



Mission Statement

We are People of God baptized in Christ and professing our faith in a living Catholic tradition. We are men and women, lay and ordained, joining together as a “communion of communities” in response to the messianic call of the Spirit to preach the Gospel of liberation and justice; to offer a refuge in Christ for those who suffer prejudice; to stand open to dialogue with others so called and, to conform our lives to the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.



Frequently Asked Questions

The Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC) is a gathering of Faith Communities from across America who have entered into a covenant relationship with one another as we seek to celebrate the love of Christ in all people. We are deeply committed to our Catholic identity and practice a distinctively Catholic Faith Tradition that is rooted in the ancient Church. We also believe that as Catholics we have the responsibility of honoring our Catholic Tradition while responding in love and wisdom to the needs and realities of the contemporary world.

What are Ecumenical Catholic Churches?

We are independent Catholic faith communities in that we are not under the jurisdiction of the Pope nor are we subject to the canon law or the guidelines of the Roman Catholic Church. We share common roots of the same Bishop – The Most Reverend Peter E. Hickman. We also share a common Catholic theology and liturgical tradition, we differ significantly in many of the disciplines and rules that govern the Roman Catholic Church.

How is the ECC a catholic church?

We uphold our catholic tradition with respect to the following principles:

- The teachings and person of Jesus Christ
- The New Testament
- The Nicene Creed
- The Sacramental & Liturgical tradition practiced
- Apostolic Tradition and Succession affirmed

Our Communion unites authentic Catholic faith communities that stretch across the United States. We are a communion of communities which are ecumenical and catholic in that we celebrate a characteristically Catholic faith tradition that is not sectarian.

We share a common theology and liturgical tradition with the Catholic Church. Our deacons, priests and bishops participate in the same historic apostolic succession as do the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and other apostolic Churches. We share the same historical developments as Western Christianity.

We trace our modern roots to the emergence of the Old Catholic movement which began in 1870 as a response to the first Vatican Council's pronouncement of Papal Infallibility and the primacy of papal jurisdiction.

What does the word “ecumenical” mean?

We understand the word ecumenical, as it is expressed within our ecclesial community, in four ways:

1. We recognize that the body of Christ, the Universal Church, includes all baptized Christians regardless of denominational affiliation. All those who have followed the Lord Jesus in baptism are regarded as members of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”
2. We are actively engaged in promoting Christian unity. Therefore, we seek to join together with all of our Christian brothers and sisters in the proclamation of the Gospel, in the celebration of the liturgy and the realization of the life of Christ.
3. We recognize the presence of the Spirit at work throughout the world in the faith experience of people of other religions. We recognize the divine presence in every human heart, believing that all people are the beloved of God. Therefore, we seek mutual understanding and respect with those of other religions through dialogue and we seek mutual cooperation in the endeavor for peace and justice in our world.
4. Webster defines it as: universal.

Does the ECC support the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood and why?

Absolutely! In the ECC, women are encouraged to respond to a genuine vocation and to participate in all levels of ministry – lay or ordained. As St. Paul writes: "...there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, all are one in Christ Jesus."

What is the ECC's understanding of same-gender sexual relationships?

We are an open and affirming communion recognizing the value and dignity of every person, in our God given diversity. We promote the education and development of the People of God in their understanding of the diversity of sexual orientation among their brothers and sisters. All sexual relationships are to be guided by the Christian moral principles of love and fidelity. We uphold the ideal of committed relationships blessed by the sacred rites of the church. We believe that all questions of sexual morality are best addressed through pastoral care and counsel.

What is the ECC's understanding of clerical celibacy?

Clerical celibacy was not a requirement until 1274. In fact, it was enforced for relatively practical reasons: first to ensure that clergy would not be hindered by following a call to ministry with respect to the responsibility of a family; and second, to prevent the threat of hereditary claims placed upon church property, by the children of clergy. Again, we follow the teachings of Jesus and allow individuals to respond to God's call freely and, therefore, marriage and ordination are not mutually exclusive.

How is the ECC authentically Catholic if it is separate from the authority of the Pope?

We are practicing the original understanding of the Church which existed for the first 800 years of Christianity and still exists in the current Eastern Orthodox tradition. In this ancient understanding of Catholicism, each faith community was led by its bishop and pastoral councils. The people of each local faith community participated in the life of the Church by electing their bishops and taking an active role in the ministry of their faith tradition. The Pope was considered to be a spiritual leader, however, each community upheld the autonomy of its own life and governance. Approval from Rome was not required in the decision making process of each local church.

Are the sacraments offered to denominations other than Catholic?

We do not withhold the sacraments from any person based solely on their denomination or faith tradition. For example, we recognize that Jesus is the host of the Eucharistic celebration and therefore all are welcome to the table of the Lord!

I feel I have been called to be an ordained minister. What is the process for ordination in the ECC?

We attempt to create a nurturing path to ordination for all levels of interest. We have established guidelines for those that have just identified their calling and for those that have already been validly ordained in the Roman Catholic Church.

Who is the governing authority within the ECC?

The People of the ECC are the governing authority! Our constitutional document was ratified by both clergy and lay persons present at our 2003 convocation. This constitution establishes a polity structure including a House of Laity, a House of Pastors and an Episcopal Council - all possessing roles of decision-making and leadership in governing the Communion.



Distinctives

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We share the same historical developments as Western Christianity. We trace our modern roots to the emergence of the Old Catholic movement which began in 1870 as a response to the first Vatican Council's pronouncement of Papal Infallibility and the primacy of papal jurisdiction.

The Catholics of our faith communities, though recognizing the importance of the Pope in his role as a sign of unity and as an important source of leadership within the Church, view the dogma of papal infallibility as a reinforcement of authoritarianism within the Church, and a misuse of power which runs counter to the spirit, example and teachings of Jesus. The dogma of Papal Infallibility, though an effort to create unity within the Church, has had the opposite effect. It now stands as an immense obstacle to the unity of the Church and diminishes the Pope as the successor of Peter and as a sign of unity. The dogma of Papal Infallibility and primacy of jurisdiction are, at best, sectarian and thus not truly catholic.

We recognize that each baptized person is an equal member of the Catholic Church. No bishop, priest, or deacon owns the Church, the sacramental ministry, or the grace of Christ. Therefore, lay people play an important and prominent role in the governance of the Church. All must respect, as well as actively seek to discern, how the Holy Spirit is motivating the faithful to act. In Catholic tradition this is called ascertaining the "sensus fidelium" --- the sense of the faithful.

To emphasize the importance of the role of the laity, we practice a polity of participatory discernment and selection of bishops and pastors of congregations by the people who call them to service in those capacities. This practice has historic precedence and the legacy of Catholic tradition, and is confirmed in a letter from Pope Leo I in 450 on the election of bishops, in which he states, "He is to govern all and should be chosen by all." (Pope Leo I, Letter 10, no. 6)

As with all Christians, we seek reconciliation with Rome, and pray for the unity of the whole Body of Christ. Because we do not recognize the universal primacy of jurisdiction of the Pope, we do not participate in the canon law of the Roman Catholic Church. We uphold all persons in their discernment of the primacy of conscience over the law.

We also support Catholics in bringing their lived experience to full participation in the formulation of church teachings and in choosing their leaders.

As Ecumenical Catholic Communities we uphold the following practices:

- **Invitation to the Sacramental Life.**

Consistent with Catholic theology, especially as promulgated by the second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII, we recognize the baptism and faith of all our Christian brothers and sisters. By virtue of our common baptism, a genuine unity already exists in Christ's Church. Therefore, we are pleased to make known to all our Christian brothers and sisters, regardless of denominational affiliation, Christ's invitation to partake in the Eucharist. All the baptized are welcome to receive and to celebrate the sacramental life in our communities. We recognize that the sacraments are not rewards for any human achievement or accomplishment but are divine gifts of grace to enable us to become the People of God.

- **Invitation to Co-equal ministry**

In our communities all the baptized, men and women alike, are given the opportunity to respond to a genuine vocation and to fully participate in the ministerial priesthood. As St. Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, neither male nor female; all are one in Christ Jesus." We recognize and are acting to correct the injustice done by the long-standing practice of excluding women from ordained ministry, which unfairly diminishes women within the Church and also within the current world culture. Presently, within many of the communities of our Diocese, women are actively engaged in the ordained priestly ministry and we have already enjoyed benefits of the coequal ministry of women in our faith communities.

Similarly, we affirm those, whether lay or ordained ministers, who are called to serve the People of God in a variety of life states which include people who are single, or have taken promises of celibacy, commitment, or marriage.

- **Invitation to Intimate Commitment**

The experiences and insights of laypersons are nowhere more needed than in the area of intimate human relationships. We believe that the gift of sexual union is a source and celebration of love for couples, which allows for the special and safe sharing of intimacy. We consider it a danger to marriage and other intimate relationships to be denied sexual sharing. This has significant implications for Catholic practice, particularly as it applies to divorce and remarriage.

Divorce is traumatic for all who experience it --- spouses, children or extended family. Yet, in many circumstances, divorce is the best and most faithful response to permanently broken relationships. For many, whose marriages have failed, yet who still have the vocation of marriage, the co-joining in intimate love with another created in God's image and likeness, there is a void in not being able to fulfill that vocation. For most of these, we do not require participation in an ecclesial annulment process which may, in many cases, add further damage to the health and wellbeing of an individual. We join our Eastern Christian brothers and sisters who have carried on the tradition of divorce and remarriage from the first eleven hundred years of our common history. We counsel the remarried to reflect upon all that has passed and to grow in all that will come during their new marriage. These new unions can best be nourished in the sacramental life of the Church.

- **Invitation to follow conscience**

The use of contraception and artificial birth control as a way of responsibly limiting the size of one's family is an issue of conscience to be decided by couples. We believe the use of contraception, if used responsibly, can be a positive good as a means of increasing the frequency of the gift of sexual union, reducing the incidence of abortion for unwanted pregnancies and limiting the spread of sexually transmitted disease.

We affirm the dignity of all human persons regardless of race, national origin, religious affiliation, gender, or sexual orientation. We strive for justice within the universal Church and the whole world. As a Community of Communities we follow the ancient wisdom of the Church as expressed in the words of St. Augustine, "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."