

## Understanding the Role of Priesthood

All baptized people share in the priesthood of Christ by virtue of their Baptism. The Church calls this the common priesthood of the faithful. Within this common priesthood, some people are called to unique participation in the mission of Christ through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Their role is to serve the Christian community in the name of Christ, and to represent Christ in the community. Because Christ is the head of the Church, this means that ordained ministers exercise a leadership role in the liturgy and in community life.

The role that bishops, and priests, and deacons play in community life does not make them more important in the eyes of God than any other person. Nor does it mean that they are holier than laypeople—God calls us all to lives of perfect holiness according to our vocation. However, the priesthood of men called to ordained ministry is different in its essence from the common priesthood of all the baptized. It isn't that they have *more* priesthood than the laity. They have a *different* priesthood, one that gives them unique responsibilities that no layperson can fill. These unique responsibilities fall into three areas: teaching, divine worship, and Church leadership or governance. Three degrees of Holy Orders have existed from the beginning of the Church: bishops, priests (presbyters), and deacons. All three ministries are necessary for the effective functioning of the Church; without any one of these ministries, the Church would be incomplete.

### Deacon

A deacon is ordained for works of service and liturgical ministry, as directed by the bishop. Deacons may or may not be assigned to a parish. A deacon assists the bishop and priests with the celebration of the Eucharist, including the proclamation of the Gospel, giving homilies, and distributing Holy Communion. Deacons can also baptize, bless marriages, and preside over funerals. They also dedicate themselves to works of charity and compassion to the community.

Transitional deacons are men who are ordained as deacons on their way to being ordained as priests.

Permanent deacons are men who after years of preparation and study, are ordained deacons who can baptize, preach, distribute Communion, witness marriages, preside at wakes and funerals, and engage in works of service to the Christian community. Permanent deacons must be at least thirty-five years old and may be married or celibate.

### Ordination Rite

- The bishop lays his hands on the man to be ordained deacon.
- The bishop prays that the man to be ordained deacon receives the graces of the Holy Spirit necessary for his ministry.
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### Symbols of Ordination

When a deacon is ordained:

- He is clothed in special vestments.
- He receives the book of the Gospels to symbolize his ministry of preaching.

## Priest

A priest is a coworker with the bishop of the diocese. When the bishop ordains a priest, he is extending a portion of his apostolic authority to the priest. All the priests of the diocese, called the presbyterium, are responsible for the spiritual life of the diocese. The priest is assigned by the bishop to a particular parish or diocesan ministry, and the priest is responsible for leading it in the name of the bishop. Priest can celebrate all the sacraments except Confirmation (unless given special permission) and Holy Orders.

### Ordination Rite

- \*The bishop lays his hands on the man to be ordained priest.
- \*The bishop prays that the man to be ordained priest receives the graces of the Holy Spirit necessary for his ministry.

### Symbols of Ordination

When a priest is ordained:

- He is clothed in the special vestments of his office.
- His hands are anointed with oil.
- He is presented with a paten (plate) and chalice (cup) as a sign of his role in the Eucharist.

## Bishop

The bishop receives the fullness of the responsibilities of Holy Orders. Through the bishop's ordination rite, he becomes a successor to the original Apostles and takes on all the responsibilities that Christ entrusted to them. He becomes a member of the college of bishops, so that with his brother bishops, he must lead the entire Church in union with the Pope. A bishop is uniquely responsible for the diocese that he has been designated to lead. Only the bishop can ordain priests. He is the ordinary minister for Confirmation. He blesses the sacred oils that are used in the sacraments by all the parishes in the diocese. He is the chief catechist (teacher) of the diocese, and is responsible for ensuring that the Catholic faith is correctly taught. He provides support and direction for parish and diocesan ministries.

## Ordination Rite

- The bishop is the ordinary minister.
- The bishop lays his hands on the man to be ordained bishop.
- The bishop prays that the man to be ordained bishop receives the graces of the Holy Spirit necessary for his ministry.

## Symbols of Ordination

When a bishop is ordained he receives:

- the book of the Gospels as a sign of his authority to teach the truth,
- a ring to signify marriage to the Church,
- a miter (the unique pointed hat) to represent authority,
- a shepherds' staff to symbolize that he is to model his leadership after Jesus, the good shepherd.