

# *The Ecumenical Catholic Communion*

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New Ways of Imagining an Ancient Faith



(Presiding Bishop, Peter E. Hickman, at Liturgy with Children of St. Matthew Parish, Orange, California)

*"Everyone skillful in the kingdom of heaven is like the homeowner who brings both old and new treasures from the closet."*

(Matthew 13:52)

A booklet on how to live our Catholic identity in an open ecumenical spirit  
By Father James Farris, Father Tony Bomkamp, and Dr. Tony Battaglia



(Altar at Saints Francis and Clare Parish, Fort Lauderdale, Florida)

## **Introduction**

In America we are Christian (Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant), Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist, and Native religion as well. Those “formed” by a religious tradition are affected by it in their attitudes toward the world, human suffering and death, goodness, evil, the meaning of God, and any continuation of life beyond death. Those raised in a religious tradition retain even further aspects of its perspective – and sometimes a reaction to it.

**The Ecumenical Catholic Communion** is a communion of Christian communities across the United States that seeks to live out a deeply held Catholic identity in a manner that is true to our ancient and diverse tradition, while fully respecting the gifts and contributions of the many denominations that constitute the Body of Christ – for Baptism makes us one in Christ Jesus.

The Catholic identity that we in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion share with other Catholics (Eastern and Western) brings self-understanding and guidance to the life of our faith communities; much in the same way that personal identity gives meaning and direction to each of our lives. Being Catholic means more for us than just being members of a denomination. Our Catholic identity is in the very fiber of our individual consciousness, as well as our community life, and defines how we worship as we come together as the Body of Christ. It has formed our attitudes about life and our intimate relationship with God.

Though we may have even been troubled by the actions of some Catholic leaders, or the attitudes we have occasionally encountered among Catholic sisters and brothers, we find an indescribable attachment to our Catholic identity. In the face of discouragement or scandal, we ask ourselves why a Catholic expression of Christianity remains central to us. The answer is that, even in the face of such discouragements, our deeply rooted sense of God's presence, that is mediated by our Catholic identity, cannot be overcome. We are filled with images and thoughts that are as profound an attachment as that of child and parent. Many who have felt this strong attachment have found their way to our Ecumenical Catholic communities – wanting to retain a Catholic practice of faith. They have also found a renewed expression of Catholicism in our Communion – in line with the ideals affirmed in the Second Vatican Council, convened more than forty years ago.

Members of our Communion cannot but pause and reflect on the meaning of this Catholic identity that we share in common with other groups identifying themselves in the line of Catholic heritage. We want to understand our part in that Catholic heritage as the Ecumenical Catholic Communion along with our part in the Body of Christ.



(First Communion at Holy Family Parish, Aurora, Colorado)

## **Knowing Who We Are Is the Essence of How We Act Out Our Identity.**

Some ask, “What makes you Catholic?” or “Why are you Ecumenical?” or “Doesn’t Ecumenical mean the same as Catholic? A simple way to answer this is to list the beliefs and practices that mark us as Catholic. However, a deeper consideration of our Catholic identity is required as our growth continues. This growth is both in the number of our communities and in the realization of whom we are. Just as in the growth of each person, there are times to stop and reflect on our corporate identity. The adolescent asks, “Who am I?” The same question returns to someone who changes career, becomes a parent, or loses a spouse through death or divorce. Just as the answers to such questions in the lives of individuals provide a powerful understanding of who we are, so it is that similar reflections on our corporate values, and our outlook on faith and practice, inform our mission as followers of Jesus.

Our name itself contains three terms that we will examine to answer these questions. We are *Ecumenical* and *Catholic*, and we are a *Communion*. Our name speaks to us of a special mission within Catholicism, and in the larger Body of Christ.

### **The First Term of Our Identity Is “Ecumenical.”**

We have been asked, “Doesn’t Ecumenical mean the same as Catholic?” Our response is that both terms refer to the whole or entire Church – but in different ways. Some of the initial references to “ecumenical” come from the earliest councils of the Church, in which bishops from the various branches of Christianity convened to further define the meaning of Christian faith. These councils brought together diverse Christian Churches to unite the entire household of faith – but the emphasis was not on uniformity. Catholic and Orthodox Christians recognize the first seven Ecumenical Councils as normative for the Church. The various ancient Churches (Syrian, Gallican, Mozarabic, Roman, Greek, Armenian, etc.) retained their diversity and autonomy, and were seen as different faith communities sharing common traditions – understanding and celebrating Catholic faith in their own ways.

In this sense, Ecumenical refers to the diversity that is celebrated as a necessary factor of our identity. We are united without requiring each community to be the same. Ecumenical refers to the beauty of differences in the way we celebrate the liturgy and sacraments, express our understanding of faith in Christ, and govern our local communities. We gather as one people of faith, but enjoy the many differences in its expression.



(San Damiano Parishioners, Little Rock, Arkansas, “Walk for Unity”)

Ecumenical also refers to our openness to those who do not share our Catholic tradition. First, we welcome Christians from the various Protestant traditions – who intimately share our dedication to the Gospel. This is easily seen by our open communion table – where it is common for non-Catholics to share with us the Body and Blood of Christ. For Catholics, this is a great sign of acceptance and love. Many of our communities are intentionally involved in ecumenical ministries, and it is not uncommon for pastors from other Christian Churches to serve as special guest homilists at our liturgies and participate in the Eucharist.

Our hearts hold a special place for our Jewish sisters and brothers, who share with us the heritage of faith from Abraham and Sarah. They are our elders in devotion. We are also open to other non-Christians with whom we share a love of God, and still others with whom we share the search for wisdom. We share a common sincerity of faith. As Christians, we recognize that we are all members of one human family – the beloved of God.



(Father Scott Jenkins at Eucharist,  
Holy Family Parish, Aurora, Colorado)

Make us grow in love, together with (N), the Bishop of Rome—a sign of the worldwide Catholic tradition. Remember the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Archbishops of Utrecht and Canterbury and all bishops, especially our own bishop, (N).

Remember this community of faith and all people who worship in the heritage handed down to us from the Apostles.

Remember our Protestant brothers and sisters, and their leaders, who share with us the saving message of the Gospel.

Remember the Jewish and Moslem people, who have received with us the spiritual heritage of faith of Abraham and Sara.

Remember, too those of the Hindu and Buddhist faiths, and those of the Native religions as well, and all who seek truth and peace.

May your grace pierce the veils that separate us, may the inspiration of your Spirit make us one on the path of wisdom, and may the brilliant light of Christ lead us to discover your love in every human heart.

—From the Ecumenical Eucharistic Prayer

### **The Second Term in Our Name Is “Catholic.”**

The word *Ecumenical* is a celebration of our diversity, gathered into one family of faith. Our use of the term *Catholic* refers to the things we hold in common regardless of our differences. Specifically, we point to the historic elements of Catholicism – passed from one generation to the next, from the time of the Apostles of Jesus. These elements include a devotion to Jesus

Christ, the Trinity as affirmed in the creed, the scriptures, the sacraments, and the tri-fold ministry of ordained leadership:

- ❖ We are followers of Jesus, and honor him as the Christ. In our liturgy we celebrate his humanity and divinity, and affirm our share in both (traditionally stated as, “through him and with him and in him...”). It is Jesus who has authored and completed our faith (Hebrews 12:2), and we proclaim ourselves to be “in Christ” – united with him and his teaching through his death and resurrection.



(Jesus Surrounded by His Disciples, Rembrandt, 1634)

- ❖ The creed proclaims our belief in the Trinity. The ancient expression is our belief in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is intimately our source, a living presence with us, and the transforming power leading us ahead. Two creeds have been standard for our liturgy: one from the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople, and the other that is called “The Apostles’ Creed.” They are based upon the earliest formulas used at baptism by Christian converts. These ancient formulations of faith have affirmed our Catholic identity throughout the ages – *though our understanding of this faith has developed through time.*



- ❖ We recognize iconic phrases and actions that are essential to our Catholic and Christian identity. Some examples of this are that at Eucharist we consecrate bread and wine, and the Eucharistic celebration is led by a priest in the midst of the assembly. We retain specific formulas as sacrosanct, such as “This is my body...This is the cup of my blood...” We baptize with water, using the ancient formula, that is recognized even beyond Catholic tradition: “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (Directly taken from the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19). Many of these actions and words are both recognized by Catholics worldwide and foundational to Catholic identity.
  
- ❖ We also recognize the great authority of the celebration of the sacraments throughout the ages. Those Catholics who have gone before us have also passed on to us an understanding of faith that is expressed well in the Latin phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. This expression means that the way we have prayed as Catholics – over the centuries and around the world – teaches us what we believe. Our prayers express in worship what our creed expresses in systematic thought. Additionally, the style and format of our worship teaches us the meaning of Catholic faith in its elements and sentiments: What and how we pray is the great teacher of what we believe. An example of this is the way we venerate the remaining bread and wine after Eucharist because we believe these elements to still be the Body and Blood of Christ. (Many non-Catholic Christians would not recognize these elements to be the Body and Blood of Christ after the Eucharist.) Yet, the ancient way of celebrating the Eucharist has always maintained this belief that the elements of Holy Communion remain the Body and Blood of Christ and should be so revered.
  
- ❖ At the same time, we recognize that the evolution of certain doctrines and practices of the Church reflect a growth or deepening in our understanding of our ancient Catholic identity, and do not represent changes from the foundational elements of Catholicism. The ordination of women to the priesthood is an example of such a development. Its roots can be found in the gradual movement toward diversity in the Church, as men of many cultures were accepted for ordination. The ancient practice of honoring all martyrs as icons of Christ also contributed to understanding that priests can be a sacramental symbol of Christ for the Church, regardless of gender.

Also, the belief that every Christian is an icon of Christ in the world calls us to see that both women and men can be icons of Christ for the Church as ordained deacons, priests and bishops. Similar processes of development have been experienced by the Church in the areas of human sexuality, the active role of the laity, and many other important areas that involve cultural change or scientific and social development.

- ❖ We have recognized ourselves to be successors of the community of the Apostles of Jesus. We have also recognized our bishops (our senior ordained leadership) to be successors of the Apostles – by the ancient and scriptural rite of the laying on of hands. The orders of deacon and presbyter (priest) join the bishops as the ordained ministers of the Church.
- ❖ We recognize the need for canonical legislation and governance that includes the balanced voices of the laity and the clergy together in synod, as we also understand our principal teachers and guides in governance to be the bishops of our Communion. However, we affirm the belief that every Christian carries the mission and ministry of Jesus to love God and to love each other in service.
- ❖ Our basic points of faith are shared with others in the Catholic and Apostolic tradition, such as the Episcopal Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Old Catholics of Europe, the Roman Catholics and many other Churches around the world that claim a continuous historical heritage from the community of the Apostles of Jesus Christ and the historical succession from its Apostolic leadership.



(Church of Saint Praxedis, Rome, Ninth Century)

Our Catholic heritage includes a belief in the communion of the saints. This is an understanding that we are one with those who have died. They have passed beyond the duality of life and death and await the Resurrection, when God shall be “all in all.” (1Cor. 15:28).



### Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen



Catholics recognize Mary, the mother of Jesus, to hold a special honor among the saints. *All Churches of the Catholic tradition have a special devotion to Mary.* This has not been as popular a devotion for many contemporary Catholics. Though much of this devotion was grounded in the past in sentimental cultural language, it remains for us a powerful image of the Sacred Feminine. Mary is an ancient icon of the Christian. She is portrayed as filled with the Spirit, and is an image of the *divine life* we experience in Christ. This is understood as our belief in grace: that we are filled with the same divine Spirit as Jesus – becoming Christ (Romans 8:29).

Modern Catholics are challenged to balance the heavily male imagery of our tradition with recognition of the feminine divine. We could begin with a review of past Marian devotion. Perhaps what seemed excessive was really the undeveloped imagery of Mary as the model for all Christians – one who shares the very life of God. She was the first to know the Good News of Christ by receiving it in her very being. The image of Mary bearing Jesus, and bringing him into the world is a powerful icon of the spiritual call of all Christians to bear Christ in ourselves and to bring Christ into our worlds. In Eastern Christianity, Mary is called *Theotokos* – the God-bearer. This image of Mary helps us recall our own divinization, our share in the divine life.

The story of Mary reminds us of the stories of the saints in general. Their lives and examples are yet another way to know what it means to be Catholic. Their stories touch us more deeply than intellectual explanations of our faith because our hearts can appreciate their joys and troubles, their transformations of faith, and their dedication to God and the service of others. Catholic devotion to the saints is a cherished tradition celebrated by naming our faith communities after them, and celebrating their feast days.

## **We Are Discovering Identity Through Continued Thought and Dialogue**

We meet many admirable people of different faiths. This happens more in our day than in the past. Our encounters with non-Catholics are constant. Many of us often meet non-Christians because our society is now more populated with people of various cultures. We respect and love people of sincere faith. But we remember our own Catholic family, our traditions, and our heritage. Our Catholicism is known through our life of prayer and worship, as well as our theology. As we participate in the renewal of our Catholic tradition, we are challenged to remain faithful to what we believe and what we practice. Yet, we are also challenged to bring a sense of balance to our language and our practice. This means expansive language in our worship; the recognition of women in ordained ministry; the acknowledgement of God's presence in all people; and the belief that the Word of God has always been active in the world, and that the Spirit speaks to the hearts of people in all the world's religions.

The call of tradition and the call of change remain in dynamic tension. A great example is that some people are troubled if the language of the liturgy is more contemporary, while others are troubled if the language is more traditional. These struggles are a part our renewal. The authentic elements of Catholicism must be guiding lights for renewal. Otherwise, we shall question our identity as Catholics – and so shall others who come to our Communion to find a truly Catholic faith community.



(2007 ECC Synod, Tampa, Florida)

## **The Final Term in Our Name Is “Communion.”**

The final term in our name is *Communion*. It means that we are united as one family of Catholic faith. Though some of our communities may differ in style, we are united in love for each other, and in recognition of our common identity. Our unity is not a required adherence to uniformity – an attempt to remain Catholic that suppresses innovation. Our Communion brings together an Ecumenical diversity with a Catholic unity. It is flexible, yet stable – open to all people of faith, yet faithful to our Catholic roots. In a final thought, it is good to remember that we are the Ecumenical Catholic Communion – the people of God who make up our communities of faith.



(Healing Liturgy at Church of the Beloved, Northglenn, Colorado)

## **Some May Not Agree With the “Catholic” Connection.**

Can we address this without offense? Some may come to realize they are just not “Catholic.” Some may have problems with even being Christian. This may seem too exclusive to them.

Participation in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion means commitment to Jesus Christ because of the transforming experience we have “in Christ.” Still, that experience is unique to each person – some are more emotional about it, some more intellectual, etc.

We can retain our identity without the baggage of thinking that we are superior to non-Catholics or non-Christians. At the same time, we can affirm the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and we can authentically say that we find a complete spirituality in Catholicism. This is why we have chosen it. And still, we remain open to all people of faith – affirming their goodness and sincerity.



(Ordination of Mother Jessica Rowley, St. Louis, Missouri, 2007)

## **Living Our Catholic Identity**

Our Catholic identity is rooted deep within us. As we attempt to grasp it in thought and action, we find ourselves returning again and again to reflections on its profound mystery. It colors all parts of our lives, can often be seen in our behavior, and experienced in our ordinary religious life. This identity has many sources and characteristics – making it difficult to explain or express completely.

Catholic identity arises from our encounter with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that is the core of our Christian tradition. All of us who have been shaped by the Catholic tradition, or who are drawn to its riches, have a share in its spiritual depths.

A Catholic identity arises from the particularly Catholic way of understanding the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith. These are the things we profess in creeds and solemnly affirm in the Eucharistic Prayer that is the heart of the liturgy. The distinctively Catholic experience of Christianity is shaped from our limited but real understanding of such mysteries as the relation of God to the world – of the human to the divine – and of the interconnection of “nature” and “grace.” We may think of such matters as so abstract that they must only be the concern of theologians, but actually they are the heart of Catholic spirituality.



(Liturgy at Holy Spirit Parish, Tampa, Florida)

Our Catholic spirituality arises from the conviction that Christ can be found in our world and our everyday life. God’s grace is present here and now, and it makes us more fully alive, more fully human. Our Christian identity does not replace our natural, human identity, but builds upon and ultimately completes it (a central affirmation of the celebrated Catholic theologian, Saint Thomas Aquinas, in his work, *Summa Theologica*, I, i, 8, ad2).

Christian faith transforms us, but it does so by affirming our basic goodness. In trying to make sense of this we always return to the mystery of Christ. We look to the life of Jesus – one who is both fully human and fully divine – which becomes a “mirror” for our own lives, showing us what we are and what we shall be “in Christ.” The life of Jesus gives us an understanding that the world is very “material,” yet one with God as the very fiber of its existence. We share our humanity with Jesus, as he shares his divinity with us. This is what it means to be “in Christ.”



(Liturgy at Pathfinder Community of the Risen Christ,  
Bermuda Dunes, California)

## Two Aspects of Our Catholic Identity

A central element of Catholic spirituality is its sacramental sense of God within our lives. The incarnation of Christ is celebrated in the sacraments and communal life of faith we now share. Water, bread, wine, oil, candles, and other very physical things are the elements that speak God's presence to us. What we touch and speak is seemingly ordinary, but is really the living presence of Christ. This is most emphasized in the Catholic belief that the bread and wine of Holy Communion at the liturgy is truly the Body and Blood of Christ. This sacramental "seeing" is deeply unitive and helps us overcome the separation between the physical or material and the spiritual, leading us to proclaim with St Paul that all things will be reconciled in Christ (Colossians 1:17, 20) .

Our Catholic spirituality is also seen in everyday life in our values and practices. This is also *Incarnational* because Christ comes to us in the people we meet and events we experience. Jesus taught this in the Gospel of Matthew, when he said, "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me." (Matthew 25:40).

Reflections on Catholic spirituality can begin by emphasizing that the revelation of God is found in the written words of Scripture, but also in the presence of the Incarnate Word in the world itself. This vision of the Christian life has been expressed from apostolic times and is rooted in Scripture's emphasis on the Incarnation of Jesus, who "became flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1:14). It was developed in a world in which only a very small minority could read. Most ancient Christians relied upon an understanding of God's plan that was rooted in the experience of God's presence in the liturgy, in the world and in everyday life. The celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments moved Christians to see God working in the ordinary processes of the natural world and the ordinary experiences of life.

Our Catholic spirituality is Trinitarian: This world emerges from the Source of our Being, whom Jesus called "the Father"; is blessed and made even more precious by the presence of God, in the person of Christ; and returns to "the Father" through the Holy Spirit, living in all and guiding all. This world is not perfect, of course, but it is being transformed by the Divine presence and grace into the very image of God, when God shall be "all in all." (1Corinthians 15:28)

The word Catholic means universal, as is well known; within the Catholic tradition there has been room for many different styles of spirituality through the centuries. Still, there is one spirituality that is the most central to the way we understand Christianity. It is an understanding that we encounter Christ, the Word of God, not simply in the words of Scripture, but also as the Incarnate Word, present within the creation of which He is the Divine *Logos* – the form and pattern of creation. We encounter Christ not only in the written word, but in Creation itself, in time and in history (Colossians 1:16). Most of all we encounter Christ in our own lives as we progress from childhood to adulthood, through the everyday experiences of growth and nourishment, through the love of family and/or spouse and into old age, sickness and death. This *Incarnational* spirituality is the heart of the sacraments, and for this reason the sacraments have long been the heart of specifically Catholic spirituality.

To be Catholic is to understand Creation and God’s presence in this dynamic, material, temporal, and above all Trinitarian way – the Trinity is relational and dynamic. It is to see God at work in the processes of nature and to find moral guidance in the participation of the material world in the eternal will of God. Plenty of things in the world around us challenge our sense of justice or harmony, even to the point of pain and bewilderment. It is sometimes numbingly difficult to find courage and the possibility of transformation in this broken world. The spirituality that helps us to do this is one that relies upon the Catholic understanding of the “unfinished” status of the world – already redeemed, yet still struggling and incomplete. Like the great sculptures of Michelangelo, which were incomplete while being formed, the world is not “imperfect,” but only yet unfinished. It is our vocation not only to pray for the coming of God’s kingdom here on earth, as Jesus taught us, but also to help create that new world by caring for one another, promoting justice wherever it is needed, and acting as stewards of the earth itself.

Sacramental experience is the paradigm of Catholic spirituality. It teaches us to acknowledge the meeting of the divine and the human in our ordinary lives, which are holy because all creation is holy. This world has been holy from the beginning, filled with that light that the author of Genesis tells us issued from the Creator on the very first day. Though it has been elevated by the Incarnation of Jesus, this world is not yet perfect, and “groans as if in the pangs of childbirth” (Rom: 8:18). We await the final transformation

when it will fulfill its destiny. But even in its present form we can find Christ within the world and within life. The sacraments are the model of this meeting with Christ. They model for us the complicated realities of our lives, entirely ordinary and created, yet open to the fullness of divine life.

In the sacraments we see the lived embodiment of Catholic spirituality. The sacraments affirm the presence of Christ in the community of the church, and in the Christian experience of entering life, becoming adult, living and working in the rhythm of day-after-day transformation, sometimes through love of a spouse, serving the community, and encountering old age, sickness and death. In the sacraments we find Christ and we experience the holiness of our ordinary struggles to lead a full human life, to love one another, to raise our children and to help one another. In our own time we experience the world in the same ways as those in days gone by, but also in new ways. In our own time we struggle to preserve Catholic Christianity as we search for ways of meaningful change as we strive to be true to the timeless tradition that is now “our turn” to embody in our lives. We live with this pattern of change – and its challenging difficulties – knowing that we are doing no more or less than those who have preceded us in the Catholic Faith.



(Liturgy at Saint Jerome Parish, Tulsa, Oklahoma)

## **Our Continued Journey of Self-Discovery**

We live in an era when Christianity is going through a period of profound change, not unlike other such periods that have occurred in our long history. It is a time in which we strive to learn the lessons of the past as well as to understand the changing needs of the present. We seek to be open to living history – to the unexpected. In some respects, it is like the time of Jesus; and it is a time to remember Jesus’ teaching that every householder who is instructed in the kingdom of God is able to draw out of the warehouse both new things and old (Matthew 13:52). Catholics approach such moments with trust in the presence of the Spirit of God, recognizing the need for both willingness to change, and caution regarding changes that do not truly develop the faith in the Catholic tradition and in the call of the Gospel.

The ECC has formed at a time of spiritual need in the Western Church: membership is in decline across denominations (Catholic and Protestant), dysfunction is rampant at many levels of our social life, and enormous political, economic and environmental challenges lay ahead. Yet, there is great reason for hope. An ecumenical consciousness is growing at the grass roots level within the western church. Christians of all denominations are recognizing our common baptism and unity in Christ is more important than our differences and requires us to seek unity in many ways.

Seminaries are similarly recognizing that the Gospel of Jesus makes claims on us that require unity beyond our verbal expressions. Biblical scholarship is in a true renaissance and is in part driving many of these changes, as evidenced in movements or conversations such as the “Emergent Church,” that is seeking to follow the teaching of Jesus in true simplicity. Many Protestant groups are re-instituting the practice of weekly communion or Eucharist and are drawing on principles of spiritual formation that has been practiced by Catholics for millennia. Contemplative prayer is making a major resurgence, as the value of popular spiritual writers (such Thomas Merton) have begun to be recognized and, more importantly, have been incorporated into spiritual practice.

All of these changes offer great hope for the future of a Church where unity is again central and sources of division are set aside. Part of the vision and

chrism of The ECC is to be a voice and a light that shows how such unity can happen.



(Liturgy at San Damiano Parish, Little Rock, Arkansas)

**\*\*Discussion questions can be found on the two next pages\*\***

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Or go to the website for **regional information** at:  
[www.ecumenical-catholic-communication.org](http://www.ecumenical-catholic-communication.org)

## Some Suggestions for Discussion

1. The name of this document includes the words “New Ways of Imagining an Ancient Faith.” Is that a good title – does it help you imagine your faith in new ways? Can you give an example or two of new ideas, or new ways of thinking about familiar ideas – about creation, or the church or spirituality, or anything else --that the document led you to?
2. What seems new about what you’ve read in “New Ways”? Do you think the answer to this first question would be different if you were an outsider to the Catholic tradition? Or, if you are someone who was until recently such an outsider, do you think it would be a different answer to you if you had been born Catholic?
3. Does “New Ways” add to your sense of being at home in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion? Does it answer your questions about why ECC is genuinely Catholic and what that means? Why or why not?
4. The document says that the sacraments are the key to understanding the Catholic tradition. What does the document mean by this? Is this a new idea or a familiar one? Do the sacraments mean more in your life today than they once did, or less? Does the emphasis on sacraments make more sense to you or less? Why?
5. Page 19 of this document states: *“To be Catholic is to understand Creation and God’s presence in this dynamic, material, temporal, and above all Trinitarian way – the Trinity is relational and dynamic.”* How does the document link the idea of sacraments with such doctrines as Creation and with the nature of Jesus? Is this a familiar idea? Does it enrich the idea of sacrament?

6. Are you comfortable with the idea of being ecumenical with other Christian groups in the sense of opening up conversation with them? Are you comfortable with the idea that we may have things to learn from others, just as they may have things to learn from us?
  
7. How do you think about Mary, the Mother of Jesus? Does “New Ways” help you to think about her in positive ways and to think of the place of women in the Church in more positive ways? Is there more to Mary than “New Ways” suggests? Does she lead you to thoughts of the place of femininity and the divine life?
  
8. When you hear the word “spirituality” what do you think of? Have you always had “a spirituality” or is it a new idea to you? How is spirituality different from faith? Has your spirituality deepened over the years? What are some reasons that may have helped or hindered your growth?