

## **Diocesan Mutual Visitation as a Mechanism for Renewal**

A VOTF Structural Change Working Group proposal for structural change

Under the current Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, the diocesan bishop has absolute authority within the diocese, and the sole authority to report to the Holy See the state of the diocese. No one has the authority to come into a diocese and report independently: All reports go to the Holy See through the diocesan bishop. Needed change is very unlikely to come from within the diocese under these circumstances.

To ameliorate communication, VOTF proposes that a process of mutual visitation among dioceses be established as a mechanism for encouraging renewal and strengthening fraternal correction where it is needed. This visitation would be similar to the process used in some dioceses and analogous to the accreditation process in universities and hospitals. An accreditation visit triggers a valuable process of self-examination in the organization preparing for it, and would have the same beneficial effects within a diocese preparing for a mutual visitation.

In the case of mutual visitation, an independent Visitation Committee, established by an appropriately constituted committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, could be established. The Visitation Committee could include both clerical and lay members, acting in the essential spirit of collaboration. In this process, a group formed from peer communities comes into an organization and visits and consults with elements of the organization (in this case, laity, clergy, religious orders, et al.) The Visitation Committee then prepares a visitation report. Where remarkable weaknesses are identified, the report could include an action plan.

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