

**GUIDE FOR
ABBATIAL ELECTIONS**

**IN THE
AMERICAN-CASSINESE CONGREGATION
OF BENEDICTINE MONASTERIES**

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

1995

The ***GUIDE FOR ABBATIAL ELECTIONS***
in the
AMERICAN-CASSINESE CONGREGATION
of Benedictine Monasteries

was approved by the
forty-fourth general chapter
of the American-Cassinese Congregation

7-12 June 1992

PREFACE

According to St. Benedict's view of the cenobitic life, the abbot is the keystone of the entire monastic structure. Consequently, the choice of their abbot is the most important decision that a community of monks is called upon to make.

It was quite in accord, therefore, with the desire of Vatican Council II for a return to sources and an updating of religious practices that our 1977 general chapter mandated a study of the abbatial election process. The committee appointed to implement this mandate devoted much effort to producing the Guidelines for Abbatial Elections in the American-Cassinese Federation that were approved by the 1980 general chapter and published shortly afterwards. They have served us well since then.

The publication of the new Codex Iuris Canonici in 1983, however, and especially that of our new proper law, The Constitutions and the Directory, in 1990, required some changes in these Guidelines. Accordingly, the forty-third general chapter, meeting at St. Anselm's Abbey in 1989, decided that a revision should be undertaken.

The revision was entrusted to a committee chaired by Father Jonathan DeFelice (A), which also included Abbot Jerome Theisen (f), Abbot Hugh Anderson (P), and Father Warren Murrman (V). The draft that they prepared was approved, after discussion and some revision, by the forty-fourth general chapter, meeting at St. Bernard Abbey in 1992.

We now have in hand, therefore, this new version of our Guide for Abbatial Elections in the American-Cassinese Congregation of Benedictine Monasteries. With thanks to all who devoted themselves to producing it, we commend it to the monasteries of our Congregation.

March 21, 1995

+ Melvin Valvano, O.S.B.
President

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INTRODUCTION

E 1. The election of an abbot constitutes one of the most important acts of a monastic community, for it ordinarily involves the transfer of authority from one abbot to another. The election process brings the cenobium to a time of decision, which is both a danger and an opportunity. The election is a danger if taken lightly by the community; it is an opportunity if approached as a moment of enrichment.

E 2. Members of the monastic community look to the Holy Spirit to be their guide in an abbatial election, but they must also approach the event with willingness to sacrifice time and energy. Moreover, they need courage and humility to acknowledge the kind of abbot required for the future of their monastery.

E 3. The monks believe in the presence of Christ whose sacrament they are about to elect in the person of the abbot. Christ is present in the gathering of the monks; he is vitally interested in a worthy representative of himself as the good shepherd. Faith leads the monks to discern the abiding presence of an involved and interested Lord. Faith leads them to put forth effort and care as they allow themselves to be guided by the strength of Jesus and his Spirit.

E 4. The institution of cenobitic monasticism depends on the central role of the abbot. Monks group together in communities, not to live isolated lives with little reference to other monks, but to place themselves in a Christian and monastic milieu and to receive the guidance of others, most especially the direction of an abbot. Cenobites belong to a monastery and desire to live under a rule and an abbot (RB 1:2).

E 5. The abbot does not create the monastic tradition. He himself enters the tradition at one point in his life and lives its values in the midst of his brothers. He is selected from the number of his brothers to lead them forward in the ever old yet ever new and changing life of the monastery. Thus, the abbot is himself a monk, one tested and trained in the gospel and in the monastic tradition of a particular house. He forever retains the imprint of the community that guided his beginning steps in monastic life. Upon election he does not cease to be a monk; in fact he must be even more zealous in pursuing the monastic life. But he is given the added task of guiding the life of a monastery and its monks.

E 6. The abbot both represents and embodies the monastic tradition of a specific monastery. He sums up the tradition, interprets its thrust, and guides its expression for today. The abbot is not a law unto himself since he must be guided by the sacred Scriptures, the Rule of Saint Benedict, the tradition of monasticism, the ecclesiastical norms of the church today, and the yearnings of his own monastic community. Within this context the Rule accords much discretion in the manner in which he shapes the direction of his own community. Thus the crucial importance of the person of the abbot.

E 7. The abbot functions first of all as the spiritual father of each monk. This does not necessarily imply that he is the monk's spiritual director in the contemporary sense of the term, but it means that the abbot must judge with keen insight what promotes the spiritual progress of each particular monk and what is best for him in matters of assignment, education, and way of life. The abbot cannot function as spiritual father without the guidance of the Holy Spirit and without a knowledge of the monk and an interest in his spiritual progress. Conversely the monk will not find a spiritual father in his abbot unless he allows himself to be known and guided by the abbot.

E 8. The abbot serves the community as a personal center of unity. He fosters and preserves unity by relating to each and every member of the community, by eliciting and summing up their legitimate aspirations, and by expressing the spirit of the community. He serves the cause of unity by presiding at liturgies, chapters, and community meals. Indeed, the monastic community forms the abbot, forms around the abbot, and is formed by the abbot.

E 9. The Rule of Saint Benedict uses many titles and images to depict the person and the work of the abbot. He is the pastor who is charged with the task of protecting, guiding, and nourishing the flock. He is the teacher who is conversant with the biblical and monastic tradition and is able to instruct the monks in the best of godly teachings. He is the chief steward who oversees the goods and property of the monastery, the administrator who knows how to work with others for the

protection and proper use of the patrimony of the monastery. He is the father of the monks, fostering a milieu conducive to life and growth. He is the physician, healing wounds and promoting the health of the monks. He is the servant seeking to profit the brothers and making himself available to their needs.

E 10. The abbot is also a brother, a confrere to the members of the community. He lives in the community with his brothers, not in a house by himself. He interacts with his brothers in all the ways that constitute common life. His brotherly relationships abide even as he moves into the abbatial office.

Ell. The abbot's task today includes discernment with regard to the way in which the monastery supports itself and serves the church in various apostolates. Here especially the abbot needs to be the kind of person who can seek counsel and work with others in forming a sustainable plan for the monastery's work of self-support and service.

E 12. When the abbot is chosen from the membership of the community, he takes with him into the office the marks of the community. He should in a real sense be the most characteristic monk of the monastery. He articulates the life of his monastery and embodies it for the monks as well as for outsiders.

E 13. The monks who enter the election process must look for an abbot to lead their community. The abbot is elected for a particular house and for a particular time. The circumstances of a particular monastery, e.g., its need for someone with special skills as a teacher or an administrator, will dictate their choice of an abbot.

E 14. The election of an abbot brings the monastery to a crucial juncture of its life. The monastic community needs a leader and it normally looks within its own membership to find candidates. By way of exception the monastery may find it necessary to look to some other monastic community for a suitable candidate, especially when the monastery is small or when serious divisions render a community incapable of discovering a leader it can follow.

E 15. In the end the monks need to trust the Holy Spirit and the election process itself to present the best candidates for the office of abbot. The monks should not assume that their candidates will be without fault or limitations. The community needs to assess the limitations of the candidates to discover whether their shortcomings preclude their ability to lead the monastery. The community needs to assess the strengths of the candidates to see whether their talents are sufficient to support the demands of the office.

E 16. The monks will be enriched if they achieve a consensus and shift their allegiance to a brother who is selected to bear the burden of office. The monks will be rewarded if their choice falls upon a fellow monk of faith and love, a man of vision, compassion, and common sense.

PART I
INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL
FROM *THE CONSTITUTIONS AND THE DIRECTORY*

C 10.1. The office of abbot is an essential element of Benedictine monastic life. The abbot of a monastery, a sacrament of the person and will of Christ, is principally a spiritual leader, helping and guiding the community and the individual monk to fulfill their respective roles in the Church through fidelity to the charism expressed in the Rule of Saint Benedict by which he himself is guided.

C 10.2. The abbot is father, teacher, and administrator, whose concern must extend to the entire way of life envisioned by the Rule of Saint Benedict.

C 20. The tenure of an abbot is governed by the proper law of the Congregation (CIC 624.1).

D 20.1. The tenure of an abbot of a territorial abbacy is established by the norms of universal law (CIC 401).

D 20.2. Every other abbot is required to submit his resignation to the President of the Congregation three months before either:

1. The completion of his seventy-fifth year of age if he has held office for at least eight years; or
2. The end of his eighth year in office if he was elected after the completion of his sixty-seventh year of age.

D 20.3. The President, after consulting the abbot who is resigning and his own council, will set the date when the office becomes vacant and will inform the abbot and community concerned in writing (cf. CIC 186).

C 21. An abbot may for serious reasons voluntarily submit his resignation to the President of the Congregation who, after consulting his council, will make suitable provisions after the circumstances have been evaluated.

C 22. An abbot who has resigned retains the rights and obligations of other capitulars in his own community, with due regard for the prescription of C 122.

D 22.1. An abbot who has resigned in accordance with D20.2 may be reelected for successive terms of eight years.

D 22.2. A resigned abbot may use the pontifical insignia according to the norms of universal law (cf. *Motu Proprio Pontificalia insignia*, 3, in *AAS* 60 [1968] 374- 377).

C 23. For very grave reason and for the welfare of a community the President of the Congregation with the consent of his council has the right to remove an abbot from office in accordance with the proper law of the Congregation.

D 23.1.

1. The abbot of a monastery is removed from office by universal law in the cases mentioned in CIC 194.
2. The President of the Congregation is the authority competent to issue any required declarations.

D 23.2.

1. An abbot may be removed from office for other very grave reasons including the following:
 1. His inability to fulfill the obligations of his office for whatever reason, including prolonged absence or grave mental or physical illness.
 2. Habitual neglect of the obligations of his office
 3. Continued disregard for the proper law of the Congregation or for the lawful

mandates imposed on him by the President of the Congregation;

4. Grave scandal arising from his culpable behavior.
2. Once the President of the Congregation has been made aware of circumstance that may warrant the removal of an abbot from office, he is to examine the evidence to determine whether the complaint is well founded. If he judges that it is, he is to consult his council and determine whether a special visitation is to be conducted or whether some other course of action is to be followed.
3. The abbot in question is to be informed of his right to self-defense and be given an opportunity to present his defense to the President.
4. If, after examining all the evidence, the President and/or the visitators determine that there are sufficient grounds to remove the abbot from office, the President is to present the matter to his council and, acting collegially with them, is to review the matter and vote upon it. If it is decided that the abbot is to be removed, the President issues the decree.
5. The abbot retains his right of recourse to the Apostolic See, in accordance with the provisions of universal law on administrative recourse (CIC 1732-1739). During the recourse, the provisions of the President's decrees remain in effect. No election of a new abbot may take place. The President will appoint an administrator.

PART II

THE PRELIMINARY PROCESS

1. Interim Administration of the Monastery

C 24. When the office of abbot becomes vacant, the prior becomes the temporary administrator of the monastery; or, if he is impeded, the subprior; if he also is impeded, the member of the council of seniors who is senior by profession, and so on.

E 17. Depending on the provisions of the acceptance of a resignation by the President, a resigning abbot may retain governance of the community until the day of the election, at which point the office of abbot becomes vacant. The resigning abbot works with the steering committee in the administration of the election process. Good sense would indicate that normally the resigning abbot keeps an appropriate distance from the process. He does, however, retain the right to vote in the actual election.

E 18. In cases where the office of abbot becomes vacant prior to the first meeting of the election chapter (cf. D 14.4, page 26), the provisions of C 24 (above) apply. In such cases the temporary administrator has the responsibility of governance of the community and administration of the election process.

D 24.2. It is the responsibility of the President of the Congregation to decide if a particular superior or other capitular is impeded from assuming the position of temporary administrator.

E 19. A temporary administrator must have the qualifications specified in C 13 (page 31).

2. Notification of Vacancy

D 24.1. It is the duty of the temporary administrator to send notice at once of the death or resignation of the abbot to the absent members of the community, the bishop of the diocese, the Abbot Primate, the President, and, if the monastery is a territorial abbacy, the Congregation of Bishops.

E 20. When the office of abbot is to be or has become vacant, all the members of the community and the others specified in D 24.1 (above) are to be notified. If he is able, the resigning abbot himself provides for such notification; otherwise it is the responsibility of the temporary administrator.

3. Constituting an Abbot

C 11. In the monasteries of the Congregation an abbot is constituted by election and the subsequent confirmation of the election by the proper authority (cf. C 18, *CIC* 625).

4. Role of the President

E 21. In preparing for an election, the President of the Congregation serves as a resource person to interpret the proper law of the Congregation, the provisions of this Guide, and the canonical regulations governing the election process. While respecting the autonomy of a community, he offers direction in problematic circumstances.

C 14. The provisions for the election of an abbot are contained in the proper law of the Congregation.

5. Scheduling an Election

D 14.1.

- 1. Upon the death or resignation of an abbot with jurisdiction, or upon the raising of a conventual priory to the status of an abbey, an election of an abbot is to be held within three months.**
- 2. Because of particular circumstances, the chapter of a monastery may vote to postpone the election of an abbot. In this case the President of the Congregation is**

to appoint a temporary administrator under the same conditions as in D 17.1 (page 37).

D 14.2.

1. **The date for an abbatial election and the appointment of a secretary for the election process, who is to keep the President informed of the preparatory plans for the election, are to be determined by the President after consultation with the superior.**

E 22. The superior of the community (either the resigning abbot or the temporary administrator) consults with the President to establish the date for the election, unless, in accordance with D 14.1.2 (page 12), the chapter has voted to postpone the election of an abbot. With due regard for the proper law of the Congregation, adequate time for preparation is to be provided between the announcement of a vacancy in the office of abbot and the date of the election.

6. Secretary and Steering Committee

E 23. The superior of the community recommends to the President the name of a capitular to be appointed as secretary of the election; the secretary may be appointed immediately.

E 24. The superior meets with the council of seniors for the purpose of deciding whether the entire council or a committee chosen from its membership will become the steering committee for the election process.

E 25.

1. Once constituted, the steering committee, with the cooperation of the superior and having consulted the community, establishes the procedures the community will use to prepare for the election and assists in carrying out these procedures.
2. The steering committee determines as soon as possible the number of names that capitulars should submit when requesting a proxy for the election. In doing so, consideration is to be given to the size of the community and the probable number of capitulars that will be absent from the election.

7. Consideration for Monks in Special Circumstances

E 26. In establishing preparatory procedures, the steering committee should make special efforts to insure that the sick living at the monastery and capitulars stationed away from the monastery participate in the preparation process as fully as circumstances allow. They are to be informed of the community's program of preparation and, whenever feasible, major preparatory events are to be scheduled so that at least those who do not live a great distance from the monastery may participate in them. Absent capitulars are to receive copies of the papers and documents presented to the resident community, as well as reports on the outcome of the various preparatory events and specific suggestions concerning ways in which they can participate in the preparation by prayer, reading, writing, and discussion.

E 27. When appropriate, capitulars living at some distance from the abbey, but fairly close to other community members (for example in a dependent priory or deanery), may be asked by the steering committee to gather as a unit of the community in their own locale to undertake those preparatory activities in which the resident community is engaged.

E 28. It is fitting that members of the community who are not capitulars participate in an appropriate way in the community's spiritual and informational preparation for an abbatial election. In preparations for the election of an abbot of a territorial abbacy the appropriate participation of others even outside the community can be particularly significant.

PART III

THE PREPARATORY PROCESS

1. The Nature of Preparation

E 29. Preparation for an abbatial election is the responsibility of each member of the community, attending to the principles and suggestions contained in this Guide (see **Appendix 2**).

E 30. A monastic community faced with the sacred task of choosing an abbot needs to prepare itself. Certain aspects of such preparation, of course, go on constantly in the day-to-day prayer and work of the community. However, the central and unique importance of the abbot in a Benedictine community counsels a very special preparation for this task, which will profoundly affect the community's future.

E 31. Every community should give high priority to the spiritual and informational preparation for the abbatial election and should seek to carry out the process in an atmosphere of faith and fraternal love. The specific means for carrying out the process will naturally vary according to the particular circumstances of each community, e.g., its size, its apostolic commitments, the number of capitulars living away from the monastery, the usefulness of the preparatory material or of the recessus of a recent visitation, and so on. Whatever the means used, they should be adequate for achieving the goal of the preparation: a community whose capitulars have shared fully in the preparatory process and who can act as faith-filled and well-informed electors.

2. The Nature of the Election Process

E 32. The process by which a monastic community chooses an abbot has both a human and a divine (or transcendent) dimension. This is so because the monastic community shares in and expresses the reality of the Church and the Church's Lord: the mysterious union and marvelous interaction of the human and divine that characterize the Incarnation. Hence, in carrying out an abbatial election, the community is called to a constant awareness of this two-fold dimension: awareness that the electoral process in all its stages is a fully human social process, with all that this implies concerning human effort and the interaction of community members; and awareness that this human effort and interaction must be penetrated at every step by an openness to the presence and action of God's Spirit.

E 33. The election of an abbot, therefore, differs in a fundamental way from the election of a chief official in a civil society. In an abbatial election the role of the community is to serve as an instrument of the Spirit of Christ, operative in and through the Church, who raises up for the community a new father in Christ.

3. Issues for Common Preparation

E 34. In his ordinary providence God works out his purpose through human agents. That is why each monk has the responsibility of doing all that is humanly possible to become an informed, sensitive and judicious elector. This requires not only individual effort but also community-wide sharing of knowledge and insights, so that an understanding of what each brother has at heart can enrich and help the judgment of all.

E 35. The human efforts to form a well-prepared electorate will ordinarily include community-wide consideration of:

1. the nature of the abbatial office as proposed in the Rule and illumined and developed by monastic history (see Appendix 1);
2. the spiritual needs and the present condition and commitments of this particular community as it has been shaped by its past and is called to serve the Church and society for the future (see Appendix 2);
3. the combination of qualities most desirable at this time in an abbot of this community (see Appendix 2);
4. in the light of all the above, the abbatial qualifications of individual community members as specified in the proper law of the Congregation (cf. C 13, page 31).

4. Individual Responsibilities in the Process

E 36. To safeguard the freedom of the electors, dishonest efforts to secure the success of a candidate are proscribed. All efforts to exercise undue influence upon the electors are understandably forbidden.

E 37. An elector is not to solicit votes for himself. Yet, this restraint does not require a person to practice false humility with regard to the gifts of nature and grace he has received. Rather, it leaves entirely to the judgment of others whether these gifts are to be called into use at this time in this particular office.

E 38. An elector is bound in conscience to strive sincerely to discern God's gifts and enter into God's designs for the welfare of the community as a whole.

E 39. The nature of the abbatial election requires action on the part of both the individual elector and the community as a whole. Since each elector is bound in conscience to vote for the person he judges to be most qualified for office in this particular set of circumstances, he must seek to acquire (and should be helped by the community to gain) that information and those dispositions that will allow him to discern:

1. what talents and capabilities make a person qualified to be abbot of this community at this particular time;
2. what potential candidate possesses these talents and capabilities to a degree that makes him the most qualified for the office.

5. Public/Private Discussion

E 40. Both private conversation and public discussions organized in a variety of ways can help clarify the combination of qualities desirable in an abbot at a particular time. Community-wide discussion can have great value not only in forming a well-prepared electorate but also in discouraging the factionalism that can be fostered when private discussion takes place only among the like-minded. Community-wide discussion can help to eliminate prejudgments about the thoughts and needs of others that result from lack of communication; it can help provide needed information about the community as a whole and about the present role of individual monks; and it can allow one to enrich the thinking of others and to have one's own limited views complemented or corrected by others' views.

E 41. The nomination and official evaluation of individual monks is reserved to the preliminary session of the election chapter. However, prior to the election chapter private discussion concerning individuals, if carried out in an appropriate way and excluding the solicitation of votes, is permissible.

E 42.

1. With regard to himself, an elector entering into public or private discussion about specific candidates must truly be seeking the welfare of the community, not simply personal or private advantage, and must desire to discover the person who is truly worthy and best qualified for the office.
2. With regard to the possible candidates discussed, the elector should be guided by a keen sense of justice and charity, with full commitment to the truth, respect for the good name and other rights of those discussed, and concern for confidentiality, particularly where its lack would injure any party concerned.
3. With regard to the other electors, the elector must fully respect their liberty, refraining not only from dishonest means of influencing them, but also from any form of undue pressure or over-urgent pleading.

E 43. Suggestions for particular methods of preparation are provided in Appendix 2 of this Guide.

6. Determining eligibility

C 12. All capitulars of the monastery have the right to vote in the election of an abbot.

D 12.1.

1. **In addition to the capitulars, all other perpetually professed monks of the community have the right to vote in the election of an abbot.**
2. **Those solemnly or perpetually professed monks who are legitimately living outside the monastery according to the provisions of CIC 665.1 have both active and passive**

voice unless other provisions were made when the permission to live outside the monastery was given and with due regard for the provisions of C 26.

3. Exclaustrated members of the community lack active and passive voice in accordance with the prescriptions of CIC 687.
4. A monk who has received the written permission of his abbot to begin the process of transfer lacks active and passive voice (cf. D 88.2.1; D 90.4).
5. Monks who are unlawfully absent from the monastery (cf. C 92; CIC 665.2) are to be declared so by the council of seniors of the monastery. The decision is to be confirmed by the President of the Congregation. Those who are unlawfully absent lack active and passive voice. At the first meeting of the election chapter, the written confirmation made by the President is to be entered into the record of the election chapter.

D 12.2. If the mental competency of a potential elector is questionable (cf. CIC 171.1), the superior is to appoint a curator to represent the monk and to defend his right to vote. The matter is to be decided by the council of seniors of the monastery. The decision is to be confirmed by the President of the Congregation. Those who are declared mentally incompetent lack active and passive voice. At the first meeting of the election chapter, the written confirmation made by the President is to be entered into the record of the election chapter.

D 12.3. In an abbatial election non-voting members of the community are not permitted to be present at any of the sessions of the election chapter but may be admitted after an election has been accepted.

7. Official Notifications

E 44. Once the required determinations regarding eligibility to vote in the abbatial election have been made, the secretary of the election is to send the notifications required by the proper law of the Congregation.

E 45. If the address of an eligible capitular is doubtful, the secretary sends the notification by certified mail to the last known address, with a return receipt requested as proof of delivery. Since CIC 166 requires, under possible penalty of declaring an election invalid, that all eligible capitulars be notified, this safeguard should not be overlooked.

D 14.2.

2. Under the direction of the superior, the secretary will send written notification to every member of the community who has the right to participate in the election, indicating the time and place of the election.
3. If the right of anyone to vote is doubtful, the secretary will consult the council of seniors. The final decision remains with the President.
4.
 1. With the notification the secretary will inform the members of the community that a monk who is legitimately impeded from attending the abbatial election may request the appointment of a proxy. Unless the monastic chapter determines otherwise, the monk may himself cast a nominating ballot by a letter sent to the secretary of the election.
 2. The secretary is likewise to send a form to be returned to him by each recipient, indicating that he has received the notification and whether he intends to be present for the election. If he cannot attend, he is to explain the reason(s). If he wishes to vote by proxy, he is to list in the order of his preference a specified number, determined by the council of seniors, of names of electors whom he would choose as his proxy; otherwise he is to indicate that he does not wish to vote in the election.
5. The secretary will request that the form be returned to him as soon as possible, or at least within a specified number of days, so that there will be sufficient time for the council of seniors of the monastery to ascertain whether the reasons are valid and whether, therefore, a proxy is to be named for the absent elector. The final decision in this matter lies with the President, who will name the proxies at the first meeting of the election chapter.

8. Proxies

D 14.3. Those who are unable to be present at an abbatial election may vote by proxy. If two or more monks choose the same proxy (cf. D 14.2.4.2, page 22), the absent elector who is senior by profession shall have the preference. An elector may act as proxy for one person only, and he must cast both ballots for the same candidate. This proxy vote is exercised in all the balloting strictly related to the election, i.e., for tellers, the nominating ballot, unless a nominating ballot has been cast by letter (cf. D 14.2.4.1, page 22), and in the election ballot itself.

E 46. Before the election the secretary delivers to the President of the Congregation all requests for proxies submitted by eligible capitulars.

9. Preparatory Duties of the Secretary

E 47.

1. The secretary, having consulted the steering committee and the superior, is to select, equip, and arrange a room in which the capitulars may carry out the election process privately and without undue distraction. Arrangements are to be so made that individual electors may cast their votes secretly.
2. In making the arrangements, the secretary should inform all concerned that the introduction of electronic recording equipment by capitulars or non-capitulars is strictly forbidden. As the sole exception, the President of the Congregation may allow an "official" recording, for the monastery archives, of events in which the confidentiality of the election is not violated (e.g. the exhortation of the President or the words of acceptance of the newly-elected abbot). If he allows this exception, the President will determine what is to be recorded, how, and by whom.

E 48. The secretary is responsible for preparing the following items:

1. A sufficient number of ballots for the selection of tellers, the naming of candidates, and the election of the abbot (see Appendix 5 for samples);
2. Instructions for tellers and proxies (see Appendices 6 and 7), the texts of the necessary oaths (see D 14.5.2, page 28; D 16.1.3-4, page 31; Appendix 8), a written order of procedure to be used by the capitulars during the election process (see Appendix 4), proxy cards if needed, a ballot box or boxes, containers in which to place the used ballots, and, if helpful, a participation sheet for use at the thanksgiving service after the election.
3. Three copies of the following official documents:
 1. the petition for confirmation of the election (see Appendix 10);
 2. the profession of faith (see Appendix
 3. confirmation of the election (see Appendix 12);
 4. protocol or official minutes of the election (see Appendix 13).

After the election, one copy of each is to be sent to the Congregation archives at Saint Vincent Archabbey, one copy is to be given to the President of the Congregation, and one copy is to be kept in the archives of the monastery.

PART IV

THE ELECTION PROCESS

1. Initial Worship Service

E49. After all the electors have assembled at the monastery, an initial worship service is celebrated, which begins the actual election process. Normally this is to be a celebration of the Eucharist. However, if the particular circumstances of the community so counsel, the election process may be opened by a prayer service in which the entire community participates. It may be either part of the Liturgy of the Hours suitably adapted for the occasion, or a specially organized service of prayers and readings. If such a prayer service for the entire community is not possible, an appropriate, brief service of prayer should be held by the electors at the beginning of the preliminary session of the election chapter (see Appendix 14).

2. First Meeting of Election Chapter

D 14.4. The first meeting of the election chapter is to be convoked for the purpose of:

- 1. the President's officially naming the proxies and confirming decisions made regarding unlawful absences and mental competence;**
- 2. the calling of the roll by the secretary;**
- 3. the election of tellers or confirmation of previously elected tellers;**
- 4. the naming and evaluating of candidates for the office of abbot.**

E 50. The first meeting of the election chapter is opened with a prayer by the President unless it begins with the initial worship service (see Appendix 14).

E 51. 1. The President of the Congregation, having previously checked the proxy list, officially names those who have been chosen as proxies for absent electors. Those named are given a proxy card. Only for the most serious reason is it permitted to ask for a proxy after this official naming.

2. An elector may act as proxy for one person only, and he must cast both ballots for the same candidate.

E 52. The secretary of the election calls the roll of electors; each responds "Present." Those who serve as proxy for an absent elector respond "Present by proxy" when the name of the absentee elector is called. The superior of the community responds for the sick in the monastery, whose ballots will be collected by the tellers.

3. Election of Tellers

D 14.5.1. For the election of tellers one ballot is taken; those (as many as may be needed) with the highest number of votes are elected.

E53. In the case of a tie vote, the senior by profession is elected.

D 14.5.2. After they have been elected, the tellers take the prescribed oath to perform their functions conscientiously and to preserve secrecy if they come to know the vote of anyone; e.g., in obtaining the votes of the sick in the monastery (see Appendix 8).

4. Naming of Candidates

D 14.6.1. After the election of tellers, each elector may name by secret ballot two monks whom he considers best suited for the office of abbot, in order that their qualifications may be evaluated by the election chapter.

E 54. Each elector is to indicate his choice or choices on a single ballot (see Appendix 5).

E 55. The ballots are counted by the tellers and those named as candidates are announced.

D 14.6.2. If a monk who has been named in the balloting wishes to withdraw his name, he may state that, as of the moment, he would not accept the election and he may request that the electors do not vote for him. The electors, however, remain free to vote for him if they wish to do so.

D 14.6.6. The President may determine, in consultation with the electors, whether every monk named should be evaluated, or only those who have been named a specified number of times. Even if a minimum number has been set, the electors remain free to vote for candidates who have not been evaluated. Prior to the election ballot, the President will state that, if someone not evaluated draws a specified number of votes, he will stop the balloting and ask the chapter to evaluate that candidate.

5. Evaluation of Candidates

E 56. The President reminds the electors of the serious obligation to observe charity during the evaluation and to maintain secrecy regarding statements made during the process, especially those that are offered as a negative evaluation of a person's character or actions.

D 14.6.3. Beginning with the one most frequently named, each monk who has been named as a candidate will leave the room while his qualifications for the office of abbot are evaluated. After his evaluation has been completed, the monk is free to return for the evaluation of the others named.

4. If there is anyone in the chapter, including the superior or the President, who is related by blood or marriage to the fourth degree (i.e., up to first cousins), inclusive, to the monk being discussed, the relative will leave the meeting for the evaluation of that candidate. If the President must leave he is to appoint someone to preside during his temporary absence.

5. In an election that follows the resignation of an abbot, the abbot who resigned will absent himself from the entire evaluation process.

E.57. When the evaluations are concluded, the President closes the session with a prayer (see Appendix 14).

E.58. The secretary of the election places the used ballots from this session in sealed containers to be destroyed.

D 14.7. An elector who has definite knowledge of something of a serious moral or canonical nature that is not publicly known and that he judges in conscience makes the monk unfit for the office of abbot, must inform the President privately. If he judges the information well founded, the President, respecting the right to self-defense on the part of the candidate concerned, must speak with him privately. If he is convinced in conscience that the candidate is unworthy, he must state that, if the candidate is elected, he will not confirm the election.

6. Balloting for Candidates

D 14.8. In order to allow sufficient time for prayer and reflection, the balloting for candidates for the office of abbot is not to begin until several hours have elapsed after the close of the evaluation.

E.59 When the electors reconvene for the abbatial election, the President opens the session with a prayer (see Appendix 14).

D 16.1. After the electors have gathered for the balloting:

1. The secretary will call the roll;

E 60. The secretary of the election calls the roll of electors; each responds "Present." Those who serve as proxy for an absent elector respond "Present by proxy" when the name of the absentee elector is called. The superior of the community responds for the sick in the monastery, whose ballots will be collected by the tellers. The secretary records the number of electors present in person or by proxy.

D 16.1

2. The President or his delegate will read chapter 64 of the Rule of Saint Benedict,
3. After the President has given an exhortation, he will take the prescribed oath (see Appendix 8);
4. The electors also take the prescribed oath (see Appendix 8).

7. Requirements for Election

E 61. Electors are to be aware of the provisions of the proper law of the Congregation regarding eligibility of a candidate and requirements for election.

C 13. In order to be validly elected to the office of abbot it is required that a monk be:

1. at least thirty years of age;
2. solemnly professed for at least seven years (CYC 623);
3. an ordained priest;
4. a member of the Congregation.

D 14.9.

1. To be valid a vote must be free, secret, certain, absolute, and determinate (CIC 172.1).
2. Any condition attached to a vote prior to the election is to be considered as not having been attached (CIC 172.2).

C 15.1. Not more than six valid ballots are permitted in the election of an abbot. To be validly elected on one of the first three ballots a candidate must receive the votes of two-thirds of the electors responding to the roll call either in person or by proxy.

C16.

1. If a candidate is impeded from being elected by a canonical impediment that can be dispensed, he may be postulated in accordance with the norms of universal law and the proper law of the Benedictine Confederation (CIC 180-183; Lex Propria, 45).
2. The monk being postulated must receive on any ballot at least two-thirds of the votes of the electors responding to the roll call.

8. Balloting Procedure

D15. Before each ballot the secretary is to determine if the number of electors present has changed since the roll call. If it has, he is to inform the President, who will announce the new number of votes required for the appropriate majority.

E 62. The tellers distribute the ballots in whatever way seems most convenient, giving two ballots to those who have proxy cards.

E 63. Each elector marks his ballot secretly and deposits his ballot in the ballot box; one who is a proxy casts his own ballot first, shows his proxy card, and drops in the proxy ballot.

E 64. One or two tellers obtain the votes of those in the monastery who are unable, because of illness, to be present in the election hall. Before the first ballot the teller has the sick monk take the prescribed oath (see Appendix 8). The sick monk marks his ballot secretly; if he is unable to do this, the teller may do so for him, at his request, and the teller is bound by the oath of secrecy. The ballots of the sick are mingled with those cast in the election hall.

D 16.2. After each ballot, the President will ask the tellers to count the ballots; if the number is equal to, or less than, the number of electors, he will instruct the tellers to open the ballots. If the number of ballots exceeds the number of electors, the ballots are not opened but sealed and set aside to be destroyed later with the valid ballots. Such an invalid ballot does not count in the six ballots permitted.

D. 16.3.

1. After each ballot has been opened, read aloud, and passed to another teller for verification, it is passed to the President. If any question arises concerning the validity or the meaning of a ballot, the tellers ask the President for a decision.
2. After each balloting the teller announces the results.

E 65. If the required majority has not been attained, the teller announces this fact and adds that, according to the proper law of the Congregation a second (or third) ballot is required (see Appendix 9). If the required majority has been reached, the process continues with D 16.4 (below).

C 15.2. If there is no election after three ballots, time for reflection and prayer is to be given to the electors.

E 66. When the election chapter reconvenes, the process begins again with an opening prayer, the calling of the roll, and the voting.

C 15.3. To be validly elected on one of the final three ballots a candidate must receive the votes of more than half of the number of electors responding to the roll call.

9. Declaration of an Election

D 16.4.1. When all the ballots have been counted and the required majority has been reached, the secretary asks the President to declare an election. After doing so, the President will inform the monk elected that, in accord with CIC 177A, he has eight days to accept or reject the election. At the same time the President will remind the monk of the difficulties a lengthy delay could cause. The President may then declare a recess of at least half an hour.

2. The President, either immediately or after the chapter has reconvened, asks the monk elected if he accepts. If he does accept, the process continues with C 18 (below).

10. Election Accepted

C 18. A monk who is elected abbot and who accepts the office must request confirmation of the election from the President of the Congregation. In the case of a territorial abbacy, confirmation of the election must be sought from the Apostolic See.

E. 67. To request confirmation, the monk who is elected signs the previously prepared petition and presents it to the President (see Appendix 10).

D 18. Before the election can be confirmed, the newly-elected abbot is to make a profession of faith (CIC 833; see Appendix 11).

E. 67. To confirm the election, the President signs the previously prepared document (see Appendix 12).

C. 19 Once an election has been confirmed, the newly elected abbot obtains full jurisdiction according to the norms of universal law and the proper law of the Congregation. He has all the rights and obligations attributed in universal law to the major superior of a clerical institute of pontifical right (CIC 596).

E 69. The President of the Congregation, the tellers, and the secretary of the election sign the official minutes of the election. The copy of the minutes that is to be kept in the monastery archives may also be signed by all the electors if this is desired (see Appendix 13).

E 70. At his earliest convenience, the secretary should see that all the ballots used in the election are destroyed.

E 71. After the election and confirmation of the abbot, a brief thanksgiving service is held in the abbey church, where the capitulars are joined by the other members of the community. Among the elements of this service may be a prayer for the newly-elected abbot, the sign of peace exchanged between the abbot and the members of the community, the new abbot's blessing, and a hymn of thanksgiving (see Appendix 15).

11. Election Refused

D 16.5.1. If the monk elected does not accept the election, he loses any right deriving from the election and does not regain such right by a subsequent acceptance; such a monk can, however, be elected again (CIC 177.2).

2. If the monk elected refuses the election, a new election must begin within a

month after such refusal. In the new election, which may begin immediately, six ballots are permitted, with the same majorities required: two-thirds on the first three ballots; and an absolute majority on the next three.

E 72. If the monk elected refuses the election, a new election may begin after allowing time for prayer and reflection.

12. Election Deferred

C 17. The right of appointing a temporary administrator devolves upon the President of the Congregation if there is no election after the specified number of ballots.

D 17.1. If there is no election after six ballots the election of an abbot is deferred. Except in the case of a territorial abbacy, the right of appointing a temporary administrator devolves upon the President of the Congregation, after consulting with the community and his own council. The term of the temporary administrator, who must have the same qualifications as an abbot, is determined by the President after consulting with his council; however, it must not exceed three years, computed from the date of taking office. At the end of the term the President, after consulting his council, may reappoint the administrator or make other suitable provisions.

D 17.2. The temporary administrator has the full jurisdiction of a major superior.

D 17.3. The President, with the consent of his council, may terminate the office of a temporary administrator at any time, either when the community appears ready before the end of three years to elect an abbot, or when the temporary administrator, for any reason, is unable to continue. In the former case, the community will proceed to the election of an abbot in the usual manner; in the latter, the President, after consulting his council, will make suitable provision.

13. Abbatial Blessing

D 19. Within three months of the election, a new abbot is to receive the abbatial blessing. A superior who is not an abbot does not receive this blessing.

PART V

NOTES ON THE ABBATIAL BLESSING

E 73. Since the circumstances in which an abbatial blessing is celebrated vary so much from one monastery to another, it does not seem feasible to draw up specific guidelines to cover all situations. Instead, a few theological and liturgical principles underlying the rite for the blessing of an abbot as revised according to the spirit of Vatican Council II may serve as guides for the preparation of a celebration that will both reflect a community's specific needs and accord with sound monastic and liturgical practice.

E 74. The blessing of an abbot is understood within the ecclesial tradition of calling God's blessing upon all those who are to exercise a role of service in the community. At the culmination of a process of discerning and selecting the candidate, the prayerful support of the Church is given to the "abba" who undertakes the heavy task of teaching others by word and example the fear of the Lord. The 1970 *Rite of Blessing of an Abbot* is a revision of the previous abbatial blessing ritual, drawing on the rich heritage of historical development yet in keeping with the theology and guidelines of the Vatican II reforms. Accordingly there has been an effort to simplify the rite and have it reflect present reality, to avoid confusion with the ordination of a bishop, and to move from a previously too juridical cast to a more spiritual and monastic tone in the texts (see commentary by S.B. in *Notitiae* 7 [1971] 35-36).

E 75. The blessing of an abbot takes place as a celebration of the local church, which is understood primarily as the monastic community, gathered with their bishop, and usually joined by other monks and faithful related to the community.

E 76. The blessing has occurred traditionally within the context of the eucharistic celebration, expressing the inner affinity with the mystery of Christ's self-sacrificing service, the sacrament of his body and blood, by which the whole brotherhood is united.

E 77. The *Rite of Blessing* is conducted in a way that manifests the liturgical signs with simplicity and clarity:

1. The abbot is presented to the bishop by two monks of the community, one of whom requests the bishop to bless the candidate, testifying that he has been duly elected.
2. The homily is followed by the examination of the candidate in a series of questions posed by the bishop which emphasize the role of the abbot as found in the Rule.
3. The prayer of blessing, preceded by an invitation to prayer and the litany of the saints, is the central part of the rite (four options for this prayer are given). It is primarily a petition that the new abbot may fulfill his pastoral role.
4. The presentation of the Rule and of the staff continues the most ancient monastic tradition. The presentation of ring and miter are optional, in keeping with the *motu proprio* of 1968 on the reform of the use of pontifical insignia.
5. The sign of peace is given to the newly-blessed abbot by the members of the community.
6. The celebration of the eucharist continues, according to the rite of concelebration.

E 78. The introduction to the 1970 *Rite of Blessing* mentions that the abbot-elect is wearing pectoral cross and dalmatic at the beginning of the Mass of blessing. Use of the dalmatic is optional since the reform of insignia in 1968. Use of the pectoral cross is seen today not as an item of pontifical accoutrement but as a simple distinction of the abbot within the community and it is normally conferred during the concluding ceremonies of the election process.

E 79. A short bibliography on the *Rite of Blessing of an Abbot* is provided at the end of Appendix 1 of this Guide.