

After Jesus' Ascension the apostles chose Matthias (Acts 1. 15-26) to succeed Judas and laid hands on him to mark the change they intend to bring about in him. The apostles first call and lay hands on those they discern should serve as deacons in Acts 6.

St Paul reminds his disciple Timothy that he was made a Bishop by the imposition of hands (see 1.Timothy 4:4).

The terms bishop (meaning overseer), priest (presbyter), and deacon, are early but somewhat fluid in the apostolic era. Gradually over time the office of priest and bishop become more distinct. A bishop in the early church presided over a city or a region whereas a priest had oversight over a local community or smaller area under the authority of the bishop.

Quote from Scripture

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. Acts of the Apostles 6. 5,6

Quote from a theologian

"It is necessary, therefore—and such is your practice that you do nothing without the bishop, and that you be subject also to the priests, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom we shall be found, if we live in him. It is necessary also that the deacons, the dispensers of the mysteries [sacraments] of Jesus Christ, be in every way pleasing to all men" (Ignatius of Antioch Letter to the Trallians 2:1–3 [A.D. 110]).

What is a Sacrament?

A Sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. What Jesus did on earth he still does through his seven sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation (Confession), Anointing of the Sick, Marriage, and Holy Orders. Each of these sacraments enable us to have a personal encounter with Jesus our risen Lord. The sacraments are God's gifts to equip us to lead a full and holy life.



THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

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What next?

Although not everyone is called or eligible to be ordained, all Christians do have a role in supporting priests and promoting vocations. It is very important that we pray for our priests. They are human and they can fall but the Lord has chosen them to be the people through whom we receive His sacramental grace. It is also important that we pray for, and nurture vocations for the priesthood of the future. You might like to use the prayer from the Additional Curates Society which works across England & Wales to promote vocations.

Almighty God, Give Us Priests
to establish the honour of Your Holy Name;
to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar;
to give us Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament;
to proclaim the faith of Jesus;
to Baptise and to teach the young;
to tend Your sheep; to seek the lost;
to give pardon to the penitent sinner;
to bless our homes;
to pray for the afflicted;
to comfort mourners;
to strengthen us in our last hour;
to commend our souls;

Almighty God, Give Us Priests

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

All Christians are part of the priesthood of all believers under Jesus Christ, our High Priest. We are called to offer our lives in the service of God and neighbour, but some Christians are called to a particular share in Jesus' ministry through receiving Holy Orders or Ordination. Those who receive Holy Orders are called to lead the Church and to continue the ministry of the apostles, whom Jesus chose to lead His Church in mission.

The sacrament of Holy Orders is a sacrament of service. It is a gift given to some to equip and sanctify all God's people. The sacrament of Holy Orders is threefold and comprises the orders of Bishop, Priest and Deacon.

Outward Sign

The outward sign of this sacrament is the laying on of hands and the prayer of the Bishop(s) over the head of those who have been called and chosen to serve.

In the ordination of a Deacon one Bishop lays hands on the head of the candidate and prays: "Send down the Holy Spirit upon your servant for the office and work of a Deacon in your Church" A deacon's office is signified by the stole worn diagonally across the chest and the dalmatic which is a vestment distinguished from a priest's chasuble by it having two sleeves.

At the ordination of a Priest, the bishop, joined by his priests, lays hands on the head of the candidate and prays: "Send down the Holy Spirit upon your servant for the office and work of a Priest in your Church" After the prayer the newly-ordained priest is often anointed with holy oil, and then vested in a chasuble and given symbols of his office including a Bible and a chalice and paten.

At the ordination of a Bishop a minimum of three bishops lay hands on the head of a priest and say: "Send down the Holy Spirit upon your servant for the office and work of a Bishop in your Church" The new bishop receives the symbols of his office including the

crozier (pastoral staff) which symbolizes his authority as a shepherd of Christ's flock. A bishop often wears a pointed hat called a Mitre which is said to resemble both the flames of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the headdress worn by the high priests of old covenant in the temple at Jerusalem.

Inward Grace

The inward grace received at ordination is the gift of the Holy Spirit needed to carry out the ministry to which someone has been called.

Bishops receive the fullness of Holy Order. A Bishop continues the ministry of the Apostles, which he has received in an unbroken chain from Our Lord Jesus Christ. The bishop is responsible for all of his flock and is the focus of unity. He relates to other bishops nationally and internationally with whom he shares the undivided faith of the apostles.

Priests are co-workers with the bishop and work with him to administer the sacraments and build up the Kingdom here on earth. They might have responsibility for a portion of the bishop's flock and have oversight over a parish. They are principally ordained in order to celebrate the Eucharist, grant absolution to sinners, and to anoint the sick and dying.

Deacons are ordained in order to serve; they assist in the liturgy, lead the prayers of the faithful, proclaim the Gospel, preach, and assist the bishop or priest at the altar. They are called to lead the people of God in mission and ministry to the world, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Origins

The sacrament of Holy Order goes back to biblical times. Jesus chose the apostles to serve with him. He gave them authority to act in his name, commanded them to offer the bread and wine, exhorted them to make new disciples, gave them power to absolve sins, and endowed them with the teaching office.