposes;
- f. Maintain accurate records of all income and expenditure;
- g. Prepare an annual account of their administration at the end of each year;
- h. Keep an organised archive of all documents and records that prove the Church's rights to its property; where possible, authentic copies should also be placed in the diocesan archives.

§3. Annual Budget

Administrators are strongly encouraged to prepare an annual budget showing expected income and expenditure. Particular law may make this mandatory and specify the required format.

Canon 973 – Gifts within Ordinary Administration

Within the limits of ordinary administration, administrators may make gifts for pious purposes or Christian charity from movable goods that do not form part of the stable patrimony.

Canon 974 – Annual Accounts and Transparency to the Faithful

§1 Where ecclesiastical goods are not lawfully withdrawn from the diocesan Bishop's governance, administrators, clerical and lay, must submit annually to the local Ordinary an

account of their administration, which he is to forward to his finance committee for examination. Any contrary custom is reprobated.

§2 Administrators are to render accounts to the faithful concerning goods given to the Church, in accordance with norms to be laid down by particular law.

Canon 975 – Resignation from Administration and Restitution

Although administrators may not be bound by an ecclesiastical office to carry out administration, they may not arbitrarily abandon the work they have undertaken. If they do so and this causes damage to the Church, they are obliged to make restitution.

Volume VI

Penalties and Other Punishments

Section I

Subsection I

Censures

Canon 976 – Effects of Excommunication

§1 An excommunicated person is prohibited from:

1. Celebrating the Sacrifice of the Eucharist and the other sacraments;
2. Receiving the sacraments;
3. Administering sacramentals and celebrating other ceremonies of liturgical worship;
4. Taking an active part in the celebrations listed above;
5. Exercising any ecclesiastical offices, duties, ministries or functions;
6. Performing acts of governance.

§2 If a *ferendae sententiae* excommunication (excommunication imposed by formal sentence of competent ecclesiastical authority) has been imposed or a *latae sententiae* excommunication (sentence already brought; referring to an automatic excommunication) declared, the offender:

1. Proposing to act in defiance of §1, nn. 1–4, is to be removed, or the liturgical action is to be suspended, unless there is a grave reason to the contrary;
2. Invalidly exercises acts of governance which, in accordance with §1, n. 6, are unlawful;
3. Prohibited from benefiting from privileges already granted;
4. Does not acquire any remuneration held by virtue of a merely ecclesiastical title;
5. Is legally incapable of acquiring offices, duties, ministries, functions, rights, privileges or honorific titles.

Canon 977 – Effects of Interdict

§1 One who is under interdict is bound by the prohibitions mentioned in canon 976 §1, nn. 1–4.

§2 A law or precept may define the interdict so that the offender is prohibited only from certain particular actions mentioned in canon 976 §1, nn. 1–4, or from certain other particular rights.

§3 The provision of canon 976 §2, n. 1, is to be observed also in cases of interdict.

Canon 978 – Effects of Suspension

§1 Suspension prohibits:

1. All or some acts of the power of order;

2. All or some acts of the power of governance;
3. The exercise of all or some rights or functions attached to an office.

§2 A law or precept may prescribe that, after a judgment or decree imposing or declaring the penalty, a suspended person cannot validly perform acts of governance.

§3 The prohibition never affects:

1. Any offices or power of governance not within the control of the Superior who establishes the penalty;
2. A right of residence that the offender may have by virtue of office;
3. The right to administer goods that may belong to an office held by the person suspended, if the penalty is *latae sententiae*.

Canon 979 – Extent of Suspension

§1 The extent of a suspension is defined either by law or precept, or by the judgment or decree imposing the penalty.

§2 A law, but not a precept, can establish a *latae sententiae* suspension without further determination or limitation.

Canon 980 – Expiatory Penalties and Exceptions

§1 If the competent authority imposes or declares a censure in a judicial process or by an extra-judicial decree, it may also impose the expiatory penalties it considers necessary to restore justice or repair scandal.

§2 If a censure prohibits celebration of the sacraments or sacramentals or the performance of acts of the power of governance, the prohibition is suspended whenever necessary to provide for the faithful who are in danger of death. If a *latae sententiae* censure has not been declared, the prohibition is also suspended whenever one of the faithful requests a sacrament or sacramental or an act of the power of governance; for any just reason it is lawful to make such a request.

Subsection II

Expiatory Penalties

Canon 981 – Nature and Types of Expiatory Penalties

§1 Expiatory penalties (only lifted by a competent authority) may apply to the offender permanently or for a determined or indeterminate period. Apart from other penalties that law may establish, the following are included.

§2 A prohibition:

1. Against exercising, everywhere or inside or outside a specified place or territory, all or some offices, duties, ministries or functions, or only certain tasks attaching to offices or duties;
2. Against performing all or some acts of the power of order;
3. Against performing all or some acts of the power of governance;
4. Against exercising any right or privilege or using insignia or titles;
5. Against enjoying an active or passive voice in canonical elections or taking part with a right to vote in ecclesial councils or colleges;
6. Against wearing ecclesiastical or religious dress.

§3 A deprivation:

1. Of all or some offices, duties, ministries or functions, or only of certain functions attaching to offices or duties;
2. Of the faculty of hearing confessions or of preaching;
3. Of a delegated power of governance;
4. Of some right or privilege or of an insignia or title;

§4 Dismissal from the clerical state.

Subsection III

Penal Remedies and Penances

Canon 982 – Warnings, Corrections, Penal Precepts and Supervision

§1 When a person is found to be in a near occasion of committing a canonical offence, or when a preliminary inquiry yields a serious suspicion that an offence has been committed, the diocesan Ordinary, either personally or through a delegate, may issue a formal warning to that person.

§2 If the conduct produces scandal or seriously disrupts public order in the local Church, the Ordinary may impose a corrective measure addressed to the person; this correction is to be proportioned to the person's situation and to the gravity of the behaviour.

§3 Every warning or correction must be evidenced in writing and filed in the curial secret archive so that there is an official record of what was required and when.

§4 Where warnings or corrections given once or repeatedly have produced no effect, or where it is unreasonable to expect they will be effective, the Ordinary is to issue a penal precept: a precise, written injunction specifying what the person must do or refrain from doing.

§5 When the case is sufficiently grave, and especially where there is a real danger of relapse, the Ordinary may, by singular decree and in addition to any penalty otherwise imposed, place the offender under a measure of supervision or other specified obligations intended to protect the faithful and to assist the offender's reform.

Canon 983 – External Penance and Its Use

§1 A penance that may be imposed in the external forum consists in the performance of concrete acts of religion, piety or charity required by ecclesiastical authority.

§2 A public penance is not to be imposed for a transgression that is wholly private and unknown; public penance is reserved for cases that are public or known to ecclesiastical authority.

§3 The Ordinary, exercising prudent pastoral judgement, may attach appropriate penances to warnings or corrections when these remedies require a concrete reparative or devotional element.

Section II

The Application of Penalties

Canon 984 – Obligation to Institute Formal Procedure

When the Ordinary judges that pastoral means (including fraternal correction), warnings or corrections are insufficient to restore justice, procure the offender's amendment, and repair scandal, he must initiate an administrative procedure to consider the imposition or declaration of penalties.

Canon 985 – Extra-Judicial Decrees and Their Limits

A penalty may be imposed or declared by episcopal decree, provided the safeguards required by law for the right of defence and the moral certitude of the decision-maker are observed. Penal remedies and penances may, where lawful, be applied by such decree.

Section III

Particular Offences and the Penalties Established for Them

Subsection I

Offences Against the Faith and the Unity of the Church

Canon 986 – Apostasy, Heresy and Schism: Penalties and Aggravations

§1 A person who apostasises from the Christian faith, who embraces heresy, or who wills schism incurs automatically (*latae sententiae*) excommunication. This automatic penalty is applied without prejudice to the provision cited in canon 194 §1, n. 2. In addition to excommunication, the offender may lawfully be subjected to any of the expiatory penalties enumerated in canon 981 §§2–4.

§2 When the conduct is persistent over time or has produced grave scandal in the Christian community, the competent authority may lawfully impose additional penalties, graduated to the seriousness and duration of the offence; among these, and where circumstances warrant, dismissal from the clerical state may be imposed.

Canon 987 – Teaching Condemned Doctrines or Obstinate Rejection After Warning

A person who, apart from the case covered by canon 986 §1, publicly teaches a doctrine rejected or condemned by the Primate, Synod of Bishops or by an Ecumenical Council, or who obstinately rejects a doctrine, and who, after being warned by the Primate or by the competent Ordinary, refuses to retract, is to be punished by a censure and by removal from any ecclesiastical office held. To these penalties may be added, according to the gravity of the case and the rules of law, any of the expiatory penalties listed in canon 981 §§2–4.

Canon 988 – Public Attacks on Religion and Public Morals

Any person who, in a public meeting or assembly, in a printed or digital publication, or by any other use of mass or social communications, insults God, uses blasphemous language, seriously undermines public morality, or incites hatred or contempt against religion or the Church, is liable to a just canonical penalty proportionate to the gravity of the act. Such penalties are to be applied taking into account the manner, scope and lasting effect of the offence, and with regard for the need to repair scandal and to safeguard the common good.

Canon 989 – Profanation of Sacred Things

Whoever desecrates or otherwise profanes a sacred thing, whether movable or immovable, is subject to an appropriate canonical penalty. The measure of the penalty shall correspond to the seriousness of the profanation, the value and importance of the sacred object or place, and any resulting harm to the faithful; the competent authority must also take necessary steps to repair the damage and to restore reverence.

Subsection II

Offences Against Church Authorities and the Exercise of Duties

Canon 990 – Violence against Ecclesiastical Persons and Its Consequences

§1 Any person who employs physical violence against the Primate incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication, a penalty reserved to the judgment of the Primatial See. If the offender is a cleric, additional penalties may be imposed according to the seriousness of the act, which may include dismissal from the clerical state.

§2 Any person who uses physical force against a diocesan Bishop incurs an automatic interdict; if the offender is a cleric, an automatic suspension is also incurred.

§3 Whoever uses physical force against another member of Christ's faithful – whether a cleric, a religious, or a lay person – motivated by contempt for the faith, the Church, ecclesiastical authority or ministry, is subject to an appropriate canonical penalty proportionate to the gravity of the offence.

Canon 991 – Disobedience, False Oaths, Breaches of Secret and Failures to Report

§1 A person who refuses to obey a lawful order or prohibition issued by the Primatial See, the diocesan Ordinary or a legitimate Superior, and who persists in such disobedience after a due warning, is to be punished according to the seriousness of the case. Penalties may include censure, removal from office, or other expiatory penalties listed in canon 981 §§2–4.

§2 A person who fails to comply with obligations imposed as a penalty is liable to the expiatory penalties set out in canon 981 §§2–4.

§3 A person who, in making an assertion or giving a promise before an ecclesiastical authority, deliberately swears falsely or commits perjury, is to be punished with a just penalty.

§4 A person who violates the duty to observe the Primatial secret is subject to the penalties enumerated in canon 981 §§2–4.

§5 Definition of the Primatial secret: the highest level of confidentiality in canon law, binding those with knowledge of certain matters to absolute silence under pain of penalties, including potential excommunication. It applies to specific cases defined by law, primarily in criminal proceedings and certain administrative matters of grave importance.

§6 A person who neglects to carry out an executive sentence entrusted to them is to be punished with an appropriate penalty, which may include censure.

§7 A person who, contrary to a canonical obligation to report an offence, fails to do so, is to be punished with the penalties listed in canon 981 §§2–4, with the addition of other penalties where the seriousness of the omitted report and the underlying offence warrant them.

Canon 992 – Interference with Ministry, Governance and Elections

Those who obstruct the free exercise of ministry or ecclesiastical governance, who prevent the lawful use or administration of sacred things or Church property, or who intimidate or threaten anyone legitimately exercising ecclesiastical authority or ministry, are to be punished by one of the expiatory penalties enumerated in canon 981 §§2–4. Likewise, those who obstruct the freedom of a canonical election or who coerce, threaten or improperly influence an elector or a person already elected are to incur the same categories of penalties.

Canon 993 – Incitement against Church Authority

Anyone who publicly stirs up hatred, enmity or organised opposition against the Primatial See or against the diocesan Ordinary because of an official act, or who actively foments disobedience toward them, is to be punished with an interdict or with other appropriate canonical penalties proportionate to the gravity of the conduct.

Canon 994 – Membership or Leadership in Anti-Ecclesial Associations

A person who joins an organisation whose purpose is to conspire against the Church is subject to a just canonical penalty. If a person promotes, leads, or accepts an office in such an association, the penalty to be imposed is an interdict, reflecting the greater culpability of those who organise or direct hostile activity.

Canon 995 – Usurpation of Ecclesiastical Office

§1 Anyone who unlawfully assumes and exercises an ecclesiastical office or function which he or she has not lawfully received is to be punished with an appropriate canonical penalty.

§2 The unlawful retention of an office after lawful deprivation or after otherwise ceasing to hold it is equivalent to usurpation and is punishable in the same manner.

Canon 996 – Offences Against Church Temporal Goods

§1 The following are to be punished with the expiatory penalties set out in canon 981 §§2–4, without prejudice to the obligation to repair the harm caused:

1. Anyone who steals ecclesiastical goods or deliberately prevents the Church from receiving income or proceeds to which it is entitled;
2. Anyone who, without the consultations, consents, permissions or other formal requirements prescribed by law for validity or lawfulness, alienates ecclesiastical goods or otherwise carries out acts of administration over them.

§2 The following conduct is punishable, possibly including deprivation of office, and always subject to an obligation to repair the harm:

1. Any person who, through grave personal culpability, commits the act described in §1, n. 2;
2. Any person who is found to have been gravely negligent in the administration of ecclesiastical goods.

Canon 997 – Simony, Bribery and Illicit Requests

§1 A person who gives or promises something in order to induce a holder of an ecclesiastical office or function to act unlawfully or to omit a duty is to be punished according to canon 981 §§2–4; the person who accepts such gifts or promises is to be punished in proportion to the gravity of the offence, which may include deprivation of office, and remains bound to make restitution for any damage caused.

§2 A person who, in the exercise of an office or function, demands or receives an offering beyond what has been lawfully established, or additional sums, or any material benefit for personal advantage, is to be punished with an appropriate monetary fine or with other penalties, not excluding deprivation of office, and is obliged to repair the harm done.

Canon 998 – Abuse of Ecclesiastical Power and Negligence

§1 A person who, apart from cases already provided for in law, abuses ecclesiastical power, office or function by wrongful exercise or maladministration is to be punished in proportion to the seriousness of the act or omission; penalties may include deprivation of the power or office and an obligation to repair the harm.

§2 A person who, through culpable negligence, unlawfully performs or omits an act of ecclesiastical power or office in a way that causes harm or scandal is to be punished by one of the expiatory penalties in canon 981 §§2–4 and is bound to make reparation for the damage caused.

Canon 999 §1 – Attempted Eucharistic Celebration by the Unordained

§1 A person who, not being validly ordained to the ministerial priesthood, attempts the liturgical celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice incurs a *latae sententiae* interdict and, if a cleric, also a *latae sententiae* suspension; additional penalties may be applied according to the gravity of the offence.

Subsection III

Offences Against the Sacraments

Canon 999 – Unauthorised Attempt to Celebrate the Eucharist

§1. Any person who, without valid ordination to the ministerial priesthood, attempts to preside over or to carry out the liturgical celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice thereby incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) interdict; if the person is a cleric, they also incur an automatic (*latae sententiae*) suspension. The canonical effects attach from the moment of the unauthorised attempt and the penalties may be accompanied by further sanctions proportionate to the seriousness of the act.

§2 Any person who, though lacking the power to validly absolve sins, nevertheless attempts to pronounce sacramental absolution or who unlawfully hears sacramental confession is to be sanctioned with an appropriate penalty. Such conduct undermines the sacramental order and misleads the faithful, and penalties are to be proportionate to the seriousness and public impact of the act.

§3 A person who attempts to confer sacred orders on a woman, and the woman who attempts to receive such an order, incur an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication reserved to the Primatial See; if the offender is a cleric, additional penalties up to and including dismissal from the clerical state may be applied according to the gravity of the act. The Church treats such attempts as a grave breach of the Church's sacramental discipline.

§4 Apart from the specific cases already described, anyone who falsely claims to have administered a sacrament or who simulates its administration is to be penalised with a just canonical penalty proportionate to the deceit, harm and scandal caused.

Canon 1000 – Simony in Sacramental Celebration or Reception

Any person who celebrates or receives a sacrament as the result of simony (the giving or receiving of spiritual goods for payment or favour) is liable to an interdict or suspension or to one of the expiatory penalties listed in canon 981 §§2–4. Penalties take into account the degree of corruption and the need to deter such abuses.

Canon 1001 – Prohibited Participation in Rites

A person guilty of illicit or forbidden participation in religious rites contrary to law is to be punished with an appropriate canonical penalty. The measure of sanction must reflect the nature of the participation, its publicity, and any resulting scandal or harm to the Church.

Canon 1002 – Desecration or Misuse of the Eucharistic Species

§1 Anyone who discards the consecrated species, takes them away for sacrilegious purposes, or retains them for such purposes, incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication reserved to the Primatial See; if the offender is a cleric, other severe penalties, including dismissal from the clerical state, may also be applied.

§2 A person who, for a sacrilegious purpose, consecrates one or both eucharistic elements, whether within or apart from the Eucharistic celebration, is to be punished in proportion to the seriousness of the offence, up to and including dismissal from the clerical state.

Penalties for sacrilegious actions involving the Eucharist are among the gravest in canon law because of the centrality of the Eucharist to the life of the Church.

Canon 1003 – Trafficking in Mass Offerings

Whoever unlawfully traffics in Mass offerings or treats them as commercial objects is to be punished by censure or by one of the penalties listed in canon 981 §§2–4. The rule guards the integrity and devotional purpose of offerings made for the intentions of the faithful.

Canon 1004 – Solicitation in Confession

A priest who, in the confessional or on the occasion or under the pretext of confession, solicits a penitent to sin against the sixth commandment is to be punished according to the gravity of the offence: suspension, prohibitions, and deprivation of office; in the most serious cases dismissal from the clerical state is mandated. This crime violates the trust of the penitent and the integrity of the sacrament.

Canon 1005 – Violation of the Sacramental Seal and Related Breaches

§1 A confessor who directly breaks the sacramental seal incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication reserved to the Primatial See; one who violates the seal indirectly or who reveals confessional content in a manner less direct is to be punished according to the gravity of the breach.

§2 Interpreters and others who, in the course of confession, reveal the secret entrusted to them are to be punished with an appropriate penalty, which may extend to the gravest sanctions.

§3 Any person who records, by technical means, what is said in a confession, or who disseminates such recordings by social or other communications media, is to be punished according to the seriousness of the act; if the offender is a cleric, dismissal from the clerical state may be among the penalties.

The inviolability of the confessional seal is absolute; any breach is treated as a most serious offence against the sacrament and the faithful.

Canon 1006 – Illicit Episcopal Consecration

A bishop who consecrates another as bishop without a Primate's mandate, and the person who receives such consecration, incur an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication reserved to the Primate's See. The Church preserves unity in episcopal ordination by requiring the Primate's mandate.

Canon 1007 – Ordination without Dimissorial Letters and Concealment of Irregularities

§1 A bishop who ordains someone lacking the lawful dimissorial letters is forbidden to confer sacred orders for one year; the person thus ordained is *ipso facto* suspended from the order received.

§2 A candidate for sacred orders who conceals a censure or an irregularity by which he is bound is *ipso facto* suspended from the order received.

Canon 1008 – Unlawful Exercise of Priestly or Sacred Ministries

Apart from the specific offences already named in these canons, any person who unlawfully exercises the office of priest or another sacred ministry is to be punished with a just canonical penalty, which may include censure where fitting. The penalty must reflect the nature and harmful consequences of the unauthorised ministry.

Subsection IV

Offences Against Reputation and the Offence of Falsehood

Canon 1009 – Calumny and False Accusation

§1 Anyone who falsely accuses a confessor of the crime described in canon 1004 to a Church Superior incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) interdict; if the accuser is a cleric, that person also incurs an automatic suspension.

§2 Anyone who maliciously accuses another person of any other offence to a Superior, or who otherwise unlawfully harms another's good name by false or injurious statements, is to be punished according to the expiatory penalties enumerated in canon 981 §§2–4; a censure may be added where appropriate.

§3 The person found guilty of calumny must be required to make suitable reparation for the harm done to the reputation of the injured party.

Canon 1010 – Falsification and Misuse of Ecclesiastical Documents

The following acts attract the expiatory penalties listed in canon 981 §§2–4, in proportion to their gravity:

1. Composing a false public ecclesiastical document, or altering, destroying or concealing a genuine document, or using a falsified or altered document;
2. Using a false or altered document in any ecclesiastical matter;
3. Asserting falsehoods in a public ecclesiastical document.

Penalties for documentary falsehood protect the integrity of Church governance and the rights of the faithful.

Subsection V

Offences Against Special Obligations

Canon 1011 – Voluntary Abandonment of Sacred Ministry

A cleric who deliberately and unlawfully abandons the sacred ministry for a continuous period of six months with the intention of severing himself from the authority of the competent Church is to be punished according to the seriousness of the case. Sanctions may include suspension and other expiatory penalties from canon 981 §§2–4, and in more serious circumstances dismissal from the clerical state may be imposed.

Canon 1012 – Commercial Activity and Financial Offences by Clerics and Religious

§1 A cleric or consecrated religious who engages in trade or business in contradiction of the norms of the canons is to be punished with one of the expiatory penalties enumerated in canon 981 §§2–4, according to the gravity of the conduct.

§2 A cleric or religious who, apart from cases already provided for in law, commits an offence in financial matters, or who seriously breaches the obligations of lawful stewardship (including those indicated in canon 285 §4), is to be punished with one of the penalties in canon 981 §§2–4 and remains bound to repair any harm caused.

Subsection VI

Offences Against Human Life, Dignity and Liberty

Canon 1013 – Homicide, Violence and Abortion

§1 Anyone who by force or deception abducts, imprisons, mutilates or inflicts grievous bodily harm on another, is liable to canonical penalties in proportion to the seriousness of the offence, chosen from the measures enumerated in canon 981. When the victim is a person who enjoys special protection because of their office or status under canon 990 (for example the Primate or a Bishop), the offender is subject to the penalties prescribed for attacks on such persons as well as to the additional penalties provided in §3 of this canon.

§2 Any person who procures an abortion is subject to an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication.

§3 In particularly grave cases involving the offences described in this canon, a cleric who is found guilty may be punished by dismissal from the clerical state in addition to any other penalties that canon law provides.

Canon 1014 – Sexual Offences against Vulnerable Persons

A cleric who commits any of the following acts is to be punished by removal from office and by other appropriate penalties, up to and including dismissal from the clerical state when the severity of the conduct so requires:

1. He engages in sexual acts contrary to the sixth commandment with a minor, with a person who habitually lacks the use of reason, or with a person whom civil or canonical law recognises as entitled to equivalent protection;
2. He grooms, induces or coerces a minor or a person who habitually lacks the use of reason, or a person entitled to equivalent protection, to expose themselves for pornographic purposes or to participate in pornographic performances, whether real or simulated;
3. He acquires, possesses, displays or distributes pornographic material depicting minors or persons who habitually lack the use of reason, by any means or technology.

Canon 1015 – Punishment for External Violations of Divine or Canon Law

External violations of divine law or of canonical legislation may be punished by a just canonical penalty beyond those already specified elsewhere in law only when three conditions are met:

1. The offence displays a particular seriousness that warrants penal response;
2. It is necessary to prevent or repair scandal arising from the offence; and
3. The requirements of necessity and proportionality demand such punishment. In other words, only exceptional and grave public breaches that create or risk serious harm to the Church's good order, reputation or the faith of the faithful justify imposing a penalty not otherwise prescribed.

Subsection VII

Reinstatement

Canon 1016 – Grounds for Total Reinstatement

§1 A final judgment that has become res judicata may be the object of a total reinstatement when it is clearly established that the judgment was unjust.

§2 A judgment is not considered clearly unjust unless one of the following conditions is shown:

1. The decision rested substantially on evidence later shown to be false so that, without that evidence, the dispositive part of the judgment could not stand;
2. Documents are subsequently discovered which indisputably establish facts that require a contrary decision;
3. The judgment was procured by the deceit of one party to the detriment of another;
4. A provision of substantive law (not merely procedural law) was manifestly omitted or neglected;
5. The judgment contradicts an earlier decision that has itself become res judicata.

Canon 1017 – Time Limits and Competent Forum for Requests

§1 A request for total reinstatement is to be presented to the same authority who issued the challenged judgment within three months of the day on which those reasons became known to the requesting party.

§2 A request for total reinstatement is to be presented to the bishop within three months from the notification of the publication of the judgment.

Canon 1018 – Effect of the Plea and Measures Against Dilatory Claims

§1 The filing of a petition for total reinstatement suspends execution of any sentence not yet begun.

§2 If the judge, on the basis of probable indications, suspects that the petition was lodged solely to delay execution, he may order that the judgment be executed notwithstanding the petition. Before doing so he must require suitable guarantees from the petitioner that, should total reinstatement be granted, appropriate indemnification will be provided.

Canon 1019 – Disposition When Total Reinstatement Is Granted

When total reinstatement is granted, the tribunal that grants it must proceed to adjudicate the merits of the case, pronouncing anew on the substantive rights and obligations of the parties in light of the newly established circumstances.

