

TITLES, TERMS, MINISTRIES

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.
~ Ephesians 4:11-12

THE PEOPLE WHO BECOME PART of an organization always have a new vocabulary to learn. The Catholic Church, which is nearly 2,000 years old, has developed a tremendous number of terms covering every aspect of its activity. This hand-out provides a guide to some of the more common ones that might be encountered. For the sake of simplicity, the following refers almost exclusively to the Latin rite, to which most English-speaking Catholics belong.

Most people know that the head of the Catholic Church, its supreme authority on earth, is the **Pope** (from Latin and Greek for “father”). The Pope is also known as the **Supreme Pontiff**, a term that derives from the Latin title of the chief priest of pagan Rome, the *pontifex maximus* or “chief bridge-builder” (from the gods to the people).

The Pope is the Bishop of Rome, that is, he is responsible also for the specific geographic area in and around that city. Such a geographic area is called a **diocese** (from the Greek word *diokesis*, referring to the management of a household, which was applied in ancient Roman civil administration to a geographic area dependent for its administration on a city), and a **bishop** (from the Greek word *episcopos*, meaning “overseer”) is the chief shepherd of a diocese. Every area of the world where there is a significant number of Catholics is organized into one or more dioceses, usually named

after their principal cities. Each diocese is headed by its own bishop, who has his own authority as a successor to the apostles — that is, he is not a subordinate of the Pope, even though he is appointed by him, but exercises his “pastoral office over the por-

“A bishop is the chief shepherd of a diocese.”



St. Anthony's Parish in Wichita, Kansas, founded in 1887

tion of the People of God assigned”¹³ to him (CCC 886). **Provinces** are groups of dioceses organized under an **archdiocese**, headed by an **archbishop** (also called a **metropolitan**). Bishops of dioceses under an archdiocese are called **suffragan bishops** (that is, they may vote in provincial councils). The bishop of a diocese is often called the **ordinary**, that is, the one who exercises “ordinary jurisdiction” over a diocese. He can be assisted by **auxiliary bishops**. Auxiliary bishops are often given specific parts of the diocese to manage under the overall supervision of the bishop. Large groups of dioceses are called **regions**. In some countries, one bishop is considered the “first among equals” and is called the **primate**. A few Latin-rite dioceses have **patriarchs** (for example, Venice, Italy).

This title is, however, much more common in Eastern-rite churches. Collectively, the bishops are called the **episcopate** and, together, they in communion with the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) have a “common solicitude ... for the universal Church” (CCC 879).

Dioceses are broken down into **parishes** (from

the Greek *paroikia*, meaning a neighboring group of homes), geographic areas with a common building for worship usually called a **church**. Both the parish and the church are named after some event in our Lord's life (for example, Incarnation or Resurrection church), his Mother using her name or one of her titles (for example, St. Mary's, Immaculate Conception, or Our Lady of Good Counsel parish), or saints or angels. While parishes have borders, Catholics residing within the boundaries of a given parish are not required to be members of that parish. They are, however, strongly encouraged to do so since they form a natural community of neighbors as well. Parishes are headed by **pastors** (from the Greek word for "shepherd") who are **priests** (a word derived from the Greek *presbyteros*, meaning "elder"). Other priests may also serve the parish as **associate pastors or parochial vicars**, especially if it has a large membership. Unlike bishops, who are not subordinates of the Pope, priests obtain their authority from their bishop. They are subordinate to the bishop and take a vow of obedience to him. Priests receive their powers through the sacrament of Holy Orders, which is conferred by a bishop. (Bishops are consecrated by several bishops simultaneously.) Priests can administer all the sacraments except Holy Orders, which is reserved exclusively to bishops; their administration of the sacrament of Confirmation, however, is permitted only during the Easter Vigil when adults are received into the Church (or into full communion if already baptized). Collectively, priests are called the **presbyterate**. Training for priests takes place at **seminaries**, whose enrollees are called **seminarians**.

Within large dioceses, parishes are sometimes grouped into **deaneries**, and one pastor is named as

dean (from the Greek word *deka*, originally denoting a minor military officer but later used for minor officials in the household of the Roman emperor). In other dioceses, parishes may be grouped into a **vicariate** under a **vicar** (from the Latin *vicarius*, meaning "instead of"), who may be a bishop or monsignor (for monsignor, see below). Some positions within a diocese use the title vicar as well, such as **vicar general** (if there is one cleric who is administratively responsible under the bishop) and **judicial vicar** (who is responsible for dealing with questions of annulments, that is, determining whether a marriage is sacramental or not). The Pope is sometimes called the **Vicar of Christ**.

Deacons (named from the Greek word *diakonos*, meaning "servant") are clergy who, like priests, obtain their authority from their bishop through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Deacons have some of the powers of the sacrament of Holy Orders, and can baptize, witness marriages, preside at funerals (but not celebrate the Mass), and offer blessings. Unlike bishops and priests who must be **celibate** (unmarried), deacons can be married (although if ordained before marriage, they cannot later marry). Deacons serve in a wide variety of parish and non-parish capacities. Altogether, the Pope, bishops, priests, and deacons form the **hierarchy** (from the Greek *hierarchia*, meaning "sacred rule"), an ordered clergy whose hallmark is their special calling of service to the People of God exercised in the name of Christ, the true Head of the Church.

There are also titles of honor. Priests can be named **monsignor** (from the French for "my lord"). This title gives no additional powers or duties. Bishops, priests, and deacons can be named **cardinal** (from the Latin *cardo*, meaning "hinge"; the term originally

"Parishes are geographic areas with a common building for worship usually called a church."



A Catholic deacon vesting for Mass in the sacristy of a parish

referred to a central or bishop's church, the "hinge" church for the diocese, but over time, the term began to be used in a more restricted way). In the modern Church, the overwhelming number of cardinals are bishops. The few non-bishop cardinals are usually priests given the title to honor a lifetime of faithful service as theologians, and are usually over 80 when so named. While the title of cardinal is honorary, it has real significance in the governance of the Church. Since 1059, only cardinals may gather in **conclave** (from the Latin for "with a key," referring to the locked nature of the proceedings) to participate in electing a pope, replacing a system by which the clergy of Rome chose the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) in elections often affected by turbulent and violent partisan mobs of Romans. (As a reflection of the ancient practice, each cardinal is named as "titular" pastor of a church in Rome.) Bishops who have high-ranking posts in governing the Church are usually named cardinals, as are bishops of prominent dioceses throughout the world. When a cardinal, the ordinary of a diocese is often called the **cardinal-archbishop** or **cardinal-bishop**.

It is usually not difficult to identify a cleric. Everyday wear for Roman Catholic clergy (except the Pope) is a black business suit and a black shirt with a **Roman collar**, an up-ended collar with a white undercollar visible as a "notch." (In some cases, such as certain European countries, priests do not wear clerical garb when not performing liturgical functions. Deacons are also less likely to wear clerical garb on a day-to-day basis. Seminarians will also sometimes wear clerical garb.) Clergy who are members of **religious orders** usually do not wear the black suit but the **habit** of their order. This habit is normally black, black and white, brown, or gray. (Women's and non-

clerical men's religious orders also often, but not always, distinguish themselves with habits.)

The Pope does not wear a business suit, but instead a white **simar** (an ankle-length garment, with an elbow-length shoulder cape, buttoned all the way down the front) and a white **zucchetto** (a skullcap). The practice of wearing white dates from Pope St. Pius V, who as a member of the Dominican religious order always wore

white. When not wearing a suit, cardinals wear a scarlet **cassock** (known to non-English speakers as a **sout-ane**), a garment similar to the Pope's simar but without the cape, and a scarlet zucchetto, or a black simar or cassock with a scarlet **fascia** (a wide sash) and the scarlet zucchetto. Scarlet signifies that they are ready to shed their blood for Christ, and is the source of our "cardinal red." Where the cardinals' color is scarlet, bishops wear a color called amaranth red (which looks like fuschia or magenta). Monsignors wear black cassocks (never simars) with amaranth-red trim but black fascia and no zucchetto.

During liturgical celebrations, all clergy wear a **stole** (a long, fairly narrow band of cloth). The Pope, bishops, and priests wear the stole over the neck and

down the chest; deacons wear it across the left shoulder and fastened at the hip. Bishops wear a **mitre**, a covering for the head formed of two stiff, flat pieces that come to a peak, joined at the sides and with two ribbon-like extensions from the lower edge of the back piece. Archbishops wear a special, additional sign of office called the **pallium**, a loose, narrow cowl of white wool with extensions down the front and back. Only the Pope may wear his pallium at liturgical celebrations outside his own diocese, and only the Pope may confer the pallium. (For more on liturgical vestments, see the handout Liturgical Vocabulary List.) Bishops also carry a **crozier**, which is a staff with a shepherd's crook (except for the Pope's, which has a crucifix).

"The Pope, bishops, priests, and deacons form the hierarchy."



His Eminence James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore from 1877 to 1921

The Church is governed from **Vatican City**, an independent nation within the city of Rome. (In centuries past, the Pope had governed large swaths of territory in central Italy called the Papal States. The effort to unify Italy as a nation in the 19th century resulted in the cession of the Papal States to secular control.) Overall, the government of the Church is called the **Holy See** or **Apostolic See** (from the Latin *sedes*, meaning “chair,” from which an official governs), and is often referred to as “the Vatican” or “the papacy.” The Vatican bureaucracy is collectively called the **Roman curia**, which is a term taken from the ancient Roman civil government. **Tribunals** are administrative courts; the most commonly encountered one is the diocesan tribunal that handles cases of annulment. As part of his teaching office, the Pope will periodically issue written documents, the best-known of which are **encyclicals**, addressed to the entire Catholic clergy and faithful. Every five years, bishops go to Rome to report on the conditions of their dioceses.

These visits are called **ad limina apostolorum** visits, informally “ad limina” visits. The term is a Latin phrase meaning “on the threshold of the apostles,” referring to the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome.

A Catholic church building consists of, at least, a **nave** (from a Greek term for the central area of a temple), where the congregation gathers for worship, and a **sanctuary**, or holy area, around the **altar**. The sanctuary can also be called the **apse** or the **chancel**. Most churches also have **vestibules**, closed entrance areas before the nave. These are sometimes called **narthexes**. Cross-aisles are called **transepts**.

The principal church in a diocese is the **cathedral**, the bishop’s church. The name comes from the Greek word *kathedra*, meaning “throne” or “elevated seat,” that is, the official “location” from which the bishop teaches. (When the Pope teaches infallibly, he is said to teach **ex cathedra**, which is Latin for “from the chair.”) Other large or important churches can be **major basilicas** (several in Rome and one in Jerusalem) and **minor basilicas** (all other basilicas). “Basilica” is a name taken from the ancient Roman government term for a large, beautiful ceremonial hall but its root is *basileus*, the Greek for “king.” Small churches can be **chapels** (named from the cape of St. Martin of Tours, which was kept as a holy relic in a small church attached to a larger one). Chapels are often attached

to larger churches or are within buildings not exclusively for worship. Special places of pilgrimages are often designated as **shrines** (and may or may not be churches, chapels, or basilicas as well).

There are many ministries now often available to **lay Catholics** (those who are neither ordained nor members of a religious order). **Lectors** read the Scripture readings except for the Gospel at Mass (which is reserved for a deacon, priest, or bishop). **Cantors** lead congregational singing and sing the Psalm at Mass. **Acolytes** (from the Greek *akolouthos*, meaning “attendant”) assist the celebrant at Mass, and carry the processional cross and lighted candles at the beginning and end of Mass (these acolytes are very often called **altar servers**). Very often, especially at parish Masses, children serve in this ministry. **Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion**, in the absence of sufficient priests, help distribute the Body and Blood of our Lord at Mass and may also take Holy Communion to the sick and homebound.

Pastoral associates, perhaps most often a member of a religious order, administer parishes lacking a resident priest. The

chief lay **catechist** of the parish is usually its head of religious education, receiving delegated authority to teach from the pastor. Lay catechists are trained in the tenets of the faith and teach it to the Catholic faithful of all ages in **parochial** (parish day) schools, diocesan high schools, parish schools of religion (usually offered on Sundays for children not enrolled in day schools), and various adult education programs, including most notably the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults** or **RCIA** by which the Church brings in new members. Other parish lay ministries include **music ministry** and direction of **youth programs**. **Ushers** seat those who need assistance at Mass and collect monetary contributions toward the support of the parish during Mass. **Parish councils** and other lay bodies within the parish act in an advisory capacity to the pastor; similarly, there are lay advisory bodies that serve dioceses. These and a multitude of other lay ministries, including teaching, administration, care for the poor, evangelization, and others too diverse and numerous to list, are expressions of the “common priesthood” of the laity derived from the dignity of their Baptism.

(CCC 875-877, 879, 881-883, 886-887, 895, 897, 903, 1143, 1273, 2179)

*“The government of the Church
is called the Holy See.”*