

# Bishops and the Apostolic Succession

There are five unique characteristics of the “historic” or Catholic Churches (i.e. Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, and Oriental):

1. An Apostolic foundation
2. All seven sacraments, including the Sacrament of Holy Orders: the ordination of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons in the direct and unbroken Apostolic Succession
3. Historic, sacrament-centered liturgy
4. The historic Doctrine of Salvation as a life-long process of Sanctification beginning with Justification through Baptism.
5. The historic Doctrine of the Church as the divine Body of Christ with three parts: Militant on earth, Expectant in Paradise, and Triumphant in Heaven

Validly consecrated bishops are the successors of the original Apostles chosen and empowered by Jesus Christ Himself, and each bishop can trace the line of his own consecration directly back to one of the twelve Apostles. The original Apostles were the first bishops of the Church, and the bishops are the Apostles of the Church today.

Every nation or regional area where Catholic Churches are located is divided into geographic districts called dioceses, each headed by a bishop. Groups of dioceses make up a province, which is headed by a chief bishop called the Metropolitan with the title of Archbishop. A group of provinces within a nation comprise a “national church” which is headed by the chief archbishop called the Primate.

The bishop who is head of a diocese is called the “Ordinary” or Diocesan Bishop. In larger dioceses the Ordinary often has one or more assistant bishops. They may be:

1. A *Bishop Coadjutor*: an assistant bishop who automatically becomes Ordinary upon the death or retirement of the Diocesan Bishop.

2. A *Suffragan Bishop*: a permanent full time assistant bishop

3. An *Assistant Bishop* or *Auxiliary Bishop*: an assistant bishop who assists part-time or temporarily, often a retired bishop.

A diocese is the bishop’s jurisdiction made up of all the churches, institutions, clergy, and lay persons in that geographic area (except for monastic communities which are “extra-diocesan”). There are 99 dioceses in the Episcopal Church in the United States. In some sparsely populated states the diocese covers the whole state. Heavily populated states, such as New York or California, may have as many as five or six dioceses. Illinois has three: Quincy which covers the southwestern third, Springfield which covers the southeastern third, and Chicago which covers the northern third of the state.

The central or “mother” church of a diocese is the Bishop’s church called a cathedral from the Latin *cathedra*, “the throne.” It is the church which contains the Bishop’s throne or chair, a symbol of authority. Parishes (self-supporting congregations) and missions (those which are not self-supporting) are the local churches which minister to people where they live.

In the Diocese of Chicago, St James’ Cathedral is located on the Near North Side on the corner of Wabash Ave and Huron Street. Just behind it, at the corner of Huron and Rush Streets, is the Diocesan Center with offices for the Bishops and other diocesan personnel. There are 135 parishes and missions in the Diocese of Chicago ranging in size from very small (less than 50 communicants) to quite large (over 1000 communicants) and from quite historic (1830’s) to quite new (1980’s), with over 390 clergy and 43,000 lay persons canonically resident.

As the diocese’s Apostle, the Bishop is the Chief Priest and Pastor of the diocese. Only a bishop in the Apostolic Succession can validly administer the sacraments of Ordination and Confirmation. The Diocesan

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Bishop is also responsible for the temporal administration of the diocese. In larger dioceses this can be very complex, and all dioceses have administrative staffs including both clergy and laity to assist the Bishop in this responsibility.

Canon Law requires that the Ordinary, or another bishop representing him, visit each church in his diocese at least once every three years. This is called a canonical Visitation. Often in small dioceses the Bishop can do this every year. In larger ones it may take the Sundays of two or three years to complete the cycle. (In the Diocese of Chicago each congregation gets a Visitation once every two years, alternating the Ordinary and the assistant bishop, so we see a given bishop once every four years.)

At a Visitation the Bishop celebrates the Eucharist (normally the principal Mass of the Sunday), preaches, and if there are candidates, administers the Sacrament of Confirmation and canonically Receives as Confirmed Communicants of this Church those who have been Confirmed in other branches of the Catholic Church. He also inspects the parish's official records and often has a short meeting with the Vestry and other parish leaders.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is the sacrament of becoming an adult in the Church. Since being an adult in the Church is being a minister of the Church, Confirmation has been called the "Ordination to Lay Ministry." Like ordination to the Diaconate and Priesthood, Confirmation is a sacrament which requires substantial preparation and adult commitment and is administered by a bishop himself ordained in the Apostolic Succession.

Also like ordination to the Diaconate, Priesthood, and Episcopacy, Holy Confirmation is indelible and can only be conferred once on a person. Those who have validly received this sacrament in another branch of the Catholic Church and wish to become a part of the Anglican Church are "Received" by the Bishop as

canonical Confirmed Communicants of this Church; they cannot be "re-confirmed."

In addition to his diocesan responsibilities, each Ordinary is also a member of the "College of Bishops" of the Universal Church. Diocesan bishops meet as members of the Synod of their regional Province, as members of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in the United States, and every ten years with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primes of all the national churches of the Anglican Communion world-wide as members of the Lambeth Conference.

When it becomes possible once again, they will also meet with all the bishops in the Apostolic Succession as part of a General Council of the Universal Church. A General Council is a world-wide synod of all bishops in the Apostolic Succession which is recognized by the Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Old Catholic Churches as the only body which has been empowered by Jesus Christ to interpret authoritatively the once-for-all revelation given by Our Lord and to define dogma.

At the Eucharist, in addition to the vestments which a priest wears, a bishop wears:

- a **gold ring** on the fourth finger of his right hand (traditionally set with an amethyst)
- a gold **pectoral cross** around his neck (this is traditionally worn under the chasuble so it cannot be seen when the bishop is vested to celebrate Mass)
- a **mitre** on his head which represents the tongues of fire which came down on the twelve Apostles on the Day of Pentecost when they were ordained as the first bishops.

The Bishop carries a **crosier**, or pastoral staff, shaped like a shepherd's crook as a symbol of his role as a shepherd of Christ's flock. The Bishop's **cassock** is magenta (a reddish-purple which is the episcopal color, just as black is the color worn by priests).