

*Organizational  
Structures  
of the  
Catholic Church*

# GOVERNING LAWS

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- Canon Law
- Episcopal Directives
- Diocesan Statutes and Norms
  - Diocesan statutes actually carry more legal weight than policy directives from
- the Episcopal Conference
- Parochial Norms and Rules

# CANON LAW

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- Applies to the worldwide Catholic church
- Promulgated by the Holy See
- Most recent major revision: 1983
- Large body of supporting information

# EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE NORMS

- Norms are promulgated by Episcopal Conference and apply only in the Episcopal Conference area (the U.S.)
- The Holy See reviews the norms to assure that they are not in conflict with Catholic doctrine and universal legislation
- These norms may be a clarification or refinement of Canon law, but may not supercede Canon law
- Diocesan Bishops have to follow norms only if they are considered “binding decrees”
  - Norms become binding when two-thirds of the Episcopal Conference vote for them and the norms are reviewed positively by the Holy See
- Each Diocesan Bishop implements the norms in his own diocese; however, there is

# DIOCESAN STATUTES AND NORMS

- Apply within the Diocese only
- Promulgated and modified by the Bishop
- Typically a further specification of Canon Law
- May be different from one diocese to another

# PAROCHIAL NORMS AND RULES

- Apply in the Parish
- Issued by the Pastor
- Pastoral Parish Council may be consulted, but approval is not required

Note: On the parish level there is no ecclesiastical legislative authority (a Pastor cannot make church law)

# EXAMPLE: CANON LAW 522

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- Canon Law 522 states that to promote stability, Pastors are to be appointed for an indefinite period of time unless the Episcopal Council decrees that the Bishop may appoint a pastor for a specified time
- The Episcopal Conference decreed that in the United States, Bishops could appoint pastors for a renewable six-year term or for an indefinite period of time
- At the Diocesan level, statutes indicate whether the local bishop will use the six year option or not. Customs may also guide the

# MODIFICATION PROCESS

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- Canon Law – Modified by the Holy See
- Episcopal Norms – Modified by the Episcopal Conference and subject to review by the Holy See
- Diocesan Laws and Directives – At the discretion of the Bishop
  - In some instances, a regional or diocesan synod may be called to discuss modifications, but it is not strictly required
- Parochial Directives – At the discretion of the Bishop and Pastor, ideally with the input of the parish faithful

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# Titles, Roles, and Organizational Structures

# ORDAINED OFFICES

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- There are only three ordained offices:
  - Deacon
  - Priest
  - Bishop
- All other terms are administrative or honorific

# TITLES OF THE LATIN RITE

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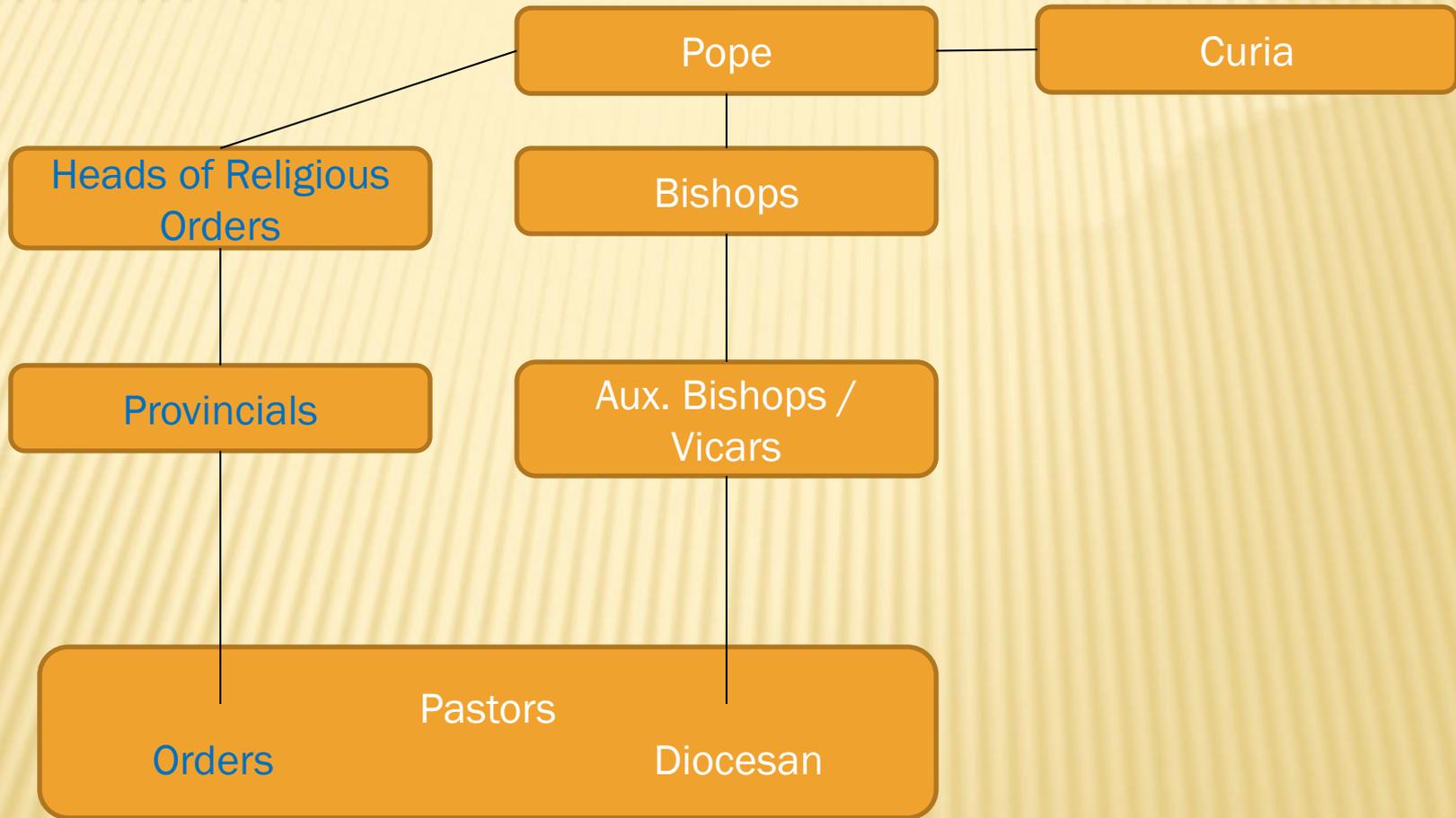
- Pope: the bishop of Rome
- Cardinal: A bishop or priest selected by the Pope as part of a group whose only official right and duty is to meet to elect a new Pope
- Archbishop: A bishop who presides over an Archdiocese, which is the “lead” diocese of a group of individual dioceses for organizational purposes; Each bishop has full authority within his own diocese, and does not “report” to the Archbishop
- Diocesan Bishop: A bishop assigned by the Holy See to lead an active diocese
  - Titular Bishop: A bishop without a active diocese who may be assigned to a Diocesan Bishop to assist in his diocese
  - Auxiliary Bishop: A Titular Bishop with such an assignment in a diocese
- Monsignor: (purely honorific)
- Vicar: Given jurisdiction in certain matters by the Diocesan Bishop

# ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES: THE HOLY SEE

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- The Pope
  - The Bishop of Rome and in that role has primacy among all the Bishops
- The College of Cardinals
  - The Pope selects the Cardinals, usually from the pool of Bishops although the only requirement is ordination
  - Their only right and duty per se is to meet to elect a new Pope
  - “Cardinal” is a title, not an office and can be revoked by the Pope. There are currently over 140 in the College of Cardinals, but those over 80 are not eligible to vote
  - The Pope may use them singly or collectively for consultation.
  - Some Cardinals have prominent roles in the Roman Curia
- The Roman Curia
  - Composed of the Secretariat of State, and a variety of congregations and other offices created to assist the Pope in the administration of the Church
- In the Latin church there is ordinarily no intervening authority between the Pope and Diocesan Bishops

# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH



# ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES: THE DIOCESE

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- Bishop – Appointed according to current Canon law
- Episcopal Vicars/Auxiliary Bishops – Granted authority by the Diocesan Bishop for governance of a part of the Diocese or in a specific role, such as Education
- Vicar General - Assists in the governance of the entire Diocese
- Vicars or Deans - Parish Pastors from a group of neighboring parishes (a vicariate or deanery) within a region, “first among equals”
- Pastors
  - Parochial Vicars
  - Assistant Pastors

There are currently more than 2700 active dioceses (Episcopal Sees or similar units) worldwide, 195 in the US

# The Laity

# LAY STRUCTURES

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- Diocesan Pastoral and Finance Councils
  - Membership and function of both are based on Diocesan Statutes and Canon Law
- Parochial Pastoral and Finance Council
  - Diocesan guidelines for membership and function of these councils are common, but implementation varies significantly and is often not a high diocesan/parish priority

# DIOCESAN FINANCE COUNCILS

- Required by Canon Law (Can 492)
- Can 492 and 493 addresses the composition and scope of the Council
  - Prepares a yearly budget for the governance of the diocese and is responsible for accounting at the end of the year for income and expenditures
  - Finance Councils may veto specified financial transaction by the Ordinary, but otherwise have no authority over the Ordinary
- Diocesan Statutes may dictate how to elect members, require meetings, etc.
- Membership and operation are functionally at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop

# PARISH FINANCE COUNCILS

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- Required by Canon Law (Can 537)
- Governed by Canon Law and by the norms laid down by the ordinary
- It remains the responsibility of the Pastor under the Bishop to ensure
- that the parish goods are administered in accordance with Canon Law

# DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCILS

- Required by Canon Law (C. 511) “in so far as pastoral circumstances suggest”
- C. 512 through C. 514 address the composition of the Council, and scope.
- Diocesan Statutes may dictate how to elect members, require meetings, etc.
- Membership and operation are functionally at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop

# PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

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- Recommended by Canon Law 536 if the Ordinary “considers it opportune”
- Required by many Diocesan statutes
- Governed by Parochial Foundation Documents which should comply with
  - diocesan guidelines
- Pastoral Councils are given “consultative” authority in Canon law; but the
  - interpretation of “consultative” varies greatly

Putting it All Together

# THE DIOCESE

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## PARISH

- Laity: Parish Pastoral and Finance Council
  - Clergy: Pastor / Assistant Pastor / Parochial Vicar
  - Governed by: Diocesan Statutes
- (Parish may operate under Parochial By-Laws)

## VICARIATE (Optional)

- Laity: No Formal Organization
- Clergy: Vicar (Pastor of one in the group)
- Governed by: Diocesan Statutes

## GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS (Optional)

- Laity: No Formal Organization
- Clergy: Episcopal Vicars
- Governed by: Diocesan Statutes

## DIOCESE

- Laity: Diocesan Pastoral and Finance Council
- Clergy: Bishop, Auxiliary Bishops, Vicars General
- Governed by: Diocesan Statutes

# SUMMARY

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## Governing Laws and Norms

- Canon Law applies to the Catholic Church worldwide
  - Episcopal Norms apply within the Episcopal Conference (such as the US)
  - Diocesan Statutes and Norms carry more legal weight than Episcopal Norms, based on the legal authority of the Bishop
  - Parochial Norms and Rules do not have the force of law
- ## Titles, Roles, and Organizational Structures
- Priest, Deacon and Bishop are the only ordained offices
  - The Pope has primacy in his role as the Bishop of Rome
  - No intervening authority normally exists between the Pope and a Diocesan Bishop
  - All executive, legislative and judicial authority belong to the Bishop within his Diocese

## The Laity/ Putting it All Together

- Parish and Diocesan Finance Councils are required under Canon Law
- Parish and Diocesan Pastoral Councils are called for “if opportune” or “if pastoral circumstances suggest”