

What Is A Bishop?

Catholic bishops are the chief pastors of the Diocesan Church; they are the spiritual and administrative leaders of the Catholic people in a given area. Bishops are seen as the signs of unity within the Diocesan Church, as their link with each other through the Pope is a sign of the universal unity of the Church. The Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s reiterated that bishops are successors of the apostles and are ordained into the apostle's mission:

TO TEACH: "Bishops should proclaim the gospel of Christ to everyone. This is one of the principal duties of bishops. Fortified by the Spirit, they should call on people to believe or should strengthen them when they already have a living faith.... They should present the doctrine of Christ in a manner suited to the needs of the times; that is, so it may be relevant to those difficulties and questions which people find especially worrying and intimidating. They should also safeguard this doctrine, teaching the faithful themselves to defend it and propagate it....

Bishops should endeavor to use the various methods available nowadays for proclaiming Christian doctrine." (Section 12 and 13 of the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, 1965*)

TO SANCTIFY: "Bishops should see to it that the faithful know and live the pascal mystery more deeply through the Eucharist, forming one closely-knit body, united by the charity of Christ; 'devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4) As spiritual guides of their flocks, bishops should be zealous in promoting the sanctity of their clergy, their religious and their laity according to the vocation of each individual, remembering that they are under an obligation to give an example of sanctity in charity, humility, and simplicity of life." (Section 15 of the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, 1965*)

TO LEAD: "In exercising his office of father and pastor, the bishop should be with his people as one who serves, as a good shepherd who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him, as a true father who excels in his love and solicitude for all, to whose divinely conferred authority all readily submit.... The various forms of the apostolate should be encouraged. Close collaboration and coordination of all the apostolic works under the direction of the bishop should be promoted in the diocese." (Section 16 and 17 of the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, 1965*)

The Church's canon law of 1983, describes Diocesan Bishops as being entrusted with the care of all Catholics in their diocese. They should show special concern for those who "are not sufficiently able to benefit from ordinary pastoral care, and to those who have lapsed from religious practice" (section 383.1). They should "act with humanity and charity to those who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church (and) foster ecumenism as it is understood by the Church" (383.2). A bishop is to have "a special concern for priests, to whom he is to listen as his helpers and counsellors" (384), and he is to "foster vocations to the various ministries and to consecrated life" (385). The code adds that Diocesan Bishops are "bound to teach and illustrate to the faithful the truths of faith which are to be believed and applied to behavior" (386), and "frequently to preside at the Eucharistic celebration in the Cathedral Church or in some other church in his diocese" (389). Administratively, the code states that the bishop governs "with legislative, executive, and judicial power, in accordance with the law" (391.1). "Since the Bishop must defend the unity of the universal Church, he is bound to foster the discipline which is common to the whole Church" (392.1).