



Q&A

Q: What do you mean when you say you are “Ecumenical Catholics”?

A: There are two parts to the answer to this question. Firstly we need to clarify what it means to be Catholic.

The word “catholic” has two basic connotations, the first being that it relates to the “Roman Catholic Church” and the second being the Greek root of the word “...(derived (*katholikos*), meaning "universal")...(*kath'holou*), meaning "on the whole," "according to the whole" or "in general", and is a combination of the Greek words κατά meaning "about" and ὅλος meaning "whole". The word in English can [therefore] mean either "including a wide variety of things; all-embracing" or "of the Roman Catholic faith."ⁱ One does not have to be a ‘Roman Catholic’ to be truly ‘catholic’.

For our purposes we are Catholic in the sense that we are a part of the “whole” or “universal” church and in that we are a Sacramental church in the style of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches (A Q&A regarding our Apostolic Succession will be addressed in another document). We are then a Sacramental church, and part of the Church Universal, ergo Catholic.

To the word “Ecumenical” - there are many organisations that use the term and according to the definition in Wikipedia, “...mainly refers to initiatives aimed at greater Christian unity or cooperation. It is used predominantly by and with reference to Christian denominations and Christian Churches separated by doctrine, history, and practice. Within this particular context, the term *ecumenism* refers to the idea of a Christian unity in the literal meaning: that there should be a single Christian Church...”ⁱⁱ

While there have been great advancements in many areas of achieving church unity, being “ecumenical” in the current sense does not generally achieve the unity that Christ demands of usⁱⁱⁱ. For example, The Roman Catholic Church is heavily involved in dialogue and other forms of communication with the Orthodox and some protestant denominations but the real situation is revealed when one asks ‘do you share at the table of The Lord?’ Sadly, in most instances, the answer is a resounding “no”. As a general rule, Roman Catholics do not allow non-Romans (or those not subject to the Bishop of Rome, the Pope) to take communion. The same is true for many of the Orthodox Churches and protestant denominations; unless you are a member of that “Communion”, you may not share in the Body and Blood of The Lord in their church.

The United Ecumenical Catholic Church is “ecumenical” in that we accept most expressions of Christianity as “valid”. While we may not always agree with the theological or doctrinal positions of some churches, or their manner of worship, we do accept that they are our equal’s in the Kingdom of God on earth. Our clergy are prepared to stand by any other any other valid minister of Religion and, most importantly, share the Bread of Life and The Cup of Salvation with anyone who seeks The Christ. Some would decry this attitude as heresy; we see it as following the example of Jesus and there are three biblical passages in particular which support or stance.

Firstly, we look to the examples of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14:13-18). In the first example we see Jesus feeding the multitude without regard to their background; these were people who required spiritual nourishment and Jesus provided it without question. In the latter example we again see Jesus feeding the multitude, this time in a physical way. There are no questions by Jesus such as ‘what is your marital status’, ‘what is your gender’, ‘which temple do you worship at’, ‘are you Jewish’, or any other question that separated people into one group or another. There was one simple fact behind the actions of Jesus, the need for physical nourishment, and Jesus provided it without question. He saw a need and he met it.

The third example we look to is Mark 9:38-42:

³⁸ “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

³⁹ “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.” (New International Version)

How much clearer could Jesus be? The Apostle John was either the jealous type or possibly he was protecting his ‘turf’. In either event, Jesus would have none of it. This example clearly shows that there is room for more than one ‘tribe’ when it comes to following Jesus and those other ‘tribes’ are welcomed by Jesus. So it is with us; while we may worship differently and we may have different interpretations of the Sacraments such as the Holy Eucharist, we do not reject the validity of those who differ from us. Simply said if it was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for us.

In summary, we are “Catholic” in our traditions and our basic theology, and by virtue of the fact that we are part of the ‘Church Universal’; we are ‘Ecumenical’ in that we welcome all people to our churches and we acknowledge that the altar that we serve at is the altar of Jesus, not our own. Jesus asked no questions and refused no-one; neither do we.

Archbishop Ronald Langham
Metropolitan Archbishop
Australasia

ⁱ Definition retrieved from Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic>

ⁱⁱ Definition retrieved from Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenical>

ⁱⁱⁱ John 17: ²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (New International Version).