

Where Does the Church Say?

Type of Document	Author	Audience	What's in It? / Examples
Sacred Scriptures	various writers inspired by the Holy Spirit	all people	the Word of God in the words of humans
Dogmatic Constitution	the Pope and Ecumenical Council fathers (example: Vatican Council II)	all the people of God	a solemn, formal decree that expresses the dogma or doctrinal understanding of the Church in a particular era (example: <i>Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium, 1964]</i> from Vatican Council II)
Apostolic Constitution	the Pope in his own name	usually all the faithful, but see greeting for specific group being addressed	solemn, formal document on matters of highest consequence concerning doctrine or disciplinary matters that are published as either universal or particular law of the Church (example: <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>)
Encyclical (<i>encyclica epistola</i>: literally “circular letter”)	the Pope in his own name	usually addressed to the bishops, clergy, and faithful of the entire Church, but also to “all people of good will”	a pastoral letter that attempts to refine our understanding of some doctrine or part of the human condition through the Pope’s ordinary teaching office (example <i>Caritas in Veritate</i> , by Pope Benedict XVI)
Apostolic Letter	the Pope in his own name or a Vatican congregation	addressed to particular audience in greeting	a formal papal teaching document, not used for dogmatic definitions of doctrine but to give counsel to the Church on points of doctrine that require deeper explanation in the light of particular circumstances or situations in various parts of the world (example: <i>Rosarium Virginis Mariae</i> , by Pope John Paul II)
Apostolic Exhortation	the Pope in his own name	addressed to bishops, clergy, and all the faithful of the entire Catholic Church	a reflection on a particular topic that does not contain dogmatic definitions or policy directives; not a legislative document (example: <i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , by Pope John Paul II)
<i>Motu Proprio</i> (literally “by one’s own initiative”)	the Pope in his own name	addressed to bishops, clergy, and all the faithful of the entire Catholic Church	a legislative document or decree issued by the Pope on his own initiative, not in response to a request (example: “ <i>Summorum Pontificum</i> ,” by Pope Benedict XVI)



Declaration and Decree	specific Vatican congregations or specific bishop groups	addressed to specific group in greeting of the document	a statement involving Church law, precepts or judicial decisions on a specific matter; an ordinance given by one having the power of jurisdiction (worldwide or local diocese) (example: <i>On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church [Dominus Iesus]</i> from Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith)
Instruction	specific Vatican congregations	addressed to specific group in greeting of the document	explains or amplifies a document that has legislative force, such as apostolic constitutions, and states how its precepts are to be applied (example: <i>General Instruction on the Roman Missal</i>)
Pastoral Letter	national bishops' conferences or local bishop	the faithful within the country or the local diocese	an explanation of how Church teaching applies to or is to be put into effect within a given country or diocese (example: <i>Economic Justice for All</i> , by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

