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CONCERNS ABOUT ‘SHARING THE CONCERNS’: A CRITICAL RE- EXAMINATION OF THE OFFICE OF AUXILIARY BISHOP

Peter M. Folan, SJ[♦]
Georgetown University

Abstract

Of the Second Vatican Council’s sixteen major documents, only one, *Christus Dominus*, speaks about the office of auxiliary bishop, and when it does, it argues that, primarily, these bishops “are called to share the concerns of the diocesan bishop.” Even at the council, though, objections that the proliferation of auxiliary bishops undermined the principle of the mono-episcopacy, caused cultural confusion, were sacramentally unnecessary, and did ecumenical damage, arose from multiple quarters. This article retrieves these interventions and undertakes a critical re-examination of the office of auxiliary bishop. What comes to light leads to three concrete proposals: first, the practice of ordaining priests to become auxiliary bishops ought to be suspended for at least a set period of time, and perhaps indefinitely; second, clear criteria for dividing large dioceses into smaller ones need to be established and utilized; and third, the function of “sharing the concerns” should be performed by a “kitchen cabinet” composed

♦**Peter Folan** is a Jesuit priest and an assistant professor in Georgetown University’s Department of Theology and Religious Studies. He holds degrees from the University of Notre Dame, Fordham University, and Boston College, where he earned his PhD in systematic theology. In addition to publishing works about issues pertaining to ecclesiology, Folan has also written on ecumenism, the interpretation of Scripture, sacramental theology, and Catholic higher education. His forthcoming monograph from the University of Notre Dame Press, *Martin Luther and the Council of Trent: The Battle for Interpreting Scripture and the Doctrine of Justification*, examines the role of biblical hermeneutics in the most consequential doctrinal dispute in church history. Email: peter.folan@georgetown.edu

primarily of laity who must support and partner with the diocesan bishop in his ministry of *episkopē*.

Keywords: Auxiliary Bishops; Authority; Ecclesiology; Reform; Vatican II

In light of historian John O'Malley's assessment that episcopal collegiality and its relation to papal primacy served as "the lightning-rod issue of the [Second Vatican] council,"¹ it is hardly a surprise that all but three of the sixteen major documents from Vatican II address at least some aspect of the office of bishop in the Catholic Church.² Only one of the sixteen, however, gives explicit consideration to auxiliary bishops, that is, those bishops assigned to a diocese in order to work alongside, but also under, that particular church's diocesan bishop. The document is *Christus Dominus*, the council's Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, and it yokes the fundamental responsibility of an auxiliary bishop to "the supreme concern [of the diocesan bishop]," namely, "the good of the Lord's flock."³ The decree envisions the possibility that the diocesan bishop "cannot by himself cope with (*adimplere*) all the pastoral activities as the good of souls requires."⁴ Consequently, and to borrow from the language of the decree itself, an auxiliary bishop is "called to share the concerns of the diocesan bishop."⁵

Casting the role of the auxiliary in this manner—in effect, he is to provide help, *auxilium*, to the diocesan bishop—sounds reasonable, even prudent. The greater the service demanded from a community's chief servant, the greater the help that that servant will require. Yet, as the German theologian Klaus Mörsdorf notes, the legal position of the auxiliary bishop "belonged to the most controversial points" in the draft document that would eventually become *Christus Dominus*.⁶ Why? What was the controversy over the seemingly innocent suggestion of providing a helper for the diocesan bishop? Answering this question does more than give us a peek under the hood of *Christus Dominus*. It retrieves some of the forgotten wisdom of a

¹John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, 163.

²The three documents that say nothing about the office of bishop are *Nostra Aetate*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and *Perfectae Caritatis*.

³Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church (*Christus Dominus*), October 28, 1965, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vol., ed. Norman P. Tanner, SJ, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990, §25.

⁴*Christus Dominus* (henceforth, CD), §25.

⁵CD, §25.

⁶Klaus Mörsdorf, "Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. H. Vorgrimler, New York: Herder and Herder, 1968, 2:176–77.

number of council Fathers, and applies that wisdom to today's church. And the church needs such wisdom because the same objections that confronted the office of auxiliary bishop in the early 1960s have only become more pronounced in the nearly sixty years since they were first aired.

This article begins by reviewing the four basic objections to auxiliaries presented at the council, and showing how these objections have only gained in intensity today. Next, and in response to the claim of *Christus Dominus* that auxiliaries are appointed for "sharing the concerns" of the diocesan bishop, I will add and engage critically what I believe to be an unstated reason for their appointment. Finally, and in light of these first two sections, I will offer three concrete recommendations for how a local church might best share the concerns of its diocesan bishop.

Four Objections to "Sharing the Concerns"

To help understand the original context of the four basic objections to the appointment of auxiliaries as fully as possible, it is advantageous to view those objections against the reasons *Christus Dominus* proffers for assigning an auxiliary to a diocese in the first place. We have already seen that the general reason is so that another bishop might "share the concerns" of the diocesan bishop, but the decree goes on to claim that such sharing is appropriate when the territory or the Catholic population of a diocese is especially large, when "unusual circumstances [in] the apostolate" call for it, or when any of "a variety of other reasons" arises.⁷ In a word, then, the time is ripe for an auxiliary to come to a diocese when some aspect of the ministry of *episcopē* in that diocese becomes unwieldy.

The first objection picks up on this point of unwieldiness: no matter how complicated the leadership of a diocese may become, introducing more than one bishop into that diocese undermines the mono-episcopacy, an affront that is problematic on several levels. One of those levels is strictly theological, a point made by Cardinal Julius Döpfner, Archbishop of Munich and Freising, when he argued,

The fundamental idea...is the notion of the bishop as pastor and head of the diocese; this notion necessarily demands that the head be one and that the unity of the diocese be kept safe and sure. The residential [i.e., diocesan] bishop is the ordinary and immediate pastor of the particular Church. He visibly represents Christ the Lord to the flock entrusted to him.⁸

⁷CD, §25.

⁸Second Vatican Council, *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II* (henceforth, AS), Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1972, II/4:711. *Idea*

Presumably, Döpfner did not cite any sources to support the “notion” of which he speaks because the council Fathers required no reminder that *one* particular church having *one* bishop (or its equivalent in law) has roots nearly as old as the church itself, with its most well-known support coming from the early second century letters of Ignatius of Antioch.⁹

A second level of this first objection, one pressed most strongly by two African bishops, fleshed out the cultural implications of introducing an auxiliary into a diocese. Archbishop Raymond-Marie Tchidimbo of Konakry, located in what is now the nation of Guinea, suggested, “Moreover, the word ‘auxiliary’ in Africa means some secondary person, a man who cannot assume responsibilities for himself.”¹⁰ Bishop Joseph Busimba of Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, echoed the complications that Tchidimbo raised regarding the word “auxiliary”:

Our people do not have the same notion of auxiliary bishop as the notion that peoples in the older churches [i.e., European churches] could express. In their mentality, a village can have only one leader. After the great ceremonies of consecration in which all the insignia of leader and pastor are solemnly conferred on the new bishop, our people do not understand why the new chosen one does not have full responsibility, care, and authority.¹¹

That this opposition to appointing auxiliaries was grounded in an African cultural context underscores both the newness of Vatican II—not since the church’s earliest councils were the voices of African bishops major factors in deliberations—and a sign of, in some ways, its maintenance of the *status quo*—these African voices were, for the most part, drowned out by European ones.

Both levels of this first objection remain active today. It is still unclear why, theologically, it makes sense to have more than one

fundamentalis...est notio episcopi pastoris et capitis dioeceseos; quae notio necessario postulat, ut caput sit unicum et unitas regiminis dioecesani sarta tectaue seruetur. Episcopus residentialis est ordinarius et immediatus pastor Ecclesiae particularis. Gregi sibi commisso visibiliter Chrisum Dominum repraesentat.

⁹Cf., Neil Ormerod, “The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002) 3–30 at 22–27.

¹⁰AS, II/5:24. *Insuper verbum auxiliaris in Africa significat aliqua persona secundaria, vir qui per se responsabilitates assumere nequit.*

¹¹AS, II/5:61. *Populus noster notionem episcopi auxiliaris eandem non habet quam possunt concipere populi in antiquioribus ecclesiis notionem. In eius mentalitate unum tantum potest pagus habere ducem. Post grades consecrationis caeremonias in quibus omnia ducis et pastoris insignia solemniter novo episcopo remittuntur, populus noster non intelligit cur novus electus plenam responsabilitatem, sollicitudinem et auctoritatem non habet. Emphasis original.*

bishop actively engaged in the work of teaching, sanctifying, and governing in a particular church. If, as *Lumen Gentium* says, the ministry of bishops gives them authority for “presiding in the place of God over the flock,” how does the presence of more than one active bishop in a diocese not constitute a troubling plurality?¹² As for the cultural level, I grant that there are now more widely-known secular examples of two people of the same “rank” having an unequal amount of authority in an organization than there were sixty years ago. Still, there may be places in the world where such an arrangement continues to sow confusion. If those happen to be places where the church is developing, such as it was in Africa in the 1960s, this confusion could stunt the growth of the church and hamper the spread of the Gospel. And where the church is already firmly established, one must think about the dangers that would arise if there were even a hint of theological or ideological daylight between a diocesan bishop and his auxiliary. It does not strain the imagination today to conjure up such a state of affairs, nor is the fallout hard to foresee. People take sides. They become polarized. Some laity, religious, and clergy pick one bishop, some the other, and the unity that should be the hallmark of the bishop’s ministry weakens, or perhaps vanishes altogether. It is thus no wonder that *Christus Dominus* makes abundantly clear that auxiliary bishops should always proceed “in such a way that they conduct all matters of business in unanimous agreement with [the diocesan bishop].”¹³

The second objection voiced at the council to the office of auxiliary bishop was that the sacramental life of a local church ought not to require more than one bishop. The key phrase here is “ought not” because, at the time, having only one bishop in a large diocese made one part of ecclesial life especially difficult: the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation. The 1917 Code of Canon Law, like the 1983 Code after it, held, “The ordinary minister of confirmation is only a Bishop,”¹⁴ but it is only the 1917 Code that continues, “The

¹²Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), November 21 1964, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, §20.

¹³CD, §25.

¹⁴Edward N. Peters, ed., *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law*, San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 2001, Can. 782, §1 (henceforth, CIC (1917)). The Latin of CIC (1917) reads, *Ordinarius confirmationis minister est solus Episcopus*, while the 1983 Code of Canon Law (henceforth, CIC (1983)) reads, *Confirmationis minister ordinarius est Episcopus*. The elimination of *solus* in CIC (1983) likely owes to the presence of two other canons in CIC (1983): Can. 882, which states that, in some instances, a presbyter has the faculty to confirm provided to him by the universal law, and Can. 883, §2, which gives a concrete example of such provision, namely, a presbyter “who by virtue of office or mandate of the diocesan bishop baptizes one

extraordinary minister is a priest to whom the faculty has been granted, either by common law or special indult by the Apostolic See.”¹⁵ Döpfner was the first to raise the possibility that the diocesan bishop could, on his own authority, that is, without appeal to Rome, delegate a priest to confirm those prepared to receive the sacrament, an action that would have the benefit, to use his words, of “restricting the number of auxiliary bishops.”¹⁶ Bishop Hermann Volk of Mainz, speaking the very next day at the council, cited Döpfner by name, endorsing this very position.¹⁷

Today, nearly forty years after the question of delegation was resolved precisely as Döpfner and Volk suggested it should be and was enshrined in canon law, the need for an auxiliary bishop in the church’s administration of the sacraments is non-existent.¹⁸ After all, the only other sacramental celebration for which a bishop is the ordinary minister is Holy Orders, a responsibility that is not delegable to a presbyter.¹⁹ But ordination liturgies do not occur often enough to warrant the presence of more than one bishop in a diocese.²⁰ Of course, we could turn our attention to rites that, while not sacramental in the strict sense, either require or prefer the presence of a bishop—the consecration of chrism and the dedication of a church come to mind right away. But if presiding at such rites were the only, or even the best, reasons to justify the presence of an auxiliary in a diocese, the argument in favour of such presence stands little chance of being compelling.

The third and fourth objections, though distinct, are closely related to one another, and they both issue from the fact that auxiliaries

who is no longer an infant or admits one already baptized into the full communion of the Catholic Church.”

¹⁵CIC (1917), Can. 782, §2.

¹⁶AS, II/4:713–14. *Ut numerus episcoporum auxiliarium restringi possit.*

¹⁷Cf., AS, II/5:23.

¹⁸The relevant canon from CIC (1983) is Can. 884, §1, which states, “The diocesan bishop is to administer confirmation personally or is to take care that another bishop administers it. If necessity requires it, he can grant the faculty to one or more specific presbyters, who are to administer this sacrament.” It is worth noting that the presbyter is the ordinary minister of chrismation in the Catholic churches of the East (cf., *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Can. 694).

¹⁹Cf., CIC (1983), Can. 1012.

²⁰In the United States, for instance, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) reports that 468 men were ordained to the presbyterate in 2019 (with an undetermined number of others being ordained to the diaconate), but with nearly 200 diocesan bishops active in the country, it is hard to envision a situation that would require an auxiliary bishop to preside at an ordination (cf., <https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/>).

belong to a larger set of bishops called titular bishops, a group that would also include certain high-ranking members of the Roman Curia and of the diplomatic corps of the Holy See. Titular bishops are bishops whose see of governance no longer exists as a diocese itself, but rather, is incorporated into another Catholic diocese. The title of the see remains, but the bishop who receives the title of the see plays no role whatsoever in serving the people of that territory. The need, if one can call it that, of assigning each bishop a see owes to the fact that all bishops, by virtue of their ordination, participate in the *munus regendi* of Christ, and thus, they need a territory and a people to govern, even if it is a territory they never visit and a people they never meet.

The third objection, simply put, calls the whole concept of titular bishops a sham. Bishop Antoine Caillot, coadjutor of the Diocese of Evreux in France had this to say about assigning any bishop a titular see:

A non-residential bishop is really deputed for a pastoral function in the Church, just as it appears from the liturgical text itself: 'Preach to the people entrusted to you.' But now the people to be evangelized corresponds not at all to the title that is conferred on him; this title is a mere geographical fiction.²¹

Bishop Matthias Wehr of the Diocese of Trier in Germany picked up on Caillot's logic and called for the abrogation of the practice of assigning auxiliaries titular sees and, instead, having them "be ordained in the title of the diocese to which they have been assigned,"²² a point to which Bishop Bernhard Stein, one of Wehr's auxiliaries, readily assented.²³

What was, to borrow Caillot's term, a "geographical fiction" at Vatican II remains no less fictitious today. Naturally, one would be hard pressed to say that, in and of itself, the practice of assigning certain bishops titular sees is doing serious harm to the church. God knows the church has bigger problems than this. But the fact remains that, the longer this practice continues, the clearer it becomes that the church, despite knowing the cogent challenges to bishops being assigned titular sees, persists in assigning them anyway. If this aspect

²¹ AS, II/4:739. *Episcopus non residentialis ad munus pastorale in Ecclesia reapse deputatur, sicut apparet ex ipso textu liturgico: "Praedica populo tibi commisso." Nunc autem, titulo qui ei tribuitur minime correspondet populus evangelizandus; hic titulus est mera fictio geographica.*

²² AS, II/5:168. *Episcopi auxiliares (et coadiutores) ordinantur in titulum dioecesis, cui destinantur.*

²³ Cf., AS, II/5:248.

of the ministry of a bishop is but an illusion, are other aspects, people might begin to wonder, empty as well? Moreover, continuing to assign bishops titular sees encourages the sort of thinking that would see the episcopacy first as a rank in the hierarchical ordering of the church, rather than an ecclesial relation to the entire community of believers.

But there exists another reason that having titular bishops in general, and auxiliaries in particular, is problematic: it damages ecumenical relations. This is the fourth objection that was raised at the council. Though many articulated this objection, Caillot did so most briefly, asking, “Does it not seem strange that the Roman Catholic Church should confer on bishops of the Latin rite the names of cities that exist in the East?”²⁴ In posing this question, and further, in calling it “the ecumenical reason” for doing away with the practice of assigning bishops titular sees, Caillot was turning his attention squarely to the Orthodox Church. In effect, he was asking how it could possibly be considered appropriate to assign a Latin rite bishop to an Eastern see that was already occupied by another Christian, albeit not Catholic, bishop. The question was more than theoretical to him: as the coadjutor of Evreux, he was assigned the titular see of Bononia, which, today, is the city of Vidin in Bulgaria, a see that was then, as it is now, occupied by a Bulgarian Orthodox bishop. How could that Orthodox bishop think it anything but insulting that a Catholic bishop who had probably never set foot in Bulgaria, and who probably did not speak a word of Bulgarian, would, at least theoretically, claim some pastoral responsibility in Vidin?

Nearly sixty years after Caillot and others raised this point about ecumenism, auxiliary bishops continue to be assigned sees whose very titles exist as actual diocesan or eparchial seats for Orthodox Christians. Thus, Caillot’s question remains as pointed now as when he first posed it. But we can extend this ecumenical objection further, can we not? So long as there is even one person—lay, religious, or clergy; Orthodox, or hailing from one of the churches of the Reformation—working for the spread of the Gospel in the territory indicated by the name of a titular see, does assigning a bishop that title not disrespect the other Christian’s labour? And if it does amount to such disrespect, why would the Catholic Church continue this practice?

²⁴ AS, II/4:739. *Nonne insolitum videtur, quod Ecclesia catholica romana conferat episcopis ritus latini nomina urbium, quae in oriente existerunt?*

Alone, these four objections to the appointment of auxiliary bishops, articulated first at the council, and renewed today, provide enough of a foundation to make some concrete recommendations for how to move forward. But before turning to those recommendations, it is imperative to move beyond what *Christus Dominus* offers as the primary reason for appointing an auxiliary—sharing the concerns of the diocesan bishop—to speak briefly about what I believe is a second, unspoken reason for having an auxiliary: training him to be a diocesan bishop.

A Training Ground for Future Diocesan Bishops

I grant that no ecclesial document I have consulted makes even oblique reference to the idea that ordaining a priest to be an auxiliary bishop is something of an apprenticeship for becoming a diocesan bishop. But the facts speak for themselves. Of the 188 sitting diocesan bishops in the United States today, seventy-one of them, that is, just under 40%, were themselves auxiliary bishops prior to becoming diocesan bishops.²⁵ At the council, some of the most important Fathers—De Smedt, Franić, McIntyre, Ritter, Siri, Spellman, Suenens, Villot, Wojtyła—all served as auxiliaries in one diocese or another prior to becoming diocesan bishops. Pope Francis too, before becoming the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, was an auxiliary there. The move from being an auxiliary bishop in a place to being the diocesan bishop of that or of some other place is by no means assured, but it is a well-trodden path.

I applaud, at least in principle, the instinct to identify, ideally through prayerful discernment and widespread consultation among laity, religious, and clergy, and to train would-be diocesan bishops. To be sure, problems would abound when one moves from the abstract to the concrete, but the basic point, I would argue, holds: preparing any minister, ordained or lay, for the service he or she will potentially be undertaking one day, is a good thing. The question, however, is whether ordination to the episcopacy and assignment as an auxiliary bishop is the best way to train future diocesan bishops. I think not, and I would summon a recent decision of Pope Francis to support my position.

In February 2020, in a letter he wrote to the President of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, Pope Francis requested “that priests preparing for the Holy See diplomatic service dedicate one

²⁵This total of 188 includes the Archbishop of the Military Ordinariate of the United States of America, as well as the bishops of Eastern Catholic churches in the USA.

year of their formation to missionary commitment in a diocese.”²⁶ The principle I see at work here is that the best prelude to undertaking any ministry of leadership or governance in the church is to have as thick an understanding as possible of the people whom and the places where one will be serving. Yes, other training is necessary as well, but this sort of grassroots preparation ought to be seminal. For a future diplomat, one year of missionary work might be the best way to embody this principle. For a future diocesan bishop, much longer and much more varied service would be necessary. By no means is it impossible to render this service, that is, to receive this training, as an auxiliary bishop, but there are trade-offs. To name just one, the trappings, real or perceived, of the office of bishop might keep the people one is sent to serve at an arm’s length, thus undermining the whole experience of service before it could even begin. Few, if any, such trade-offs would emerge if a priest who is not yet ordained a bishop were commissioned to an apprenticeship in service.

Conclusions

How does the church move forward in light of the arguments I have laid out in the preceding pages? I offer three concrete recommendations.

First, there ought to be a suspension of the ordination of further auxiliary bishops. As it stands, the office of auxiliary bishop, we have seen, has a flimsy theological foundation, can sow cultural confusion, is sacramentally superfluous, perpetuates a geographical fiction, and threatens ecumenical comity. What is more, the prospect that ordaining a priest to be an auxiliary bishop is the best way to train him to be a diocesan bishop seems at variance with Pope Francis’s own approach to ordained ministry. I hasten to add that I am not calling for any change in status for current active auxiliary bishops. A good number of them, no doubt, will one day become diocesan bishops, while many will retire as auxiliaries. But what if there were a moratorium for a set period of time—three years sounds about right—on the church appointing any new auxiliary bishops? The voices from the council that this article has recalled, along with sound theological reflection, suggest that such a trial period is not only worth initiating. It is likely to be fruitful.

²⁶Pope Francis, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the President of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy,” 11 February 2020.

If this suspension were ever to be put in place for a time, however, I think it prudent that it be enacted as *virtually* exceptionless, not absolutely so. One simply must allow for the existence of “unusual circumstances of the apostolate,” to borrow the language of *Christus Dominus*, and thus, have the tools to respond properly.²⁷ There could arise situations, for instance, where the relationship between the Holy See and the secular jurisdiction of a place is such that civic authorities want a say, and perhaps even the final say, on who ought to be ordained a bishop. Some would argue that this dynamic exists right now in China, where both the Holy See and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) appoint bishops, sometimes independently from one another, sometimes in agreement with one another. Were a disagreement to arise in a particular church over who ought to be the diocesan bishop, and a peaceful way forward would be to have one bishop appointed by Rome, and the other by the CPCA, with one serving as diocesan bishop and one serving as an auxiliary, I would judge this an acceptable exception to the suspension I propose, so long as the auxiliary was “ordained in the title of the diocese” to which he was assigned, to pick up on the argument of Wehr from Vatican II. No doubt, other rare situations might arise that would claim to justify a similar exception. These ought to be dealt with in an *ad hoc* fashion and, so long as the ministry of *episkopē* has some founded hope of being unified, a diocesan bishop ought to be granted the auxiliary he needs to serve the local Catholic population well.

Second, the church needs to develop specific criteria for determining the appropriate geographic boundaries of dioceses, a process that should result in the partitioning of especially large dioceses into several smaller ones. One must recall that even before *Christus Dominus* suggests that the excessive size of a diocese is one of the reasons for appointing an auxiliary, the document contains a three-paragraph section entitled “Diocesan boundaries.” In the first of those paragraphs, the council suggests,

In what concerns the drawing up of diocesan boundaries, this synod decrees that, so far as the good of souls requires it, a prudent effort for appropriate reconstruction should be a top priority. This can be done by dividing dioceses, by cutting up some dioceses or uniting others, by changing their boundary lines or finding a more suitable location for episcopal sees, or finally—and particularly where it is a question of dioceses containing a large proportion of big towns—by making a completely fresh internal rearrangement of them.²⁸

²⁷CD, §25.

²⁸CD, §22.

The final remedy this quotation proposes—internally rearranging large dioceses—has proven to be the most frequently utilized way of providing for the good of the souls in a diocese in the USA. The country's four most populous dioceses all divide themselves into pastoral regions (Los Angeles and Boston) or vicariates (New York and Chicago), the majority of which are overseen by auxiliary bishops. Other large dioceses around the globe proceed similarly. Why not, instead, implement the first remedy listed in CD, §22? Having smaller dioceses, in addition to obviating the need for further auxiliary bishops, also makes it all but certain that the diocesan bishop will come to know a larger percentage of the people whom he serves. Were one to object that creating more dioceses also necessitates creating all the curial apparatus that goes with a diocese, two responses could be made. For one, aside from certain offices that canon law requires each diocese to have—vicar general, chancellor, and so forth—why could multiple dioceses not share other offices—evangelization, liturgy, and so forth? Additionally, with an increase in the number of lay ecclesial ministers in various parts of the world, might they not find a diocesan curia, now with more ministerial opportunities than it had previously, an attractive place to work?

Third, and recognizing that the proposed phasing out of auxiliaries, combined with the possible increase in the number of dioceses in various parts of the world, could create something of a vacuum for sharing the concerns of the diocesan bishop, some other person or persons must undertake this task. The diocesan bishop needs local colleagues to share his concerns. But what are his concerns today, and who should be sharing them?

Where shall we begin? In the USA, the diocesan bishop must grapple with the continued horrors of the clerical sexual abuse crises, manifested most recently with the release of the McCarrick Report late in 2020; he must reckon with the anti-black racism that has always been a seminal part of the Catholic Church in this country as a whole, and perhaps in his very own diocese in particular; he must steer his diocese through what almost certainly is significant financial strain; he must balance the ecclesial good of communal worship with the common good of the public health in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic; and, of course, he must preach the Gospel, steward the sacraments, support his diocese's clergy, religious, and lay ministers, care for the poor, form his people in the faith, and forge good relationships with ecumenical and interreligious partners, all in a civic culture that has grown more hostile to religion, and an ecclesial culture that, too often, is rife with ideology. Diocesan bishops in other

parts of the world share many or most of these same challenges, and, of course, some challenges they face are particular to their own contexts. All bishops, though, have numerous, varied, and deeply significant concerns.

On one level, the whole local church will need to share these concerns, so many and so serious as they are. On another level, though, a smaller group of people, people whom the diocesan bishop must see as his colleagues in ministry, ought to be the ones entrusted with sharing his concerns. One can think of them as a “kitchen cabinet.”²⁹ That cabinet would include laity, religious, and clergy of varying ages, professional competencies, ethnic backgrounds, marital statuses, geographical locations, and so on. Just as important as the diversity of composition of such a cabinet would be the twin obligations of transparency on the part of the bishop, and *parrhesia* on the part of the cabinet. He must tell them what is actually happening, what his concerns actually are; and they must tell him what they think. That sort of help, that sort of *auxilium*, simply does not need to be provided by a bishop. Indeed, it would be richer if it came from a broader cross section of the people of God.

²⁹Such a cabinet would differ in a variety of ways from the pastoral council described in CIC (1983) Can. 511-514. Most significantly, the kitchen cabinet I recommend would meet regularly, and it would not be so tied to the person of the diocesan bishop that it would cease when the see is vacant.