
Parish: Holy See, “proximity” keyword for pastoral units

“Proximity” is the “key factor” of “pastoral units” and “regions”. This is according to the Instruction “The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church” released by the Congregation for the Clergy today. The document recalls that the canonical norm underlines the “need to individuate different territories within each Diocese, with the possibility of these being assembled into intermediate realities between a given Diocese and an individual Parish” taking into account the “size of the Diocese and its pastoral reality”. When establishing a pastoral unit, the document reads, “the homogeneity and customs of the inhabitants, together with the common traits of the area” must be taken into consideration “in order to foster a close relationship between Parish Priests and other pastoral workers”. Prior to establishing Parish groupings, the Bishop must first consult with the Presbyteral Council. As the text points out, “the scarcity of diocesan clergy, the general financial situation of a Diocese, or other conditions within the community that are presumably reversible and of brief duration”, such as numerical consistency, lack of financial self-sufficiency, and the urban planning of the territory, “are not sufficient” causes to establish a pastoral unit. The act by which a Parish is suppressed by the Bishop must also make provision for the disposition of temporal goods in accord with the Canon law. The “reduction of Churches to profane but not sordid use” is another possibility referred to in the text. In this case, too, “the legitimate causes for decreeing such a reduction do not include reasons like the lack of clergy, demographic decline or the grave financial state of the Diocese”. Each Parish within such a grouping must be entrusted to a Parish Priest or to a group of priests “in solidum”, who would take care of the whole Parish community. Alternatively, the grouping could be composed of several Parishes, each having the same Parish Priest.

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