

## A PETITION TO EACH (ARCH)BISHOP ORDINARIUS IN THE WORLD Concerning Broad Participation in the Selection of Bishops

*Context: This world-wide petition is one step in an extended strategy focusing on transforming the governance structure of the Catholic Church to bring it in line with the freedom-fostering collegial spirit of Vatican II. It includes the writing and living by collegially-drafted Constitutions from the parish level on up to the international, culminating in a new Ecumenical Council (in civil society, a “Constitutional Convention”) with full representation of all elements of the Church. Because in the “real world,” we set specific goals and time-frames, we aim to gain the commitments of one hundred bishops world-wide—and publicly report on them—by Advent, 2006.*

*In light of the following 2,000-year Catholic Tradition:*

- From the very beginning of the Christian Church all the faithful gathered together to choose a successor to the Apostle Judas (Acts 1:15-26);
- this participatory approach was thereafter continually affirmed, first by the first-century document the *Didache* (15:1-2): “You [the faithful] must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons”;
- also in the first century St. Clement of Rome stated that bishops should be chosen “with the consent of the whole Church” (*1 Clement*, 44,5);
- St. Cyprian (third century) bore witness to the custom of the people having the right not only to elect, but also to reject and even recall bishops: “The people themselves most especially have the power to choose worthy bishops or to reject unworthy ones.” (*Epistle*, 67, 3, *CSEL*, 3.2.737);
- St Cyprian also wrote, “from the beginning of my episcopate I have been determined to undertake nothing on my own private judgment without consulting you and gaining the assent of the people.” (*PL* 4, 234);
- Ss. Ambrose as bishop of Milan and Augustine of Hippo (fourth and fifth centuries) were elected bishop of Milan and Hippo respectively by the acclamation of the people: “*Nos elegimus eum!*” “We elect him!”
- Pope St. Celestine (d. 432 A.D.) said: “No one is given the episcopate uninvited. The consent and desire of the clerics, the people, and leadership are required.” (*Epistle*, iv, 5; *PL*, 50, 431);
- Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461 A.D.), who faced down Attila the Hun and saved Rome from the sack, wrote: “Let him who will stand before all be elected by all.” (*Epistle*, x, 4; *PL*, 54, 634);
- the first bishop of the United States, John Carroll, was elected by all the priests of the United States;
- all the Catholic bishops of the world, including the bishop of Rome, stated that all Catholics must “wherever necessary, undertake with vigor the task of renewal and reform.... But their primary *duty* is to make a careful and honest appraisal of *whatever* needs to be renewed and done in the Catholic household itself.... [called] to that *continual reformation* of which it [the Catholic Church] always has need.” (*Decree on Ecumenism*, Vatican Council II – italics added);
- Pope Paul VI in 1965 established a Commission to draft a Constitution (*Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis*) for the whole Catholic Church, which Commission worked for sixteen years, producing several drafts;
- Pope John Paul II stated that the Church “values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility *both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them.*” (“John Paul II to the Participants in the 6th Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences,” February 23, 2000 italics – added);

