



Diocese of Madison Office of Communications

702 S. High Point Rd.
Madison, WI 53703
Phone (608) 821-3033
Fax (608) 821-4552

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Points of Clarification: FAQs, regarding Ms. Ruth Kolpack, and a bishop's responsibility

The diocesan offices have received a number of letters and calls, regarding the termination of Ms. Ruth Kolpack from St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Beloit, which have raised many legitimate questions and concerns that are answered below. Whether true or false, all information regarding this termination has been made public and volunteered by Ms. Kolpack and her supporters. While the diocese will still not discuss specifics of her case (or any other, as a matter of policy) in order to protect every person's good reputation, this set of answers to frequently asked questions will aim to clear up any confusion or untruths which have become apparent.

If you have additional concerns, not addressed here, please email them to communications@straphael.org and we will do what we can to answer your questions in future postings of this list of frequently asked questions.

1. Q: Why was Ms. Ruth Kolpack fired?

A: Ms. Kolpack was let go because the Bishop is not confident she can or will present the complete and authentic teaching of the Church, the presentation of which he is responsible for in every parish in the diocese. The bishop and, by extension, every priest, pastoral associate, coordinator or director of religious education, teacher, youth group leader, etc. is called, first, to be a catechist. And every person who is charged with teaching in the name of the Church, including the bishop himself, is necessarily held to a higher standard than the average Catholic. While any Catholic may, at times, question or lack a complete understanding of a particular Church teaching, it only makes sense to expect all catechists and parish leaders to faithfully impart the authentic, complete and integral teachings of the Church, avoiding any compromise due to one's personal opinion. That demand upon the many men and women, priests and laity, who are charged with catechesis within our Church is difficult at times, but it is a demand made in love for Christ and to which catechists are called to respond in love and humility themselves.

Before the bishop made his decision, Ms. Kolpack had the opportunity to meet with him and assure him that she would faithfully carry out her role as a catechist of the Roman Catholic faith. Ms. Kolpack claimed that, in good conscience, she was unable to comply.

Bishop Morlino has never questioned Ms. Kolpack's decision, made in conscience. However, to be true to his conscience and to the oaths he took as bishop, he had to make the decision he did, as chief teacher, and to insure that the truth is being taught to our Catholic faithful.

2. Q: But Ruth did wonderful things. Don't those count? Who will continue them?

A: Ms. Kolpack has, no doubt, done many good things, both within and outside of the parish. This fact has never been disputed by the bishop (or anyone else for that matter). In justice to her, the many wonderful things that Ms. Kolpack has accomplished during her tenure at St. Thomas must be appreciated and respected. We hope and pray that all people of good will continue to seek the truth and serve their fellow man, for the love of God. But, the fundamental requirement for those directly associated in the Church's work of catechesis is, obviously, that they actually assent to the teaching they are charged with imparting. They are not free to filter or shift that teaching, regardless of the good things they do.

3. Q: I've heard that this firing has to do with Ruth's master's thesis, would someone really be fired for something they wrote in a college?

A: Whether someone is 18 or 24 years old, or in their late 50's, what they write in a college paper, or graduate thesis, should not be, by itself, the grounds for their termination. Statements that this is why Ms. Kolpack was fired are false.

The collegiate and university settings are often the acceptable place for discussion of Church teaching and discipline. However, the parish and the work of a parish employee (especially a professional catechist) can never be the setting for such debate, especially when it involves established Church doctrine, which will not and cannot change.

4. Q: You keep talking about "catechesis." What is that?

A: 'Catechesis' derives from a Greek word meaning "to echo." Those who undertake this work are called to echo the Truth revealed by Jesus Christ and entrusted to the Apostles and their successors, the bishops. It is important to distinguish this from "theology," which is the study of God based on His revelation to us.

Within the parameters of established Church teaching, there is a time and place to speculate upon theological questions. But, the role of the catechist is to constantly endeavor to transmit (i.e. "echo") the teaching of the Church by internalizing it through contemplation and prayer, exemplifying it in their behavior and associations, and enthusiastically teaching it in its fullness and splendor. Since those who present themselves to the Church have a right to this authentic teaching, it is the obligation of all catechists (bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay people) to provide it.

5. Q: Was Ruth fired because of her involvement with Call to Action?

A: No. Ms. Kolpack's involvement with the group "Call to Action," which was not clear until hours after her termination, was not a part of any discussions regarding Ms. Kolpack's departures from authentic Catholic teaching.

Call to Action is noted, however, for their own serious departures and denials of the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church. Associating with such anti-Catholic groups as Call to Action, Catholics for a Free Choice, Women's Ordination Conference, FutureChurch, CORPUS, DignityUSA, and many others, would certainly be grounds for removal of someone charged with passing on the Church's teaching, which these groups openly reject.

Likewise, it seems disingenuous that anyone associated with these groups would commit themselves to teaching what they themselves don't believe. Again, however, this was not the case

with regard to Ms. Kolpack, as the diocese was unaware of any association prior to her termination.

6. Q: In other places people belonging to groups such as Call to Action have been excommunicated, why hasn't the bishop just excommunicated them?

A: One of the primary purposes of excommunication is to call an individual back into full communion with Christ and His Church by bringing absolute clarity to the gravity of the particular sin they have or are continuing to commit. We thus say that the declaration of excommunication is “medicinal,” for it is ordered toward healing and reconciliation. If a formal excommunication would do little to bring a person outside of Church communion back into Christ’s sheepfold, or only serve to drive them further from full communion with the Catholic Church, then it is of little or no use (although excommunication also has the purpose of repairing scandal and so, should it be necessary, this could be a valid reason for the declaration thereof).

Furthermore, Bishop Morlino has emphasized in the past how the rite of ordination for a bishop requires him, and gives him the grace, to have “unfailing patience” and to be forbearing.

Never giving up hope in the grace of God, we should all continue to have recourse to the conventional means of building communion in the Mystical Body of Christ, and that is our individual call to holiness including prayer for the conversion and salvation of our neighbor.

7. Q: I understand that the bishop is responsible for maintaining the teaching at every parish, but does he usually get involved in hiring and firing at the parish level? Should catechists at other parishes be concerned that their work is being monitored?

A: As a rule, the bishop does not get involved with the everyday business of individual parishes – including hiring or firing personnel. However, since the responsibility is ultimately his, the bishop can and must get involved in those serious situations where his pastor is either unable or unwilling to resolve problems.

Bishop Morlino is repeatedly talking about his gratitude for all the wonderful people who become active in their parish and are involved in passing on the faith – whether they be paid employees or one of the many volunteers who help with projects large and small. The only thing catechists should be “concerned about” is doing their sincere best at learning the authentic teachings of the Church themselves, internalizing those, and then passing them on, to the best of their ability!

8. Q: How does somebody know that what they're teaching is what the bishop is asking them to teach?

A: Frankly, it has very little to do with what Bishop Morlino is asking anyone to teach. It is not about the preferences of a particular bishop. It has all to do with the straightforward presentation of what Jesus Christ teaches through His Church. The truths taught by the Catholic Church must be just that, “catholic” – the same everywhere, in every diocese, parish, in every city and country, and throughout time and space; the same in heaven as on earth, because there is only one Christ, one Church, and one truth to be taught/accepted.

On a number of occasions, over the years, the bishop has addressed all those who assist him in the work of catechesis, on just this point. In summary, the catechist should first seek individual holiness through study, prayer, and acts of charity. Their specific catechetical efforts should seek to systematically convey the contents of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in an

authentic, complete, integral and joyful manner. Such catechesis naturally emphasizes the most essential elements: the doctrine of the faith, Our Lord's presence in the Sacraments and His Church, the saving guidance of the moral life, and the life of prayer.

9. Q: Why wasn't this taken care of a long time ago? I've known the catechists at our parish to teach things that are not Church teaching, what can I do?

A: To those who ask the first question, it is important to reemphasize that this was a personnel decision, the details of which will remain private, as is our policy in these matters for the sake of preserving the good reputation of all involved.

Regarding the second question, it is important to emphasize two things: First, as Pope John Paul the Great said in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* "parents have been appointed by God himself as the first and principal educators of their children and that their right is completely inalienable." (40) Second, all of the faithful have the right to receive the Truths of faith and the precepts of God, as handed down by the Church. With these rights firmly in mind, it should be clear that when the faithful recognize that they or their children are not receiving the faith, whole and unadulterated, they have the right to demand a remedy.

After praying about the issue and giving the other person the benefit of the doubt until we are able to fully research the matter, in Christian Charity we should always take issues of concern directly to our brother or sister first (Mt 18:15). If that doesn't work, you should then bring your concern to your parish priest who should be the first one responsible for correcting any error and/or bringing the issue to a happy resolution. If, however, that does not work, and your rights are not being respected, a Catholic always has the right to petition their bishop, and should even that fail, the Holy See.

We are, however, a Church made up of sinners and we should first give the benefit of the doubt to our brothers and sisters. We should be mindful that corrective action may already be underway and that we may not directly see the fruits of the conversion of those around us. Even if an issue clearly exists, it should be handled with charity and respect for all persons involved, calling one another to deeper faith, and avoiding gossip.

10. Q: Is it true that Ms. Kolpack was not given an opportunity to confront her accusers, and that there was no due process in this matter?

A: What is true is that this should never have happened. A bishop should be able to trust that every priest, deacon, religious and lay person tasked with catechesis is teaching the truths of the Church. But this is not always the case.

The optimal process, as described above, would have seen any issues resolved, lovingly, in a one-on-one basis, within parish structures. But again, this is not always the case.

If a serious concern has not been dealt with, or dealt with properly, at these other levels and reaches the bishop or even the Holy See, then the process is different. The question is not who, or how many people, are raising how many concerns. Rather, once it is put to the bishop, the questions are: "Are the concerns of a serious nature?", "Are they warranted?", "Has the accused person been given the benefit of the doubt?" and "What action needs to be taken?"

In Ms. Kolpack's case, there is well-warranted and serious concern. She was given the benefit of the doubt for a number of years and alternate resolutions were sought, prior to the meeting at which she was let go. The serious concerns brought to the bishop's attention should not

have been news to Ms. Kolpack. As stated previously, Ms Kolpack had an opportunity to establish the bishop's trust to teach in his name, in his parish.

"Due process" has its place in criminal matters. Were this a criminal accusation, canonically or civilly, the proper canonical or civil process would then come into effect. This is not a trial, but simply a matter of trust. Can the bishop trust that Ms. Kolpack will teach the Truth of Jesus Christ as revealed to His Church, without compromise? In the end, in his prudential judgment, the bishop decided he could not. Ms. Kolpack was let go and her termination did follow a process.

If there was a breakdown in the optimal process, that necessitated that the bishop address the situation himself, then this is something that must also be addressed. Because, again, this should have never happened.

11. Q: In addressing this issue, the diocese keeps bringing up the marks of the Church. What do the marks of the Church have to do with any of this?

A: Everything! This is what makes us Catholic. As stated in a previous question every one who wishes to call themselves Catholic must proclaim (as in the creed) faith in the fact that the church itself is one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

We are **one** because the Church's source is the *one* God. There can only be *one* true church, founded by Jesus, who restores unity between creation and the Creator. We believe in: *one* faith, rebirth in *one* Baptism, only *one* Body, and that it is given life by the *one* Spirit.

We are **holy** because Christ, Himself, founded the Church as His bride. He gave Himself up to make her *holy*. At Pentecost, the Spirit of *holiness* gives her life. Since she still includes sinners, she is "the sinless one made up of sinners." Her *holiness* shines in the saints; in Mary she is already *all-holy*. It is through the Church that the grace of God is distributed. We need that grace to be saved. We, likewise, are called to become *holy*!

We are **catholic (universal)** because the Church contains the *fullness* of the faith. She bears in herself and administers the *totality* of the means of salvation. She is sent out to all peoples *everywhere*. She speaks to all people and *encompasses all times*. She is missionary of her very nature. We likewise are called to assent to this *fullness* of the *universal* truths she offers and to be missionary.

We are **apostolic** because the Church was built on the twelve *apostles*, by Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Church is therefore indestructible. She is upheld infallibly in the truth because Christ governs her through Peter and the other *apostles*, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops, in union with him. This is, by definition, the Magisterium of the Church.

If we fall short of really believing these lofty things, we are not being sincere when we make our profession of faith every Sunday and on every other solemnity. We cannot accept one, or only some, of these marks. We are called to believe them all, in illuminated faith. Similarly, we must always take an honest look at those beliefs which we might question and look deeper, so as to reconcile ourselves to the faith of Christ's Church, and never the other way around. This is our faith. We ask that every baptized Catholic assent to these truths and they must be espoused, in word and deed, by all those charged with catechesis, at every level. Anything less is scandalous. (See the catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 866-870.)

12. Q: Isn't this asking us to have "blind" obedience?

A: For a Catholic to profess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, is for them to profess His mystical (“sacramental”) guidance of the Church which Jesus Himself established upon the Twelve Apostles, establishing St. Peter as the head. This same promise of guidance and authority has been handed down thorough the centuries to successors of St. Peter and the Apostles, the Pope and the bishops in communion with him (“I will send you the Spirit of Truth ... he will guide you to all truth” [Jn. 16], “He who hears you hears me” [Lk 10], etc.). Therefore, in being obedient to the Church, the Catholic is obedient to Jesus Christ, who continues to personally shepherd His sheep (Ez. 34:15), and guide each of us who believe to the abundant life, which He Himself promised (Jn. 10:10). Faith in Jesus Christ, being reasonable, inclines the believer to joyful and loving obedience to Him through the sacramental teaching and life of His Church.

13. Q: Are you saying that someone has to be perfect to work for the Church or risk getting fired?

A: Absolutely not. We are all sinners and in need of God's mercy through the salvific actions of Jesus Christ. However, every person who assists in the catechetical work of the Church, and most especially those who are paid by the Church to do so, should assent to everything in her teaching and strive continually to better understand and live that teaching. This does not mean that, from time to time, each of us isn't left with questions regarding Church teachings or our understanding of God's mysteries. Even great Saints throughout our history have written privately of their struggles and doubts, yet we see from them a true witness of what it is, by their virtues of humility, piety, and perseverance, to submit to the will of God and trust in the tenets of the faith. Likewise, each of the faithful is called to be a saint and humbly assent to the truth, despite these struggles. Personal integrity should prompt an employed catechist who, after trying, cannot give such assent, to withdraw from these responsibilities until they can.

14. Q: Is this the bishop's way of trying to close St. Thomas Parish?

A: No. The bishop has absolutely no plans to close St. Thomas Parish. The Diocese of Madison is presently implementing the strategic pastoral plans of the *Guided by the Spirit* planning process that every parish participated in creating. This multi-year effort called *Trusting in the Spirit*, is the result of thousands of hours of work, of several hundred people throughout the diocese, in increasing the life of each and every community by focusing efforts on our ability to help people meet Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, in a life-changing way. These plans are posted on the diocese website for all to see. The parishes of Beloit, of which St. Thomas Parish is one, have worked very diligently to create an excellent plan for their future. A plan to which the Bishop has given his blessing, and he fully supports the implementation of their plan.

Any speculation that the bishop has designs on closing the parish are, at best, careless gossip or, at worst, mean-spirited lies. Please visit the [Trusting in the Spirit Pastoral Plan on the diocesan website](#) to get all the information on the Diocese of Madison's strategic planning for the future. Please assist us in clarifying this error.

15. Q: Is it possible for Ms. Kolpack to be reinstated?

A: The bishop's prudential judgment to no longer allow Ms. Kolpack to continue teaching in one of his parishes is not likely to be reversed. However, the bishop has stated that we should “never say never” in this regard.

Our God is one of love and of mercy. Each of us should continually seek to conform ourselves to Him and to His will. As has been stated above, the understanding of Catholic doctrine

and our assent to that teaching is an ongoing choice and one to which the Church is continually calling every man and women, most especially those who wish to teach in her name.

16. Q: The newspapers have reported that Ms. Kolpack would be willing to make a profession of faith, and take the oath of fidelity, yet they also report she supports so-called “gay marriage” and “woman’s ordination.” Is it possible for one to hold these views and sincerely make the profession of faith, and take the oath of fidelity?

A: Good question. Again, since we’ll not discuss particular issues of this personnel issue, we’ll steer away from any discussion about Ms. Kolpack. However public statements do give rise to this important question and many members have asked similar questions. Since this inquiry involves several different aspects that deserve attention, let’s break it down into manageable portions:

a) Why does the Church teach that only men may be admitted to Holy Orders?

Jesus Christ asked his detractors, “*Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?*”(Mt. 9:15). With this subtlety, Our Lord indicates to his first century Jewish listeners his own identity as God, the Old Testament divine Bridegroom of Israel. He is the Bridegroom who remains faithful, even when the Bride betrays his love (cf. Hos 1-3; Jer 2). This Old Testament prefigurement is fulfilled in the New Covenant where the Son of God takes on human flesh and draws to himself His Bride, the Church ([Jn 3:29](#)), purifying her that she may be without blemish ([Eph 5: 25-27](#)) through the water (of baptism) and the blood (of the Eucharist) flowing from his pierced side. As Eve was born from the side of Adam, so too is the Church, the Bride of Christ, born from the side of Jesus, the “new Adam” (cf. 1Co 15: 22, 45; Ro 5:14).¹

With such symbolism throughout divine revelation, the Holy Spirit reveals the unfathomable mystery of God’s active and complete (nuptial) love for humanity.

Unlike most other societal roles, by the design of God, *symbol* is more important than *function* in the sacred liturgy. It thus makes sense that Jesus Christ would choose only men to be his apostles to symbolically (that is, sacramentally) re-present Him “*in persona Christi*,” the divine Bridegroom of His Bride the Church in sacred liturgy, and the apostles would, in turn, choose only men to be their successors, the bishops.

This in no way undermines the absolute equal personal dignity of men and women ([Gaudium et spes](#), 29), for diversity of mission in no way compromises equal personal dignity ([1 Cor 12-13](#)).

Due to these reasons, and more,² the Church recognizes herself bound by the action of the Lord Himself in calling only men to the college of Apostles. This practice was also continued by the Apostles in choosing their successors, the bishops, and continues to this day ([CCC, 1577](#)). With this understanding very clearly in mind, Pope John Paul II concludes his Apostolic Letter [Ordinatio Sacerdotalis](#) with the following: “*Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed ... I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.*”

¹ Also see [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 796](#).

² For a thorough analysis of this question, see: Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Inter Insigniores](#), 1976; and John Paul II, Apostolic Letter [Ordinatio Sacerdotalis](#), 1994.

b) Where does this teaching fit into the Profession of Faith?

The teaching that only men may be admitted to Holy Orders falls within the second category of teaching addressed in the *Profession of Faith*³ which states, “I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals.”⁴ Therefore, “Every believer ... is required to give firm and definitive assent to these truths, based on faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the Church's Magisterium, and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Magisterium in these matters. Whoever denies these truths would be in a position of rejecting a truth of Catholic doctrine and would therefore no longer be in full communion with the Catholic Church” (emphasis in original text).⁵

c) Does this therefore mean that those who deny this truth, that Holy Orders is reserved to men alone, are “no longer in full Communion with the Catholic Church”?

Yes. It is important to recall that not every teaching of Christ is easy to understand or accept, as we see in Christ's own time (see Jn 6:53-60, Mk 10:17-22). However, each of us, to remain in Communion with the Church, are called to trust the teachings of Christ and His Church. That does not mean that we cannot question and try to work out answers. In fact, the great Doctor of the Church, St. Anselm, in his *Monologion*, says that a faith which, “merely believes what it ought to believe,” is, in effect, “dead.” Instead, St. Anselm says, in all matters we should have “faith seeking understanding.”

That being said, if one is unable to give assent to a teaching of the Church, if one chooses to challenge that teaching publicly or teach to the contrary, they have, by definition, removed themselves from full Communion with the Catholic Church.

d) What about so-called “gay marriage”? Why is that wrong?

First, with regards to individuals who have an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction to persons of the same sex, they, as with each and every human person, share the dignity of an individual for whom Jesus Christ the Son of God willingly laid down his life and died on the Cross. Such individuals, our brothers and sisters who have a same sex attraction, “*must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter.*”⁶

As with every other human person, people who have a same sex attraction are called to be saints and to share in the eternal beatitude with the Holy Trinity through the practice of virtue (necessarily including chastity) and a sacramental life of following Jesus Christ in and through His Church.

As with any temptation, the *inclination to homosexual acts* is not sinful. However, the Church has always declared homosexual acts themselves to be “*intrinsically disordered.*” *They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be*

³ [Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity](#), 1998.

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio Fidei](#), 6, 1998.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2358.](#)

approved.”⁷ Thus, homosexual acts, are “*sins gravely contrary to chastity,*”⁸ and therefore, “*all Catholics are obliged to oppose the legal recognition of homosexual unions.*”⁹

In summary, “*The Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behaviour or to legal recognition of homosexual unions.*”¹⁰

e) Where does this teaching on homosexual acts fit into the Profession of Faith?

Like the teaching above (sections a to c) with regards to the priesthood, this teaching also falls within the second category of teaching addressed in the *Profession of Faith*¹¹ which states, “*I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals.*”¹²

f) Does this therefore mean that those who deny this truth, by supporting so-called “gay marriage,” are also “no longer in full Communion with the Catholic Church”?

Yes. (see 16c, above)

17. Q: But the newspapers have also reported that Ms. Kolpack defends these departures from the teaching of the Church as a matter of personal conscience. Is this a legitimate position for a Catholic?

A: Just to be clear, once again, we’ll address this question generally, and not in respect to any one person’s public statements, but only as regards the general questions which have arisen.

First, conscience is “*the interior voice of a human being, with whose heart the inner law of God is inscribed.*”¹³ It functions as a judgment of the practical intellect which applies universal principals to particular situations.

There are two fundamental duties with regard to conscience: 1) an individual must properly form his or her conscience with an understanding of true universal principals¹⁴, 2) an individual must properly follow the judgments of his or her conscience, for in listening to one’s conscience “*the prudent man can hear God speaking.*”¹⁵

When making a profession of faith, either formally, at their baptism, at their entrance into the Church, or merely at a regular Sunday Mass, “*the believer recognizes and attests that he professes the faith of the entire Church.*” It is for this reason the formula “We believe” is used. For this “*is the faith of the Church confessed by the Bishops assembled in council or more generally by the liturgical assembly of believers.*”¹⁶

In making the profession of faith, reciting the Nicene Creed, in “*the liturgical assembly of believers*” on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation, the Catholic freely reasserts their baptismal

⁷ Ibid., [2357](#).

⁸ Ibid., [2396](#).

⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition To Unions Between Homosexual Persons](#), 10, 2003.

¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹¹ [Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity](#), 1998.

¹² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio Fidei](#), 6, 1998.

¹³ [Glossary](#), *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition.

¹⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3; and *Gaudium et Spes*, 16

¹⁵ [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1777](#).

¹⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio Fidei](#), 12, 1998. Also see, [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 167](#).

vows assenting to the revelation of God through Jesus Christ and all of the authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church (which the Lord Himself founded) as a true representation of the universal principals of God’s law, thus professing and forming one’s conscience.

A professed Catholic, therefore, cannot simultaneously profess *assent* of conscience to the teachings of the Church and then, with integrity, maintain *dissenting* views of the same teaching.

18. Q: The newspapers also report Ms. Kolpack makes the case that “the bishop is not the church, the people are the church.” Is this accurate Catholic teaching?

A: The question here really is, “what is the Church?”. This can be answered in a number of ways, for the Church is spoken of in Her many different aspects. The Church is a Sacrament; the Church is both visible and spiritual, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ; the Church is one, yet formed of two components, human and divine. In Sacred Scripture the Church is spoken of as a sheepfold, led by the Good Shepherd; as a cultivated field; as the building of God, God’s Holy Temple; as the spotless bride and as our mother. This mystery of what and who the Church is is truly a great mystery of the faith.

The Second Vatican Council spoke of the Church as, “the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery,”¹⁷ The Church is born primarily of Christ’s total self-giving and the Church is His Mystical Body ([Eph 1:22-23](#)). All Catholics (i.e., “the people”) including the hierarchy (who are incorporated into Jesus Christ the head), are most privileged to be members of Christ’s Mystical Body.

As Christ challenged the Jews in the Temple, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,*” we learn a verse later that “*he spoke of the temple of his body*” (Jn 2:19, 21). Our Lord’s body, His Very Self, is the New Temple, the Church.

The book of Tobit prophesies that the Messiah will build a glorious New Temple that will last forever ([14:5-7](#)). Catholics are made members of this New Temple, the Church ([Mt 16:18](#)), through the reception of the Holy Spirit at baptism ([1Co 3:16](#)) and fully incorporated into Christ’s body with the reception of the Holy Eucharist ([Jn 6:56](#)). Thus, as St. Paul explains, Christians are individual members of the body of Christ ([1 Co 12:27](#)), that is, members of this New Temple, the Church, which is “*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*” ([Eph 2:20-22](#)).¹⁸

19. Q: OK, so the Church is Christ and “the people” are His members. What, then, is the bishop’s authority in the Church? Is the bishop, “just one member like everyone else”? Is this an accurate summary of Catholic teaching on this matter?

A: This statement seems to suggest the Church has a democratic structure. By the will of Jesus Christ, this is not the case. The Church is rather a Kingdom ([Mt. 3:2](#)), where Jesus Christ is the King ([Lk 1:32-33](#)). In this everlasting kingdom, all subjects strive to be joyfully obedient to their savior Jesus Christ (see question 12 above).

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 3

¹⁸ Also see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [669](#), [787-795](#), [797-798](#).

As reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council the bishops are successors of the apostles: *“Christ (the King), whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, has through His apostles, made their successors, the bishops, partakers of His consecration and His mission”*¹⁹

The Council further describes how the bishop acts with the teaching, sanctifying and governing authority of Jesus Christ the King, Himself. The bishops are, therefore, *“authentic teachers”* of the apostolic faith, *“endowed with the authority of Christ.”*²⁰ Furthermore, *“Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power, which indeed they use only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness ... This power, which they personally exercise in Christ's name, is proper, ordinary and immediate ... In virtue of this power, bishops have the sacred right and the duty before the Lord to make laws for their subjects, to pass judgment on them and to moderate everything pertaining to the ordering of worship and the apostolate.”*²¹

The Church, therefore, teaches *“the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ (cf. Lk. 10:16) ... In the bishops, therefore, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe.”*²²

With regard to the response of the faithful to their bishops, the Second Vatican Council continues, *“The faithful must cling to their bishop, as the Church does to Christ, and Jesus Christ to the Father, so that all may be of one mind through unity, and abound to the glory of God.”*²³ And as St. Ignatius of Antioch taught, as early as 106 A.D., *“Let all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows his Father, and the college of presbyters as the apostles; respect the deacons as you do God's law. Let no one do anything concerning the Church in separation from the bishop.”*²⁴

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¹⁹ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, [Lumen Gentium](#), 28.

²⁰ Ibid., 25.

²¹ Ibid., 27.

²² Ibid., 20-21. Also see, the [Rite of Ordination of a Bishop](#), 18.

²³ Ibid., 27.

²⁴ Quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [896](#). For further study see, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 861-896.