

So why do we have Bishops?

Being a Christian is not simply a matter of individual belief and belonging to God. It is also about belonging to the larger community of believers who make up the Church, the body of Christ Jesus. That belonging is practiced and lived out concretely in our local congregation. But, it does not end there. We also belong to one another in the larger congregation of congregations of the diocese and through that we belong to the Church around the world and through the ages. The Holy Spirit, working in that belonging, enables us to live into the promise that God heals all that is separating us from God and one another.

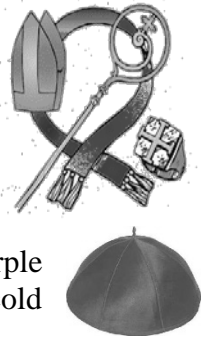
Bishops are a symbol of that belonging. Bishops are consecrated by the laying on of hands by other bishops whose authority has come down from the Apostles – the appointed leaders of the early Church. Thus, bishops are a physical representation of belonging through their connection with other bishops around the world and through history. They are the visible sign of the Church's unity and of continuity within the Church's life and witness through the ages. Thus, the bishop is a sort of bridge (*pontiff* in Latin) between the congregations of the diocese as well as to other dioceses throughout the world and throughout time. As far back as we can go in the history of the Church, bishops have served this role.

Bishops exercise general oversight of a diocese through their ministry as chief priest and pastor, prophet and teacher. Their duties include: visiting the congregations of the diocese, supervising diocesan staff and programs, issuing guidance on the Church's doctrine, discipline and worship.

The bishop also serves as “the pastor to the pastors.” Two Sacramental functions are reserved for bishops: Confirmation and Ordination.

Symbols of the Bishop's Office

A bishop wears or carries some very specific signs of the office. The most notable might be the staff or *crozier*. It is shaped like a shepherd's crook reminding us that our bishop is our chief pastor or shepherd.



The bishop wears two particular pieces of head-gear. The first is a *zucchetto* or a purple cap. This is to keep the head warm in drafty, cold cathedrals.

The other is the *mitre*. This has many associations. It has two sharp peaks said to represent the flames of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). The lappets, or two tails which hang down behind, are like two large book marks said to represent the Old and New Testaments. The bishop removes the mitre for the proclamation of the Gospel and to approach God in prayer.



The bishop wears a pectoral cross.



The bishop also wears an episcopal ring. It symbolizes the call to faithfulness to the diocese. It has been compared to a wedding ring.



It is also a custom for bishops to put a cross before their signature as in "+John Smith." (*Priests customarily place one after their signature, as in "John Smith+"*)

The Pontifical Blessing

Bishop Our help is in the Name of the Lord.

People The maker of heaven and earth.

Bishop Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

People From this time forth for evermore.

Bishop The blessing, mercy and grace of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you, and remain with you for ever.

People Amen