

Session One



“Bishop, ...”

The Role of the Bishop

Goal

For the candidates to understand the role of the bishop in the sacrament of confirmation

Approach to teaching this session

Introduce the material by telling the candidates that you will be using the liturgy of confirmation to teach about the sacrament and that you will be focusing on the ritual dialogue between the bishop and the candidate.

What is a bishop?

A bishop is a successor to the apostles. An apostle is “one who is sent by Christ.” Through baptism, we are all “sent” by Christ to spread the gospel, but bishops have a special responsibility to guide and teach us in our efforts. By reason of his “ordination” as a bishop of the Church, he shares in the threefold apostolic function of teacher of doctrine, priest of sacred worship, and minister of church government.

In today’s Church, the bishop is given charge over a geographical area. In that territory or area, called a diocese or archdiocese, the bishop is the pastor, the representative of Jesus Christ. Like Jesus and the first apostles, he is a shepherd. There is a “flock” of people entrusted to his care. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the bishop is the “expression of the Church gathered around the altar, with the one who represents Christ, the

Good Shepherd and Head of his Church, presiding” (#1561). The bishop is the head of the Church in his diocese (or geographical area).

Jesus said to his first disciples: “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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

—Matthew 28:19–20

In the beginning of his ministry, Jesus summoned twelve men and they were “sent” out together to promote the message of Jesus. They collaborated so that their work would be more effective. Remember the old adage, “there is safety in numbers”? In the early days of the Church, the apostles had to band together and show their collegiality (their unity). Today, this is still true. All of the bishops work together to proclaim the gospel. They are referred to as the college of bishops. The head of all the bishops is the pope, who is also the bishop of the diocese of Rome and the “head,” or “leader,” of the college of bishops.

About your bishop

1. Discuss the bishop of your diocese or archdiocese. What is his name? Where does he live?
2. Talk about the number of parishes in your diocese. Has the bishop ever visited your parish? Do the candidates remember him?
3. Share some biographical information about your bishop with the candidates. What is the motto on his coat of arms, for example?

What is a hierarchy?

A hierarchy is a group of people that hold some position of authority. The hierarchy of a group, institution, or organization provides leadership, structure, and stability. The Church has a defined hierarchy. The pope is the head, followed by the cardinals, archbishops and bishops, priests, deacons, and laity.

In today's Church, a cardinal can be a bishop, priest, or deacon. As a cardinal, one has the great privilege of selecting a new pope (the pope is usually chosen from among the cardinals). It is a great honor to be a cardinal and it carries many responsibilities. The archbishops and bishops are successors to the apostles and work together with the pope to preach and teach the gospel. Their role is to help people understand the Catholic faith. The pope and bishops work together in formulating and clarifying what the Church believes. The priests and deacons work closely with the bishops in sharing the message of Jesus. The priests and deacons work in parishes, schools, hospitals, health care institutions, and prisons to help people experience the presence of Jesus in their lives.

The term "laity" refers to those not ordained (confirmation candidates are "lay people"). By virtue of their baptism, the laity are united with Jesus and share in the mission of the Church. Lay people are called by God to be witnesses of Christ in their families, workplaces, schools, and the whole world, and they are called by God to be a part of parish ministry. For example, the laity serve as lectors in proclaiming the word of God and as Eucharistic ministers in distributing Holy Communion. They participate in the life of the parish community by serving on parish councils and on various committees and organizations that help the parish to bring the message of Jesus to others. Lay people contribute to the Church by sharing their time and God-given gifts and talents within the parish and diocese.

Note to catechists

It might be helpful to actually show the candidates a map of your diocese or archdiocese. This visual will help them more clearly understand the role of the bishop.

Catholic Hierarchy

Pope
Cardinals
Bishops
Priests
Deacons
Laity



There are many reasons for a hierarchy. There are hierarchies in every institution or organization in the world. A well-functioning hierarchy maintains a sense of balance and order, especially where there are many decisions

being made. It can prevent disorder and chaos that would damage the reputation or workings of an institution. Even though the pope and the college of bishops make decisions, they do so with the advice of the priests, deacons, and the laity of the Church. Each member of the Church has a specific responsibility and when the responsibilities are carried out, the organization remains strong and united in its goals. In the case of the Church, the goal is to bring Jesus to the world.

Note to catechists

Why talk about the hierarchy? Often candidates do not understand who the bishop is or what he does. Nor do they understand the governing structure of the Church. For many of them, this is a time in life when they question the authority of their parents and other adults. It is necessary, therefore, to share with them the importance of leadership and the need for it in the Church.

Why the bishop?

The bishop is the person who confirms. (In certain circumstances, the pastor of a parish may confer the sacrament, but this is unusual.) As the head of the diocese, it is the bishop's role to witness the willingness of the candidates to become lifelong followers of Jesus. It is his role to offer full initiation into the Church, which is what happens in the sacrament of confirmation.

Many dioceses have an "auxiliary" bishop, sometimes more than one, especially in the larger dioceses and archdioceses. An auxiliary bishop can do everything a bishop does, including administering the sacrament of confirmation.

What is a miter?

The miter is the tall hat the bishop wears at official ceremonies. It is a sign of his office as a bishop of the church. It has two points. One represents the Old Testament and the other represents the New Testament.



What is a crosier?

The crosier is the metal or wood staff that the bishop carries or walks with. It is another sign of his office as a bishop of the church. It represents the staff that shepherds carry.



Understanding this session

Use the following activities to help your candidates better understand the aim of this session.

1. Have the candidates look up information on the diocese and the bishop on the local diocesan Web site.
2. Many groups and organizations have hierarchies. Using one of the following, construct a list of how a hierarchy is set up (it may be helpful to divide the candidates into groups and have each group take one of the following terms and explain how leadership is involved): family, school, work, sports teams, and governments.
 - What does the hierarchy look like for each group?
 - Ask the candidates where they fall in the hierarchy.
 - What is the importance of leadership in each grouping?
 - How does the hierarchy work together?

If the opportunity arises, invite candidates to attend a Mass where the bishop is presiding. The Chrism Mass during Holy Week is a good opportunity for them to experience the bishop “in action.” Throughout the year, the bishop presides at various diocesan liturgies, usually in the cathedral parish. Parish bulletins often announce this in advance.