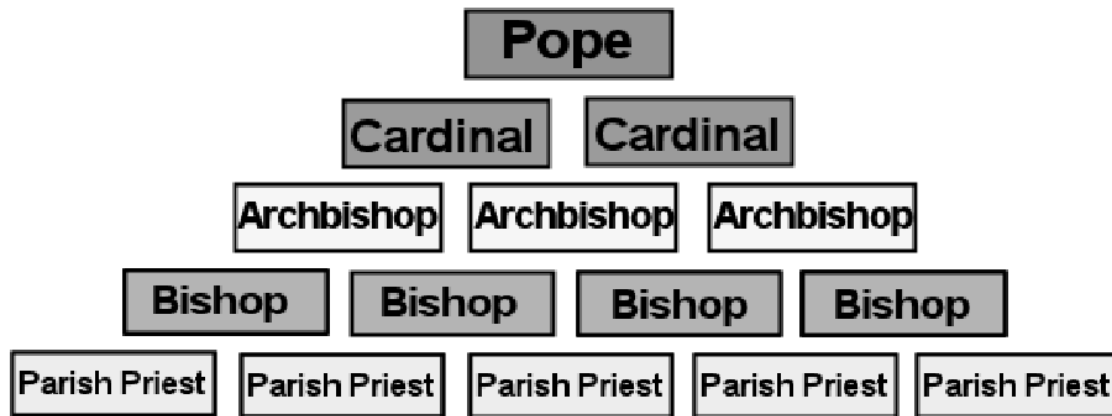


The Roman Catholic Church was the only major source of religion in Medieval Western Europe and all people were Catholics. The Church was very powerful and was controlled by the **Pope** in Rome. The diagram below shows the hierarchy of the church.



The Pope was very influential and was seen as God's representative on Earth. Cardinals were important Archbishops and **Bishops** who directly served the Pope as well as carrying out their own duties. From 1059, **Cardinals** also had the duty of electing a new Pope. Archbishops and Bishops were usually members of the nobility. They were very wealthy, owned large areas of land and advised Kings.

Although their roles were often the same Archbishops were higher than Bishops. Parish **Priests** were the hardest working members of the Church hierarchy. They worked in the Parish [District served by a church], holding church services, hearing confessions, visiting the sick and, if they were educated, teaching boys in the village. The Parish Priest was also responsible for collecting the church tax which had to be paid yearly by everyone. This tax, called a **tithe**, was one tenth of all new born animals and one tenth of crops harvested.

Religion was a very important part of people's lives. People believed that God and the Saints controlled their lives and the world around them and were responsible for things like the weather, diseases, bad luck and good luck. If bad things happened it was a sign that God was angry with the people. People prayed to the Saints to ask for their help with things that concerned them.

All people had to attend Church at least once a week where they were taught about Heaven and Hell. They were told that they were sinful and that if they did not attend church they would go to Hell when they died and would live there in agony forever. They might also have to spend time in **purgatory**, which the Church taught was a place between Heaven and Hell. People therefore tried to gain forgiveness for their sins so that they would spend only a short time in purgatory. The Parish Priest had the power to forgive people their sins and people attended confession regularly to admit their sins.

Another way of receiving forgiveness for sins was to go on a **pilgrimage** to the shrine of one of the saints. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* published at the end of the fourteenth century tells the story of a group of pilgrims who travel to Canterbury.

Some people chose to devote their lives to the Church and became monks or nuns. **Monks** entered a monastery and nuns entered a convent also called a nunnery. **Nuns** and monks worked for the good of the churches and also for the good of the community. The Monks and Nuns performed many works of charity by providing food for the hungry and help and medicines for the sick. Work was conducted on church-owned lands and the monks, and sometimes the nuns produced beautifully illuminated manuscripts of classical authors and religious works. Many people gave gifts of money or food to monasteries and nunneries because they thought it would help them to go to heaven.

1. Describe the church hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

2. What were Christians expected to do for the Catholic Church?

3. What did the Catholic Church do for its followers?

4. Why do you think someone might become a monk or a nun?