

liturgical celebrations and devotions as required. The deacon does, however, also have the important role of assisting the priest in his most important sacerdotal and sacramental function, namely the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass.

There is also a specific **distinction** to be made **between Bishops and Priests**:

- Only bishops are regarded as inheriting the full apostolic ministry, because only they are regarded as the direct successors of the apostles. Together, all bishops constitute a college representative of the first apostles. That is why, by ancient custom, the consecration of a new bishop is undertaken by several bishops in concert.
- The Presbyterium or Priesthood is to assist the bishop and be his co-workers, but under his guidance and control.

## The Conferment of the Sacrament

It is important, therefore, to remember that because the Sacrament of Holy Orders is really that of the apostolic ministry in its different forms, it is the bishop who must confer the sacrament, because he is passing on to those receiving it the appropriate grace of the Holy Spirit that is needed for the particular Ministry. The sacrament proper is given by the bishop's imposition of hands on the head and the appropriate consecratory prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The ceremony also includes a formal presentation of the candidates: bishops and priests are anointed with chrism, and there is the presentation of the Gospels, ring, mitre and crozier to a bishop, a paten/ chalice to a priest, and the Gospels to a deacon.

## What is the Scriptural Basis for these Ministries?

One of the great principles of the Protestant Reformation was the priesthood of **all** believers. Apart from the Church of England the reformers reject the historic belief in the Sacrament of Holy Orders because they claim there is no scriptural basis for Jesus establishing such a sacrament. But Jesus did clearly establish a **hierarchy** to follow him: he gave a position of special importance to **Peter** (Mtt.16) and he gave the authority **to bind and loose** to Peter and all the apostles (Mtt.16, 18 and Jn.20). Of crucial importance, he **commanded** they make disciples of all nations (Mtt.28) and promised them the Holy Spirit to help them in their witness (Jn.15 /Acts 1).

As the early Church evolved, a formal leadership structure was needed. So **elders** were appointed (**presbyters**, Acts 11, 14, 15, 1 Tim.5, Titus 1) and then **presiding elders/ overseers** (Phil.1, 1 Tim.3, Titus 1:5) - the **episcopos** or forerunners of bishops. It is also apparent that their authority was bestowed by the 'laying on of hands' (2 Tim.1). The role of **deacon** is attested from very early in the Church's mission (Rm.16:1,Phil.1:1), with the role developing from the 7 helpers in Acts 6. By the end of the 1st century the **three-fold ministry** was fully developed, and St. Ignatius of Antioch could speak of it in terms of an established Church leadership.

# Our Catholic Faith

## 24. The Sacrament of Holy Orders

*- Three Levels of Ordained Ministry*



### Questions for Reflection

1. What is the difference between the Common priesthood of all believers and the Ministerial priesthood?
2. What would you describe as the essential role of a Priest?
3. Did Jesus establish the three-fold ministry of Holy Orders?

## What is Meant by Holy Orders?

The Church has, from the very beginning, accepted that there are many types of ministry within it. St. Paul recognised that the Holy Spirit works to encourage us to use whatever talents we have been given, to follow whatever vocation he demands: **“There are many gifts but the same Spirit .. to one is given the gift of wisdom, to another knowledge, to another the gift of healing .. miracles .. to those God has appointed in his Church are first the Apostles, then Prophets, then Teachers”** (1 Cor.12). In the same chapter, St. Paul gives the analogy of parts of the body, all different but each one contributing to the whole body that is Christ.



Within this body are those who represent Christ in his Holy Priesthood. These receive their share of that priesthood through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

## What is the Priesthood of Christ?

Christ was not a Jewish priest and had not a conventional priestly ancestry. But in his death on the cross, and his self-sacrifice for our sins to God Our Father “no greater love has a man than to lay down his life for a friend” (Jn.15) he **redefined** what was meant by the word ‘priest’. All other priests in history (including the priests of the Jewish Temple) had one basic function, to offer regular sacrifices to a deity and, thereby, undertake a role of continuous service and mediation between the people and their god. Jesus' sacrifice was different - he was at one and the same time both priest **and** sacrifice, and his one sacrifice was sufficient for all times and all people. He was the supreme High Priest. There was no longer any need for further sacrifice—he was the perfect mediator because he was also God. It is this insight that is contained in the Letter to the Hebrews.

## How Can Anyone Share in Christ’s Priesthood?

The priesthood is essentially a call to service, service to God. Everyone who accepts Jesus in faith is justified or made righteous in the eyes of God. After baptism into Christ’s community, the Church, they are incorporated into his priesthood of service **“so that you too may be living stones making a spiritual house as a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ”** (1 Pt.2:5 // Ex. 19:6), to strengthen each other, to love all people and to spread the Gospel message according to our capabilities. The Constitution on the Church of Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, emphasises this **Common Priesthood** of all believers. However, there is another level of Priesthood, the **Ministerial Priesthood**, which is the priesthood conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In this special priesthood Christ is represented by the priest in three main ways:

1. He helps in the **growth of holiness** of the community by the administration of the **sacraments** which are the special ways in which Christ’s grace come to us. In particular, in the celebration of **the Mass or Eucharist** he re-presents Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, through the Holy Spirit he brings about the real presence of Christ, and his actions unite all Christians together, wherever they may be and whether living or dead, in the Mystical Body of Christ. When the priest offers the Mass, though, he is not just **re-presenting Christ**, he is **also re-presenting the Church to God** the Father by offering back to him the Church’s prayers through Christ and the reality of his son in the Eucharist “through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit”.
2. **The priest is especially singled out to help make people holy by forgiving sins in Christ’s name.** It is not a priest who forgives but Christ through him.
3. He continues the Apostolic tradition of **preaching and teaching** the truths of the Faith and spreading the Word and the Gospel Message to all humankind.
4. He acts as a **leader within the community**, guiding it along the right path as a **shepherd** would his flock as Christ did with his own disciples. He is there to **represent Christ** in love and humility.

The life of a priest is consecrated to God for the above purposes. His life is not a job or occupation but a **calling** (or vocation) from God, a ‘calling’ he is guided to by the power of the **Spirit**.



Catholic priests are required to lead a celibate life and have promised to do so. But for much of the Church’s existence priests **were** married, and this has **always** been the case in our cousin Eastern Orthodox Church, and there is nothing theologically incompatible between Marriage and Holy Orders. That is why married Anglican vicars may become priests after conversion. Celibacy is essentially an issue of church discipline - preferred because it enables exclusive, definitive and total commitment to the worship of God and service to the Church.

## The Different Aspects of the Sacrament of Holy Orders

Although when we think of Holy Orders we naturally think of priests, in reality **three ministries** are included: Episcopacy or Ministry of **Bishops**, Presbyterium or Ministry of **Priests**, and the Diaconate or Ministry of **Deacons**.

However, while all three enjoy the benefits of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, only **Bishops and Priests** participate in the **full priesthood** of Christ (the **sacerdotal** priesthood) while the **Deacons’** role is one of service to them both (**diakonia**).

The **Deacon** may perform all the non-sacerdotal functions of the priest: giving Communion, celebrating Baptisms and Marriages, directing Funeral services, undertaking and guiding the various works of charity, proclaiming the Gospel, teaching, providing spiritual guidance, and conducting other, non-sacramental,