

Chapter 4: The Church in Catholic Tradition (total 14 pages)

A. The organization of the early Church (3)

Was there a confusion about the structure of the early Church and its ministries?

To say that there was confusion about the structure of the early Church is to miss the point that there were always competing theologies and polities (forms of Church governance) throughout the history of the Church. The diversity of organizational forms was evident in the early Church. Prior to beginning of the 2nd century, the various Christian communities around the Mediterranean showed a variety of structure, but were under the leadership and governance of the bishops, who succeeded the apostles. For example, there is evidence that a council of presbyters might have led the Church in Corinth before the 2nd century (Letter from Saint Clement of Rome to the Corinthians). However, the Catholic structure solidified by the time of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, who died in AD 110. The accepted structure was that of a bishop, with a council of presbyters, and deacons. Each city had its own bishop.

There is ample evidence in the writings of all the Church Fathers that this model quickly became the standard for the Christian Church. All other models were considered irregular and unacceptable. Thus, the Catholic model of bishop-presbyter-deacon was developed throughout the Christian Church, East and West.

What was the structure of the early Church, and how is it a model for synodal polity?

Throughout the early Western Church, the people elected their bishop, who was then consecrated as bishop by the other bishops of a metropolitan region. This model of election of the bishop by the people was practiced even in Rome during the majority of the first millennium. Two popes (Celestine I and Leo I) of the 5th century condemned the imposition of a bishop upon the people of a diocese without their consent. A well-known quote from Pope Leo I says, “The one who is to govern all and should be chosen by all.” (Pope Leo I, Letter 10, no. 6)

Metropolitan regions were led by a metropolitan archbishop, who had some jurisdiction over other bishops, but governed in consensus with all the bishops in an episcopal synod. Often, lay leaders (such as civil authorities) may have participated in synods. Some synods were called by the emperor, or local civil authorities, with the votes of the bishops deciding issues, which were then promulgated by the civil authorities.

An example is in Carthage, at the time of Saint Augustine, when the Roman emperor sent a tribune to Carthage to require the Donatist and Catholic factions to settle their differences. After debate and resolution, the tribune reported back to the emperor, who then decreed that the Donatist bishops, and their congregations, had to conform to Catholic practices, and come into the Catholic jurisdiction.

When did priests and bishops emerge as leaders and teachers?

Father John A. Sullivan, S.J., published a landmark book in 2001, entitled “From Apostles to Bishops, the Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church.” In this book he describes the quick development of the present form of episcopacy in the early Church. The form has changed in terms of jurisdiction, and varies in different Catholic Churches (Orthodox Churches, the Old Catholics, etc.), but the structure of the bishop as the senior ordained leader of a diocese has continued from the first century onward. The ministry of the bishop is to teach, govern and sanctify. Thus the bishop is the primary theologian, primary administrator and primary celebrant of the Eucharist and the sacraments.

However, there is also ample evidence of the participation of the clergy and laity in the decisions of the bishop. The great African saint and martyr, Cyprian of Carthage (about AD 250), gave the following formula for the administration of his episcopacy:

I have made it a rule, ever since the beginning of my episcopate, to make no decision merely on the strength of my own personal opinion without consulting you [the priests and deacons] and without the approbation of the people. (Letters 14:4)

Aren't lay people allowed to teach or to lead public worship?

Certainly lay people who are prepared and educated have taught the faith since the first days of the Church. These are the catechists, who are authorized to teach by their bishops. Laity also have other liturgical roles in the Church. Qualified laity sometimes preach at the liturgy; and it is common for the laity to serve as readers of the readings from the Old Testament and New Testament Letters at the Eucharist, distribute Holy Communion at Mass, and take Holy Communion to the sick, lead the music at liturgy, etc. Yet, the sacraments are administered by a deacon or presbyter, and the Eucharist always has a presbyter (priest) as its celebrant (just as the Sacrament of Reconciliation is always administered by a priest). Finally, only a bishop may ordain presbyters, deacons or other bishops (more than one bishop is required for the ordination of a bishop).

Occasionally, we see deacons or qualified laity conducting a communion service, but this is different from the celebration of the Mass. And it is common for qualified laity to teach classes on doctrine, Scripture, sacraments, etc. The laity also lead retreats, serve as spiritual directors, participate in the governance of the Church through parish councils; and are delegates to the diocesan and national synods of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. They often serve as the representatives of the Presiding Bishop and the diocesan bishops to various conferences.

The laity are finally returning to the proper place of their own ministries. They are the people who live the Christian faith in the various walks of life – “in the world.” The clergy are really ordained to support and assist the laity in this ministry. The laity are the icons of Christ to the world – that the world may see Christ in their love, compassion and sense of justice. This is confirmed by Ephesians 4: 11-13, which reminds us that:

Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

B. Ecclesiology and the meaning of the Church (4)

What are some models of the Church? Is one of these models better than the others?

“Models of the Church” may mean images of the Church that give some sense of its character. One such model is that of the Church as “The Pilgrim People of God,” on the journey together – like the archetype of the ancient Hebrews of the Book of Exodus. Another model is that of a great ship – often used by the Church Fathers – that reminds us of both the Ark of Noah, which carries all to safety; and the boat of the apostle Peter, which carries Jesus and the disciples on a journey to a distant shore. These images of the Church have no “better” or “worse,” but are simply archetypes that convey the mission and ministry of the Church. There are other models as well.

“Models of the Church” also refers to the various forms of governance (called polity) in the realms of Christian ecclesial structure. There are three basic models of Church governance in the Christian world. Denominations use a variation of these three:

The Episcopal Model is based upon bishops as leaders – the senior authority in teaching, sacraments and administration. In some Churches, the bishops are elected, while in others they are appointed. Some Churches have a polity in which the clergy and laity participate in the

legislation of the Church – called general synods. The administrators of the Church are the bishops, with authority concerning the communities and clergy of the jurisdiction. In this model, ordination has a permanent sacramental character. Examples of this model are the Episcopal Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church, as well as a number of Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The Presbyteral Model does not have bishops. It is governed by a board that oversees the ministry of the clergy, and provides clergy for the communities of the jurisdiction. Communities are governed by some combination of self-governing boards and regional boards, composed of laity and clergy. Congregations are generally autonomous, but belong to a synod or regional conference. Clergy belong to a governing board that has jurisdiction over them – a kind of order of clergy. Clergy are appointed by a governing board, after a process of “call” is completed by a congregation. In this model, ordination is an office of the Church. One example of this model is the Presbyterian Church.

The Congregational Model is governed by a conference of congregations, and also does not include bishops. Clergy may be credentialed and licensed (and ordained) by a clergy board of governance. Congregations are autonomous, but belong to a conference. Clergy may belong to an association, but the local congregation is the determinant of clergy ministry. No board appoints the pastor of a congregation. In this model, ordination is an office in the Church. One example of this model is the Baptist Church.

Catholics, by definition, are of the Episcopal Model, with the bishop holding the place of chief shepherd, chief teacher and chief administrator. In the ECC, the bishop (nationally it is the Presiding Bishop) governs in consensus with the synod, composed of two houses of legislation: the House of Laity and the House of Pastors. Additionally, some legislation on the national level, and all juridical (courts of review and appeal) are the jurisdiction of the Episcopal Council. The diocese is self-governing. The local bishop of diocese is the chief shepherd, chief teacher and chief administrator of the diocese, and governs in consensus with a diocesan synod composed of lay and clergy delegates from parishes and other communities of the diocese.

Conciliarism is the ancient model of Church in which many voices participate in the direction of the Church. (The word “conciliar” comes from Latin, while its counterpart “synodal” comes from Greek.) In conciliar or synodal polity, the voices of the bishop, laity and clergy participate on the local level of diocese in the life and direction of the Church. On a larger level – such as an international level – the bishops have traditionally come together in an “ecumenical council” to give voice and vote to the direction and governance of the Church. Their voices are balanced by the voices of the patriarchs, such as the Pope, who is the Western Patriarch as the Bishop of Rome, and generally recognized as a point of unity for the universal Church. The bishops are wise to listen to the *sensus fidelium*, which is the lived experience of the faithful Catholic people who

exercise their faith in everyday life. The ECC espouses this ancient tradition of conciliarism/synodalism, as re-energized in the work of the Second Vatican Council.

Just as the word “democracy” requires elements of free speech, voting rights, a free press, an educated population, etc., so too the word “Catholic” requires elements of the authority of the bishop, the traditional seven sacraments, the understanding of the Eucharist as both the Sacrifice of Christ and Sacred Meal, Marian devotion, etc. The Ecumenical Catholic Communion fulfills the definition of “Catholic” by its inclusion of all these elements.

When is the Church really complete as the Body of Christ and the People of God?

The Church is complete when the bishop is present and united with the people and clergy, which happens especially at the Eucharist. This understanding of the Church is “holographic.” What is meant by this is that the diocese is not simply a branch or piece of the Church; it is the Church, whole and complete. Whether the bishops are gathered together as a national synod with the clergy or people; or, the bishop is simply gathered with the people and clergy for the simple celebration of the Eucharist, an ordination or a diocesan synod: the Church is fully constituted.

This understanding of the Church is evident in the New Testament, with such a passage as the one from Colossians 1:17-18, which speaks about the Church, with Christ as the head:

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church...

And such passages that talk about “the Church in Corinth,” “the Church in Ephesus,” etc., like this one from Corinthians 1:1-2, in which begins the letter from Saint Paul:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

In these passages, the Church is fully constituted – large or small – with its gifts and ministries, as full and complete in each location – as well as fully constituted around the world as one Body of Christ. Saint Paul also gives this image of the Church as the Body of Christ in other passages:

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. (Romans 12:4-6)

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. (1 Corinthians 10:14-17)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Corinthians 12: 27-31)

Another New Testament passage speaks eloquently of the identity of the Church as the People of God, reminding its readers of the image of the Hebrew people being led by God through the desert to the Promised Land:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

There is one more image that has not yet been mentioned, of the Church as a holy building, made of living stones:

As you come to him, the living Stone —rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Why is Mary called the Mother of the Church, and what is her special relationship with the Church?

Mary is the mother of Jesus. Mary has been seen in a special light from the earliest days of the Church. Because Catholics believe that Jesus is the Son of God – the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – Mary is called the Mother of God. This affirms Jesus as a Person who is fully human and fully divine. Mary's own body was given to form the body of Jesus, for he is truly human. Jesus is also truly God, and Mary carried Jesus within her body, as every human mother does.

Mary is the Mother of the Church, the Body of Christ. By bearing Jesus into the world she also bore the entire plan of redemption of God into the world – the life, death and resurrection, the

ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit, all came through Mary's "Yes" to God's call: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

Mary is the icon of the Church because she is filled with Christ and bearing Christ into the world. She is "full of grace", as the angel of Luke 1 tells her – transformed by the divinity of Christ. She is divinized – sharing the divinity of Christ, as all Christians share it by his saving presence in us. Mary is an image of the Church, and the first to hear the saving message of Christ. She is the Mother of the Church. The early Christian writers saw this in the last act of Jesus, as he was dying on the cross. They interpreted this as not simply giving his mother to his beloved disciple, but to the whole Church:

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27)

C. Church and sacraments (4)

How is the Church itself a sacrament?

The Church is a sacrament because it is a living sign of God's saving presence through Jesus Christ, which actualizes that presence in the world. The Catholic understanding is that a sacrament is not just a symbol, but that it effects what it symbolizes – a means of grace. So it is with the Church: it effects what it symbolizes. The Church is a symbol of the kingdom of God and, through the mission and ministry of the Church, that kingdom is experienced in the world.

Some may criticize this understanding of the Church, saying that throughout history the Church has been prejudiced and abusive – that it does a poor job of witnessing the kingdom of God to the world. The criticism is merited, but goes too far in saying that the Church is not an icon of God's saving presence. Like any sacrament that is poorly celebrated, the Church can be a poor symbol of God. It can fail at conveying the love of God, God's mercy or God's wisdom. If the Church is a window into God, then the window can be so encrusted with dirt that light will not shine through – but that does not stop the window from being a window.

So too, the Church is in need of reform, so that it can be a living symbol that brings the presence of Christ into the world – into the lives of those who belong to the Church, and into the lives of others who are touched by Catholics. The Holy Spirit has a way of ensuring this reform – purifying

the Church through external and internal forces that cleanse the Church of greed and corruption. Jesus warns his followers of such faults with these words:

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. (Matthew 10:16)

In the gospel of John, Jesus prays for his disciples on the night before he dies. This is a passage from that prayer:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. (John 17:15-19)

How does each sacrament relate to the Church?

Baptism is incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church. Salvation is not just a matter of believing intellectual tenets of faith, but instead it is about living the life of the Church – with its sacraments, its communal life and its ministries of service, as well as its life of personal devotion.

Confirmation (Chrismation) is a strengthening of the power of God, by the Holy Spirit, to live the life and ministry of the Church. The tiny Church gathered in the upper room after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. According to Acts 2:1, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” This was the Church prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit – the Advocate promised by Jesus:

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:2-4)

Confirmation is linked to Baptism as a sacrament of initiation, along with the Eucharist. It is the completion of the mission of Jesus: the bestowal of the Spirit upon the Church.

Eucharist is the third sacrament of initiation. It is also a strengthening of the Church – through an intense experience of its identity. At Eucharist the Church experiences Christ, and realizes itself as the Body of Christ. Christ is intensely and fully present in the congregation, in each member, in the ordained ministers of the liturgy, in the proclamation of the Word, in the bread

and wine consecrated as the Body and Blood of Christ – in a myriad of ways, the One Christ is present and transforming all who are present to him.

In Holy Matrimony, the Church experiences its means of life and growth. Everyone belongs to a family – even if the other members of the family are dead or alienated. The family is sanctified in Holy Matrimony. It is a “little church” because “two or three are gathered” in the name of Christ. (Matthew 18:20) All the future members of the Church will come from families. The members of the Church are nurtured in families – children grow in families. The greatest ministry of spouses is to lose the ego-self, and meld one’s identity with the other spouse. Jesus emphasizes this in the strongest terms, as he quotes from the creation story of Genesis, and speaks a difficult saying against divorce:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matthew 19: 3-6)

Marriage is one school of Christian love for the members of the Church, as shown by the most popular reading at Christian weddings:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8)

The Sacrament of Holy Orders gives ordained leadership to the Church. The ministry of the Church belongs to the entire Church – all the members. But there are different roles in the Church – different ministries to the Church. Those ordained are to be icons of Christ for the Church, just as every baptized member of the Church is to be an icon to the world, and as spouses are to be icons of Christ to each other – and parents to their children.

That image of Christ for the Church begins with the bishop. It is through the ministry the bishop that all the sacraments are given to the Church. The bishop is a spiritual father/mother to the Church – giving life and guidance as the chief celebrant of all the sacraments and the chief teacher. The bishop ordains the presbyters and deacons of the Church, for service in its communities of faith. The presbyters serve the Church by the administration of the sacraments

and teaching the Gospel – keeping the unity of the faith community. Deacons have an affinity with the outreach of the Church – specific ministries of service. They have always been the outreach to the marginalized:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:1-4)

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is meant to heal the divisions of the Church. “Sin” is a very unpopular word in modern culture – often stirring resentment from childhood experiences of the excessive promotion of guilt. Yet sin can easily be seen as an act that damages the relationship with another – all sin is communal, in that it somehow harms others. Even actions that harm the self – like the extreme act of suicide – damages those surrounding the one who commits the act. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a remedy for “sin.” The confessor is to act as a doctor of the soul – examining the circumstances and applying the love of God as the healing agent. The “penance” given is not meant to make up for the act, but to move the penitent to a place of restoration – the true justice of God. The transformation of God’s grace heals the alienation of the one confessing – the reconciliation with the Church at large. The confessor then helps the one confessing with the first step (like getting out of bed after a major surgery), which is a strategy for recovery.

The Anointing of the Sick is also a healing agent – for the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of mind and body. It is also an agent of comfort in the anguish of suffering and pain – a manifestation of “the human condition.” While we may not witness many miracles – as in the ministry of Jesus in Palestine 2000 years ago – we do find a ministry of love (and perhaps a miracle now and again) in this sacrament. It is meant to restore the members of the Church to their lives and ministries as Christians. Jesus’ ministry to the sick was extensive, according to the gospels. Saint Peter cites this in his very first sermon after the Pentecost experience in the upper room:

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.” (Acts 2:22)

The Church continues this ministry by all its sacraments and teaching; and ministers to its own members in their suffering through the Anointing of the Sick.

D. Church leadership and apostolic succession (3)

Does the entire Church inherit the Catholic faith, and how does this apply to each person who is a baptized Christian?

In the past, the impression might have been given that the Church belongs to the clergy. This was never the intention of Jesus Christ. The clergy do not own the Church; no one owns the Church. All are invited into the Church of Christ through faith and the sacraments, beginning with baptism. All are inheritors of the Catholic faith, without regard to his or her place of ministry in the Church.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs —heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8: 16-17)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3: 26-28)

How are bishops the successors of the apostles, and why is this so important for Catholic faith?

In the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:15-26), the entire apostolic community of Christians is gathered in the upper room, before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The structure of the Church is evident in its seminal form, as the community chose two men to replace Judas, and the community prayed for guidance. After casting lots, Mathias was chosen. The Scripture then says, "So he was added to the eleven apostles." This is scriptural evidence that the continuation of the ministry of the apostles was important for the apostolic community. In other words, the apostolic ministry was not simply to be the witness to the resurrection, it was to continue as a ministry of the Church.

The continuance of the ministry of the Church is evident in three areas:

- ❖ **Word** There is a continual preaching of the Gospel, and a passing of the sacred Scriptures as the initial witness. Faithfulness to the witness of the Scriptures is one form of faithfulness to the apostolic faith.
- ❖ **Sacrament** The celebration of the sacraments from generation to generation is another form of faithfulness to the apostolic tradition of faith. It is seen even in the first generation, as Saint Paul gives witness to passing on the apostolic Eucharistic tradition:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26)

- ❖ **Authority** The Lord Jesus chose twelve apostles as the senior leadership of Church. They continued the apostolic tradition by the laying on of hands. In the apostolic community there is a distinction between apostles and elders. The apostles continued in the line of bishops, ordained through the laying on of hands. They also followed the apostolic tradition of other leaders (such as the "elders" cited above) who were presbyters and deacons.

Christianity is not a matter solely of right doctrine, but also of right sacramental worship. It involves faithfully carrying on the traditions of the apostles. Apostolic succession is one guarantee of the continuance of authentic Catholic faith. The authority of the Church is centered upon the episcopacy as the chief teachers and chief sacramental celebrants of the faith. They are a guarantee of the authenticity of the core beliefs cited above (Word, Sacrament and Authority).

It is important to note that the bishops are ordained into a *collegium* of bishops. They participate with other bishops in a "communion" of Catholic orthodoxy. This *collegium* is essential to understand the nature of authority in the Church, which is conciliar and synodal.

What is synodal polity and why is it the basis of the structure of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion?

Synodal polity is ancient, and can be found in the Acts of the Apostles. It means that various voices come into "communion" to share in the life of the Church. That communion is expressed in the polity of the Church – its governance. This means two things:

- ❖ Various voices are expressed on the diocesan (local Church) level in the governance of the Church. Thus, the voices of the bishop, laity and clergy are expressed in the diocesan synod.
- ❖ Various voices are expressed on the universal level, through the communion of the bishops, as the elected senior leaders of each diocese. This is conciliar Catholicism, which traces its history throughout history in the ecumenical and regional councils of the Church (also called "synods").

Synodal polity is seen in the earliest writings about the Church, the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 1, when the apostles sought a replacement for Judas, after his betrayal and death, they asked the community to choose candidates. Likewise, in chapter 6 of the Acts, the apostles again ask the community to choose the candidates who will be ordained as deacons by the apostles. The principle of multiple voices being involved in the discernment and direction of the Church is shown by these two examples.

Throughout the history of the early Church, this principle of the engagement of voices of the bishop, laity and clergy in a continuous conversation is seen as a strength:

- ❖ In the third century, Saint Cyprian was the Bishop of Carthage, in North Africa. This great saint was eventually martyred for his faith. As bishop, he wrote the following:

I have made it a rule, ever since the beginning of my episcopate, to make no decision merely on the strength of my own personal opinion without consulting you [the priests and deacons] and without the approbation of the people. (Letters, 14:4)

Saint Cyprian of Carthage offered this testimony about the election of bishops in the early church:

It comes from divine authority that a bishop be chosen in the presence of the people before the eyes of all and that he be approved worthy and fit by public judgment and testimony.

When Cornelius was elected pope in 251, Cyprian wrote these words in a letter to a colleague:

Cornelius was made bishop by the judgment of God and His Christ, by the testimony of almost all the clergy, by the vote of the people who were then present, by the assembly of venerable bishops and good men.

- ❖ Celestine I was Pope (422-432). He defended the election of bishops by the people. Pope Celestine wrote: "No one who is unwanted should be made a bishop; the desire and consent of the clergy and the people and the order is required" (Epistolae 4.5, PL 50:434-35).
- ❖ From the very beginning of church history, bishops were elected by the laity and clergy of the various local churches, or dioceses. And this included the Bishop of Rome, known more popularly as the pope. In the 5th century, Saint Leo I, the Bishop of Rome (440-461), wrote these words: "He who is to preside over all must be elected by all."

The historical evidence for conciliar and synodal polity (Church discernment, governance and direction) is overwhelming, and has become the central focus of Catholic renewal in the ECC.

How is synodal polity a reflection of the Holy Trinity?

The Holy Trinity is dynamic, relational and understood as complete unity with distinction of the Three Persons. Synodal polity strives to mirror the Trinity in these qualities. It is a dynamic and loving conversation between the three distinct voices of bishop, laity and clergy – united as one, and reflecting One Church, the Body of Christ. The three voices are given clarity through the houses of polity, and the Presiding Bishop with the Episcopal Council.

How does the meaning of the Church relate to the role of the bishop?

The bishop is to bring unity to the Church by witnessing to the voice of the past (the Catholic tradition), and by supporting the voices of the laity and clergy in his jurisdiction (which is normally the diocese.) The bishop is the chief shepherd of the diocesan Church, and as such is the prime teacher, prime celebrant of the sacraments and prime administrator. This role of the bishop as chief shepherd is cited in Canon 23 of the constitution of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. *This is best accomplished in small dioceses, where the people have access to their bishop, and the bishop functions as the spiritual guide for the communities of the diocese, its people and its clergy.*

What is the difference between consecration as a bishop and jurisdiction as an ordinary of a diocese, or as the Presiding Bishop?

Consecration as bishop is a sacrament of the Church. As such, it is permanent, and gives to the bishop the power to exercise her/his ministry as bishop, but not the authority to exercise that power. It is the Holy Synod of the ECC that *confirms* the jurisdictional authority to diocesan bishops, after they have been chosen by their people.

Sacramental consecration gives the power to the bishop for his teaching, sacramental and liturgical function, but election to the position of diocesan bishop (ordinary of the diocese) authorizes the function of the bishop, which is confirmed by the synod.

For bishops who are not ordinaries, their sacramental consecration gives them the power to act as bishops, but the act as representatives of the Presiding Bishop or the diocesan ordinary – they are called “suffragan” to the bishop they represent.

The Presiding Bishop, as with all other bishops, derives her/his sacramental and teaching power and authority from sacramental consecration as bishop, but derives her/his jurisdiction from election by the Holy Synod.

What is the difference between a suffragan bishop and a bishop who is a diocesan ordinary?

A suffragan bishop represents either the Presiding Bishop, or the ordinary of a diocese. If the suffragan bishop represents the ordinary of a diocese, she/he is an auxiliary bishop – usually consecrated as bishop to serve a particular population. (For example, an auxiliary bishop may assist the ordinary by serving the Spanish-speaking people of the diocese, especially when the ordinary does not speak Spanish, and thus serving the whole diocese.)

When the bishop is suffragan to the Presiding Bishop, she/he may represent the Presiding Bishop in service to a specific population (again, such as the Spanish-speaking), but more often serves as a regional bishop – forming a regional mission with a dean (who is elected by the clergy of that region) and an advisory council (composed of laity and clergy from the communities of the region), until the time that the region is large enough to form a diocese with its own elected bishop (ordinary of that diocese) and diocesan synod.

E. The Ecumenical Catholic Communion in the Catholic tradition

How is the Ecumenical Catholic Communion authentically Catholic?

Words can describe qualities. For example, the word “democracy” is used to describe a country. What are the elements of democracy? The word does not simply mean that the citizens vote. It also means that they are educated enough to vote; that there is a free and independent press, that commerce is generally open but regulated, that the judicial system is free from political constraint and free to exercise the law without undue pressure, etc. This is what we mean when we use the word “democracy.”

The same can be said of the word “Catholic.” To say that a Church is Catholic describes elements embraced by that Church. These elements can be found in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), and are expressed through the ECC constitution. They can be listed as:

- ❖ A foundational faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Savior of the world is proclaimed by the ECC and its communities of faith.
- ❖ The Scriptures (Old and New Testament) as the sacred foundational record of faith, and affirmed as such by the ECC.
- ❖ The ECC embraces and affirms the tradition of the Church (beginning with Scriptures as normative) as the guide for authentic faith – continuous thread of belief and

understanding, according to the creeds of the great ecumenical councils. (The Nicene-Constantinople Creed is generally considered normative in the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox world.

- ❖ The ECC maintains the tradition of the sacraments – generally numbered as seven – with an understanding that they are the presence of Christ, and the work of Christ. The sacraments are an authentic encounter with Christ – each sacrament bestowing a grace for a special purpose, by the work and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The Eucharist is central to the Church, and affirmed as such by the ECC. In the ECC, the Mass is affirmed as the timeless sacrifice of Christ on the cross at Calvary – and his resurrection and triumph over death. We participate in his life, death and resurrection through our participation in the Eucharist, and by receiving Holy Communion, which we believe is the Body and Blood of Christ.
- ❖ The tradition of apostolic succession: The Church is the community that inherits the faith of the apostles; and the bishops are within the Catholic community of faith as the successors of the apostles. The ordained ministry is bishop in the apostolic succession, with presbyter and deacon ordained by the bishop as successor of the apostles. The bishops succeed the apostles in the Church as the chief pastors, teachers and celebrants of the sacraments. This does not diminish from leadership among the laity, nor the participation of the priests and deacons in the ministry of the bishop for the Church.
- ❖ For the ECC, the Church is the community of faith which is part of the worldwide Church of Christ. However, each Church (bishop-laity-clergy) is whole and complete in itself as “Church.” The local Church (bishop-laity-clergy) is in communion with other local Churches, while the bishops form a *collegium* – the apostolic order that inherits the consecration and role of the apostles in the original community of the Church. The Church is the gift of Christ, and not simply an organization that fosters faith –it is the Body of Christ, and the People of God, filled with the presence of the Trinity, and guided by the Spirit.
- ❖ The ECC affirms the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in its entirety, while the interpretation of the creed is specific to the Church in each age and culture.
- ❖ The ECC maintains devotion to Mary as the Mother of God (Theotokos), and devotion to the saints – who have gone to be with the Lord Jesus, and are still present in the “communion of saints.”

The Ecumenical Catholic Communion is the name that proclaims three basic elements:

1. It is Ecumenical – dedicated to the unity of the Church, the reconciliation with all Christians and their ecclesial communities. This is central to the mission of the ECC: the restoration of the unity of the Church. Additionally, the openness to all people who embrace faith and peace is affirmed as part of the mission of the ECC, and the continuation of the mission of Christ as Savior of the world.
2. It is Catholic – as explained above, it bears the element of Catholicity, the ancient apostolic tradition. The Catholicity of the ECC is lived out through a sense of justice, in that diverse people are welcomed to participate in the sacramental life of the Church. This diversity is inclusive – male and female, of different sexual orientations, of all ethnicities and races, without regard to educational background, of all political persuasions, and of all social and economic levels.
3. It is a communion – meaning that it is the participation of the whole and complete Church (bishop-laity-clergy) in unity with other such Churches. It is open to communion with other Catholic Churches, East or West.

Additionally, the ECC reflects the authentic marks of the Church. It is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. This is further explained in the section on the creed and the life of faith, under the question below: **“How is the structure of the Church guided by the official creeds?”**