

*What about Catholic leadership and Authority?*

Leadership at all levels of Church depends on three things; natural God-given talents, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and recognition by Church authority. Authority among God's people comes from our risen Jesus who is truly alive in the Church He instituted. Both the teaching and governing authority in the Church flow through the Bishops in union with the Pope. All lay leadership in a parish is subject to this pastoral authority. Even voluntary home based fellowships that are initiated by private inspiration must ultimately be subject to the discernment of the Church. The Holy Spirit is alive in a primary way in the overseer's authority Jesus gave His apostles and their successors. God affirms His word in them.

This has never been an easy concept for some zealous lay leaders to accept. They know the Holy Spirit too, sometimes better than some bishops. To understand Catholic leadership we need a better grasp of just what God's Church is and what it is not.

Church cannot be a full democracy. God's voice in His ordained leaders cannot be voted down. Church is both an institution made up of imperfect humans and, less obviously, it is also a holy mystical reality. It is not a human organization in the secular sense. Church was instituted by Jesus with His apostles and grew and developed over 2000 years under the watch and inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. There is only one vote that counts and that is God's. He informs all who listen yet He set up the authority of the Magisterium to guarantee His vote.

Now all this is firm and final, but in day to day practice the Church depends heavily on the talents and gifts of all her people. Our Church freely delegates certain large areas of ministry and leadership to talented people who are obedient and open to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works both from the top and from the bottom but He does not say one thing at one end and another at the other. God's message is too important to leave to individual interpretation. Creative and loyal lay leadership in cooperation with our pastors is what Jesus wants. We all have a part to play on this team. Our Bishop and Pastor are like coaches who guide us. Our team spirit is the Holy Spirit. We are all in this together. Amen.