

Installation of Bishop Douglas John Lucia

What is a bishop?

A bishop is regarded by Catholics as a successor to the Apostles, as chosen by Jesus Christ, to carry on the work of His Church.

As His own public ministry was ending, Christ directed the Apostles to preach the Gospel “to the ends of the earth:” - a mission each bishop performs daily within the diocese he governs.

This spiritual power the bishop holds from God is under the direction of the pope, the Bishop of Rome, who is the successor of the first apostle, Peter.

The Anglo-Saxon word bishop is derived from the Greek word for overseer: episcopos.

The episcopal ordination brings about the fullness of priesthood for the one being ordained a bishop. While the whole community of believers is priestly, the hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests differs in essence. Whereas we are all called to a life of faith, hope and love by baptism, the bishop and his priests are the specific means by which Christ both builds and leads the Church {Lumen Gentium 21).

The subordination of one order in the church to a higher one – priest to bishops, and bishops to the pope- is called a hierarchy, which means “sacred rule”.

Although the role of a bishop is the same as that of the Apostles – to teach, govern and foster holiness – modern methods are at his disposal in a world far different from that of Peter and Paul. He also entrusted to lead and sanctify his people, and does not do so independently but collegially, as the first Apostles were commissioned as a collegial group.

The bishop of today relies on many assistants within his chancery and not simply on the intimate, word-of-mouth direction available to the Apostles. The modern metropolitan area requires hundreds of priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, and laity to assist the bishop to carry out his duties.

He regularly visits parishes, administering the sacrament of confirmation and celebrating other events with these communities of faith, and frequently interviews the priests whom he and his predecessors have ordained after overseeing their education and training. He also attends parish anniversary observances, dedications and graduations.

As the authoritative teacher of those entrusted to his care, the bishop interprets the Christian revelation to his flock. At his ordination he is asked to confirm his beliefs in the major tenets of the Creed. He must set forth the moral teaching of Christ and make judgments on conditions within the diocese to which principles of social justice apply.

The apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” (the Gospel must be proclaimed) sums up the thought of the Church on this point: “In union with the successor of Peter, the bishops, who are successors of the Apostles, receive through the power of their Episcopal ordination the authority to teach the revealed truth in the Church. They are teachers of the faith” (EN, 68).

When it says that episcopal ordination confers the three tasks of sanctifying, teaching and governing, the Second Vatican Council speaks of three distinct but not separate tasks. It is a question in fact, of three aspects of the one office of the pastor, the successor of the Apostles. Each of these tasks presupposes the other two. As regards his teaching task, the bishop is not only the one who instructs but who leads. His word is not only based on the truth; it is the way. It marks out a path, for the bishop is head of the flock which he governs in order to lead it to meet the Lord. His teaching is also sanctifying (the Council says deliberately that the bishop is a spiritual guide.) Through the specific dynamism of conversion and deepening of religious life, he gathers and constitutes the Christian community which reaches its culminating point in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist (SC, 41)

The bishop, as the local chief shepherd, encourages a spirit of prayer, celebrates the liturgy for all, works for peace and justice, especially for the poor and disenfranchised, and strives to promote a healthy ecumenism.

He is also an administrator of a specific area known as a diocese. There are 32 archdioceses and 146 dioceses in the United States. Dioceses generally follow natural and civil boundaries. The Diocese of Syracuse is comprised of seven counties of Central New York: Oswego, Oneida, Onondaga, Madison, Cortland, Chenango, and Broome.

But the chief work of the bishop is to help people attain Christian perfection. As the Apostles were, he is particularly concerned with communicating the love of God and neighbor which inspires better living.