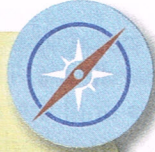


Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Christ is the head of the Church.
- Those who lead the Church do so with a spirit of *service*.
- We trace our Church leaders back to Peter and the apostles.



- How is your workplace or living arrangement structured?
- How do you make decisions, divide tasks, and work together?



Who Shepherds the Church?

Who affects your daily life the most? Certainly your spouse or boss plays a large part in determining your focus, time, and efforts. But friends, coworkers, children, and parents can also change the course of a day, week, project, or event, propelling you forward or turning your attention to something unexpected.

Any time people live or work together, they establish roles and responsibilities to clarify how decisions will be made and work accomplished. This can happen casually, as with roommates, or formally, as within a business. The Church also benefits from organization; its hierarchy and various roles serve the whole of God's people. Following Jesus' example, those who lead the Church are to do so with a spirit of *service*.

"If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

John 13:14–15

The Pope

Christ is the head of the Church, and all Christians are united in him. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave his apostles special roles and authority in order to continue his mission on earth. Catholics believe these roles and authority have been passed down through the centuries.

In particular, Jesus gave the Apostle Simon Peter a position of ultimate authority and leadership among Jesus' followers. After Peter's martyrdom in Rome, a successor was chosen, inheriting his title of "rock" on which the Church is built (Matthew 16:18). Today, the **pope**, as bishop of Rome, is looked upon as Peter's successor, the recognized leader of the Catholic Church on earth.

The pope also inherits Peter's responsibility to serve the whole Church and the faith that has been handed down. Acting in union with all the bishops, the pope preserves and spreads Christ's teaching as revealed in Scripture, sacred tradition, and the ongoing unfolding of divine revelation. His authority and governance come from the **Holy See** (sometimes *Apostolic* or *Roman See*), which includes the **Roman Curia**—Vatican officials and offices who assist him in the day-to-day handling of Church matters and resources.

Peter and Church Authority

Read and reflect on the Scripture passages below. How does each one illustrate the unique role of Peter (and the popes after him)?

Matthew 16:13–20

John 1:40–42

John 21:15–17

Acts 1:15–16, 21–26

Acts 10:9–42

Acts 15:1–12

Is the Pope Infallible?

It's easy to misunderstand what the Church means by papal infallibility. It does not mean that the pope never makes a mistake. It does not mean that the pope never sins. What **infallibility** does mean is that under these certain specific conditions, the teaching of the pope is preserved from error by the Holy Spirit:

- The pope must be speaking in his capacity as chief leader and shepherd of the Church.
- He must be clearly defining a teaching as being a truth of faith to be accepted by the whole Church.
- The teaching must be concerned with matters of faith or morals.

The more common teachings of the pope (in homilies, speeches, encyclicals, and so on) don't fulfill these conditions. In fact, the total number of infallible statements is very small. One example is the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, declared in 1950 by Pope Pius XII. Nevertheless, Catholics give due respect to all the teachings of the pope, whether infallible or not.

The Bishops

Peter was only one of the twelve apostles Jesus appointed "to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mark 3:14–15). Catholics teach that the bishops are the successors to these remaining apostles. Through the sacrament of holy orders (ordination), the bishops continue Christ's mission and the work of the apostles and remain in communion with the pope in Rome.

In a large diocese, an **auxiliary bishop** may assist with sacramental and administrative duties.

The pope designates some members of the clergy as **cardinals**. They may vote in the election of a new pope until the age of eighty in a private, prayerful meeting called a **conclave**.

Conferences of bishops and their agencies express and apply Catholic teaching to important religious and social topics within a specific country, region, or culture. Examples are the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (**USCCB**) and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB).

A **papal nuncio** is an archbishop who acts as the official Vatican delegate to a country. He holds the diplomatic rank of ambassador. In the U.S. and Canada, he also functions as a facilitator between these countries' bishops and the Vatican offices in Rome.

- *What qualities make a good leader?*



Priests

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19–20

Bishops ordain **priests** as coworkers in their mission. A **diocesan priest** is attached to a specific diocese under the authority of the local bishop. A **religious priest** is a member of a religious community and may work in various parts of the world at the invitation of local bishops.

A **pastor** is the bishop’s direct representative to a parish. Larger parishes may also have an **associate pastor** (or **parochial vicar**). **Monsignor** is an honorary title given to a priest in recognition of his contributions to the life of the Church.

Deacons

Finding themselves in need of assistants, the apostles said, “Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task” (Acts 6:3). The apostles prayed and laid hands on the chosen men.

Today, this is the ministry of a **deacon** (“servant” in Greek), an ordained member of the clergy. A deacon can be **transitional** (a step on the path to priesthood) or **permanent**. Permanent deacons may be married but only if they were married at the time of ordination.

- *Is there a deacon at your local parish? What are his duties and responsibilities?*



Sisters and Brothers

“If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor...Then come, follow me.”

Matthew 19:21

When the rich young man heard Jesus say these words, “he went away sad, for he had many possessions” (19:22), but others answer Jesus’ call and follow Christ as **religious** priests, brothers, or sisters. Examples of religious institutes are the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans), the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), and the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists). Religious take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in order to follow Christ more faithfully.

Some people use the word nun to describe all women in religious institutes. The more appropriate title is **sister**. A **nun** is a sister who belongs to a cloistered (secluded and contemplative) order and resides in a monastery.

A **brother** is a nonordained member of a religious order of men. Priests and brothers in monastic orders are referred to as **monks**. Some religious communities include laypersons and deacons. All men and women, religious or lay, who profess vows of poverty, chastity (in the form of celibacy or perpetual virginity), and obedience are called **consecrated**.

The Laity

Baptized Catholics who aren’t ordained make up the **laity** of the Church. Laypeople live out their baptism by bringing the presence of Christ to the world and striving for holiness in their daily lives. Lay adults serve God in marriage or in the single life.

“The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth...”

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), 33.

Parish Ministries

"To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."

1 Corinthians 12:7

According to St. Paul, the people in the Church are responsible for teaching, mighty deeds, healing, assistance, even administration (1 Corinthians 12:28). These roles appear in various titles and positions within a parish, such as:

- **Pastoral Administrator:** In the absence of a full-time pastor, this person handles the pastoral care of the parish that doesn't involve celebrating the sacraments.
- **Parish Council:** This advisory body is made up of elected or appointed people who assist the pastor in the administrative and spiritual life of the parish.
- **Director / Coordinator of Religious Education or Pastoral Associate:** These men and women manage the religious formation of parish members. They provide resources and programs for spiritual growth and development.
- **Lectors:** These liturgical ministers read from Scripture (except the Gospel) at Mass and other liturgies.
- **Altar Servers or Acolytes:** These people assist at the altar during Mass.

- **Extraordinary Ministers of holy Communion:** These trained laypeople assist the clergy in distributing the Eucharist during Mass and may take Communion to the sick and homebound.

- **Music Ministers:** These liturgical ministers include the organist and instrumentalists as well as singers. The **cantor** may lead the songs, especially the Responsorial Psalm at Mass.

Who's Who?

For each title or ministry below, identify who serves in that role for your parish.

RCIA coordinator, director, or team leader:

Director of Religious Education:

Lector(s):

Extraordinary Minister(s) of holy Communion:

Music or choir director:

How do you already serve God's people and Church in your daily life?

What Catholic ministries or parish groups interest you?



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