



Year for Priests

What does it mean to be ordained?

By Doug Culp

YEAR FOR
PRIESTS

Q: What is the significance of the term “ordination”?

A: The catechism states that, in Roman antiquity, order (*ordo*) was used to designate an established civil body. Ordination (*ordinatio*) then simply meant the incorporation of a person into a particular order.

In the church today, ordination is reserved for the sacramental act that integrates a man into one of three recognized “orders”:

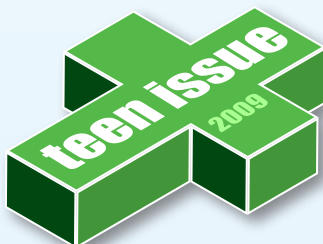
bishop (*ordo episcoporum*), presbyter or priest (*ordo presbyterorum*) and deacon (*ordo diaconorum*). The rite of ordination is not simply a rite of election, designation or institution by the community, rather, it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit upon the ordained. This gift permits the ordained to

exercise a “sacred power” that comes only from Christ himself through the church.

Consecration (*consecratio*) also can be applied to describe the rite of ordination because it signifies a “setting apart” of the ordained for a special ministry within the church. This understanding of ordination may have its roots in Acts 13, where the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to the work which I have called them.”

Q: What are the steps toward ordination?

A: Until 1972, the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church had four minor orders leading to the major order of subdeacon, which were conferred on all seminarians before they became deacons. The minor orders and the subdiaconate were



not considered sacraments proper and were practically suppressed under Pope Paul VI as part of the implementation of the Second Vatican Council.

The church retained only the three sacramental orders, (deacon, priest, bishop), but modern Catholic seminarians are “instituted” in “ministries,” called acolyte and reader/lector, which replace the former “minor orders.”

As an acolyte, the seminarian has the duty to attend to the service of the altar and to assist the priest and any deacons in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass. As a lector, the seminarian proclaims the readings at liturgy and is invited into a living, loving relationship with sacred Scripture. In addition, the seminarian most likely will distribute communion when appropriate at Mass or during communion services at hospitals, etc.

Typically, in the last year of seminary training, a seminarian will be ordained to the diaconate, called by Catholics in recent times the “transitional diaconate.” This is to distinguish candidates bound for priesthood from those who have entered the “permanent diaconate” and do not intend to seek further ordination. Deacons, whether transitional or permanent, are licensed to preach homilies (under certain circumstances, a permanent deacon may not receive faculties to preach), to baptize, and to witness Catholic marriages. They assist at Mass, but are not able to consecrate the bread and wine. Additionally, they cannot hear confessions nor anoint the sick. Normally, after six months or more as a transitional deacon, a man will be ordained to the priesthood.

Q: What happens at ordination?

A: The ordination of a bishop, priest or deacon takes place within the eucharistic liturgy. Its essential rite consists of the laying on of hands by the bishop and of the consecratory prayer, which together constitute the visible sign of ordination.

Like baptism and confirmation, ordination imprints an “indelible sacramental character” upon the ordained that cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily. Through his ordination, the recipient is configured to Christ so that he may serve as Christ’s instrument for his church.

There are also additional rites that are part of ordination. Initial rites consist of the following: presentation and election of the ordinand (the man being ordained), instruction by the bishop, examination of the candidate and the litany of the saints.

After the consecration, additional rites symbolically express and complete the mystery accomplished. For a bishop, there is an anointing of holy chrism (a sign of the Holy Spirit who alone will make his ministry fruitful); and the giving of the book of the Gospels (as the sign of his apostolic mission to proclaim the Word of God), the ring (a sign of his fidelity to the church), and the miter and the crozier (signs of his office as shepherd of the Lord’s flock).

For a priest, there is also an anointing with holy chrism, plus the presentation to the priest of the paten and chalice, symbolizing “the offering of the holy people” which he is called to present to God. Finally, there is the giving of the book of the Gospels to the deacon who has just received the mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. ☩



stole:

The stole is the long strip of material that hangs around the neck of a priest during the performance of sacramental functions. It is also worn diagonally across the chest by deacons who are assisting at Mass. There is a small embroidered cross in the center of the stole, which the priest kisses before donning it. The stole is a symbol of the office of priest or deacon.



How has Hollywood depicted Catholic priests?

>> We often hear complaints about how priests and the church are portrayed in the movies. Have things really changed? Take a look back at some priestly depictions from the 1930s and '40s – an era some call the ‘golden age’ of filmed priest-heroes.

In 1944’s *Going My Way*, Bing Crosby portrays Father Chuck O’Malley, a tough but kind priest who saves young men from gang life, and helps the aging pastor of his congregation (Barry Fitzgerald) along the way. Father O’Malley returned in 1945’s *Bells of St. Mary’s*.