

Ecclesiastical Terms

Archbishop. The title given automatically to bishops who govern archdioceses. It is also given to certain other high-ranking church officials, notably Vatican ambassadors (apostolic nuncios), the secretaries of Vatican congregations and the presidents of pontifical councils.

Bishop. The highest order of ordained ministry in Catholic teaching. Most bishops are diocesan bishops, the chief priests in their respective dioceses. But some (auxiliary bishops) are the top assistants to their diocesan bishops, and some priests are made bishops because of special posts they hold in the church, such as certain Vatican jobs. Diocesan bishops and their auxiliaries are responsible for the pastoral care of their dioceses. In some cases diocesan bishops are assigned a coadjutor bishop, who is like an auxiliary except that he automatically becomes the diocesan bishop when his predecessor resigns or dies. In addition to their diocesan responsibilities, all bishops have a responsibility to act in council with other bishops to guide the church.

Cardinal. Highest-ranking Catholic clergy below the pope. Most cardinals are archbishops; canon law since 1983 says they must at least be bishops, but exceptions have been made in several cases where a noted priest-theologian over the age of 80 has been named a cardinal to honor his theological contributions to the Church.

Diocese. A particular church; the ordinary territorial division of the church headed by a bishop. The chief diocese of a group of dioceses is called an archdiocese.

Liturgy. The general term for all the Church's official acts of worship. It includes the Mass (also called the Eucharistic liturgy), the celebration of other sacraments, and the Liturgy of the Hours, which contains the official prayers recited by priests and some others to sanctify parts of the day.

Mass. The central act of worship in the Catholic Church. The Mass is divided into two main parts. The Liturgy of the Word includes Scripture readings and a homily and ends with the general intercessions. The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the offering of the gifts, followed by consecration of the bread and wine and the reception of Communion. Catholics believe that in the consecration, the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Christ.

Parish. A specific community of the Christian faithful within a diocese, having its own church building under the authority of a pastor who is responsible for providing ministerial service. Most parishes are formed on a geographical basis, but they may be formed along national or ethnic lines.

Pastor. A priest in charge of a Catholic parish or congregation. He is responsible for administering the sacraments, instructing the congregation in the doctrine of the church, and providing other services to the people of the parish.