

Committed to Accountability

ECCLESIAL TERMS



Here is a brief glossary of terms often used in the Catholic Church that may not be completely familiar to journalists who have not had a great deal of experience in covering church matters.

A

apostolic nuncio – a papal ambassador represents the Roman Pontiff (Pope) before the Catholic Church of a nation, as well as before the civil authorities of a nation. Also called *papal nuncio*. See also *papal legate*.

archbishop – title given either to a diocesan bishop who is the chief shepherd of an archdiocese and who presides over an ecclesiastical province or to a bishop who is not a bishop of a diocese but holds another, high-ranking Church office, such as an *apostolic nuncios*.

archdiocese – the *ecclesial province*. The *archdiocese*, headed by an *archbishop*, is typically the largest or oldest diocese in an *ecclesial province* and takes on an additional administrative role for the whole *province*.

archeparchy – the equivalent of an archdiocese in the Eastern Catholic Churches that is entrusted to an *archeparch* (equivalent of an archbishop) of an Eastern Catholic *ecclesiastical province*. There are two Catholic archeparchies in the United States: the Byzantine Catholic Archdiocese of Pittsburgh and the Ukrainian Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

ad experimentum – literally, “as an experiment.” In the context of the *motu proprio*, the norms presented in the document have a three-year timeframe. Norms approved *ad experimentum* may be revised in the future.

auxiliary bishop – a bishop who is not the diocesan bishop, and who is appointed to assist with the pastoral needs of a diocese under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

B

bishop – a cleric who through episcopal ordination is a successor to the apostles and who shares in the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ (sanctifying, teaching, and governing). A bishop exercises these in hierarchical communion with the Roman Pontiff (Pope) and the College of Bishops. Most *bishops* are *diocesan bishops*, the chief priests in their dioceses. The Eastern Catholic equivalent is an *eparch*. In addition to *diocesan bishops*, there are *auxiliary bishops*, *coadjutor bishops*, and *archbishops*.

bishops’ conference – see *episcopal conference*.

brother – a non-ordained man who is a member of an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life, and who seeks to live a life consecrated through the profession of poverty, chastity, and obedience by vow or some other bond.

C

canon law – code of ecclesiastical laws governing the Catholic Church. In the Latin Church, the governing code is the 1983 *Code of Canon Law (CIC)*. A separate but parallel *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO)* governs the Eastern Catholic Churches.

cardinal – the highest-ranking Catholic clergy below the pope. According to church law, *cardinals* are regarded as the pope’s closest advisors. Most cardinals are archbishops. Those *cardinals* (79 years of age or below) are tasked with the responsibility of electing a new pope by gathering at a conclave in Rome.

CCEO – abbreviation for the Latin title, *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, which is the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. It was promulgated by Pope St. John Paul II in 1990.

celibacy – the condition of living chastely in the unmarried state. At ordination, a diocesan priest or unmarried deacon in the Latin rite Catholic Church makes a *promise* of celibacy.

chancellor – the office of the chancellor is a mandatory office in a diocese. Although a chancellor may hold many different responsibilities in a diocese, the principal function of a chancellor is to maintain the records of the diocese under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

chastity – is the virtue of correctly ordering one’s own sexual conduct and desires.

Church – The *local or particular Church* normally refers to a diocese or an eparchy. The universal Church refers to the entire Catholic communion of the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches.

clergy – a collective term referring to ordained bishops, priests, and deacons.

CIC – abbreviation for the Latin title, *Codex Iuris Canonici*, which is the *Code of Canon Law*. The current version used by the Catholic Church (Latin rite) is the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*.

coadjutor bishop – A bishop appointed to a Catholic diocese or archdiocese to assist the diocesan bishop. Unlike an *auxiliary bishop*, the *coadjutor (arch)bishop* has the right of succession, meaning that he automatically becomes the new bishop when the diocesan bishop retires, resigns, or dies.

chancellery – the main office building of a diocese.

College of Cardinals – the body of all cardinals of the Catholic Church, including both Latin and Eastern Church cardinals. The cardinals are chosen by the pope as his chief advisers. Most are archbishops or prefects of major departments at the Vatican.

conclave – The gathering of the world’s Catholic cardinals after the death of the pope to elect a new pope. Only cardinals under the age of 80 are allowed into a conclave.

congregation – a term used for some Vatican departments responsible for important areas of church life, such as worship and sacraments, the clergy, and saints’ causes.

curia – the offices through which a bishop administers a diocese. The *bishop of Rome* (the pope) administers the universal Church (through the *Roman Curia*) while a bishop administers a diocese (through a *diocesan curia*).

D

deacon – The first of three ranks in the ordained ministry. Deacons preparing for the priesthood are called *transitional deacons*. Those not planning to be ordained priests are called *permanent deacons*. Married

men may be ordained only as *permanent deacons*, while single men are ordained with a commitment to celibacy either as *transitional* or *permanent deacons*.

defrocking – When a cleric is dismissed from the clerical state without his consent for a crime under canon law. It is sometimes imprecisely described as *defrocking* or *unfrocking*; these terms, which refer to the removal of clerical vestments are a common colloquial term. Properly speaking, laicization without consent should be referred to as a *dismissal from the clerical state* or *forced laicization*. See also *laicization*.

delict – an act which is a crime under canon law, the governing law of the Catholic Church. Acts considered to be a crime are articulated in the *Code of Canon Law* (for Latin rite Churches) and in the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (for Eastern rite Churches).

diocesan bishop – A bishop who heads a diocese. He may be assisted by *auxiliary bishops* or a *coadjutor bishop*. See also *auxiliary bishop* and *coadjutor bishop*.

diaconate – the office of deacon or the collective body of deacons. Deacons preparing for the priesthood are ordained into the *transitional diaconate*. Those not called to be ordained priests are ordained into the *permanent diaconate*. See also *deacon*.

dicastery – a type of administrative body of the Holy See’s Roman Curia, which includes *secretariats*, *congregations*, *dicasteries*, *tribunals*, *pontifical councils*, and other offices.

In the context of the *motu proprio*, the *competent dicastery* refers to one of several Congregations of the Roman Curia. The *competent Dicastery* is the particular office with authority and responsibility to review and respond to the case at hand.

diocese – a geographic territory of the Church that is governed by a bishop. A list of the 178 Latin Church (arch)dioceses of the United States is available on the USCCB website (www.usccb.org/about/bishops-and-dioceses/all-dioceses.cfm).

durante munere – literally, “while in office.” In reference to the *motu proprio*, this refers to acts committed by clerics while in office.

E

Eastern Catholic Churches – Catholic Churches with origins in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa that have their own distinctive liturgical, legal, and organizational systems and are identified by the national or ethnic character of their region of origin. Each is considered fully equal to the Latin tradition within the Church. In the United States there are 16 Eastern Catholic Church dioceses and two Eastern Catholic Church archdioceses. In addition, there is one non-territorial Eastern Catholic Church apostolate in the United States. See also *eparchy* and *archeparchy*.

eparchy – an Eastern Catholic Church equivalent of a *diocese* in the Latin Church. An *eparchy* is governed by an *eparch* (bishop) who is the *local hierarch* (ordinary) of the Church in that territory. There are 18 eparchies and archeparchies in the United States (www.usccb.org/about/bishops-and-dioceses/all-eparchies.cfm).

episcopal – referring to a bishop, a group of bishops, or to the form of church governance by which bishops have authority.

episcopal conference (bishops’ conference) – a national or regional body of bishops that meets periodically to collaborate on matters of common concern in their country or region. The United States Conference of Catholic

Bishops (USCCB) is the *bishops' conference* in the United States.

ex officio – a right by virtue of the office one holds. Literally, “from the office.” When a person has a right because of the office they hold.

excommunication – a Church penalty which forbids a Catholic from receiving the Eucharist or any other of the sacraments or to exercise any ecclesiastical ministries, offices or functions. An excommunicated person remains a member of the Church with the hope that he or she will amend their ways and return to full participation in the life of the Church.

F

finance council - a diocesan body mandated by the *Code of Canon Law* that is charged with preparing the annual diocesan budget and annually reviewing diocesan expenses and revenues.

H

hierarchy – the collective body of bishops throughout the world or within a particular region. It may also refer to all who are ordained: deacons, priests, and bishops.

hierarch – equivalent term for an *ordinary*, used in the Eastern Catholic Church for the cleric who has the primacy of authority in an eparchy. A *hierarch* holds the rank of eparch/major archbishop (equivalent of a Latin rite bishop). See also *local ordinary (local hierarch)* and *ordinary (hierarch)*.

Holy See – the diocese of Rome, which is the diocese of the bishop of Rome (the pope) and the chief diocese of all Catholic dioceses and eparchies of the universal Church. *Holy See* often refers to the pope and the offices of the

Roman Curia, the governing and administrative offices of the Holy See. In general use, the term *Vatican* is synonymous with *Holy See*.

L

laicization – the process by which a priest is dismissed from the clerical state. Sometimes used as a penalty for a serious crime or scandal, but more often it comes at the request of the priest. A laicized priest is barred from all priestly ministry with one exception: he may give absolution to someone in immediate danger of death. The pope must approve all requests for laicization.

laity/lay – in canon law, anyone not ordained a deacon, priest, or bishop is a layperson. In this legal canonical sense, women religious (sisters) and nonordained men religious (brothers) are technically laity. In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, however, the laity are those who are neither ordained nor members of a religious order. The Vatican II sense of the term *laity*—whereby the faithful are composed of laity, religious brothers and sisters, and ordained clergy—is usually intended in most discussions of laypeople and their role in the Church.

Latin rite – may refer to persons, sacraments, laws, traditions, organizations, or other bodies or entities in the *Latin Catholic Church*. Such entities are commonly, but imprecisely, called the Roman Catholic. It is more precise, for example, to say “in the Latin rite diocese,” rather than “in the Roman Catholic diocese.”

Latin Church (Latin Catholic Church) – commonly, but imprecisely, called the Roman Catholic Church or the Western Church, the *Latin Church* is the largest of the 24 churches that have their own laws and liturgical rites recognized by the supreme authority of

the Church. These 24 churches are in full communion with the Holy Father and form the Catholic Church.

legate (papal legate) – representative of the pope (appointed by him) sent to foreign nations or to a national Church. Nuncios are the type of *papal legates* appointed to foreign nations with which the Holy See has diplomatic relations. The *papal legate* to the United States is the *papal nuncio* (or *apostolic nuncio*), currently Archbishop Christophe Pierre.

liturgy – a general term for all the Church’s official and approved acts of worship which are carried out in the name of the Church. It includes the Mass (also called the *eucharistic liturgy*), the celebration of the other sacraments, and the Liturgy of the Hours, which contains the official prayers recited by priests, deacons, and some others to sanctify parts of the day.

local ordinary (local hierarch) – the office holder with the authority and jurisdiction to execute laws of governance over a particular territory. For example, the Bishop of Rome is the *local ordinary* of the Catholic Church. The diocesan bishop is the *local ordinary* of a diocese.

M

Mass (eucharistic liturgy) – the central act of worship in the Catholic Church. The Mass is divided into two main parts. The *Liturgy of the Word* includes scripture readings and a homily and ends with the general intercessions. The *Liturgy of the Eucharist* begins with the offering of the gifts, followed by consecration of the bread and wine and the reception of Communion. Catholics believe that in the consecration the bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ.

metropolitan – the archbishop of an archdiocesan/metropolitan see. The diocesan archbishop is, by virtue of his office, the *metropolitan*. The *metropolitan archbishop* has limited supervisory jurisdiction over the ecclesiastical province of the other (suffragan) dioceses in the ecclesiastical province. The archbishop is usually only referred to as the *metropolitan* in contexts that reference his capacity as head of the province.

metropolitan see – the governing territory (archdiocese or archeparchy) under the authority of the metropolitan archbishop. It is the chief diocese of an ecclesiastical province. *Metropolitan see* refers to the archdiocese itself and to the seat of authority that the metropolitan holds. The ordinary of the *metropolitan see* is the known as the *metropolitan archbishop*, who is the ordinary of the archdiocese.

ministry – a broad term for any activity conducive to the salvation of souls. It can include ordained ministry, such as liturgical leadership and administration of the sacraments, or lay ministry, such as instructing children in the faith, serving the poor, visiting the sick, or being an altar server, reader, or music leader at Mass.

motu proprio – literally, “on his own initiative.” A papal document that expounds upon existing—or creates new—church law or procedures.

N

nun – strictly speaking, a member of a religious community. It generally refers to all women religious, even those in simple vows, who are more properly called *sisters*. Whether a woman religious is a *nun* or *sister* in a strict sense, it is appropriate to use the term *Sister* as the religious title before her name.

O

ordinary (hierarch) – a diocesan bishop, or others who are placed over a particular church or community that is equivalent to a diocese, as well as those persons who possess ordinary executive power.

P

papal nuncio – see *apostolic nuncio*.

parish – a certain community of the Christian faithful in a diocese whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop. Most parishes are formed on a geographic basis, but they may be formed along national or ethnic lines.

pastor – a priest in charge of a Catholic parish or congregation. He is responsible for administering the sacraments, instructing the congregation in the doctrine of the Church, and providing other services to the people of the parish.

pastoral council – a parish or (arch)diocesan body that the pastor or (arch)bishop consults concerning policies and major decisions in the governance of the Church. Such a council's role is consultative and always subject to the final authority of the pastor or bishop.

priest (religious priest / diocesan priest) – a baptized man who has been ordained by a bishop. Sometimes called a *presbyter*. *Religious priests* are professed members of a religious order or institute. *Religious priests* live according to the rule of their respective orders. In pastoral ministry, they are under the jurisdiction of their local bishop, as well as of the superiors of their order. *Diocesan priests* (also called *secular priests*) are under the direction

of their local bishop. Most serve in the parishes of the diocese, but they may also be assigned to other diocesan posts and ministries or be released for service outside the diocese.

pontifical representative – the representative (appointed by the pope) who is sent to foreign nations or to a national Church. In countries with diplomatic relations with the Holy See, this representation is held by the papal nuncio. In the United States, the *pontifical representative* is the papal nuncio (or apostolic nuncio). The term may also include the pope's representatives in other offices as well, such as offices within the Holy See or those appointed as superior general of a religious order.

presbyteral council – a council of priests from a diocese. This is the principal consultative body mandated by the *Code of Canon Law* to advise the diocesan bishop in matters of pastoral governance. It consists of bishops and priests serving the diocese.

presbyterate – either a synonym for the *priesthood* or a reference to the collective body of priests of a diocese or other ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

province (ecclesiastical province) – an *ecclesiastical province* is a territory consisting of several dioceses or eparchies (the *suffragan sees*), including at least one *archdiocese* or *archeparchy* (the *metropolitan see*), headed by a *metropolitan archbishop*. The *metropolitan* has certain ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the other bishops/dioceses in the *province*; the metropolitan's obligations and authority with respect to the dioceses in the province are in the *Code of Canon Law*.

province (of a religious order) – a grouping of communities of a religious order under the jurisdiction of a provincial superior.

R

region (or episcopal region) – a territory of *ecclesiastical provinces* and their dioceses in the United States, covering one or more U.S. states. The USCCB has 14 defined *episcopal regions* (Region I through Region XV). The *episcopal regions* in the United States are as follows:

Region I: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut

Region II: New York

Region III: New Jersey and Pennsylvania

Region IV: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia

Region V: Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee

Region VI: Michigan and Ohio

Region VII: Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin

Region VIII: Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota

Region IX: Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska

Region X: Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas

Region XI: California, Hawaii, and Nevada

Region XII: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington

Region XIII: Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming

Region XIV: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina

Region XIV: Eastern Catholic Churches *sui juris*

Roman Curia – the administrative and governing body of the Holy See, composed of various dicasteries, which assists the pope in governing the Church.

S

sacraments – efficacious signs of grace that were instituted by Christ in order to dispense

divine life through the power of the Holy Spirit. There are seven sacraments: *baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, matrimony, holy orders* and the *anointing of the sick*.

see – another name for a diocese or archdiocese. It appears in such phrases as *Holy See, titular see, metropolitan see, suffragan see*, and *see city*. An archdiocese is the *metropolitan see* of a province, while the dioceses under it are *suffragan sees*. A *see city* is that city after which the diocese or archdiocese is named.

seminary – an educational institution for men preparing for the priesthood.

sister – in popular speech, any woman religious. Strictly, the title applies to women religious of those institutes, mostly formed during or since the 19th century, whose members do not profess solemn vows.

Society of Apostolic Life – a group of men or women who come together to live life in common, as brothers or sisters, according to the *constitution* of their *society*, while pursuing a particular apostolic purpose in society. *Societies of Apostolic Life* can be either lay or clerical. Some such societies follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They do not, however, make any formal vows.

Institute of Consecrated Life – an institute, either religious or secular, by which members assume the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience through a public vow or some other sacred bond.

Secular Institute – an institute of consecrated life in which members of the Christian faithful *live in the world* and seek to contribute to the sanctification of the world. Members assume the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and are bound by obligations set forth by the institute.

Religious Institute – members of *Religious Institutes* publicly profess the evangelical counsels of poverty, consecrated virginity, and obedience, and they live life in common with other members. These members may be cloistered, monastic, or living apostolic life.

superior – The head of an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life who exercises internal authority over members.

suspension – a church penalty under which a cleric, while retaining his clerical status, is no longer permitted to perform either all or some acts of the power of orders, the power of governance, or rights or functions attached to an office.

suffragan diocese – one of the dioceses in an ecclesiastical province other than the archdiocese.

suffragan bishop – one of the diocesan bishops of an ecclesiastical province other than the metropolitan bishop.

T

tribunal – a *tribunal* (court) is the name given to the person or persons who exercise the Church’s judicial powers.

U

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) – the national membership organization of the Catholic bishops of the United States through which they act collegially on pastoral, liturgical, and public policy matters

affecting the Catholic Church in the United States. The USCCB traces its origins to the 1919 establishment of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. In 1966, the conference was reorganized as the canonical entity known as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and its twin civil corporation known as the U.S. Catholic Conference. Another reorganization in 2001 resulted in the USCCB.

V

vespers – also called *evening prayer*. *Vespers* is part of the Liturgy of the Hours, the series of psalms, prayers, and readings for different parts of the day that Catholic priests and deacons pray daily.

vicar general – a priest, auxiliary bishop, or coadjutor bishop who assists the diocesan bishop in the governance of the entire diocese. Each diocesan bishop must appoint a vicar general for the diocese.

vow – a deliberate and free promise that is made to God and its fulfillment involves a serious religious obligation. Men and women entering religious life take *vows*, typically of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

votum – an authoritative written opinion, which the metropolitan bishop submits to the competent dicastery in Rome.

vulnerable person – “any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty that, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offense” (*Vos Estis Lux Mundi*).

