

What is the role of a Vicar General and a Moderator of the Curia in a diocese?

According to the *Code of Canon Law*, “In each diocese the diocesan Bishop must appoint a Vicar General ... who is to assist him in the governance of the whole diocese” (canon 475.1). He “has the executive power over the whole diocese which belongs to the diocesan Bishop by law” (canon 479.1). That is, he is given the authority to carry out all administrative functions except those which can only be performed by a Bishop (such as ordinations and consecrations) and anything that the Bishop reserves to himself.

Although he is given authority to act by virtue of his office, the Vicar General may “never act contrary to the intention and mind of the diocesan Bishop,” and he “must report to the diocesan Bishop concerning the more important affairs which are to be handled or have been handled” (canon 480). The title of Vicar General dates back at least to the thirteenth century, and the role is connected to an older office, that of *archdeacon*, which is first mentioned in the fourth century.

The *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* (2004) says that “the diocesan Bishop should appoint as Vicar General a priest who is doctrinally sound, trustworthy, esteemed by the presbyterate and in public opinion. He should be wise, honest and morally upright, with pastoral and administrative experience, capable of establishing a good human rapport with others and competent in dealing with diocesan affairs. He should be not less than thirty years old, but when possible, it is preferable that he should be forty years old or more, with suitable academic preparation ...” (no. 178).

In carrying out the pastoral governance of a diocese, a diocesan Bishop is assisted by a number of clergy, religious and lay faithful in various roles, institutions and offices. Together, these collaborators compose the diocesan *curia*. To help ensure that all of them work well together, “the Bishop can also establish the office of Moderator of the Curia with the specific task of coordinating administrative affairs and of taking care that the other members of the curia properly fulfill their duties” (*Directory*, no.177). The Moderator of the Curia is always a priest, and usually the Vicar General.

“In directing and coordinating all the work of the diocese agencies,” the *Directory* says, like the Bishop himself the Moderator of the Curia should “keep in mind, as a general principle, that diocesan structures should always be at the service of the good of souls, and that administrative demands should not take precedence over the care of persons.” Rather, all administrative work should “always be directed towards its proper supernatural end” (no. 177).