

History of the Ecumenical Catholic movement— Part 3/4

Up to now, we've talked about the considerable diversity within the Universal Church, and provided some background on the historical roots of our Communion. In this third part of the series, let's talk briefly about the more recent history of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion.

As a communion, we are relatively young. In the early 2000's, a group of existing non-Roman Catholic communities decided to join together to form a larger communion. Considerable time went into deliberations about how the communities would jointly live and express their catholic faith. There was a strong agreement on a few fundamental points: the group would be a "communion of communities," with each community retaining a degree of autonomy; there would be a decentralized authority structure; the clergy leaders (bishops and pastors) would be selected by the people that they served; there would be term limits for bishops; ordination would be open to all who were appropriately trained and qualified, regardless of gender, marital status or sexual orientation. A constitution, regulating the life of the Communion, was developed; major changes in organization, governance, or practices would require the affirmation of laity, clergy and bishops. The communities met in 2003 to finalize the constitution and formally create the Communion. The Communion adopted the following 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 Jesus, the Christ.

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."

The ECC has grown rapidly since its inception. In the last section of our series, we will discuss this growth, and provide a "bird's eye view" of the size and diversity of the communion.