

Heraldic Achievement of
MOST REVEREND BARRY C. KNESTOUT
Thirteenth Bishop of Richmond

Per pale: dexter, argent an orle gules overall on a bend azure three mullets argent; sinister, gules in front of a tower embattled argent a lion couchant guardant Or, within a border of the second charged alternately with crosses bottony gules and luces vert.

In designing the shield—the central element in what is formally called the heraldic achievement—a bishop has an opportunity to depict symbolically various aspects of his own life and heritage, and to highlight particular aspects of Catholic faith and devotion that are important to him. Every coat of arms also includes external elements that identify the rank of the bearer. The formal description of a coat of arms, known as the *blazon*, uses a technical language, derived from medieval French and English terms, which allows the appearance and position of each element in the achievement to be recorded precisely.

A diocesan bishop shows his commitment to the flock he shepherds by combining his personal coat of arms with that of the diocese, in a technique known as *impaling*. The shield is divided in half along the *pale* or central vertical line. The arms of the diocese appear on the *dexter* side—that is, on the side of the shield to the viewer’s left, which would cover the right side (in Latin, *dextera*) of the person carrying the shield. The arms of the bishop are on the *sinister* side—the bearer’s left, the viewer’s right.

The arms of the Diocese of Richmond, founded in 1820, are derived from the municipal arms of Richmond, Yorkshire, which date from 1665. The English market town used a red field (*gules*) charged with an *orle*, a narrow band that follows the shape of the shield, painted white (*argent*). The whole design was surmounted by a diagonal stripe (a *bend*) painted to look like ermine fur. The Diocese keeps this arrangement but reverses the colors of the field and the orle, and paints the bend blue (*azure*). The resulting red, white and blue color scheme recalls the national colors of the United States of America. The bend is charged with white stars, alluding to Our Lady, Star of the Sea; the three stars also honor the Blessed Trinity.

The colors of Bishop Knestout’s arms allude to the ethnic heritage of his parents. The most significant colors, red and white, are prominent in the heraldry of Lithuania, the country of origin of the Knystautas family. Together with green (*vert*), they are also the national colors of Italy, the homeland of the Bishop’s maternal relatives. Red and white also figure prominently in the heraldry of District of Columbia. Cardinal James Hickey, Archbishop of Washington from 1980 to 2000, also bore a coat of arms that was predominantly red and white. Bishop Knestout was ordained a priest by Cardinal Hickey, and served as his secretary for several years.

The objects or *charges* placed on the shield are meant to honor several other Archbishops with whom Bishop Knestout has served during his priestly ministry. A white tower appears in the center of the field, in a similar style and position as one in the arms of Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who was Archbishop of Washington at the time that Bishop Knestout was ordained a Bishop. The tower also alludes to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is called by several symbolic titles in the Litany of Loreto, including “Tower of David” and “Tower of Ivory”. Moreover, the presence of this structure is meant to recall the Bishop’s secular education in architecture.

Depicted before the tower is a gold lion—an animal that figures prominently in the coats of arms of both Cardinal Hickey and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, whom the Bishop also served as secretary. The reclining position of the lion refers to the mystery of the Incarnation, as it is recalled in the Old Testament prophecies of the Lion of Judah. In the Book of Genesis, Israel blesses his sons before his death, and foretells the great king that will come forth from the descendants of “Judah . . . [who] crouches, lies down like a lion . . . who would dare rouse him? The scepter shall never depart from Judah, or the mace from between his feet” (Gen 49:9–10). Later, at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the prophet Isaiah speaks of the day of the coming Messiah, “the shoot of Jesse”, when the wild animals lie down with the tame, and the Lord brings peace (cf. Isa 11:1–9).

The position of the lion reclining in front of the tower also alludes to the Christ Child asleep in the manger before the Blessed Virgin Mary (Lk 2:12, 16). Bishop Knestout was ordained a bishop on December 29, 2008, during the Octave of Christmas.

The shield is surrounded by a white border, on which are placed red crosses whose arms terminate in circles. These *crosses bottony* are also found on the flag of the State of Maryland, and are derived from the arms of Cecil Calvert, Second Baron Baltimore, the first Proprietor of the Colony. The crosses are also meant to allude to the “Hill of Crosses” near Šiauliai in northern Lithuania, an important pilgrim shrine dating from the early 19th century. The crosses alternate with *lucres*, a particular type of fish (also known as pikes) which figure on the Italian coat of arms of the Bishop’s maternal relatives.

The motto, placed on a scroll below the shield, was the theme of the Pastoral Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States in April 2008. As Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia, Bishop Knestout was closely involved with many details of the Holy Father’s visit to the Archdiocese of Washington.

The shield is ensigned with external elements that identify the bearer as a bishop. A gold processional cross appears behind the shield. The *galero* or “pilgrim’s hat” is used heraldically in various colors and with specific numbers of tassels to indicate the rank of a bearer of a coat of arms. A bishop uses a green galero with three rows of green tassels.