

Governance Study Group Report

Study Group Members:

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Introduction

The governance post pre-assembly working group met for three sessions. During the sessions of the group, a review was conducted regarding outstanding resolutions from previous assemblies in need of ratification. The working group also examined the various proposals relating to the topic of governance surfaced at the pre-assembly meetings as well as in the conversations of the members of the working group. The work of the group included drawing upon the experiences of other religious institutes and societies of apostolic life as we look upon these topics with an eye to the assembly gathering.

Ratification of 2022 Resolutions

In reviewing the previous assemblies, our committee found the following governance resolutions of the 2022 General Assembly in need of ratification at the 2026 General Assembly.

#2 (D103) The term of office for the Local Superior and for Pastors of Paulist Foundations will be four years; they may be reappointed for additional terms of either two or four years; ordinarily for no more than twelve years.

#3 (D43) The Vice President will be elected by popular ballot for a term of four years and may be reelected.

#5 (D3) Be it resolved that D3 be amended with the designation of St. Isaac Joques, St. John XXIII, St. Kateri Tekakwitha and St. Oscar Romero.

It should be noted that the Dicastery for the Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life of the Holy See had granted an *ad experimentum* implementation of resolution **#2** and **#5**, these still require ratification by the upcoming assembly. The working group recommends the adoption of the above resolutions.

New Themes

The working group reviewed the following themes that emerged from the pre-assemblies and from the topics raised by members of the working group.

Expanding Membership of General Assembly

Much discussion was had around the composition of the general assembly. The working group recognized the communal conversations in recent years to move towards an assembly of the whole. Proposals for inclusion of lay collaborators, associates, and deacon affiliates were also examined at length.

In reviewing the various options, the working group firstly commends the synodal processes leading up to the 2026 General Assembly whereby there was greater lay participation in the process. The working groups also allow issues to be surfaced and examined by selected groups of those with interests and expertise in the specific area of our mission and ministry.

While there is much support for universal suffrage at future general assemblies, concerns were raised regarding the ability of various constituencies of the community being able to travel to and be present at the assembly. Considering the diaspora and the priestly commitments of the members of the Society, it will be inevitable that certain groups be better represented than others, diluting the voices of segments of the community. There are also concerns about the feasibility of gathering of the whole for the protracted period of time. While the use of technology to mitigate this was explored, it was also pointed out that the natural conversations of a general assembly are just as important as the formal sessions. Other concerns include the extensive constitutional revisions needed to affect universal suffrage.

The working group explored other models of communal bodies in the Church. Some communities have retained the election of delegates while allowing other non-elected members to be present and take part in subcommittees and natural conversations of the gathering. Others have included non-voting delegates to include non-professed members.

Using synodal processes enabled the community to welcome the voices of laity throughout the preparations for the 2026 General Assembly. Listening sessions at Paulist Foundations shared the insights of the laity. Pre-assemblies had more laity than ever before, and laity are also involved in the working groups from emerging themes formed after the pre-assemblies. In light of this, all Paulists and laity are involved in the discernment process leading up to the General Assembly.

It is recommended for consideration that Paulist members of working groups be invited to serve as non-voting delegates if they are not elected to be a delegate at the general assembly. It is not the recommendation of this working group to pursue the option of universal suffrage at this time.

Leadership Structures

The working group also examined the composition and configuration of the general council and the presidential board. It is acknowledged that there is a notion that the community has a disproportionate leadership team for the size of the society. Other institutes and societies of comparable or large membership have functioned with a smaller council. Questions were raised regarding the need for as many full-time members in the administration of the community.

In studying composition of the council and its configuration, the working group first examined the various roles of the general council – namely to serve as an advisory body to the president, to be a decisive body as envisioned by the Constitution, and to serve as a check upon the exercise of administrative power of the president. In addition, the council is often called upon to exercise roles relating to the civil affairs of the Society.

The working group noted that the larger council allows for greater diversity of viewpoints to advise and to provide checks upon the president. It was noted that a smaller leadership would also mean a more centralization of power upon the administrator, which is contrary to the spirit of the community. Lastly, the working group raised concerns that a smaller council would mean a greater burden of responsibilities, such as visitations, upon the members of the general council. The implication of this concern is that qualified candidates would be less willing to step forward for this role of service to the community given the balancing of other ministerial commitments. It was the consensus of the working group that a diffusion of power and responsibilities should be of predominant value given our smaller numbers of professed members.

It is the recommendation of the working group that the size of the council be retained and that the work of the council be made more manageable. This can include reduction of in person meetings and the utilization of more regular consultation using modern technology.

Election of Leadership

Foremost among the issues of the society's election process is the proposal for the adjustment of the terms of its officers. The working group explored the benefits and the drawbacks of a 6-year nonrenewable term of office. It was noted that the adjustment allows a longer term to carry out visions without the motivation of reelection. Some feedback from other communities have indicated that a 6-year term can be challenging upon the office holders and does not allow as much flexibility for adaptation to the signs of the times. The majority of the working group was in support of a six-year term for the office of President of the Paulist Fathers and recommends this for further discernment.

Other topics the working group considered included the timing of our election, the number of colleges in the assembly and the method of selection of delegates. The working group again acknowledges these as topics of conversation and commends it to the general assembly for any future discussion.