



## MEDIA FACT SHEET FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### On Episcopal Appointments

*This fact sheet has been prepared to assist the media with reporting on the transition of episcopal leadership in the Diocese of Providence. For additional information, contact the Office of Communications and Public Relations at the Diocese of Providence at [communications@dioceseofprovidence.org](mailto:communications@dioceseofprovidence.org) or 401-278-4600.*

#### **What is a Bishop?**

Bishops are the successors to the Apostles.

“The bishop is to be considered as the high priest of his flock, from whom the life in Christ of his faithful is in some way derived and dependent.” (§41, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*)

The bishop who leads a diocese is called the diocesan bishop. He is the chief legislator, executive, and judge in the diocese. He alone can legislate. He can exercise executive power personally or through vicars general or episcopal vicars. He can exercise judicial power personally or through a judicial vicar and judges.

Being a bishop is also the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, which is comprised of three major orders or degrees: deacon, priest, and bishop. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (§1594) explains: “The bishop receives the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders, which integrates him into the episcopal college and makes him the visible head of the particular Church entrusted to him. As successors of the apostles and members of the college, the bishops share in the apostolic responsibility and mission of the whole Church under the authority of the Pope, successor of St. Peter.”

The Catechism also explains, “Through the ordained ministry, especially that of bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community of believers. In the beautiful expression of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the bishop is *typos tou Patros*: he is like the living image of God the Father.” (§1549)

#### **Who appoints Bishops?**

The appointment and removal of bishops is the sole prerogative of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, as Supreme Pontiff. For more information on the process of appointing bishops, see this guide from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: <https://www.usccb.org/offices/general-secretariat/appointing-bishops>

#### **What is an Auxiliary Bishop?**

If the diocesan bishop has other bishops assisting him, they are called auxiliary bishops. The auxiliary bishop assists the diocesan bishop in the entire governance of the local church in harmony with the diocesan bishop in effort and intention.

#### **What is a Coadjutor Bishop?**

A coadjutor (pronounced co-ad-JOO-ter) is a bishop who assists the diocesan bishop, much like an auxiliary bishop, but who also has been granted the right of succession. Upon the death or resignation (retirement) of the diocesan bishop, the coadjutor immediately becomes the new diocesan bishop. The appointment of a coadjutor bishop allows the future bishop of the diocese time to familiarize himself with the diocese, its people, institutions, and operations.

**What does it mean when a bishop resigns?**

The Code of Canon Law requires all bishops to offer a letter of resignation to the Holy Father upon reaching the age of 75. It is the sole discretion of the Pope when to accept the letter. While the Holy See uses the official term resignation, it is more analogous to retirement and does not imply removal for cause.

In accordance with Canon Law, Bishop Evans transmitted his letter of resignation to the Holy Father through the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States in advance of his 75th birthday, which was September 2, 2022. Bishop Tobin will be expected to transmit his letter to the Holy Father by his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, on April 1, 2023. As with all bishops, the Holy Father will decide when to accept it.

**What happens next?**

Bishop Henning's appointment as coadjutor bishop takes effect when he receives the bollo, an official letter of appointment issued by Pope Francis, from the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Christophe Pierre at a Mass of Reception on Thursday, January 26 at 2 p.m. in the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, in Providence.

From the time of the Mass of Reception, Bishop Henning will assist Bishop Tobin as coadjutor bishop until such time as the Holy Father accepts Bishop Tobin's resignation, at which time Bishop Henning immediately becomes the 9<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Providence.

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**For additional information, contact:**

Diocese of Providence, Communications and Public Relations  
(401) 278-4600 | [communications@dioceseofprovidence.org](mailto:communications@dioceseofprovidence.org)