

# **6 of the 9 Supreme Court Justices are Catholic — Here's a Closer Look**

The Catholics on the nation's highest court include Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Sonia Sotomayor, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett



U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Amy Coney Barrett delivers remarks during her swearing-in ceremony Monday, Oct. 26, 2020, on the South Lawn of the White House. (photo: Joyce N. Boghosian / Official White House Photo)

[Alyssa Murphy Blogs](#) October 28, 2020

With the confirmation of now Associate Justice Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court Oct. 27, there are now six practicing Catholic justices. Barrett joins Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Sonia Sotomayor and Brett Kavanaugh. To date, there have only been 15 Catholic justices — out of 115 justices total — in the history of the Supreme Court. Here is a quick glimpse at the six currently serving on the highest court in the land.

## **Justice Clarence Thomas**

Sworn in on Oct. 23, 1991, by former President George H.W. Bush, Clarence Thomas was raised in the segregated south and grew up going to Catholic school. Before finding his calling in law, Thomas was the only African American student at a Catholic seminary. He ultimately left the seminary enrolling in the Jesuit-run College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. While wrestling with the civil rights era and the issue of [race](#), Thomas became involved in the Black Panther movement until he realized all of his actions were fueled by race. As he said in a recent PBS [documentary](#), one day he prayed to God for peace and healing: “If you take this anger out of my heart, I will never hate again.” After graduation, Thomas enrolled in law school at Yale University, finding a new vocation as a lawyer.

In his memoir, *My Grandfather's Son*, Thomas talks about his faith and his understanding of rights, saying: “They start with the rights of the individual, and where do those rights come from? They come from God; they’re transcendent. And you give up some of those rights in order to be governed. They’re inalienable rights. And you give up only so many as necessary to be governed by your consent.”

## **Justice Samuel Alito**

On Jan. 31, 2006, Justice Samuel Alito was sworn in by then-President George W. Bush. Born into an Italian-Catholic family in Trenton, New Jersey, Alito has spoken about the excitement he experienced in his youth when John F. Kennedy was elected president, a unifying moment for many Catholics, as they felt accepted into mainstream society. He received his Bachelor's from Princeton University where in 1971, he chaired a student conference called “The Boundaries of Privacy in American Society” which supported curbs on domestic intelligence gathering and

anticipated the need for a statute and a court to oversee national security surveillance. Alito went on to Yale Law School, where he served as an editor on the Yale Law Journal. He earned his Juris Doctor in 1975.

Justice Alito's Catholic faith has led him to be an outspoken advocate for religious freedom. In 2017, he was almost prophetic when [speaking](#) to a group of New Jersey-based lawyers and judges and said, "A wind is picking up that is hostile to those with traditional moral beliefs."

### **Justice Sonia Sotomayor**

Appointed and sworn in by former president Barack Obama on Aug. 8, 2009, Justice Sotomayor was born in the Bronx to Puerto Rican parents. Her father died when she was 9. She was [raised Catholic](#), spending her formative years in parochial school attending Blessed Sacrament in the Bronx. Being inspired by Nancy Drew books and then the Perry Mason television series, Sotomayor knew she wanted to be a lawyer by the time she was 10. She received her Juris Doctor from Yale Law School in 1979, while serving as editor at the Yale Law Journal.

Despite her recent rulings on the high court with regard to [parochial schools](#), Justice Sotomayor has praised Catholic education, offering her own personal testimony to the role that the education had on her own life. As she [told](#) the New York Times in 2013, "You know how important those eight years were? ....what it means for all our families, like my mother, who were dirt-poor. She watched what happened to my cousins in public school and worried if we went there, we might not get out. So she scrimped and saved. It was a road of opportunity for kids with no other alternative."

### **Chief Justice John Roberts**

Chief Justice John Roberts was sworn in to the court on Sept. 29, 2005, by former president George W. Bush. Born in New York and growing up in northwestern Indiana, he attended Catholic school. His college career began at Harvard University studying history before enrolling in Harvard Law School, where he was managing editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. He began his law career clerking for Circuit Judge Henry Friendly and then-Associate Justice William Rehnquist. Roberts also served the Reagan administration and the George H. W. Bush administration in the Department of Justice and the Office of the White House Counsel. His position led him to argue 39 cases in front of the Supreme Court.

Roberts and his wife are both practicing Catholics, parishioners of Little Flower Catholic Church, not far from his current home in Maryland. His wife Jane, also an attorney, is very active in the pro-life ministry and has served on the board of Feminists for Life. Roberts was asked about his personal beliefs on abortion during his Senate confirmation hearings in 2005 and after a long pause, he said he'd probably have to recuse himself. The couple live in Maryland with their two adopted children.

### **Justice Brett Kavanaugh**

On Oct. 6, 2018, Justice Kavanaugh was sworn in to the Supreme Court after being appointed by President Donald Trump after a contentious confirmation hearing. Raised in an Irish Catholic family in Bethesda, Maryland, he attended Georgetown Preparatory School, a Jesuit boys college prep school, where he was two years ahead of Neil Gorsuch, for whom he would later clerk at the Supreme Court and with whom he would eventually serve as a Supreme Court justice. Kavanaugh studied history at Yale University before entering the university's law school. Before joining the court, he was a United States Circuit Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit and also worked as a staff lawyer for various offices of the federal government.

Justice Kavanaugh's presence in the D.C. community not only comes from his public position but also from his care and concern for those in need guided by his [strong Catholic faith](#). As a volunteer for Catholic Charities, he serves meals to the homeless and also coaches CYO basketball in the district.

### **Justice Amy Coney Barrett**

Just this week, Justice Amy Coney Barrett was sworn in by Justice Clarence Thomas after being confirmed by the Senate with a strict partisan vote. Trump nominated Barrett to the Seventh Circuit and the Senate confirmed her on Oct. 31, 2017 after a contentious hearing where she was questioned multiple times about her Catholic faith. Throughout her legal career including serving on the federal bench, she has been a Professor of Law at Notre Dame Law School, her alma mater.

Born in New Orleans to a devout Catholic family, Barrett is the oldest of seven children. She attended St. Mary's Dominican High School, an all-girls Catholic high school. Barrett's father has been an ordained deacon since 1982. Justice Barrett and her husband have seven children, two adopted from Haiti. They are members of the Catholic apostolate group, People of Praise. During her confirmation hearings, Barrett made only one reference to her faith, thanking all those that had been supporting her saying: "I believe in the power of prayer, and it has been uplifting to hear that so many people are praying for me."

During her Senate confirmation hearing, Justice Barrett commented on the unlikely friendship between Justice Antonin Scalia and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg saying: "Particularly poignant to me was her long and deep friendship with Justice Antonin Scalia, my own mentor. Justices Ginsburg and Scalia disagreed fiercely in print, without rancor in person. Their ability to maintain a warm and rich friendship despite their differences even [inspired an opera](#). These two

great Americans demonstrated that arguments, even about matters of great consequence, need not destroy affection. In both my personal and professional relationships, I strive to meet that standard.”

Although we see a great divide given the partisan vote that landed Justice Barrett onto the Supreme Court, let us pray that the friendship of Scalia and Ginsberg will inspire justices, politicians, and laypeople across the country to find common ground and respect.

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