

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- The Church was founded by Jesus Christ.
- Apostolic succession works to unite the Church.
- The pope is the shepherd of the Church on earth.

to the structure of the Catholic Church. It also takes a brief look at the people in the Church. From layperson to pope, we all have a role that's important to the life of the Church. The descriptions here are very brief, but you'll learn more as you meet some of these people in your parish and read more about them in your studies.

The Pope

Christ is the head of the Church, what we call the body of Christ. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave his disciples 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 his Apostle Peter the responsibility to lead the whole Church, saying, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). The **pope**, as bishop of Rome, is regarded as Peter's successor, the rock on which the Church is built. Because this is such a great responsibility, cardinals choose the pope with great care. When it's time to select a new pope, the cardinals of the world go to Rome and meet in a **conclave** to prayerfully vote on the man who will become pope.

The pope is the official leader of the Catholic Church on earth. With the help of the bishops of the world, the pope works to spread the teachings of Jesus as they are revealed in Scripture, the traditions of the Church, and our ongoing discovery of the nature of God as God reveals it to us, which we call divine revelation. Just as important as the pope's role as Church leader is his role as servant of the whole Church. The Gospels tell us that Jesus, while leading his followers to God, continually fed them, cured them, taught them—and even washed their feet!

Who Shepherds the Church?

Think about a club, sports team, or band you're a member of; you can even think about your family. All of these things probably have some kind of organization that keeps it running. Your club probably has a president. Your team probably has a coach, and your band has a director. Even in your family everyone has responsibilities to make sure chores get done.

- *Why do organizations need some kind of structure and leadership?*
- *Give an example of good leadership in a group you've been a part of. Why was a good leader important?*
- *Are dedicated members just as important as group leaders? Why or why not?*



Every organization needs someone to take the lead, and every member of that organization has responsibilities unique to his or her talents and capabilities.

Our faith community could not exist without structure or Church leaders, we call this structure the **Church hierarchy**. This lesson introduces you

"Be shepherds, with the 'odor of the sheep,' make it real, as shepherds among your flock, fishers of men."

Pope Francis, homily, March 28, 2013

The pope has many Vatican officials who help him with the day-to-day handling of Church affairs. The pope and his officials are sometimes referred to as the **Holy See**. A "see" refers to the place of authority for a bishop or archbishop.

Can the pope make a mistake?

You may have heard that the pope is infallible. That's true, but what that means is often misunderstood. It doesn't mean that the pope can never make a mistake or that he can't commit a sin. **Infallibility** means that under very special conditions, the teaching of the pope is without error through the power of the Holy Spirit. While not all teachings of the pope are infallible, Catholics are called to the humble submission of will and intellect when the pope speaks on the subject of faith and morals.

The Bishops

Jesus appointed "twelve [whom he also named apostles] that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons."

Mark 3:14–15

The Catholic Church believes that the authority Jesus gave his apostles has been passed down through the successors of the apostles—the bishops.

This authority is passed down through **ordination**, the laying on of hands, from one generation to the next. It is the responsibility of the ordained to continue the work of the apostles. A **bishop** is the chief pastor and head of a specific **diocese** (see Q11, "Places in a Catholic Church"). He oversees all matters of Church life within the boundaries of his diocese. In a very large diocese, the bishop may receive assistance from **auxiliary** (helper) **bishops**.

A diocese that is especially large or that has a significant Catholic history is called an **archdiocese**. An archdiocese is served by an **archbishop**.

Cardinal is an honorary rank the pope gives to a member of the clergy. Cardinals are allowed to vote in the election of a new pope until the age of eighty.

- Who is the bishop of your diocese? What are his responsibilities?



Priests

Following his resurrection, Jesus told his apostles, "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

Jesus gave his apostles special commands to follow. That's why bishops ordain priests to help them with their mission. A priest can be a diocesan priest or religious priest. A **diocesan priest** is assigned to a specific diocese and is under the authority of the local bishop. A **religious priest** is a member of a specific religious community, often called a religious order, and works in many different parts of the world at the request of local bishops.

A **pastor** is a priest who serves as the chief shepherd of the parish. He is the bishop's direct representative to the parish. Other priests appointed to a parish are called **associate pastors**.

- Who is your parish pastor? What are some of his responsibilities?



Deacons

After Pentecost, the apostles found themselves unable to care for the physical needs of the overwhelming number of converts to Christianity. So they said, "Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:3–4). The apostles then "prayed and laid hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

This passage from Scripture is the basis for the Catholic ordination of deacons. A **deacon** is an ordained member of the clergy, like bishops and priests, but is called to serve in different ways. His ministry is performing works of charity and assisting in liturgical celebrations. You can identify a deacon serving during Mass by his diagonal stole. A deacon can either be **transitional** (a step taken while studying for the priesthood) or **permanent** (ordained with the intention of remaining a deacon). Permanent deacons may be married but only if they were married at the time of their ordination. If a permanent deacon's wife dies, he may not remarry.

- *Is there a deacon at your church? What are some of his responsibilities?*



Religious

Religious follow Jesus' command, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Matthew 19:21

In the Catholic Church, a **religious** is someone who belongs to a religious order. **Religious orders** have specific ministries, like prayer, service to the poor, teaching, or health care, in which their members take part. Religious take vows (promises) of poverty, chastity, and obedience in order to dedicate their lives to Christ completely.

People, including Catholics, sometimes use "nun" to describe all women in religious orders. The best word is actually **sister**. A **nun** is a sister who lives in a **cloister**, which means her religious order restricts contact with the outside world. A **brother** is a nonordained member of a religious order of men. A **monk** is a member of a religious order who lives in a **monastery**. He is usually focused on prayer and work as a way to draw closer to God.

The Laity

The **laity** consists of all baptized Catholics who aren't serving as priests, deacons, or bishops; this includes religious brothers and sisters. As a member of the laity, you might consider yourself a regular person, but that doesn't mean your role in the Church isn't important. The laity is the foundation of the Church. While bishops and priests are our shepherds and our guides, we are the ones who bring the light of Christ to the world!

Today laypeople are called to be disciples of Christ through service to our Church and to our brothers and sisters. We bring Christ's light through our compassion, care, and loving service. It is our responsibility to discover and acknowledge the gifts God has given us and then to use those gifts to build the reign of God here on earth.

Parish Ministries

One very practical way many laypeople serve in their parish is through parish ministries. Parish ministries are all the jobs people perform to keep the parish running smoothly and help to convey the meaning and prayerfulness of parish liturgical celebrations. Here are a few parish ministries found in most Catholic parishes:

Pastoral administrator: Your parish may have a person who helps with the pastoral care of the parish, other than the celebration of the sacraments, which require a priest.

Parish council: This is an advisory board of elected or appointed parish members who assist the pastor with administrative duties.

Lectors: These are the people who proclaim the Scriptures, except for the Gospel, at liturgies.

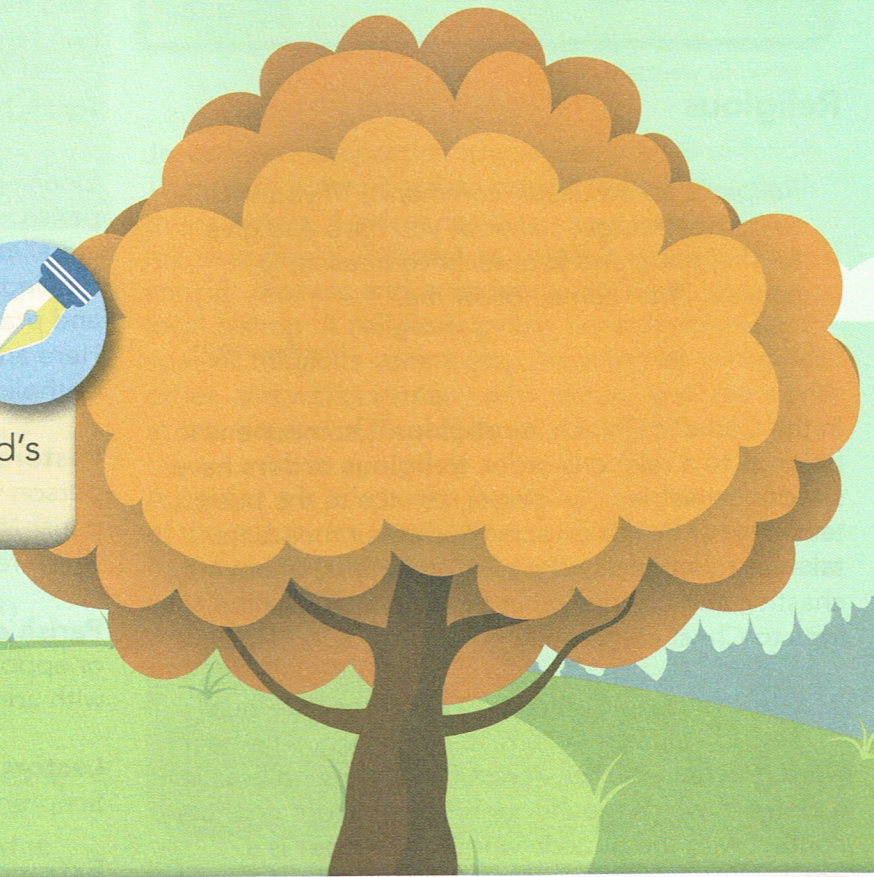
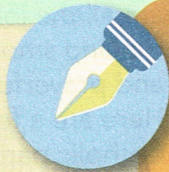
Extraordinary ministers (of the Eucharist): These are trained members of the laity who assist with the distribution of holy Communion.

Music ministers: These include the church musicians, **cantors** (song leaders), and members of the choir.

Altar servers: They assist at the altar during liturgies.

As a group, create a list of all the ministries offered by your parish (some may be listed above but others may not). Then fill out that list with the name of at least one person who fulfills that ministry and how this ministry helps to strengthen your parish or community.

Keeping your talents and personality in mind, in what way, large or small, can you contribute to the building of God's reign here on earth?



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