

## Proposal 1

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), share with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), its pastoral concern about the precipitous decline of active priests available to serve the People of God. We ask our Bishops, as Shepherds of God’s people, to employ the power and the authority of their office and work to resolve the significant pastoral and sacramental challenges resulting from an expanding Church and a declining priesthood.**

### Rationale:

- The fact of the precipitous decline of active priests available in the United States,
- The rapidly rising average age of U.S. Clergy
- The significant increase in the number of U. S. Catholics
- The diminishing sacramental and pastoral care available to the Catholic people whose parishes are being closed, or if they remain open, must share a priest.

### Documentation:

A 2009 Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) study commissioned by the National Federation of Priests’ Councils (NFPC) found the following:

Annual ordinations constitute only 30 percent of the priest replacement ratio. In other words, for every 100 priests who retire, resign or die in a given year, only 30 are ordained.

The median age of all priests in the study was 64, with an average age of 63. In 1970, the average age of a priest was 45. Now, in 2013, the average priest is on Medicare. (By way of comparison, the average age of lawyers and physicians today is in the mid-40’s).

While the NFPC study found priests to be very happy in their work, subsequent follow up with AUSCP members at their June 2012 meeting also found significant concern “for the large numbers of Catholics walking away from the church or just ‘leaving in place.’” (Cozzens, Fr. Donald “A Happy Lot,” America, September 24, 2012)

A 2012 CARA survey of Catholics 14 and older found 12 percent of males had considered a religious vocation at least “a little seriously.” Compared to earlier surveys, the percentage of men considering priesthood is declining. Twenty percent reported considering priesthood in 2003 and this dropped to 17 percent in 2008. (Survey available from USCCB website)

According to the Official Catholic Directory, since 1975, the number of U. S. Catholics had increased by 36 percent, from 48.7 million in 1975, to 66.3 million in 2012. In the same time period the U.S. Church suffered a 34 percent decrease in the number of priests.

According to a 2008 CARA study, half of the 19,302 active diocesan priests in the U.S. plan to retire by 2019. We are obtaining about 380 new diocesan priests each year. In just six years, we will have only 13,500 active diocesan priests to serve some 17,644 parishes, presuming ordinations remain constant, as they have for over a decade.

According to the Official Catholic Director, in the past twelve years 1,592 U.S. parishes have closed. New plans for significant downsizing are under way in Boston, Saginaw, Detroit and Peoria to name just a few.

Note: the Boston reconfiguration will organize 288 parishes into 135 clusters that will be served by pastoral teams. The number of available priests in Boston will plummet from 316 in 2011 to 178 in 2021; only 17 percent of local Catholics now attend Mass. (Associated Press, 9/13/2012)

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## Proposal 2

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), will promote among its members and all priests in the United States who are in positions of authority (e.g., pastors, Chancery officials, directors of social service agencies, etc.) the exercise of that authority in a collegial manner, i.e., through a consensus decision making process, with any councils, boards, ministry or other groups through which the priests is to carry out his ministry.”**

### Rationale:

- Vatican II documents call for the practice of collegiality and collaboration in the exercise of authority and ministry in the church.
- Our appeal to the Vatican and local ordinaries to further implement Vatican II in our day by exercising collegiality in decision making will have greater credibility and effectiveness if priests are modeling this collegiality in their exercise of authority.
- Canon Law has determined that the Parish Pastoral Councils and Finance Councils are only consultative, thereby reserving all decision-making authority to the pastor. Since the intent of these canons is to affirm and safeguard the canonical authority of the pastor, the pastor is still free to exercise his authority in more collegial manner by using a consensus decision-making process with these and other parish consultative groups. The consensus decision-making process goes beyond mere consultation by involving the laity as equal partners in the actual decision itself.
- The use of consensus decision-making process with lay groups in a parish or other ecclesiastical structures is one of the clearest ways of demonstrating our understanding and affirmation of the common priesthood of all the Baptized and the equality of all persons in the Body of Christ.
- Formation and training of priests and lay leaders in the commitment to a greater exercise of collegiality through the use of a consensus decision-making process can be made available in dioceses through the resources of the AUSCP.
- This formation could include a clearer understanding of servant leadership by priests as called for by the Second Vatican Council and the Lord Himself and demonstrate how this understanding of priestly leadership is best realized through the use of a decision making process that includes the laity and treats them as equals in the church.

### Documentation:

1.
  - Episcopal Collegiality: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, nos. 22-23; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, nos. 37-38.
  - Bishops' Collaboration within their own dioceses with priests, religious and laity: Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, nos. 16, 17 & 27; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 7
  - Priests' Collaboration with other priests and with laity: Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, no. 30; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 9; Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, no. 2,3 & 25.
3.
  - Cannons 536 & 537
  - According to recent Vatican statistics there are 1.2 billion Catholics in the world and approximately 420,000 Bishops and Priests. That means that the laity makes up is 99.98 percent of the Catholic Church. This would suggest that the laity should have a larger decision-making role in their parishes, their dioceses, and the universal church. See Vatican Website.
4.
  - Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, nos. 9-12; Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, nos. 2 & 25.
5.
  - The National Pastoral Life Center, founded by Fr. Phil Murnion, for years sponsored a weeklong training for pastors entitled, “Pastoring In Today’s Parishes,” that included a one-day workshop on “An Inclusive

Approach to Parish Ministry.” This includes presentations on Servant Leadership, Leadership Styles, and the inclusion of the laity through a consensus decision-making process. This training is still available.

- “Consensus Decision Making,” a description of the process is available at [ddous@aol.com](mailto:ddous@aol.com).
- 6.
- Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 9; Matthew 20:25,28; John13: 13-15; I Peter 5:1,3.

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### Proposal 3

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), ask the Holy Father to grant permission to use the 1974 edition of the sacramentary in the United States where desired. Or be it resolved that the presidential prayers of the 1974 Sacramentary including the optional Opening Collect, written by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), prayer over the Gifts and Communion Prayer be allowed to be used at all Masses.”**

#### Rationale:

- The current translation is cumbersome.
- The current translation does not use intelligible English, especially among the poor and immigrant.
- The Roman Missal is difficult to lead people in prayer with.
- The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), survey be damned, I have not met one person that likes it.
- Christ died for all does not mean the same as Christ died for many.
- Anthony Ruff summed it up nicely last year.

#### Documentation:

Ryan, Fr. Mike [America Magazine](#)

Bro. Anthony Ruff, Various articles and presentations

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Resolution Seconded By:

## Proposal 4

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), support Pope Francis in the need to reform the Church and restore credibility especially by opening the selection of bishops to the participation of the laity and clergy.”**

### Rationale:

- During the long history of the Church, lay authorities or temporal rulers provided a system of checks and balances that has been lost:
- The discipline of the clergy, the founding of hospitals, religious orders and the erecting of dioceses was entrusted by the *sacerdolum* of the Church to the lay *imperium*; therefore it is not without ecclesiastical precedent.
- When the temporal order fell into corruption, the spiritual order sparked renewal and when the spiritual order fell into corruption, the temporal order sparked renewal; therefore there is need for both lay and ordained supervision in the Church.
- The Church hierarchy has felt justified in allowing civil governments a role in the selection of bishops to preserve social order, now in democratic societies this order is jeopardized by a lack of transparency which must be corrected by openness and participation.
- The appearance of careerism in the rank of bishop is unseemly and needs to be eliminated.

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## Proposal 5

**“Be it resolved that the selection of diocesan bishops should become a more transparent process in which the local churches have a well-defined and effective voice.”**

**The diocesan bishop should generally be chosen from the presbyterate of the local church or from the metropolitan province.**

**Any consultation of the local church about possible candidates for the office of bishop should not be accompanied with the imposition of pontifical secrecy.**

**The names of candidates on the *terna* sent to Rome by the nuncio should be made known to the local church.**

**Whenever a diocesan bishop is to be appointed, the value of input from the local church should be openly stated by members of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP).**

### Rationale:

- First, the diocesan Bishop has a twofold representative duty. Since he belongs to a local church and serves as its overseer, he should represent the life and experience of his local church to the universal church. Since he is a member of the college of bishops, he should represent the life and tradition of the universal church to his local church. In our recent history the appointment of a diocesan bishop without an active and effective consultation of the local church diminishes the bishop’s ability to represent the life and experience of the local church to the universal church.
- Secondly, the consultation of the local church in the selection of a diocesan bishop can help the monarchical structures of the Church become more collegial.
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## Proposal 6

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP) supports a comprehensive plan for evangelization in the U.S.A. which includes:**

**Diagnosis of the causes of exodus of 30 percent of Catholic from the Church**

**Study of the churches that have grown rapidly in the past few decades, particularly Evangelicals and mega-churches, to identify factors.**

**Identification of the hunger in many Catholics which Catholic worship and pastoral practice fails to satisfy.**

**Presentation of effective models for Catholic evangelization.”**

Rationale:

- AUSCP seeks to complete the reforms of Vatican II, which included an opening by the Church to the world.
- AUSCP exists to identify participation of all disciples in the Mission of the Church.
- We cannot invite new persons into the Church if we are not meeting the needs of existing Catholics.
- Evangelization- spreading the Gospel is the Church’s first priority.

This requires us to re-think how the expression of the Gospel and the structure of the Church should be changed to address people of our era.

Documentation:

Paul VI: *“Evangelui Nuntiandi”*

Hegy, Pierre, *“Wake up, Lazarus!”* 2011

White, Michael and Corcoran, Tom. *“Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost and Making Church Matter”* –(Story of evangelization in a Baltimore parish)

Time Magazine 4/15/2013 “Evangélicos!”

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Resolution Seconded By:



## Proposal 7

**“Be it resolved The Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP) supports the ordination of women to the permanent diaconate and recommends:**

- **That the ongoing discussion of the ordination of women to the diaconate continue;**
- **That the US Catholic Bishops publicly support the restoration of the ancient practice of ordaining deaconesses; (cf. Constitution of the Holy Apostles, 8. 19-20)**
- **That the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) request amendment of canon 1024 which restricts valid sacred ordination to baptized males alone.”**

Rationale:

- Romans 16: 1 describes “Phoebe our sister” as “a minister (*diakonos*) of the church at Cenchreae.”
- The ancient *Constitution of the Holy Apostles* (part of an ante-Nicene collection) includes the directive in book 8 section XIX and XX that the bishop shall “lay “thy hands upon her (The deaconess) in the presence of the presbytery, and the deacons and deaconesses, and shall say, ‘O Eternal God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ...look down upon this Thy servant who is to be ordained to the office of deaconess and grant Thy Holy Spirit.’”
- References to the permanent diaconate are found in Vatican II documents: *Lumen Gentium* #29, *Ad Gentes* #16, and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* #17.
- Karl Rahner noted that the motives for restoring the permanent diaconate were: a) to counter the shortage of priests, and 2) To strengthen with sacramental grace those already performing diaconal service (*Theological Investigations*, 10.11)
- Rahner also noted that Vatican II did not insist on any one set of tasks for the diaconate. Rahner further wrote that it is not essential that today’s form should have existed in the past.
- The AUSCP Board notes that “US nuns have been doing the service function of the diaconate from its very inception in the Acts of the Apostles” and “the proclaiming of the Word in Eucharistic setting should now be institutionalized for those nuns who feel called and are prepared to do so. Of course, it would be opening the permanent diaconate to women in general, with the invitation especially apt for women religious.” (B. Survil)

Documentation:

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## Proposal 8

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), call for the study of, and an open discussion for the ordination of women and married men to the priesthood.”**

### Rationale:

- This is a first necessary step (...study and discussion...)
- The People of God need shepherds
- The people of God need sacraments

### Documentation:

The 1982 Resolution on Inclusive Ministry by the National Federation of Priests' Councils (NFPC) which was passed by consensus by the House of Delegates.

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## Proposal 9

**“Be it resolved that as a free association of Catholic Church workers, The Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), firmly supports the National Federation of Priests’ Councils (NFPC’s) Labor Priests Project and hereby establishes its own internal Priest-Labor-Union–Friendly Caucus.”**

### Rationale:

- The universal Church has been on record since Leo XXIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, if not earlier on, in support of workers’ organizing.
- As recently as 2009 Pope Benedict XVI affirmed support for workers organizing in his encyclical, *Caritas In Veritate*.
- Many AUSCP members have had family members, neighbors, and parishioners whose human dignity has been enhanced by their membership in a labor union. We are witnesses to the positive effects of worker solidarity.
- The precipitous decline of labor union membership in the USA is due in part to the increasing indifference even hostility towards organized labor even within our own parishes and dioceses. Presiding at The Eucharist we are positioned to call for solidarity, but rather than divide worker from employer, we seek to be agents of reconciliation that will create justice for all sides, as we exercise a preferential option for those most in need.

### Documentation:

Roewe, Brian. “Priest Meet in Chicago to Discuss Labor Ministry,” National Catholic Reporter, June 7, 2012

Priests Labor Workshop at the NFPC 2013 Convention in Reno, April 28, 2013 [www.nfpc.org](http://www.nfpc.org)

Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice: [www.catholicscholarsforworkerjustice.org](http://www.catholicscholarsforworkerjustice.org)

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## Proposal 10

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), urge the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), to encourage the re-introduction of general absolution in U.S. Parishes.”**

### Rationale:

- As a response to Vatican II, many attending bishops initiated the use of general absolution in the Sacrament of penance;
- Pastors of the early Vatican II era were greatly impressed with the impact this liturgy had upon the laity;
- The creativity of parish worship commissions frequently offered prayer services, incorporating some personal interaction with each penitent, so as to enhance their experience.
- Pastors realized that penitents were emotionally affected, even to the point of tears and conversion;
- Some penitents, anxious and ill at ease to face a confessor were encouraged to repentance through this form;
- This proposal is not submitted for the benefit of the clergy, but for the spiritual growth of the People of God.

### Documentation:

Dallen, James. “The Reconciling Community”

Faggioli, Massimo. “True Reform”

Vatican II *“Sacrosanctum Concilium”*

Letter of December 6, 1986 to clergy of the Archdiocese of Detroit, Edmund Card. Szoka

Association of Chicago Priests Upturn Winter Issue,

McClory, Robert. “Cardinal, Pastors Discuss General Absolution” NCR July 27,2001,

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## Proposal 11

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), in order to promote a constructive and fruitful dialogue between priests and bishops, invites the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to appoint a bishop to serve as its liaison to the AUSCP; the AUSCP also asks the USCCB to include an official delegate from the AUSCP among the auditors at its November meeting.”**

### Rationale:

This resolution, if accepted, would have many benefits, including:

- Establishment of a formal, collegial relationship with the USCCB
- Fulfillment of one of the goals of the Second Vatican Council, the mutually supportive relationship of priests and bishops
- Mutual ease of communication of needs and concerns
- Official recognition of the AUSCP as a body representing a significant number of priest across the country

### Documentation:

“Priests, prudent cooperators with the Episcopal order, its aid and instrument, called to serve the people of God, constitutes one priesthood with their bishop although bound by a diversity of duties.....they must strive to lend their effort to the pastoral work of the whole diocese, and even of the entire Church.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 28)

“This union of priests with their bishops is all the more necessary today since in our present age, for various reasons, apostolic undertakings must necessarily not only take on many the forms but frequently extend even beyond the boundaries of one parish or diocese.” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7)

“We are an association of U.S. Catholic priests, offering mutual support and a *collegial voice*.” (AUSCP Mission Statement)

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## Proposal 12

### Resolution Statement

**“Be it resolved the selection of, and publicizing The Priest Of The Month shall be an on-going program of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP) beginning in the year of its adoption.”**

### Rationale:

- As argued by AUSCP, member, Robert Bonnot (Youngstown) in his article in *America Magazine*, November 8 1997, (‘Translating ‘monsignor,’) “...there should be a way to honor priests and the ministry of all priests,” and that the title and robes of “monsignor” are culturally inappropriate in 21st Century USA.
- Pope Francis himself, by his use of the title of “brother” towards his patriarchal peers and his vestment at his installation have announced a new moment within the universal Church. (Carnival time is over)
- Given that most diocese do indeed, on a regular basis honor priests, most particularly for their sacramental ministry and administrative accomplishments, that recognition for priests need not be the task for the AUSCP.
- Rather, the emergence of our Association based on the personal initiative of the U.S. priests, calls for saluting those who – aided by God’s Grace – contribute to the building up of the Association by implementing its mission statement and resolutions.
- But also by “engaging in dialogue” and “prophetic action on issues affecting Church and society” within their own diocese or religious order.

### Documentation:

Vatican II’s *Presbyterium Ordinis*, such as Section 8: “Priests by virtue of their ordination to the priesthood are united among themselves in an intimate sacramental brotherhood.... All indeed, are united in the building up of the Body of Christ which ... requires manifold duties and new methods. It is very important that all priests, whether diocesan or religious, help one another always to be fellow workers in the truth. (45)

Fr. Bonnot’s American article as cited above.

The incarnated “documents” that are those priests upon whom shoulders we stand, who have contributed to building priestly fraternity in its various organizational manifestations, both nationally and internationally. (E.G. The Church’s many religious orders and congregations; Caritas Christi; The Association of Catholic Priests of Ireland.)

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## Proposal 13

**“Be it resolved that this Assembly of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP) decry the annual collection for the Archdiocese for Military Services for its rendering to Caesar what is to be rendered to God.”**

### Rationale:

- In our lifetimes the Archdiocese for Military Service (AMS) has given unquestioning support to at least two wars that were found to be unjust: Vietnam and Iraq. By approving financial support for the AMS one risks falling into the near occasion of sin by helping finance the AMS support of future unjust wars. (Ad Rem: The March 25, 2013 cover page of America magazine: A chaplain presiding over a scene of destruction during the Vietnam War.)
- Members of the local church are by canon law obligated to provide financial support for the needs of their church. This obligation falls upon the Baptized who are in the jurisdiction of the AMS. Given that these Faithful don't have to pay for their chaplains' salaries and benefits, not to maintain worship space since the Pentagon assumes these costs, it should not be a great burden for these several hundred thousand Catholics (the precise number is not found in the Catholic Directory) to assume their obligation for whatever additional expenses the AMS's hierarchy considers necessary for its mission including promoting vocations to the Priesthood.
- Every U.S. Catholic who pays his/her Federal income tax obligation has already contributed to the cost of the AMS clergy personnel and maintenance of worship space. This is a superfluous second collection for the U.S. Church already weighed down with many annual second collections.

### Documentation:

To be provided to the U.S. Catholic Public by the AMS: The annual aggregate amount of Catholic military full time and part time chaplains' salaries and benefits.

To be provided to the U.S. Catholic Public by the AMS: The annual aggregate amount of the rental value for the use of worship space (Granted that this is used by non-Catholics for their worship space as well.)

To be provided to the U.S. Catholic Public by the AMS: The names of Catholic military personnel who have died in the Vietnam and Iraq Wars as well as the names of those Catholic military personnel who have committed suicides during or after those two wars.

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## Proposal 14

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP), newly inspired by the words and example of Pope Francis and faithful to the dynamics and teaching of Vatican II, establish a working group to find concrete ways of promoting inclusive dialogue and collaborative practices in the U. S. church by endorsing and applying the approach of Cardinal Bernardin’s Common Ground Initiative.”**

### Rationale:

- Pope Francis has inspired a new appreciation of dialogue and collaboration: by his symbolic actions (for example, asking for prayers of the people before praying for them); by his appointment of eight Cardinals from around the world to advise him on the government of the universal church; and by his call for dialogue that “should help to build bridges connecting all people in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to be welcomed and embraced.”
- Vatican II remains for us a model of dialogue in its internal dynamics (often difficult but ultimately fruitful) and a valuable resource for promoting dialogue within the church, with other religions and with the contemporary world.
- The members of AUSCP are a valuable resource on how to live the dialogic spirit of Vatican II and to promote dialogue and collaboration in parishes and other ministerial settings.
- The Common Ground Initiative promotes dialogue that takes Christ as the norm and is accountable to the Catholic tradition. It is guided by certain working principles: no group has a monopoly on the truth; refuse to demonize the other; look for common ground (*of Called to Be Catholic; Church in a Time of Peril*).
- AUSCP is well advised to look for partners in carrying out its mission. Endorsing the work of The Common Ground Initiative is a good example of the approach.

### Documentation:

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## Proposal 15

**“Be it resolved that the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP) promote that on the occasion of a bishop’s (ordinary’s) age-related resignation or retirement a sufficient time period be allowed for his diocese, through its officials, to discern and determine from its own presbyterate, an interim leader to govern the diocese as “apostolic administrator.”**

### Rationale:

- A kindness shown to the resigning bishop
- Recognition of his ministry so faithfully accomplished
- Seems inconsiderate and impractical to ask another bishop to assume governance of two large dioceses
- A number of priests in the diocese with sufficient giftedness to assume such responsibility-available

### Documentation:

Vatican II *re collegialism*

*Lumen Gentium*

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