

CONSECRATION OF BISHOP

In the event of a bishopric becoming vacant as a result of the death of its bishop or for other reasons, a successor is nominated by the clergy and congregation, and his name is submitted to the patriarch, together with a testimonial called a deed of election. The patriarch refers this testimonial to the Holy Synod (see SYNOD, HOLY) for approval, after which a date is set for the ceremony of the new bishop's consecration. This takes place on a Sunday and is usually held at the cathedral church of the patriarchate in Cairo.

Clothing with the Schema

On the eve of the consecration, a service is held during which the nominee is given an ecclesiastical name and is [clothed](#) with the schema, unless he has already been vested with it at the outset of his monastic life. The schema is a long plaited leather girdle adorned with crosses and is worn crosswise over the chest and the back as a symbol of strict austerity and asceticism.

At the start of the proceedings, a further verification of the unanimous agreement of the clergy and congregation on the choice of the nominee is carried out by the patriarch or his deputy. With the bishop-elect standing in front of all, they are asked three times if they consider him to be the right man, one who is capable of shouldering the serious responsibilities of the bishopric. This is done in fulfillment of the stipulation laid down in the [Constitutions](#) of the Holy Apostles:

And let the principal of the bishops ask the presbytery and people whether this be the person whom they desire for their ruler. And if they give their consent, let him ask further whether he has a good testimony from all men as to his worthiness for so great and glorious an authority; whether all things relating to his piety towards God be right; whether [justice](#) towards men has been observed by him . . . whether he has been

unblameable in the course of his life. And if all the assembly together do according to truth, and not according to prejudice, witness that he is such a one, let them the third time, as before God the judge, and Christ, the Holy Ghost being also present, as well as all the holy and ministering spirits, ask again whether he be truly worthy of this ministry, that so “in the mouth of two or three [witnesses](#) every word may be established.” And if they agree the third time that he is worthy, let them all be demanded their vote; and when they all give it willingly, let them be heard.

Pledge

The bishop-elect then reads a solemn pledge taken before Almighty God, the invisible Head of the Church; the sacred altar; the patriarch, bishops, and presbyters; the members of the Holy Synod; and the people, in which he undertakes to uphold the orthodox faith to the last breath and obey the [canons](#) of the holy apostles and the ecumenical councils of NICAIA (325), CONSTANTINOPLE (381), and EPHEBUS (431), as well as the canons approved by the regional councils and the holy fathers of the church; to safeguard the rites, doctrines, and traditions of the Coptic Orthodox Church; to treat all the members of his parish with [justice](#) and without bias or favor, not condemning anyone on hearsay but affording him an opportunity to prove his innocence; to continue to lead an ascetic life, never treating the church assets as his own; and to submit to the supreme authority of the church, vested in His Holiness, the pope and patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, and in the Holy Synod.

When the bishop-elect has read the pledge, his episcopal vestments receive the sign of the cross, and his new ecclesiastical name is announced.

Sunday Procession

In the course of the celebration of the Divine [Liturgy](#) on the following Sunday morning, and immediately after the readings from the Acts and

the SYNAXARION, the bishops, clergy, and deacons go to where the bishop-elect is awaiting. They bring him into the cathedral in an impressive procession, carrying crosses and lighted [candles](#) and chanting in Coptic the hymn beginning, “The Only- begotten Son, the Eternal Logos, Who for our salvation was incarnate from the THEOTOKOS, the ever-Virgin Mary, and became man, and was crucified.”

Upon reaching the sanctuary, the bishop-elect kneels down and kisses the cross in the hand of the pope, before he is seated. Then the pope asks the archdeacon or a priest to read the deed of election.

Deed of Election

This testimonial is addressed by the clergy and congregation of the vacant bishopric to the pope, beginning with the honorific titles of the successor to the throne of Saint Mark. It describes the sorrowful state of the parish after the departure of its bishop and the eventual choice of a monk of a certain monastery to fill the vacancy, he being filled with virtue and piety, a man who has forsaken the world, a good teacher, eager to listen to the Gospel of Truth.

The pope descends from the throne and stands at the altar, facing eastward. With the bishops surrounding him, he offers incense and says the Prayer of Incense, while the bishop-elect kneels at the altar.

Petitions

The archdeacon says the following petitions, after each of which the congregation responds by saying the Kyrie eleison:

1. “Almighty God, who art in heaven, we beseech Thee, hear us, and have mercy upon “
2. “Pray for the peace of the One Holy Catholic Apostolic “
3. “Pray for the life and safety of our Father the Patriarch, Abba [name],

and all the bishops, the clergy, and the Christ-loving congregation.”

4. “Pray for the forgiveness of our sins and delivery from all tribulation.”
5. “Pray to God to bless His inheritance and have mercy upon His people, through the intercession of the Blessed *Theotokos*, Saint Mark, and all the “
6. “We beseech Thee, Lord, send Thine Holy Spirit upon this elect servant of Thine [name].”

The congregation says the *Kyrie eleison* fifty times.

Laying-on of Hands

The bishops lay their hands upon the bishop-elect’s shoulders and arms. Then, facing the west, the pope prays, “God Almighty, [Lord](#) of all, source of all mercy and comfort. . . . Thou art He who didst redeem us with Thy Blood. . . . Grant Thy servant [name] grace to bind and to loose. Give him wisdom to shepherd Thy flock in purity and justice, for Thine is the power and the glory, with Thy Good Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.”

He places his right hand upon the bishop-elect’s forehead, until the archdeacon has finished saying the following pronouncement: “May the Divine grace which makes good all inadequacy, heals all infirmity, and provides for the Holy Church of God, come upon [name] the servant of God, the priest and monk of the monastery of [name] in the place of [name] whom the [Lord](#) hath taken unto Him. Let us all pray, beseeching God to grant him the grace of the Holy Spirit.” All then say the *Kyrie eleison*.

Looking toward the altar, the patriarch says this prayer: “Yes, Lord, make him worthy of the episcopal office, to serve Thy Name and Thy holy altar, and shepherd Thy flock in purity and truth, and be crowned with the portion of Thy Saints, through the mercies of Thy Only-begotten Son, our

[Lord](#) Jesus Christ, with whom and the Holy Spirit Thou art blessed, now and forever. Amen.” He looks toward the west and places his right hand upon the bishop-elect’s head. The bishops lay their hands upon his arm and the pope recites the Prayer of Laying-on of Hands:

Master, [Lord](#) God, the Almighty, Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, who has neither beginning nor end . . . who dwelleth in the highest and looks upon the lowly . . . do now pour Thy Holy Spirit which Thou hast granted to Thy pure apostles, give the same grace to Thy servant [name], whom Thou hast chosen bishop, that he may shepherd Thy holy flock, and become unto Thee a blameless server, and pray unto Thy goodness day and night. Give unto him through Thy Christ the authority to forgive sins according to the commandment of Thy only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to ordain clergy, to loose all ecclesiastical bonds, to consecrate new churches and altars, and serve Thee without blame, all the days of his life, with pure, holy bloodless sacrifices.

Fill him, Lord, with the graces of the Holy Spirit, grant him the grace of healing and teaching, that he may become a good guide to those who go astray, a light to those who walk in darkness and sin, a teacher to the ignorant, disclosing the word of truth rightly, following the example of the True Shepherd, our [Lord](#) Jesus Christ, ready to lay down his life for his sheep . . . that he may stand with boldness before Thy awesome throne, looking forward to the great reward which Thou hast prepared for those who labor for the preaching of the Gospel.

Then the pope turns to the east, toward the altar, and continues, “Look upon us, Lord, and upon our ministry, and purify us from all defilement. Send from above upon Thy servant [bishop’s name] Thy grace of high priesthood, that he may be worthy through Thy good pleasure to shepherd Thy flock without blame, for Thou art [merciful](#) and worthy of honor and worship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever.” Turning to the west, the pope [signs](#) the head of the bishop with his thumb

three times, saying, “We ordain you [name] bishop in the holy church of the Christ-loving city of [name] and its nome, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Here the bishop is helped on with the episcopal vestments, while the pope says, “Glory and honor unto the All-holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; peace and edification unto the Church of God, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Blessed be the [Lord](#) God forever. Amen.” He makes the sign of the cross three times with his thumb over the head of the bishop, saying, “We ordain [name], elect of God, bishop in the One, Holy, Indissoluble Church of the Unseen and Living God, of the Christ-loving city of [name] and its nome, unto the glory and honor of the Name of the Holy Trinity, to the peace and edification of the Holy Church.”

The archdeacon reads a few more petitions, and the pope says another prayer of thanksgiving and returns to his throne. At this point, the celebration of the Divine [Liturgy](#) is resumed, and the [Pauline epistle](#) is read from Hebrews 4:14 and 5:6, followed by the *Trisagion*, the Intercession of the Gospel, the Gospel reading, and the rest of the anaphora.

The pope administers the communion to the new bishop, gives him the breath of the Holy Spirit, places his right hand upon his head, saying, “Worthy, worthy, worthy, bishop [name] of the city of [name] and its nome.” His [liturgical](#) vestments are changed for his black cassock, and the pope hands him his crosier and cross.

Episcopal Exhortation

Finally, the pope delivers a sermon known as the episcopal commandment, which is a [compendium](#) of precepts of virtue and godliness culled from the New Testament to serve as guidelines for the new bishop, as seen from the following passages:

Be always humble, quiet, contented and merciful, and never lose your equanimity. Eschew the love of money, and be kind to orphans, widows, and needy strangers. Judge in all truth as though you are standing before God, avoiding bias and partiality. Follow the example of Jesus Christ, Who died for us all. Shepherd your flock and search for the stray sheep. Refrain from the pleasures of life and eating choice food. Do not accept bribes, for bribery blinds the eyes of rulers. Never expect to receive gifts in return for ordaining a priest, for this is simony. Do not be over-hasty in laying on hands in ordination, lest you should find yourself responsible for other people's misdeeds. You have received this grace free; accordingly confer it free upon whom you find to be worthy of it. . . .

Be careful in dispensing church money, use it sparingly, and act as an honest and upright steward of God, allowing yourself only the food you eat and the clothes you wear. We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything with us when we leave. Be charitable to orphans, the widowed, and those in want. . . .

Proclaim the word of God on all occasions, convenient or inconvenient. Rebuke. Tend the flock of God whose shepherd you are, not under obligation, but of your own free will, not for gain but out of utter devotion. . . .

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ARCHBISHOP BASILIOS



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