



An Ambrose of Our Own

The people should choose their bishops, just like they used to.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever known a priest whom you thought would make a good bishop? What qualities did he possess? How are those qualities similar to, and different from, the qualities currently valued in prospective bishops? Is it possible to be a good priest but a bad bishop—or vice versa?

2. One of Theodore McCarrick's most valued skills was fundraising. Does the premium placed on hierarchs' fundraising abilities undermine the moral integrity of the Church and affect the loyalty of bishops in serving their people? If so, what can be done to reduce the influence of lucrative fundraisers and wealthy donors in the Church?

3. Do you think Cafardi's "modest proposal" for a lay role in the selection of bishops would improve the quality of our prelates? Could it prevent sex abuse in the Church? Does Cafardi's plan go too far—or not far enough?

4. How should lay folks be selected to attend Cafardi's proposed convocation? How could we avoid the oversized influence of wealthy donors, the lay people who currently have the biggest say in the selection of bishops? How would the composition of such a body address the enormous ecclesiastical and political disagreements within the Church?

5. Cafardi criticizes the existence of an "old boys' network" in the Church. What reforms could prevent the development of such a network? Modern priests live, work, study, and die with other priests—and they're subject to the nearly unlimited authority of their bishop. Would limiting the frequency of parish reassignments encourage deeper ties with a particular community?

6. How might bishops be held accountable *after* their selection? Is there a role for lay people in this? Should regular lay gatherings take place to evaluate the performance of bishops?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

David Gibson, "The Double Agent," November 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/double-agent>

Cathleen Kaveny, "What Benedict's Letter on Abuse Gets Wrong," May 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/putting-justice-first>

Nicholas P. Cafardi, "Accountability Gap," June 2013: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/accountability-gap>

John Gehring, "A Telling Spell of Catholic 'Leadership,'" May 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/telling-spell-catholic-leadership>

James J. Heaney, "Our Myth, Their Lie," November 2018: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/our-myth-their-lie>