

The Coat of Arms of the Archdiocese of Baltimore



It is a tradition in the Catholic Church for dioceses, bishops, and cardinals to have coats of arms. A coat of arms consists of a shield and external ornaments. Each coat of arms is unique and is designed to convey information that is particular to a person or place through symbol and color. The symbols and colors displayed on a coat of arms, then, are carefully chosen and relate to the faithful such things as the history of the local Church, the ancestry of the bishop, the traditions and principles that inspire and guide the bishop, and the office and position held by the bishop within the Catholic Church.

The coat of arms designed for the Archdiocese of Baltimore incorporates symbols and colors that commemorate the special place it holds in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. The cross displayed is taken from the Calvert family coat of arms. The Calverts, who were Catholic, founded the colony of Maryland in 1634. As victims of persecution for their faith in England, the Calverts sought to create a society where people of different religious beliefs could live together peacefully. Their policy of religious toleration, the first in the West, guaranteed people the right to worship freely and, most significantly for Catholics, to lay the foundation for the Catholic Church in this country. Maryland's contributions were recognized by the Holy See in 1789 when Baltimore was designated the seat of the nation's first diocese. After the American Revolution, the Maryland tradition, which embraced such principles as religious freedom, separation of church and state, ecumenism, and public service, were drawn upon to strengthen the ties between the Catholic community and the new country. The use of the colors of red, white, and blue, which are those of the nation's flag, reinforce this relationship and identify the Archdiocese as being part of the U.S. Catholic Church.

The coat of arms also identifies the patroness of the Archdiocese through the use of color and symbol. It was Archbishop John Carroll, the nation's first Catholic bishop, who placed the Archdiocese under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Assumption in 1791. This is represented in the use of blue, a color that is closely associated with Mary and is traditionally used in art to depict her main garment. The five-pointed star is also a symbol used to represent Mary.