

# Questions about Bishops in the Catholic Church

## 1. What is the role of a bishop in the Catholic Church?

Bishops are successors of the apostles and, in their own diocese; they are the chief teachers, sanctifiers and shepherds of God's people.

"Each bishop works in his particular diocese in a priestly, shepherding and teaching role. He possesses the fullness of the priesthood and so is the principal celebrant of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, by which the Church grows in holiness and union with Christ. He is also the chief shepherd of the diocese and so is responsible for compassionate and loving governance of the people entrusted to him. And he is the chief teacher of his diocese, responsible for authentic proclamation of the Gospel." (USCCA 133)

Beyond his own diocese, a bishop has a role in the universal Church. Ordination integrates him into the College of Bishops in communion with the Pope. He exercises his ministry collegially and shares with the pope and the other bishops care for the whole Church.

This follows the example of the apostles who were chosen and sent out together by Christ. Just as St. Peter and the other apostles formed a single *apostolic college*, so the bishops, successors of the apostles united with Peter's successor, the Pope, form one *episcopal college* to shepherd and teach the Church today.

Bishops do not act in the name of the pope, but exercise their ministry "personally in the name of Christ." "Bishops should not be thought of as vicars of the Pope," although they exercise their authority "in communion with the whole Church under the guidance of the Pope." The Pope's authority does not conflict with that of bishops, but defends and confirms their authority. (CCC 895)

Bishops are referred to as successors of the apostles, vicars of Christ, and shepherds of the church.

## 2. Where does the word "bishop" come from? Are bishops mentioned in the Bible?

The word "bishop" has its roots in the Greek word *ἐπίσκοπος* (episkopos). The prefix *epi* means "over," *skopeo* means "to look or watch." So, *episkopos* is an overseer, someone who watches over others. This was a term used for early church leaders. In Latin, the word became *episcopus*; in old English, *bisceop*; finally in English, *bishop*.

In the New Testament, passages that mention bishops in the early church include Acts 20:28, Philippians 1:1, I Timothy 3:2, and Titus 1:7. In these passages, *ἐπίσκοπος* is rendered as "bishop" or as "overseer" depending on which translation of the Bible is used.

The adjective *episcopal* derives from *ἐπίσκοπος* and means "of, or relating to bishops." Likewise, *episcopacy* and *episcopate* refer to the position of bishop or to the bishops collectively.

### **3. What is a diocese? What is an archdiocese?**

A *diocese* is a territorial division of the church under the care and authority of a bishop. It is a geographic area and the community of Christians who live there. A diocese is made up of local communities of Catholics called *parishes*.

An *archdiocese* is the chief diocese in a group of neighboring dioceses. It may be prominent because of its history, large population, or influence. Often an archdiocese is the diocese that first existed in a region before other dioceses were established in the area.

A group of dioceses, including the local archdiocese, is called a *province*.

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee is the archdiocese for the ecclesiastical Province of Milwaukee which comprises the entire state of Wisconsin. There are five dioceses in the province: Diocese of Green Bay, Diocese of LaCrosse, Diocese of Superior, Diocese of Madison and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

### **4. What is the difference between a bishop and an archbishop?**

A bishop who is entrusted with the pastoral care of a diocese is a *diocesan bishop*. A diocesan bishop who is entrusted with care of an archdiocese is an *archbishop*.

An archbishop is also called the *metropolitan* archbishop when referring to his role as head of the province. In this capacity, he has certain limited obligations and authority with respect to the other dioceses in his province.

### **5. If a diocesan bishop or archbishop is the chief teacher and shepherd in a diocese, is there more than one bishop in Milwaukee?**

Each diocese has only one diocesan bishop or archbishop. But a diocese may have one or more *auxiliary bishops*. An auxiliary bishop is appointed as a full-time assistant to the diocesan bishop.

An auxiliary bishop is also called a *titular bishop*. Not having his own diocese to oversee, he is named as head of a titular see, that is, a city that was once seat of a diocese but no longer is. He is bishop of that place in *title* only, thus a titular bishop. His actual ministry and concern is for the diocese in which he is appointed as an auxiliary.

**6. Most Reverend James Patrick Powers, is the 11<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Superior, the previous 10 Bishops were:**

In chronological order, the Bishops of Superior were Bishops Augustine Francis Schinner, Joseph Maria Koudelka, Joseph Gabriel Pinten, Theodore Henry Reverman, William Patrick O'Connor, Albert Gregory Meyer, Joseph John Annabring, George Albert Hammes, Raphael Michael Fliss, and Peter Forsyth Christensen

**7. What is the difference between installation and ordination of a bishop?**

*Ordination* is the liturgical rite that confers the sacrament of Holy Orders. In the case of episcopal ordination, it confers the fullness of the sacrament and makes one a bishop.

When a bishop is transferred from one diocese to become the bishop of another diocese, he is received by the community of the new diocese at the cathedral. Already a bishop, he now becomes the bishop or archbishop of that particular diocese. This *installation* includes his ritual reception in the cathedral and the public reading of his letter of appointment.

**8. What is the relationship between priests and bishops? What is the relationship of deacons to the bishop?**

Priests are co-workers with the bishops, ordained to preach the Gospel, celebrate the sacraments, and shepherd the faithful. They are united with the bishops in priestly dignity and, at the same time, depend on them in the exercise of their pastoral functions. The priests of a diocese form around their bishop the *presbyterium* which shares responsibility with him for the local Church. A priest is appointed by the bishop to the pastoral care of a parish or to some other ministry.

Deacons are assistants to the bishop, ordained for service in the Church. They do not receive the ministerial priesthood, but their diaconal ordination confers on them important functions in the ministries of the word, worship, and charity. They carry out these functions under the authority of their bishop.

The sacrament of Holy Orders is composed of these three degrees – the episcopate, the presbyterate and the diaconate. Thus the hierarchy of the Church consists of bishops, priests and deacons.

**9. What is the sacramental role of a bishop?**

Bishops, like priests, celebrate the Eucharist, baptize, celebrate the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, witness marriages, and anoint the sick. Bishops confer the sacrament of holy orders and are able to ordain deacons, priests and bishops. Bishops are the original ministers of confirmation, though priests may confirm when delegated or when liturgical law indicates. Only bishops consecrate chrism, the holy oil used at baptism, confirmation and ordinations.

## 10. Where can I learn more about Catholic Bishops?

### Doctrinal Information

Three catechisms present the Catholic teaching on the hierarchy of the church, the ministry of bishops, and the sacrament of holy orders.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), paragraphs 874-896: The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church and 1555-1561: Episcopal Ordination.

*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 174-187 and 326-327.

*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA), Chapter 11: The Four Marks of the Church, and Chapter 20: Holy Orders

Documents of Vatican II and of Pope John Paul II also present Catholic teaching on bishops.

*Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, esp. #20-27, Vatican II

*Christus Dominus*, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, Vatican II

*Pastores Gregis*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Bishop, Pope John Paul II (2003)

### Diocesan, Historical and Biographical Information

For information about the bishops of the Diocese of Superior:

Diocese of Superior website: <http://catholicdos.org/>

Former bishops of Superior: <http://catholicdos.org/history>

For information about the Cathedral of Christ the King:

Cathedral Website: <http://www.superiorcathedral.org/>

Cathedral Tour: <http://www.superiorcathedral.org/history.html>

For information on dioceses and bishops of the United States, and definitions of terms:

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

US Bishops and Dioceses: [www.usccb.org/about/bishops-and-dioceses/all-dioceses.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/about/bishops-and-dioceses/all-dioceses.cfm)

Glossary of Catholic Terms: [www.usccb.org/about/media-relations/glossary/](http://www.usccb.org/about/media-relations/glossary/)