

Holy orders is one of seven of the seven sacraments. Holy Orders makes an indelible mark called a sacramental character on the recipient's soul (the other two in this group are baptism and confirmation). This sacrament can only be conferred on baptized men. Holy Orders is always a call and a gift from God and ordination follows a period of discernment and formation. The **Sacrament of Holy Orders** in the Catholic Church includes three orders: bishop, priest, and deacon. In the phrase "holy orders", the word "holy" simply means "set apart for a sacred purpose." The ordained ministers of the Church form the hierarchical structure that is set apart for ministry.

The Diaconate is one of the three Major Orders in the Church. The first deacons were ordained by the Apostles in Acts of the Apostles chapter 6. The ministry of the deacon in the Roman Catholic Church is described as one of service in three areas: the Word, the Liturgy and Charity. The deacon's ministry of the Word includes proclaiming the Gospel during the Mass, preaching and teaching. The deacon's liturgical ministry includes various parts of the Mass proper to the deacon, including being an ordinary minister of Holy Communion and the proper minister of the chalice when Holy Communion is administered under both kinds. The ministry of charity involves service to the poor and marginalized and working with parishioners to help them become more involved in such ministry. Deacons, like bishops and priests, are ordinary ministers of the Sacrament of Baptism and may officiate the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Deacons may also preside over funeral rites outside of Mass, and over various services such as Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and may give blessings.

The word **priest** comes from the word meaning "elder." The Catholic Church sees the Priesthood as both a reflection of the ancient Jewish priesthood in the Temple, and the work of Jesus as our High Priest. The liturgy of ordination recalls the Old Testament priesthood and the priesthood of Christ. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, "Christ is the source of all priesthood: the priest of the old law was a prefiguration of Christ, and the priest of the new law acts in the person of Christ" (*Summa Theologiae* III, 22, 4c.) Priests may celebrate Mass, hear confessions and give absolution, celebrate Baptisms, serve as the Church's witness at the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, administer the Anointing of the Sick, and administer Confirmation when delegated by the Bishop.

Bishops are chosen from among the priests in the Catholic Church. Catholic bishops are most often the shepherds of territorial areas called dioceses.

Normally, bishops administer the sacrament of holy orders. In Latin-rite Catholic churches, only bishops (and priests with authorization by the local bishop) may licitly administer the sacrament of confirmation, while every Catholic priest should administer confirmation to children in danger of death. Bishops also, with the help of priests and lay advisers, govern the ministry of dioceses. The bishop of Rome is a shepherd for the universal Church and names the bishops of the world.

From the moment of Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary until his Resurrection, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. In biblical language, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and thus established by God the Father as our High Priest. While all the baptized share in Christ's priesthood, the ministerial priesthood shares this through the Sacrament of Holy Orders in a special way. Those who respond to God's call are repeating the words of the prophet, "**Here I am, Lord, send me**" (Is 6:8).