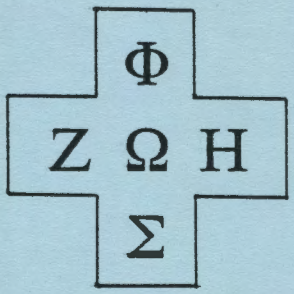
History and Overview

of the Ecumenical Catholic Church

The First Ten Years: 1985 - 95

Christ Our Light and Life



Εκκλησια Καθολικη Οικουμενικη

Archbishop Mark Shirilau

History and Overview

of the Ecumenical Catholic Church

The First Ten Years: 1985 - 95

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In Memoriam

The Reverend Deacon

Jeffery Micheal Lau Shirilau

Born on Earth *August 30, 1953*

Born in Christ *December 9, 1956*

Born in Heaven *August 9, 1993*

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INTRODUCTION

The Ecumenical Catholic Church is an independent denomination within the Christian Church. The canon law of the denomination defines the organization as "a constituent member of Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church ('the Church'), which unites all Christians throughout the world and throughout history."[1] The canons also absolutely subject the denomination to the creedal directives of the Church's Ecumenical Councils, those being Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon.[2]

Furthermore, the Ecumenical Catholic Church strives to maintain itself within the mainstream of historical Christianity, both in theology and liturgy. The theology is firmly creedal, with the Nicene Creed being accepted as the definition of Christianity. The seven traditional sacraments are observed, and Baptism and the Eucharist are celebrated as the primary means by which we receive God's saving Grace. The liturgy is consistent with the modern liturgies of the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches.

The primary salient feature of the Ecumenical Catholic Church is that it considers matters of both gender and sexuality essentially irrelevant to religious faith. As such, it provides the sacrament of ordination without regard to gender, celibacy, or heterosexual orientation. Likewise, marriage is viewed as a commitment between Christians, not something exclusively heterosexual in nature. Because sexism, heterosexism,[3] and homophobia are

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1. Canon I, Article 2. In this and all official publications of the denomination, the term *Church* with a capital *C* is used for the entire Body of Christendom, while the denomination or a local body or building would be termed "the church" or "a church" without the capital letter.

2. Canon I, Article 5.

3. The underlying social pressure to be heterosexual or the belief, whether active or implicit, that heterosexuality is superior or more normal or more desired than other forms of sexual expression. Heterosexism is to be distinguished from the more active, aggressive, hate-filled bigotry termed "homophobia." However, because it is

removed from both the church's official doctrines and its day-to-day practices, it is able to directly minister to the gay community, to people who divorced and then remarried, and to women in general, as well as to others who have been disenfranchised from other churches because of various social issues.

Essentially this involves a dethroning of sexuality. Both contemporary Western society and the church denominations which are influenced by it tend to place inappropriate emphasis on this subject. Their undue emphasis boils down to a form of idolatry, where a person's sexual expression is seen to be so important as to even override the true marks of Christian religion, such as Baptism, participation in the Eucharist, faith, and prayer. The Ecumenical Catholic Church is a body of baptized persons. Some of them are gay. Some of them have been divorced and remarried. Some are transgendered, and others aren't even certain what their ultimate sexuality is. Some of them may even be promiscuous, and some of them might have had an abortion.[4] The bottom line is that their Christianity is a matter of their faith, beliefs, and Baptism, not their sexuality or its outward expression.

Likewise, the denomination emphasizes that the Church is a sacramental Body, not a moral system. We believe that moral codes are useful guidelines to daily life, but that they do not formulate the boundaries of the Body of Christ and they are not connected with salvation. Salvation is a free gift of God through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is not something

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more subtle and so wide-spread, even among persons and groups who feel they are not at all homophobic, heterosexism is perhaps just as damaging to our society. Teaching young children that boys *should* marry girls is at least as damaging to homosexual children as are the taunts and biases of outward homophobia.

4. The church teaches that abortion is essentially wrong and not a proper loving choice. However, it also recognizes that Christians are not perfect and does not believe that having an abortion is so heinous as to be an unforgivable sin. If a person makes that choice, even though it be contrary to official church teaching, that person is still a part of the Body of Christ and still a child loved by God.

we earn by being good. Nor is salvation something that God will recall if we are "bad."

The Ecumenical Catholic Church, therefore, is set apart by its boldly inclusive nature. Its ministry is open to everyone, without arbitrary exceptions based on social issues. This is not a matter of debate. It is not something that must be wrestled by a committee. It is not up to the vote of the people or the decrees of the hierarchy. It is the way it is: *Everyone* is welcome.

Because gay and lesbian people have been so strenuously downtrodden by Christian denominations of all sorts, the Ecumenical Catholic Church finds a special calling from God to minister directly to this group. There is perhaps no other group of individuals who have more difficulty feeling at home within their native denominations. Highly liturgical and completely fundamentalist groups alike pursue this discrimination with a vengeance. Even the more liberal mainline Protestants have difficulty being totally accepting of gays. There seems to be no great correlation between theology or liturgy and homophobia (although the middle-of-the-road Protestants are somewhat more tolerant than either the Orthodox or Evangelical extremes). Because our witnessing to the gay community is so direct and so important, many of our parishes tend to be dominated by gays and lesbians, not because it should or has to be that way, but because they seem to have the greater need for our bold approach to truth and honesty.

Unlike some other gay ministries, however, the Ecumenical Catholic Church is not a "gay church" *per se*. Remember, sexuality is considered basically irrelevant. We do celebrate sexuality through the sacrament of marriage (either gay or straight), but first and foremost we are Christians. While some of our parishes may participate in gay pride parades and our leaders may speak out in favor of nondiscrimination, "Gay Pride Day" is not on our liturgical calendar and we do not compromise our essential Christian

nature for the sake of politics or social awareness. Our church services focus on Jesus Christ and our relationship with Him, not on secular events. We are *Christians* whose lives, like those of everyone else, also include other dimensions, but our faith in Jesus Christ, not our sexuality, is what unites us.

PRELIMINARY HISTORY

The Church's First 1000 Years

St. John Boswell[5] has conducted extensive research demonstrating that the Christian Church was very gay-affirming in its earlier years.[6] His research points out that there were many pairs of saints who were gay couples, joint warriors for the faith. It also demonstrates that a religious ceremony of union for same-sex couples was common practice up until at least AD 1000. There is even evidence that heterosexual marriage was essentially a legal contract designed to protect property rights, while the homosexual relationships were the primary symbols of love and affection. Much of what we accept now as the basis of Christian marriage is a blend, both liturgically and emotionally, of the legalistic heterosexual union and the romantic gay marriage.

During the Middle Ages views on homosexuality gradually began to change, though this itself was not a direct, uniform, or immediate change. History tells us of the corrupt English King Edward II, who appointed *his*

5. Dr. John Boswell, professor of history at Yale University, was a lifelong active Roman Catholic. He died of AIDS on December 23, 1994, and was subsequently declared a saint by the Ecumenical Catholic Church for his contributions toward opening up honesty and truth in the Community of Faith.

6. This research is contained in St. John's book, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (1994, New York: Villard Books).

lover Piers Gaveston as Earl of Cornwall on August 6, 1307. He was hated for his relationships both with Piers and with a later lover, Hugh Despenser, but the hatred was distinctly unattached to his homosexuality *per se*, but rather to the corruption and usurpation of power the lovers wielded away from the noblemen. The fact that the king was bisexual was generally considered irrelevant, as "affection between men is regarded as natural in [the 14th century's] militaristic society."[7]

The causes of society's shift away from accepted homosexuality are not entirely clear. Its universality, however, is evident. By the time of the American Revolution, homosexuality was well established as evilly perceived. Even as this perception grew, however, it was only later that it was put in theological terms or became established doctrine of the churches.

In viewing this period of history, it is important to note the corollary with which witches were tormented. Originally, a "witch" was a practitioner of Wicca, the ancient religion of the pre-Christian people. Rather than view these people as ministers of another religion, even as strongly termed as a false religion, they were taken to the next step and associated with evil. There is no correlation between Wicca and Satanism, except in the eyes of people who have been conditioned by hundreds of years of slander and misinformation. Properly speaking, a witch (Wiccan minister) is akin to a rabbi or a Buddhist monk or a Shinto priest. S/he is a minister of another religion. We would not call a rabbi Satanic, so it is just as improper to place such a label on a witch. Our point is not to validate the theological tenants of either Wicca or Judaism, but rather to point out their differences from evil and Satanism, which is a direct perversion of Christianity, not merely an alternative (and often a more ancient alternative) thereto.

So European (and therefore, essentially Christian) history has been

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7. Derrik Mercer, ed. *Chronicle of the Royal Family* (1991. London: Chronicle Communications Ltd.) pp 70-72.

plagued by a growing and pervading association of the different with evil. To some extent this is a tradition inherited from the ancient Hebrews, and to that extent it seems to have some biblical support. However, Jesus was rather clear in trying to eradicate those errors. He spoke with and touched a Samaritan woman, doubly condemned because she was both a female and a hated "half-breed." It seems clear that Christ calls us past the xenophobia (fear of things different) that is part of human nature.

Heterosexism

"Heterosexism" is an illness the pervades most human society. It is to be distinguished from "homophobia," the more blatant hatred of homosexuals. Heterosexism is far more subtle and pervasive. It is the underlying belief that the monogamous marriage of a man and a woman is the social ideal. Most people buy into heterosexism without even realizing it. Even very liberal, open, and accepting people may be caught by its claws.

We are all taught heterosexism from childhood. The stories of the prince and princess living happily ever after, no matter how good and romantic, still promote heterosexism. The children subtly learn that happiness is connected to heterosexual love. The only way to correct this problem would be to have children's stories that tell of two princes or two princesses that live happily ever after mixed in with those of the heterosexual bent.

Gays are often accused by the dominating society of flaunting their sexuality. In reality, heterosexuals flaunt their sexuality to a far greater extent. While they may not go around talking about the mechanics of sex, their everyday behavior often betrays them. When a man and a woman walk into a store or restaurant with a young child, they are immediately making an assumed statement about a time when they had sex. Perhaps there is no real way around this problem, but the elimination of heterosexism's deep root in

our society requires that gays come up with alternative ways to proclaim their sexuality. Unfortunately, since it cannot be done through children, these ways are often seem crude or excessively direct.

Likewise, public affection reflects our heterosexism. While two men in hot embrace would be termed "disgusting" by many, why are not a man and a woman equally disgusting? Or why are not the men equally as romantic as the boy and girl? It would be homophobic to confront the two men or do them violence. It is heterosexist to think they are disgusting if one does not place the same contempt on the boy and girl doing the same things.

Heterosexism pervades every aspect of society. It is supported by the conservative and liberal church alike, by politicians of all bents, and even by the so-called liberal, humanistic media. The roots of heterosexism are so deep that most people, even open-minded ones, do not realize it.

These roots have strangled our society. They cause untold harm to countless numbers of individuals, gay and straight alike. Many times the fruits of this evil are very deeply concealed. Teen suicides are at least three times as high among gay teenagers as among others. There are damaged marriages that result from trying in vain to live up to society's expectation and to be straight. There are children who are damaged, not because their parents are gay, but because their parents tried to be something they were not. There is misogyny and outright abuse toward women by men who have turned inward their rage, blaming women rather than society for making them feel unfilled in their hopelessly repetitive heterosexual relationships. There are women who live lives without love or sexual fulfillment because they bought into the heterosexist agenda. There are transsexuals and other fringe groups who are discriminated against even by "mainstream" gays and lesbians because even homosexuals sometimes refuse to accept the diversity of God's creation.

The poisonous river of heterosexism run deep everywhere we turn.

Yet it seems such a part of life that even those affected do not realize it. Even people who try to do what is right miss the point. Even those who try to live Jesus's call to love everyone fail to see that their simple but erroneous assumptions can be deadly to spirit, can destroy the very ability to love.

The church is caught up in this heterosexism. Like all aspects of the plague, those of the church are not well identified. Some Christians honestly believe that the family of daddy, mommy, and kids is what God wants for everyone. They build biblical or theological arguments. That is getting the cart before the horse. It is like saying that the reason we have candles on the altar is to symbolize the dual nature of Christ, rather than admitting that candles were first placed there so the priest could read, and the symbolism followed the necessity. We read heterosexism into the Bible because we have all been raised as heterosexists. It is not the other way around.

Because neither scripture nor tradition nor reason is the true root of our heterosexism, in the church or in society as a whole, it is very hard to attack and eliminate. Changing doctrines and official statements will only go so far, and even that is difficult to do because the pillars of truth get blurred out by the irrational, ingrained biases.

Toward the end of the 20th century, the concept of heterosexism was just beginning to emerge. Prior to that, people had not even been aware of it. They bought into it without thinking. At best, they fought against its more covert aspects like homophobia. In general, though, our society has yet to link rampant misogyny, divorce, and even child abuse with the twisted, deeply rotten lovelessness that heterosexism leaves within human hearts, gay/lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and heterosexual alike.

The Church's Poor Response

The Ecumenical Catholic Church comes out of a background of *development* within the larger Christian Church. It was formed in the late

1980s as a direct result of the failure of the mainline liturgical churches to deal promptly and fairly with their heterosexism, homophobia, and discrimination.

By and large, the mainline churches in America began tackling the barriers of discrimination during the twentieth century. Direct discrimination of blacks and other racial minorities was set aside.[8] By the 1970s, many of the mainline churches were ordaining women, with the Roman Church being the primary exception. The ordination of open or noncloseted gays, however, was making little progress. In the 1970s and '80s in some liberal circles a "don't ask, don't tell" policy was becoming a popular *modus operandi*.[9] This was tantamount to promoting dishonesty.

The question of gay or lesbian marriage was still totally taboo. Even as late as 1995 as this history is being written, the mainline denominations have not come near to addressing this issue in a meaningful way. Those, like some Episcopal dioceses, which are coming close are still cloaking it under nonmarital terms such as "blessing of a relationship," and even the Metropolitan Community Church usually opts for the term "holy union" rather than "marriage." It seems like we are still a long way from the time when the sacrament of marriage will be available to all individuals on an equal basis without a heterosexist bias.

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8. This is a slightly different statement than saying that racism has been eliminated in the churches.

9. Even relatively conservative bishops and churches distinguish between "orientation" and practice, resulting in the ordination of intrinsically gay individuals so long as they remain celibate, which practice creates a double standard for those denominations that allow clergy to be heterosexually married. Still more liberal bishops or committees would ordain "practicing" gays so long as they kept quiet, so as not to attract the attention of their denomination's more homophobic factions. Some research estimates that 30-40% of catholic clergy are homosexual in orientation.

The Evangelical sector of the Church was even worse off. Preachers from some of these denominations were still focusing on homosexuality as a special sin, somehow more serious than all the others. Gays in the pews were being convinced that hell awaited them, and gays in the pulpit were seeing their careers, ministries, and lives destroyed.

Development of "Gay" Churches

The Reverend Troy Perry was one such persecuted Evangelical pastor. Troy was a Pentecostal minister who realized that he was gay. As he began to deal openly with himself, the hierarchy of his denomination began to deal harshly with him. Eventually he was defrocked and excommunicated. However, Troy remained convinced of his calling, and God used the apparent tragedy for His own purposes. In 1968, Troy formed the Metropolitan Community Church, a new denomination with an open and affirming ministry to the gay community. It began as a small gathering in his house and, 25 years later has about 30,000 members throughout the world.

It was one of those *kairos* events. The timing was right. The Stonewall riots were about to happen, and the modern gay liberation movement was beginning. God had called an outspoken, active, radical Pentecostal to proclaim a message both to the gay community and to the larger Church: "The Lord is my Shepherd, and He knows I'm gay."[10] The MCC was not the first gay-supportive church started, but it proved to be the most successful.

In 1946, the Reverend George Hyde founded the Eucharistic Catholic Church. George was consecrated bishop and began working in other Independent Catholic churches. In 1960 he founded the Orthodox Catholic Church of America and backed away from direct identification of this church with the gay community, although he continued an interest in gay ministry.

10. This is also the title of Troy's autobiography (New York: Bantam Books, 1978).

George Hyde authorized the formation of a Eucharistic Catholic Church parish in New York City under the Reverend Robert Clement in 1970. This parish grew to nearly 1000 members and became an independent jurisdiction when Bob Clement was consecrated bishop by Bishop Richard Marchenna.[11] The church gradually was reabsorbed into the mainline churches as they became slightly more liberal and tolerant and established gay-supportive social organizations. Bob Clement is now retired and living in rural San Diego County, California.[12]

In 1955, Bishop George Hyde licensed Mikhail Itkin to begin work with the gay community in San Francisco. As George became less open about direct gay ministry, Mikhail separated from his jurisdiction and was consecrated bishop by Bishop Christopher Stanley in 1960. The church eventually became known as the Community of the Love of Christ (Evangelical Catholic) and was quite successful until it was seriously damaged by a 1968 schism over the ordination of women. Mikhail died in 1991, and the church has very little present-day activity.[13]

In addition, the mainline churches began forming gay-supportive groups, such as Dignity (Roman), Integrity (Episcopal), Affirmation (Methodist), and Lutherans Concerned. In some situations these groups were able to offer sacraments in an open and affirming atmosphere. However, they were unable to undo the structural homophobia of their denominations and could not eliminate the discriminatory practices surrounding ordination and marriage. They provide good social settings and also strong witnesses within their own denominational systems. However, because of their direct connection with their "host" denominations, their

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11. J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 4th ed., entry #1715, "Eucharistic Catholic Church." (Detroit: Gale Research, 1993.)

12. Personal conversations between Bishops Clement and Shirilau, 1991.

13. Melton. Entry #1713, "Community of the Love of Christ (Evangelical Catholic)."

ministries are intrinsically limited.[14]

Gay Liturgical Witness

By the 1980s, the main thing that was missing in the Christian spectrum was a gay-supportive church that maintained a liturgical setting and held on to orthodox theology. The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) had become distinctly Protestant in liturgy and polity. The once-strong gay-oriented Independent Catholic denominations had for the most part vanished into obscurity.

The UFMCC has done a superb job of integrating Christians from all denominations. In doing so, however, it has developed a style of worship which is loosely structured and not well connected with the Church's historic liturgy. While there is some variation from parish to parish, UFMCC liturgy is essentially Methodist or Congregationalist in style (except that UFMCC bylaws require the celebration of the Eucharist on a weekly basis). Many persons, particularly those from Protestant backgrounds, are very happy with this style of worship.

However, for those Christians who come from backgrounds with more traditional liturgies, MCC worship is often not sufficiently fulfilling. These people are as unfulfilled in this Sunday experience as an Evangelical would be hearing a five-minute Catholic homily. It is not so much a matter of right or wrong, proper or improper, but more a matter of personal taste, comfort, and roots. Additionally, in its effort to be inclusive not only of sexual variation but also of all denominational backgrounds, the MCC has deemphasized its creedal and sacramental theology. While the UFMCC

14. Officially many of the groups as organizations do not have direct links with their "host" denominations. Some are even officially unrecognized by their denominations. However, even those with loose relationships to their denominations still rely on the services of ministers who are personally constrained in their ability to minister by the denominational hierarchy.

bylaws reference the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, they are rarely recited at public worship. Baptism and the Eucharist are celebrated, but the desire to be supportive of those parishioners from Baptist and Evangelical backgrounds has weakened the denomination's ability to proclaim the two sacraments as absolutely certain means of grace.

There are many liturgical churches which are tolerant of gays. Many Independent Catholic groups have a clergy that is predominantly gay, but most of these groups are quiet about this subject and do little to reach out to the gay community. It is, in fact, relatively easy to find an Episcopal church in which one can happily exist as a gay person (or even a gay couple), so long as one does not want a formal marriage or seek ordination. In the larger cities, there are Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran and even Roman Catholic parishes with similar levels of tolerance.

Somehow, though, there was an obvious blank in the spectrum. We had a boldly gay-supportive Protestant denomination (the UFMCC), but not a direct equivalent for Catholics. This market niche is the target of the Ecumenical Catholic Church. In fact, when someone has not heard about the ECC or its ministry, it is often described as "the Catholic equivalent of the MCC."

Women in the Church

From very early on, the Christian Church limited its ministry to males. It is not clear, however, that this was from earliest of times, or simply from very early times. Mary Magdalene is a prime example. The Bible refers to the Twelve, all of them men, but it seems as if Mary may have been part of that group as well. It is not provable, but certainly not disprovable, that Jesus held Mary on equal par with the others and that He expected no true distinction between her apostolate and that of Peter, James, John, and the others. We may never know on earth.

Clearly Jesus viewed women with more equality than was common of His time. Both Jewish and Roman society viewed women as property of males. Jesus treated them as humans. He spoke to them directly, dealing with them in the very same way He dealt with men.

It remains an unfortunate historical fact that an ancient Church controlled or run by women would not have been accepted in the society. This is a result of the pervasive sexism of our society which, like heterosexism, causes problems that we don't even connect with it.

Jesus came into the world in a specific time and place. This is part of Incarnation. He limited Himself by this act. Presumably Jesus believed the world was flat, even though He was the Word of creation and in His eternal realms clearly had known otherwise. Likewise, perhaps He chose twelve males as leaders because He knew that choosing a mixed group would not have facilitated the spread of the Gospel because of the society's ills. Evangelization of the world was a primary goal, even more important than eliminating the poisons of sexism and heterosexism. We can never conclude that Jesus's choice of a male leadership represents any true desire, rather than a compromise to the world as it was. (Surely, for example, God would have come to earth as a human without either race or gender, since He is Savior of all, but somehow this would be a breach of biological limitations and thus would not make Him truly human.)

In the course of time, social sexism has allowed this fact to be perverted. What Jesus did in order to best facilitate His goals in the real world soon were turned into His personal desires. Men argued that Jesus did not want to choose women leaders. This lie denies the facts that Jesus lived in a particular time and place and also the fact that He treated women extraordinarily well for that time and place.

At some point in history (and that point is not absolutely known, because history is edited from generation to generation), the Christian clergy

became exclusively male. This sexism prevails to this very day in some Christian groups, including many Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

Though many Roman Catholic clergy and laity believe that woman can and should be priests, and though there is ample Protestant and Anglican evidence to support the ability of women to so serve effectively, the Roman hierarchy remains dead-set against it. Pope John Paul II, as late as 1994, put female clergy in the category of issues that "should not even be discussed." This blatantly sexist, seemingly irrational approach is cloaked in false theologizing that puts it beyond reproach.

The Protestant and Anglican churches are signs of hope that this issue will some day be placed aside. Women function very ably in most denominations, although as little as 20 or 30 years ago, most of these denominations also restricted their clergy to males. Just as heterosexism is today, sexism was a blind and little-acknowledged evil just a few years ago. Today it remains a rampant evil, but at least it is readily acknowledged and recognized, even though sometimes rather absurdly denied (as when the Roman Church denies that its approach toward female clergy is sexist).

Other Areas of Disenfranchisement

Perhaps better than any other denomination, the Roman Catholic Church tries desperately to make its people seem unwanted and unwelcome. Divorce is a prime example. If a Roman Catholic gets divorced and then remarries, s/he is excommunicated in a legalist approach reminiscent of the ancient Hebrews ("expelled from the Community").

It is true that Jesus spoke rather vehemently against divorce. But we must remember that He lived in a different society from ours. He lived in a society where divorce meant almost certain poverty and rejection for the woman. His views on divorce were in this context part of His unusual

support of women. When Jesus condemned divorce, most likely He had in mind the fact that a man leaving his wife would leave her without means of support.

While commitments are not to be taken lightly, Jesus' overriding concern most likely was not simply the idea of breaking a solemn vow. He was far more concerned about human feelings and pain than about legalisms. It is difficult to speak with certainty about how Jesus would view modern day divorce. Surely it is not something that He would say should be taken with a grain of salt, and He would probably chastise us for our callous acceptance of this alternative to staying committed to a marriage. On the other hand, we doubt seriously that Jesus would support marriage at all costs, particularly the emotional costs of the partners and the children. Our society has changed, and women are no longer entirely helpless. This is not to say that a divorcing husband does not have responsibilities to his wife and children, but that divorce is clearly not synonymous with economic and emotional devastation. On the contrary, continuing on in a dysfunctional or abusive marriage can be far more damaging.

We believe that divorce should remain an option, not necessarily a good one, but sometimes the best one under certain circumstances. It is not necessary to try to go back in time and say the marriage did not exist. It is only necessary to repent of sin and move onward in life. Divorce involves a process of forgiveness for everyone involved. Jesus preached forgiveness as an essential part of our lives.

The Roman Church also puts its members in a strange predicament regarding birth control and abortion. While abortion is viewed as always sinful, Roman Catholic couples are expected to abstain from birth control as well. This is a remnant of the extreme sex-negativism that dominates Roman thought. Apparently not only premarital, extramarital, and homosexual sex are wrong, but so is sex within marriage when there is not an intent to have

children. That is a naive and destructive view of human sexuality that the Ecumenical Catholic Church categorically rejects.

We believe that abortion is wrong, not because it has anything to do with sexuality, but because it intrinsically involves the destruction of a human life. However, again we believe first and foremost in the forgiveness of sins. A woman who has an abortion is entitled to receive God's nurturing love and forgiveness. That forgiveness comes most clearly and vitally through the sacraments. To deny a person Communion because she has had an abortion is a grave sin itself, a hindering of God's grace and love. It is probably even a worse sin than actually having an abortion. We welcome women who have had abortions to our church. We strive to offer them love and support and alternatives that will help them eliminate the need to have further abortions in the future.

We also support the free and easy access to birth control for all persons, including teenagers and high school students. While we do not support promiscuity, particularly among the young and vulnerable, we are firmly committed to the fact that sexual relations with the protection of birth control, particularly life-saving condoms, are better than unprotected sexual relations which can lead not only to unwanted children and abortion, but to deadly diseases such as AIDS.

Old and Independent Catholicism

The Old Catholics and Independent Catholics are a widely diverse group of denominations. While a few have significant membership, most are very small. Their history is convoluted, intertwined, and either documented to death in various denominations' self-justification booklets or so poorly documented as to be obscure. Several detailed historical books have been prepared, and an interested person could spend days on end perusing such

material.[15]

Most Independent Catholic churches have various doctrinal or historical justifications for their existence as organizations. The divisions among them are not too different from the divisions which permeated the Protestant and Evangelical churches during the same time period, primarily the last two centuries. To outside observers, the doctrinal differentiation seems trivial or even incomprehensible. In many cases, personality clashes between leaders are closer to the real reason for the formation of splinter groups.

The United States, and Europe to a lesser extent, is home to hundreds of Independent Catholic groups -- churches which function in a similar manner to the Roman Catholic Church but which are not under the political control of the Bishop of Rome or his delegates. The majority of these groups are small and inconsequential, hence the common but erroneous assumption that "Catholic" is synonymous with "Roman Catholic."

As with small Protestant groups, the Independent Catholics range from ultraconservative to ultraliberal. Furthermore, these distinctions can be applied along at least three axes -- theology, liturgy, and sociopolitical position. There are, for example, groups with very high liturgy but radically New Age theology. Likewise there are some with liberal attitudes toward liturgy but conservative social outlooks, and every other possible combination of these parameters.

A few of the groups have evolved into very gay-positive organizations, but the majority are more in line with the "don't ask, don't tell" philosophy.

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15. For example, Gordon Melton's *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1993) gives detailed history of the various Independent Catholics as well as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, all types of Protestant churches and even non-Christian organizations. *Independent Bishops: An International Directory* by Gary Ward, Bertil Persson, and Alan Bain (Detroit: Apogee Books, 1990) gives detailed entries on individual bishops in the various Independent Catholic churches.

Although they may have a high percentage of gay clergy, and although the bishops may be well aware of this fact and may themselves be rather openly gay, the church denominations still tend to relish in their historical foundations. Many of these historic or theological distinctions are only marginally relevant to the larger gay community. This is particularly true of those ultra-orthodox (theologically) bodies which see themselves as more doctrinally pure than the rest of Christendom, even though they have liberal outlooks toward sexuality and morality. (Again a distinguishing feature from the ultraconservative Protestant bodies which tend to see themselves as more pure both theologically and moralisticly.)

Many Independent Catholics have important and vital ministries. Others are simply tax shelters, and still others are so far off in one theological direction or another that one must honestly question whether they are truly catholic or even Christian. Some bishops base the validity of their ministry primarily upon the soundness of their apostolic succession, which may result in multiple ordinations and consecrations as one group rejects another's claims to tactile validity.[16] Others stand upon the claim that their theology is more correct or their liturgy more proper. A few have developed ministries for a specific niche within the human needs spectrum.

The term "Old Catholic" originally applied to a certain subset of Independent Catholics having some (recognized or unrecognized) association with the Church of Utrecht in the Netherlands. Tension between Utrecht and Rome, like that between Canterbury and Rome, has been long-standing. The final split between Utrecht and Rome occurred in conjunction with the First Vatican Council in 1870. The Vatican Council declared the

16. "Tactile validity" in the sense that valid ministry is derived primarily from another valid bishop having laid hands on the new bishop. In theory, this can be traced back to Jesus laying hands upon the Twelve Apostles. In some, but not all, cases, tactile validity is seen as more important than validity through actual service to God's people. This sometimes results in denominations in which the majority of the members are bishops and priests and the laity is for all practical purposes ignored.

Pope infallible when speaking *ex cathedra*. This doctrine was formally rejected by the Old Catholics, and a formal organization around the See of Utrecht began. They are termed "Old" because of their opposition to the "new" doctrine of infallibility (and some would also add some doctrines about Mary among the "new" doctrines that are rejected).

Today the apostolic lineage has become so convoluted that there is little, if any, way to distinguish "Old Catholics" from the other Independent Catholics, or even from Independent Eastern Orthodox groups. The smaller Eastern Orthodox churches, including some of the Monophysite churches, together with the See of Utrecht, became sources of apostolic succession for independent bishops. In many cases apostolic orders were passed on without the approval of the originating jurisdiction. However, the distinction between "licit" and "valid" forces recognition of orders even when proper authorization was either not obtained or even directly denied. A basic premise of tactile succession is that a consecrated bishop has intrinsically the power to consecrate a new bishop. That power cannot be blocked by political or organizational control.

Thus the Independent Catholic movement today includes groups with Western ("Catholic") liturgy and Eastern ("Orthodox") orders, vice versa, and every other possible combination. One often cannot tell by a church's name what it believes, how it worships, or from where it derives its history. Liturgy and theology are probably easier delineating markers than heritage, but in many cases personal idiosyncrasies are really the more important criteria.

While most (but not all) of the active Independent Catholic and Orthodox bodies have relatively formal and historical liturgies, derived from one or more of the various traditions, the same is not easily said about their theologies. Like many of the schismatic Protestant groups, many Independent Catholic/Orthodox groups espouse gnosticism, New Agism, Eastern mysticism, and other heresies which are clearly neither Catholic nor

Orthodox. Others, on the other hand, hold on so rigidly to decrees or liturgies of historic church bodies that they are as narrow-minded as Evangelical fundamentalists. Meanwhile, many of them, including the Ecumenical Catholic Church, strive to provide meaningful Christian worship and traditional theology to the modern world.

Bishop Mark Shirilau

Mark Steven Shirey was born on December 13, 1955, and baptized February 26, 1956, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Long Beach, California. He was raised in a devote Lutheran family and his parents and brother are active Lutherans to this day. Mark was confirmed as a young teenager and was active in church life from Sunday School through young adulthood. His first job was as part-time secretary of St. Luke Lutheran Church in Long Beach.

In college, Mark focused his career on electrical engineering, earning his BS and master of engineering degrees in electric power systems, as well as his MS in business administration. During his college years, Mark's family moved about twenty-five miles from Long Beach to Irvine, California, and Mark sought out a new church home. He had grown increasingly dissatisfied with St. Luke Lutheran's lack of attention to liturgy and investigated Roman Catholic and Episcopal, as well as Lutheran, parishes. He eventually joined St. Paul Episcopal Church in Tustin, California, and soon began attending the Episcopal Theological School at Claremont (Bloy House), a seminary program designed for working adults.

While attending seminary, Mark continued his career as an engineer for the Southern California Edison Company and also began work on his PhD in electrical engineering. Mark graduated from Bloy House in 1984 and received his MA in religion from the School of Theology at Claremont (the primarily United Methodist host school of Bloy House) in 1985. He received his PhD from the University of California at Irvine in 1988.

Since junior high school Mark had known about his sexual orientation. One of the most prominent moral features implanted in him by his parents was honesty, so the idea of straight marriage and attempts at heterosexuality were never given consideration as options. On the other hand, it took Mark several years to reconcile his sexuality with his faith. While neither the Lutheran nor Episcopal churches preached that homosexuality was a special sin, it was on par with premarital heterosexual activity and was not considered by Mark to be a moral option. He had resigned himself to a life of celibacy, and lived that way for the first 26 years of his life.

Gradually, however, he became aware of new research and concepts regarding morality and sexuality. By college age, he would willingly defend homosexuality as being compatible with Christianity, but was not yet willing to allow that into his personal life. On a trip to Europe in the summer of 1981, Mark dealt with loneliness for the first time and realized that God does not necessarily call gay persons to a life of solitude. At that time he decided that he would make himself open to the possibility of a relationship.

Through St. Paul's, Tustin, Mark met Jeffery Micheal Lau, who was visiting his family home to attend his sister's wedding. On the day they met, April 25, 1982, Mark and Jeffery knew that they would spend the rest of their lives together. On November 25, 1984, they were married in a private ceremony attended by Mark's parents, Jeffery's mother (his father being dead), Jeffery's grandmother, and Mark's brother. At that same time they processed the legal paperwork to adopt a common surname, "Shirilau," developed from a combination of *Shirey* and *Lau*. On January 7, 1985, the court of conservative Orange County willingly, with "unofficial" knowledge, and with a subtle smile of the judge, added its own form of legal blessing to the marriage.

Jeffery and Mark had many similarities as well as many striking differences. At first many mutual friends thought the relationship would

never work out, because the outward differences were so vividly apparent. They failed to give sufficient credit to the basic similarities.

Both Mark and Jeffery were raised in middle-class American families. Mark's father was a Postal Service manager, and Jeffery's an Army captain. Mark was a Lutheran, Jeffery and Episcopalian. They were taught similar value systems, and both had a deep and overriding faith in Jesus as their Lord and a love of Christian music (even though different types) which held them up in times of sadness and gave them means to express their joy.

Mark was quiet and intellectual, raised with the notion that he could do whatever he wanted and be whatever he chose. He was scripted for college and (together with his brother, a PhD sociologist) carried out that script well.

Jeffery, on the other hand, had a rough childhood, often doubted his self-worth, and expressed that through a very flamboyant lifestyle. He considered becoming a transsexual, worked as a female impersonator, and, on the "other side of the fence" became heavily involved in the ultramacho leather and S&M scenes. Throughout this time, however, Jeffery maintained a constant faith and often attended multiple church services on a given Sunday. He loved Baptist music, felt at home in the Episcopal Church, and became involved in both the Metropolitan Community Church and gay Evangelical groups.

So the 5'9" blond, blue-eyed seminarian and the 6'3" Hawaiian/ Chinese/Caucasian cowboy leatherman became one in the Lord, not because their lives had been so similar, but because they had so much to offer each other and ultimately to the world. God works in mysterious ways, and none would have guessed at that time what the plans were.

Meanwhile, Mark was considering ordination in the Episcopal Church. This became an increasingly difficult process, particularly in the Diocese of Los Angeles where there was a surplus of priests, and Mark wanted to remain a worker-priest. To some this desire appeared a lack of dedication, to

others it was a threat to have more priests who did not rely on the church for financial support. Supposedly sexuality did not have anything to do with the initial barriers to ordination, but one can never be sure.[17]

Regardless, Mark had ample opportunity to rethink his strategy while completing seminary. The recommendation of the bishop was to reapply next year. It was during this same time, however, that Mark and Jeffery met, and Mark was coming further and further "out of the closet."[18] He was also beginning to recognize what it meant to be a gay person in an open sense and what gay marriage would ultimately mean. While it took Mark and Jeffery 2-1/2 years to actually make that sacramental vow, they knew that it was something that the future did hold.

It became more and more important to Mark that the canon law of the Episcopal Church defines marriage as a heterosexual event, and priests are forbidden from marrying two men or two women. Likewise, ordinands are asked to promise allegiance to the canon law. (This is a very rational thing to require of ordinands, and the ECC requires a similar promise of its own ordinands to support ECC canon law.) For Mark it became an issue of vowing to support something when he knew in his heart that he could not and would not support it. He knew that if two men or two women came to him as an Episcopal priest and asked for marriage, that his conscience would

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17. This was reported to Mark by one of his sponsoring priests, himself gay. However, the subject is still so touchy that one cannot be assured that even this priest was given accurate information. It always remains a possibility that homosexuality was the real reason which was cloaked by some vocations committee members under such vagaries as not needing more worker-priests.

18. Jeffery brought two key factors to coming out of the closet. He was himself very openly gay, and this gave a sense of assurance that things are OK on the other side and also forced the issue just as an incident of their association. Even more important, however, is the fact that it is easy to hide inner sexual feelings, or even the details of one's Saturday night activities. On the other hand, it is neither easy nor rational to hide either one's day-to-day life or the love relationship which has become a central and vital part of one's life.

require him to say "Yes." Thus he would be entering a vow with an intention to break it. Such an act was unacceptable to Mark and would have been a violation of his personal integrity.[19] He therefore chose not to pursue ordination any further in the Episcopal Church.

This was Mark's first sense that, while the Episcopal Church may be a comfortable home for him, it may not be for other gay people. Mark and Jeffery were effectively treated like any other (straight) couple at St. Paul's, though the new priests[20] were notably absent from the party celebrating their marriage (which was held several months after the actual wedding). Mark's self-confidence allowed him to dismiss the importance of this for himself, but he began to realize that others were not so well assured and these subtle tinges of homophobia and heterosexism may in fact be important barriers and could even foster low self-esteem in some people.

During their time of contemplation of ministry, Mark and Jeffery were active in both the Episcopal Church (primarily St. Paul's, Tustin) and the Metropolitan Community Church (Christ Chapel, Santa Ana). Both Mark and Jeffery took the UFMCC clergy credentialling examinations and passed them. However, Mark was not convinced that his ministry was within MCC, and Jeffery saw his ministry as diaconal, not priestly. Jeffery was commissioned[21] as a deacon in the MCC on September 24, 1984.

They continued to bounce back and forth between the two parishes and

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19. This must be carefully distinguished from those priests who carry out similar actions after coming to new realizations *after* their ordinations. While they may still be breaking a vow, they are not entering into a vow with the intention of breaking it. It is a subtle but important difference, somewhat like the difference between getting a divorce and planning on your wedding day to divorce your partner three years later.

20. There was a major change in clergy staff at St. Paul's during this time.

21. The Metropolitan Community Church no longer ordains deacons. While the MCC has an active and vital diaconate, it does not clearly see the diaconate as a clerical order. Jeffery personally viewed his commitment as lifelong and considered the event an ordination.

denominations, as both provided something that the other did not, but neither was totally fulfilling. Mark and Jeffery began to realize the importance of the missing portion of the Christian spectrum described previously in this booklet: the boldly gay-positive Catholic ministry.

They wrestled with the idea of beginning a new ministry. Mark's concerns were theological in nature. How could someone who believes so strongly in the unification of the Church go out and start a new denomination? From Jeffery's perspective, of course, such academic banter was nonsense, and he informed Mark that no one would ever confront him at a serious level with being a heretic or schismatic for starting his own ministry. So far, Jeffery has proven himself correct.

Jeffery, however, had entirely different issues. "Are we really qualified?" was his basic question, together with "real-world"[22] concerns about the time and effort involved. In a sense, both Mark's theological issues and Jeffery's personal issues boiled down to whether people would accept them or their ministry. Mark, of course, informed Jeffery that God gives us gifts and graces to do whatever we set our hearts to do and, in response to concerns about time and effort, retorted, "No pain, no gain."

Through encouragement of each other, or perhaps even more importantly, through counteraction of each others' concerns, Mark and Jeffery began seriously planning toward the formation of the Ecumenical Catholic Church. Although the initial organizational work was relatively straightforward, becoming emotionally ready was a gradual process. Part of Mark would always have been content in the Episcopal Church, and part of Jeffery would always have been happy in the MCC. God, however, does not let His ministers escape their calling so easily.

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22. "Real world" was one of Jeffery's favorite terms to describe his street-wise outlook on life as opposed to Mark's academic outlook.

FORMATION OF THE E. C. C.

Incorporation

Business law and administration have always been interesting and easy endeavors for Mark. This was a relatively "safe" and nonemotional place for him to start the formation of the denomination. In 1986, Mark began the first draft of the church's canon law, since a corporation's bylaws must be submitted to the secretary of state as part of the incorporation procedures. The bulk of the work was done in Tijuana, Mexico, while Mark and Jeffery were waiting to have a car reupholstered.

The forty-one page first edition of the canon law was completed and ratified on the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, January 11, 1987. The canons defined a three-tiered basic organization (denomination, dioceses, parishes) which would last into the indefinite future. Provisions were also made for the growth of the church from ground-up. The structure was episcopal in polity, although there was ample allotment for the clergy and laity to voice their opinions in formal manners. The canons provided absolute reference to the basic creedal theology of the Universal Church and also assured that discrimination based upon either gender or sexual orientation would never surface in the denomination.

The canons contain means for their revision, except that the definitial position of the Ecumenical Creeds cannot be eliminated, thus assuring the denomination's orthodoxy regardless of the quirks of its people, clergy, bishops, or primate.[23] Four revisions have been made to date: March 19, 1991; June 14, 1992; May 30, 1993; and September 29, 1994. The last three revisions were made in conjunction with discussions held at clergy conferences. Most of the revisions have been minor in nature, with the basic

23. Canon XXVI, Article 6.

structure and intent of the denomination remaining as laid out in the 1987 version of the canons.[24]

The 1994 revision brought the defined political structure more in line with the church's actual functioning. The original canons called for formal conventions of lay and clergy delegates. This was similar to the structure of the Episcopal Church, except that the conventions were advisory only, with ultimate control residing in the primate. This structure had assumed that the denomination would have large parishes before national expansion began.

In reality, small parishes sprung up throughout the nation. The annual conference was not economically feasible. It was also rather foreign to both clergy and laity from Roman Catholic backgrounds. The new canons define a structure where the hierarchy strives for consensus at the local, regional, and national levels.

Once the canons were completed, the incorporation papers were filed with the California secretary of state. The church organization was officially incorporated as a nonprofit corporation on March 10, 1987. Much like a multibranch retail corporation such as Sears or Walmart, the church's parishes exist as parts of the denominational corporation. Rather than incorporating parishes as some Protestant churches do, the parent corporation is registered to operate in additional states as parishes are formed.[25]

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24. Some of the more interesting revisions include (a) reducing the educational requirements for the permanent diaconate (as the definition of diaconate *evolved* away from the stepping-stone-to-priest concept), (b) allowing for monastic orders within the denomination, (c) allowing associate clergy who share assignments with other denominations, and (d) allowing the church to witness commitment ("marriage") vows between a Christian and non-Christian.

25. In some states, such as Oklahoma, wholly-owned subsidiary corporations are formed because the registration tax laws make this route less expensive than registering as a "foreign" corporation. In general, the denomination takes the least expensive route with regard to its incorporation.

Once incorporated, the church applied for its status as a tax-exempt organization in conjunction with Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3). This was granted on June 3, 1987.

Ordination

Once the legal structure was in order, the ecclesiastical structure was next. After a six-month period of further thought and contemplation, Mark Shirilau was ordained on the First Sunday of Christmas, the Feast of St. John, December 27, 1987. The ordination took place in the chapel at the School of Theology at Claremont. Mark was presented to God for ordination by his life-partner Jeffery, his parents Kenneth and Marjorie Shirey, his brother Paul Shirey, and his long-term friend Virginia Greeley.[26] Church friends, Southern California Edison colleagues, and family were in attendance. The ceremony was festive, but very cold, as the chapel is a huge, unheated cement structure.

The First Parish

The 500-square-foot bonus room in Mark and Jeffery's large suburban home at 2302 Adams Street, Santa Ana, California, was converted into a chapel. It had an altar which Mark's father had made in 1982 together with the piano, organ, and about 25 chairs. Fr. Mark held occasional services there as well as at the homes of family and friends.

The first publicly announced service of St. John Ecumenical Catholic

26. Mark was a good friend of Nia when they attended junior and senior high school together. They met up again on the STC campus, where Nia was studying for the Disciples of Christ ministry.

Church was held on the 15th Sunday after Pentecost, September 4, 1988. Nine persons attended. Services were held every Sunday morning at 10:30. Attendance varied from two (Mark and Jeffery) to nine.

Mark and Jeffery spent a lot of time, effort, and money on advertising the parish. They used the regular telephone book, the gay yellow pages, even a full-page color ad at the Orange County Gay Pride Festival. None of this did much to increase attendance. Two hard facts seemed to be materializing. First, the gay community is a very tough market to reach. Many people have been deeply hurt, and pointing out the prior errors of the Church and offering a safe place is not enough in many cases.

Second, the home setting was probably too intimate. It was essentially rent-free, and the chapel looked like a chapel. There was plenty of room, but people often seemed to drive by without coming in. As near as can be guessed, it was threatening enough to come back to church, much less go into the priest's house where you would not be anonymous and inconspicuous. It is a different scenario than when a minister of a particular denomination moves into a new housing tract and begins holding services. In that case, church-goers are relieved to not have to drive across town. In our case, non-church-goers apparently were simply more intimidated.

This lack of response was disheartening, but not sufficient to give up. Regular services were held almost every Sunday throughout 1989 and 1990. A few gay and lesbian weddings were held, and these proved to be important ministries for the church.

Perhaps the most important feeling of ratification in Fr. Mark's ministry came on July 10, 1989, when Robert Oscar Simpson was baptized in his home in Los Angeles. Robert was dying of AIDS. He had come from a nominally Catholic family but had never been baptized. He recognized his faith and wished to be baptized before he died.

Certainly Robert could have been baptized in a nearby Roman Catholic

parish. Likewise, he could have been baptized at one of the several MCC parishes located within a few miles of his house. However, he had noticed an ECC ad in one of the gay publications and realized that this is where he belonged. It was a wonderful celebration with his mother and his lover and several close friends at his bedside. Five weeks later we held a memorial service for him in the same place, recalling that Baptism is the one sole event of our lives that counts at the gate of heaven.

Robert typified the target market of the ECC. He was called to accept his Christian faith. He came from a Catholic tradition and felt connected with the Church's ancient traditions and rites. He was gay and dying of AIDS and did not want any chance of rejection at the end. Robert's baptism made all the ads worth it. This one service provided vitality that could overcome all the despair of the Sundays Jeffery and Mark prepared for services by themselves. Robert Simpson proved the need for the ECC within the spectrum of Christian options.

In December 1990, Mark and Jeffery moved from Santa Ana to Villa Grande, California, a small village in the redwood forest on the Russian River about 75 miles north of San Francisco. St. John parish was closed, and the few regular attendees were encouraged to attend either the local MCC or a mainline church.

Villa Grande is about 5 miles down the river from the major gay resort town of Guerneville. It was idyllic. Aloha Systems, the consulting firm that Mark and Jeffery ran, had major contracts in both Los Angeles and Seattle, so the Russian River was half way between. Most of their work was done on home-based computers, and Jeffery was starting to show the signs of his progressing HIV infection. In short, life was too short[27] to live in LA.

27. "Life is too short" became one of Jeffery's favorite and most powerful sayings as he progressed on his journey with AIDS.

A small parish, St. Michael Ecumenical Catholic Church, was begun in a chapel adjoining their home. Harassment from obnoxious neighbors and difficulty with busy-body county zoning officials began soon after the parish made bold announcements of its first service.[28] Furthermore, Mark and Jeffery learned that five miles was considered a long distance in this part of the world and few people would bother to look up a church in Villa Grande when they lived in Guerneville.

The timing of this difficulty concurred with national-level growth of the denomination and Jeffery's decreasing levels of energy. St. Michael parish was therefore put on hold, and Bishop Mark spent his time on national level work. Mark and Jeffery became close friends with the Reverend Betty Pedersen, the local MCC pastor, and concluded that Betty could shepherd the local flock while they worked on the denominational ministry.

Episcopal Consecration

As the Ecumenical Catholic Church began to minister more and more to Catholics, the importance of tactile apostolic became more obvious. Mark's ordination in 1987 had been into the "threefold ministry of Jesus Christ," *i.e.*, concurrently as deacon, priest, and bishop. However, no bishop was present at the ordination.

In most Lutheran theology, the apostolic nature of the Church as

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28. The harassment could have been homophobic in nature, but most evidence indicates that it was just caused by a couple of self-centered, vociferous *individuals* who are known for making trouble in the neighborhood whenever they can. For the county's part, Sonoma County building and zoning officials are known for both their corruption and their desire to jump into the middle of neighborhood controversies whenever they can. The small town attitude was a major shock and is quite different from the "live and let live" attitude which prevails in the big city. (In contrast with Sonoma's hassles, Orange County gave Mark and Jeffery a proportionate discount on their property tax for using a portion of their home for worship purposes.)

confessed in the Creeds is based upon the Church continuing to teach the teachings of the Twelve Apostles. Essentially, the Church is apostolic because it has continued the essential nature of Christianity throughout the ages. The Church is apostolic because it professes the Creeds. Even the Episcopal seminary taught that tactile apostolic succession back to Jesus Himself cannot be *proven*.[29]

However, it was clear that ministry to Catholics would require this additional mark of validity upon the ECC, and there certainly was no reason for Bishop Mark not be consecrated into the historic apostolic succession. Regardless of whether it is necessary in an absolute sense for the validity of the church,[30] being connected with historic Christianity in this visible manner is certainly an asset. Basically, there is no good reason *not* to have apostolic succession.

Bishop Mark had come in contact with Fr. Paul Breton and Fr. Larry Bernier, two Independent Catholic priests who were also former MCC ministers. They had founded the Sarum Episcopal Church in San Bernardino, California. The SEC has a very similar ministry to that of the ECC, and it works closely together with us to this day. Paul and Larry put Mark in contact with Bishop Donald Jolly. Although Bishop Donald is not directly affiliated with the SEC, he provides episcopal services to them on an as-needed basis.

Bishop Donald agreed to ratify Bishop Mark's ordination and

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29. While lineages can theoretically be traced back to the Apostles and back to Jesus, there is no direct evidence that the Apostles themselves believed or practiced the later theology of tactile apostolic succession. In short, there is no absolute evidence that the Apostles always consecrated bishops by laying on of hands, hence no concrete proof that "holy hands" can be traced all the way back.

30. If one believes apostolic succession is absolutely necessary for the validity of a church denomination, then one must conclude that Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, most Lutherans, and many others are not really Christians. That is a rather strong, odd, and even offensive conclusion.

consecrate him into the historic episcopate. This took place in Bishop Donald's home chapel in San Bernardino, California, on the Day of Pentecost, May 19, 1991. At the same service, Bishop Donald also ordained Jeffery into the historic diaconate.

While Bishop Mark initially approached the event as merely a necessity, it proved to be a most moving spiritual event. He felt the Holy Spirit invigorate him for ministry in a stronger way than before. Mark felt that God was truly blessing the ECC and his personal ministry and that he would be given the strength, perseverance, and grace for the times ahead. The power was there and the validation -- both spiritual and emotional -- was very real.

National Growth

Certainly the original plan for the ECC as a denomination was to build a viable parish in Santa Ana and then expand from there, probably to the greater Los Angeles area and then to San Francisco and then to other states in the nation. That, however, was not the way it was to be. God had other ideas for this work of blessing.

What the ads did not achieve in parishioners, they did in church expansion. Bruce LeBlanc, a college instructor in Pocatello, Idaho, was visiting his sister in Southern California. While on this visit, he noticed an ad for St. John ECC. Later he wrote to the church about his calling.

Bruce had always felt a call to priesthood. From 1977 to 1981, he had been a temporarily professed member of the Roman Catholic Order of the Most Holy Trinity in Pikesville, Maryland. During his years as a novice, Bruce began the long process of accepting his sexual orientation, and he realized that taking a monk's vow of celibacy would not be true to himself.

During the years that followed, Bruce considered diocesan priesthood. However, the Roman Catholic Church at the same time was clarifying its

negative views on homosexuality as a "fundamentally disordered state." Bruce could not accept that decision and knew at that time that he could not pursue priesthood within the Roman Church.

Bruce pursued ordination with various Old Catholic churches, including several that advertised in gay-oriented publications. He was very open about his lifestyle and sexual orientation, and not one of the churches responded to his inquiries. Finally one Old Catholic bishop responded, but he eventually backed out due to Bruce's blatant openness and honesty. Some churches finally did respond favorably to Bruce's inquiries, but upon further investigation he found that they did not have sufficiently orthodox theologies.

So Bruce's long pursuit of ministry and priesthood eventually brought him into contact with Bishop Mark. He was the ECC's first serious inquiry into ordination. (Two or three others had written or shown up at services showing interest, but that interest quickly waned when they learned that the ECC had no funding to support them while in seminary or even while in ministry.)

Bruce came well educated, with master's degrees in both public administration and sociology, and a doctorate in sociology in progress, together with the theological education he received at the monastery. He was working as an instructor at Idaho State University and was dedicated to serving as a worker priest.

Bishop Mark and Deacon Jeffery drove to Pocatello, Idaho, and Bruce was ordained into the priesthood on July 27, 1991. The ordination took place at the Episcopal church in Pocatello. It was a very festive event attended by many of Bruce's family, friends, and colleagues.

Father Robert Spencer, an Episcopal priest and friend of Bruce's, served as Bishop Mark's chaplain. Father Bob, a hospital chaplain, later became the ECC's canon for pastoral support, providing counseling and

support to Bishop Mark and the ECC clergy. Father Bob, an Episcopal priest for over 20 years, established joint jurisdiction with the ECC and the Episcopal Church and served pastor of the small St. Francis ECC in Idaho Falls, Idaho, before moving to South Carolina for advancement in his secular career.

Father Bruce was soon assigned the positions of both director of vocations and dean of the seminary. The ECC began running occasional ads in liberal Roman Catholic publications as well as gay-oriented publications. Soon after his ordination, Fr. Bruce received a new faculty appointment at Blackhawk College in East Moline, Illinois. He served as pastor of Holy Spirit ECC, which met every Sunday evening in the church building owned by MCC of the Quad Cities until it was destroyed by an electrical fire.[31]

As word of our organization spread throughout the country, so has interest. Robert "Marty" Martin, then president of Dignity/Integrity of Oklahoma City, contacted Bishop Mark and began the ordination process. In addition, Marty's colleague Randy Lyde, a former member of a noninstrumental[32] Church of Christ and convert to "high church" Episcopal worship, also began preparing for ordination. Bishop Mark ordained Fr. Marty and Fr. Randy on December 18, 1992. The ordination took place in Lighthouse Metropolitan Community Church in Oklahoma City.

Fr. Marty and Fr. Randy became pastor and assistant pastor of Holy Trinity Ecumenical Catholic Church in Oklahoma City. Beginning on the Feast of St. Mary, August 15, 1992, they met in the evenings at Lighthouse MCC. They then rented space in a small shopping mall and became the first ECC parish to have its own facility. Holy Trinity is the oldest continuously operating ECC parish.

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31. Distinctly not arson, which has plagued MCC facilities in the past.

32. They don't have instrumental music during worship, but rather sing solely *a cappella*.

Two clergy also transferred into the ECC. Fr. Bob Spencer maintained joint jurisdiction with the Episcopal Church. Fr. Larry LeBrun, a former Roman Catholic priest now married to a woman, became responsible for monastic operations within the ECC.

Meredith Ille, who served Dignity/Integrity along with Fr. Marty, joined the parish and applied for ordination to the permanent diaconate. Meredith was ordained by Bishop Mark at Holy Trinity on the Day of Pentecost, May 29, 1993. She became the first female member of the ECC clergy.

On the same day, Chris Ehemann of Little Rock, Arkansas, was also ordained to the diaconate. Chris's main interest is the formation of a nonresidential monastic order dedicated to serving persons with AIDS. The Ecumenical Christian Brothers and Sisters was founded with two members in Little Rock. Deacon Chris also served as parish director of Holy Cross ECC in Little Rock.

In June of that year, the first complete ECC liturgy book was published, *The Holy Eucharist and Other Sacramental Rites*. It contains the liturgy of the Eucharist, the calendar and lectionary, the rites for Baptism and the other sacraments, and the funeral liturgy. The Eucharistic celebration is divided into seasonal sections. The structure of the Mass is derived from a blend of the already-similar rites of the Vatican II Mass, the 1979 (Episcopal) *Book of Common Prayer*, and the (ELCA) *Lutheran Book of Worship*. The prayers of consecration vary by season and come from different traditions, modified slightly to fit ECC sacramental theology (*i.e.*, transubstantiation). Advent is Lutheran, Christmas/Epiphany is Episcopalian, Lent is Roman, Easter is Eastern Orthodox, and Pentecost is from the World Council of Churches (the "Liturgy of Lima").

Two months later, on July 18, 1993, Mike Frost of Upstate New York and Denis Martel of New Orleans, Louisiana, were ordained to the priesthood in Plattsburgh, New York, not too far from Montreal, Quebec.

(Fr. Denis was visiting his parents in New Hampshire at the time.) The ECC had thus grown to every corner of the United States. Fr. Mike is now pastor of St. Mary ECC of Plattsburgh and took over as rector of Holy Apostles Seminary. Fr. Denis is pastor of St. Ambrose ECC, New Orleans, and now serves as the denomination's vicar general.

The diaconal ordinations of Meredith and Chris had been planned early to enhance the ability of Deacon Jeffery to participate. Unfortunately, Jeffery had just returned from the hospital and was recuperating at home (in the care of both his own and Bishop Mark's mother) while this event happened. He was, however, able to attend and participate in the July ordinations in New York. He and Mark were also able to travel about 1,300 miles through the Middle Atlantic region of the U.S.

The following week, Mark and Jeffery attended the biennial general conference of the UFMCC in Phoenix, Arizona, as guests of Elder Troy Perry. Troy introduced them at the closing Eucharist as his good friends, thus cementing the close working relationship between the ECC and the MCC. He also announced that Jeffery was a proud product of their own diaconate.

Jeffery's Death and Beyond

Two weeks later, Deacon Jeffery died of AIDS on August 9, 1993, in his and Mark's home in Monte Rio, California. His life had been complete in the truest sense of the word, and his last week was spent on the telephone saying good-bye and providing inspiration to family, friends, and fellow ministers, both within the ECC and MCC and in many mainline denominations. He was buried in his favorite cassock, surplice, and deacon's stole. Most of the ECC clergy attended his funeral in Hawaii on his 40th birthday, August 30, 1993.

The year following Jeffery's death continued to be one of great growth.

Jeffery had left insurance money to Mark that allowed him to work full time for the church and also have money to fund the next stage of church growth. Father Denis Martel became the first chancellor of the denomination and the church's first paid clergyperson (for a nominal housing allowance). Father Denis also took over vocations. Father Mike Frost began work with the seminary. Together Mike and Denis worked to define the structure of our seminary which will provide the essentials necessary for parish ministry in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

During the same hectic July 1993, the church ran ad in the schedule of the national convention of Dignity in New Orleans. This ad attracted the attention of Father Richard Cardarelli, an outspoken gay activist Roman Catholic priest in Hartford, Connecticut. Eventually Fr. Richard, along with his co-ordinand Fr. Frank Rocco of New York City, would be received as ECC priests.

On April 9, 1994, Deacon Chris Ehemann was ordained to the priesthood, and his assistant Billy Morphis was ordained to the diaconate. Bishop Mark and his father had driven to Little Rock, Arkansas, on one of Mark's many cross-country drives that would end up marking the two-year period after Jeffery's death. The trips, together with the miracles of telephones and fax machines, were key elements of maintaining cohesion during this period of rapid growth. Three days before, on April 6, Bishop Mark met Michael Raymond Ewing in Pensacola, Florida. Michael, an unsuspecting United Methodist layman, was on his way toward becoming Mark's second life-partner, a journey which began as he drove with Mark and his dad to Little Rock for the ordination.

Deacon Billy had terminal heart disease. Though there was no real estimate as to how long he would live, nothing particularly critical was apparent at the time. Nonetheless, the focal point of the ordination, taking place on the Saturday of Easter Week and the eight-month anniversary of

Jeffery's death, was the power of death and resurrection. With complete surprise, Deacon Billy died three weeks later.

In July 1994, the clergy gathered in conference in New Orleans. We discussed a number of issues that were arising as the church grew. As always, the fellowship and bonding among the clergy was at least as important as the decision-making process. The canons were revised to reflect the organizational structure as it actually had evolved and was operating. A number of policies, both doctrinal and procedural, were also discussed for inclusion in the church's policy manual. "Inclusive language" threatened to be the most divisive issue. It was important to the New England group and abhorrent to some others. Thanks to a very well prepared presentation by clergy candidate Lorraine Bouffard, a *via media* was achieved in which traditional language was maintained and expanded use of feminine imagery for God was encouraged. We termed this solution "expansive language," a "both-and" approach to be distinguished from the more common but less accurate "neither-nor" approach of "inclusive" language. We realized that the problem was not the use of masculine imagery for God, but the refusal to use anything feminine to describe the One Who transcends all human thought.

On September 10, 1994, Lorraine Bouffard was ordained priest in Hartford, Connecticut, becoming our first woman priest. Michael Avery and Dennis Finnegan were ordained with her, and Fr. Richard Cardarelli and Fr. Frank Rocco were officially received. The celebration was held in a large Baptist church and attended by 160, making it the largest ECC event to date.

Our diversity was enhanced in a two-fold manner on January 11, 1995, when the Reverend Sarah Flynn was received as a priest. Sarah became our first transgendered clergyperson. Furthermore, she holds dual affiliation as an ECC priest and a United Methodist pastor. She is pastor of a small UMC parish in Connecticut, assists at Sts. Francis & Clare ECC in Hartford, and heads St. Mary Magdalene Ministries, an ECC outreach to college students

and young adults.

Sarah's reception as a priest while maintaining active United Methodist clergy status was a breakthrough in ecumenical relations that has important implications for the larger Church. Most Catholic bodies require reordination of Protestant ministers, which the Protestant denominations interpret as an affront to their validity. This essentially eliminates the possibility of dual affiliation and has been a stumbling block in ecumenical relations between the United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church. Bishop Mark developed a rite of reception that acknowledges the prior ordination and ministry, welcomes into the apostolic ministry of the ECC, and anoints the received priest with chrism. By the outward signs of the ceremony, it is clearly not an ordination. The received clergy come forward already vested in stole and chasuble. Ordinands come forward in albs alone. Yet, it is a reception into the ECC priesthood, which is within the historic apostolic succession. The wonderful liturgical ambiguity was approved by Sarah's United Methodist bishop and will be subsequently used for any ordained clergyperson who is received into the ECC, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant.

Our First Building

In December 1994, we learned of an opportunity to purchase church property. The United Methodist Church was closing its Ebenezer Parish in Jacksonville, Illinois. The building, a stereotypical little white church in the country built in 1835, and the 2.25 acres on which it sits, were going up for auction. Bishop Mark quickly packed and drove to Illinois with his father for the auction on December 20, 1995. We were the successful bidder at $27,000. The Methodists were delighted that another church had bought their beloved building. Fr. John Reeves, a Roman Catholic priest transferring to the ECC, began St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish there.

The funding had come from Jeffery's donation. He had tied up funds for future church use by vesting 40% interest in Bishop Mark's house in the name of the church. By transferring this interest back, Mark was able to provide the cash to purchase the Illinois church outright. Owned entirely in the name of the corporation and free from debt, it became an important symbol of the ECC's growth, identity, and success. The local parish will be responsible for replenishing the national funds used so that in time, the capital can be used to help another local group.

The purchase of the historic church, together with Fr. John's concurrent formal excommunication by the Roman Church for his affiliation with the ECC, received considerable local press coverage, mostly positive. In its short life, St. Maximilian has become one of our largest parishes.

International Growth

A few clergy inquiries from foreign countries began to come in. Daniel Omole, a Roman Catholic seminarian in Kenya submitted his formal candidacy paperwork. Communication with Africa and other developing countries proved tedious and inefficient. Furthermore, many of these ministries needed financial support which we were unable to give. At one time it seemed as if our largest parish (about 25 people) was in Nairobi, but as of this writing (early 1995) that work seems to have dissipated. Apparently we were not ready to be able to provide the communicative and financial support necessary to keep such an endeavor alive.

Inquiries have come in from Asia, Australia, a few European countries, and a few Canadian provinces. Aside from the likely development of a Canadian parish within the 1995-96 timeframe, international growth seems realistically to be one to three more years in the future.

Formation of Dioceses

In April 1994, Bishop Mark appointed four regional deans -- Fr. Bob Spencer in the west, Fr. Marty Martin in the central region, Fr. Denis Martel in the southeast, and Fr. Mike Frost in the northeast. The deans were responsible for parish operations in their regions as well as specific national functions. Marty was appointed treasurer, Denis chancellor and vocations director, Mike seminary rector, and Bob canon for pastoral support. This was the first stepping stone toward the formation of dioceses and consecration of more bishops.

We wrestled with the number of additional bishops to consecrate for a considerable period of time. We wanted to avoid the all-too-common Independent Catholic model of having too many bishops, thus making the episcopacy appear trivial. On the other hand, we wanted to develop an organization that could effectively carry us into the future. We decided upon making the four deans bishops, with Fr. Denis as chancellor being a nondiocesan bishop. Very soon after that decision it became apparent that the New England region was growing strongly and rapidly and that Fr. Richard Cardarelli was strongly supported by his people to become their bishop. It was clear that Fr. Richard would also add a vital complement to the house of bishops.

The Northeast Deanery was split, and Richard was made dean and bishop-designate of New England. Bob Spencer recently resigned his position with the ECC, and the remaining four bishops-designate were consecrated in Santa Rosa, California, on July 8, 1995, following the 6th clergy conference held in Monte Rio.

After the consecrations of new bishops, the church was divided into four dioceses. The Most Reverend Richard John Cardarelli, Bishop of Hartford, serves the Diocese of Maritime New England. The Most Reverend Michael Robert Frost, Bishop of New York, serves the Diocese of the

Northeast. The Most Reverend Robert Wayne "Marty" Martin, Bishop of Oklahoma City, serves the Diocese of the Mountains and Plains. Archbishop Mark serves as bishop of the Diocese of the Pacific. The vicar general, the Most Reverend Denis Armand Martel, is also Bishop of New Orleans and serves the Diocese of the Southeast. He continues to have various administrative responsibilities throughout the denomination.

The four bishops and the archbishop will begin functioning as a house of bishops. The variety of their backgrounds, interests, and nuances of life will provide a well balanced team to manage the executive decisions of the church. In addition, the Very Reverend Dennis Joseph Finnegan, canon of Christian education and rector of Holy Apostles' seminary, will report to the archbishop and will serve as an advisor to the house of bishops.

Growing Pains

As the church grew, it became more structured and formal. In reality, the structure had been defined on paper but now was becoming an actual entity. Change is often uncomfortable, and it means that things are different from how they used to be.

The original Ecumenical Catholic Church was small and very intimate, even on a national level. All of the clergy communicated regularly with Bishop Mark and for the most part with each other. National-level workings were less time-consuming, and the "ECC way of doing things" was as yet undeveloped and gradually taking form. Many of the original players were attracted to this very small group.

When small groups grow, membership transition is common. In addition to the death of Deacons Jeffery and Billy, the 1993-95 time period saw the resignation of a few ECC clergy, including Fr. Bruce LeBlanc, Fr. Bob Spencer, and Deacon Meredith Ille, as well as some others who had never been fully involved in the movement.

The loss of Bruce LeBlanc was hard for Bishop Mark. The triumvirate that for a year or so had been the ECC (Mark, Jeffery, and Bruce) was now gone. Furthermore, Mark was accustomed to being the quiet and conservative one of this trio. Suddenly he found himself among the more liberal and outspoken of the ECC clergy.

For the most part, though, the growth has been good. We have made remarkable strides for a small body spread throughout a great nation. Our structure, administration, commitment, and communication are to be credited for this success.

Looking Toward the Future

Phenomenal growth in the number of clergy continues to be the norm. Doubling every year may well continue until 2000. Doubling, of course, becomes geometrically more challenging as size grows. Communication and financing will continue to be critical.

The church has historically been funded by Mark and Jeffery. In the very beginning their personal tithes were sufficient. For the next phase, Jeffery's life insurance donation facilitated the growth. Now the church has grown beyond that possibility, and it is in a very critical transition period toward self-support. The first step will be support by the clergy, but the ultimate goal is to have paid clergy supported by the laity in the same way that is common in all the major denominations.

Parish growth remains elusive. Most ECC parishes are very small and none presently has over 50 members. We are in the process of resolving this problem. Evangelism and stewardship will be major foci of attention for the next few years.

Key Dates in ECC History

1953	August 30	Jeffery Michael Lau is born
1955	December 13	Mark Steven Shirey is born
1956	February 25	Mark Steven is baptized
1956	December 9	Jeffery Michael is baptized
1982	April 25	Mark and Jeffery meet
1984	September 24	Jeffery becomes MCC deacon
1984	November 25	Mark and Jeffery Shirilau marry
1985	May 18	Mark Shirilau graduates from seminary
1987	January 11	ECC canon law issued
1987	March 10	ECC incorporated in California
1987	June 3	IRS issues 501(c)(3) nonprofit status
1987	December 27	Mark Shirilau ordained to three-fold ministry
1988	September 4	First public ECC Mass, Santa Ana, CA
1991	May 19	Bishop Mark consecrated into historic episcopate
1991	July 27	Bruce LeBlanc first priest ordained by Bp. Mark
1992	August 15	Holy Trinity Parish starts; first continuous work
1993	May 29	Deacon Meredith Ille ordained first female clergyperson
1993	June 25	*Holy Eucharist and Other Sacramental Rites* completed
1993	August 9	Archdeacon Jeffery dies; first ECC-affiliated saint
1994	September 10	Lorraine Bouffard ordained; first female priest

1994	December 20	ECC buys first church building, Jacksonville, IL
1995	January 11	Sarah Flynn received; first transgendered priest and first Protestant/Catholic to hold active dual affiliation
1995	July 8	First ECC bishops consecrated in Santa Rosa, CA -- Richard Cardarelli, Michael Frost, Denis Martel, and Robert Martin

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

Introduction

The apostolic succession of the various Independent Catholic bodies is at least as intertwined as the genealogies of European royalty. In other words, everyone is related to everyone else.

The Ecumenical Catholic Church's apostolic succession is derived from one of the "cleanest" lines, tracing back only fifty years to Carlos Costa, a Roman Catholic bishop in Brazil. Other legs of our succession heritage are derived from Joseph Rene Vilatte, the person who first brought the Old Catholic Church to America, and to Luis Mariano Soares of the Syro-Chaldean Church in India.

Bishop Mark Shirilau was consecrated on Pentecost Day, May 19, 1991, by Bishop Donald Lawrence Jolly. Bishop Donald provides support to a number of independent priests in the Los Angeles area. He is also active in hospital chaplaincy and alternative AIDS treatments.

Bishop Donald was first consecrated on December 31, 1973, by Bishop John Lawrence Brown of the Free Protestant Episcopal Church (Philippines). On June 25, 1980, Donald received an appointment as legal and canonical representative of the American Orthodox Catholic Church (in

Italy) and was reconsecrated by Bishops Antonio Pietroburgo and Clemens Minihofer on that day.

Roman Catholic Church in Brazil

Carlos Duarte Costa, a Roman Catholic priest, was consecrated as Roman Catholic bishop of Botucatu, Brazil, on December 8, 1924, by Sebastiao Leme da Silveira Cintra, the Roman Catholic bishop of Rio de Janeiro. Bishop Alberto Jose Conclaves of Ribeirao Preto and Bishop Benedito de Paulo Alves Pessoa assisted.

Carlos Costa had been born in Rio de Janeiro on July 21, 1888. He was ordained a Roman Catholic priest on April 1, 1911. In 1937, he retired as bishop of Botucatu and became Titular Bishop of Maura. Later he became involved in an antipapal campaign which accused the Roman Catholic Church of being in league with the Italian fascists. He was excommunicated by Rome in June 1945.

On July 6, 1945, Carlos founded the Igreja Catolica Apostolica Brasileira (Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church). The church worshiped in Portuguese and allowed priests to marry. On June 5, 1960, Carlos consecrated Milton Cunha. Carlos Costa died on March 26, 1961.[33]

After Milton Cunha was consecrated by Bishop Carlos, he associated with the American Orthodox Catholic Church. On October 3, 1968, Bishop Milton consecrated *sub conditione*[34] Bishop Giuseppe Santo Eusebio Pace. Bishop Giuseppe had been consecrated by Walter Myron Propheta, founder of the American Orthodox Catholic Church. Milton Cunha's line of

33. These and other biographical details are derived from appropriate biographical entries in *Independent Bishops: An International Directory* by Gary Ward, Bertil Persson, and Alan Bain (Detroit: Apogee Books, 1990).

34. "Under condition," *i.e.*, if the original consecration was invalid, this one would be valid.

succession was so clear, however, that the *sub conditione* consecration of Giuseppe Pace made the denomination's line of succession nearly irrefutable by Rome.

Giuseppe Pace consecrated Ignazio Antonio Pietroburgo, who took the ecclesiastical name Teodosio, and served the American Orthodox Catholic Church in Italy. On October 15, 1978, Bishop Giuseppe consecrated Helmut Clemens Minihofer-Windisch in the chapel of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Rome. Bishops Oscar Osvaldo Cairoli y Fernandez, Ignazio Antonio Pietroburgo, and Vittorio M. Francescone served as assisting consecrators.

In 1980, Bishop Donald Lawrence Jolly accepted a position in Rome working with Antonio Pietroburgo. He was consecrated in Rome on June 25, 1980, by Antonio Pietroburgo, assisted by Clemens Minihofer. On May 19, 1991, Donald Jolly consecrated Bishop Mark Steven Shirilau, founder and primate of the Ecumenical Catholic Church.

Through just five consecrations and a period of only 31 years, Bishop Mark's consecration can be directly connected to a validly consecrated Roman Catholic bishop, Carlos Costa of Batucatu, Brazil.

Table of Apostolic Succession

Mark Steven Shirilau	Ecumenical Catholic Church
Donald Lawrence Jolly	American Orthodox Catholic Church
Ignazio Antonio Pietroburgo	American Orthodox Catholic Church
Giuseppe Santo Eusebio Pace	American Orthodox Catholic Church
Milton Cunha	American Orthodox Catholic Church
Carlos Duarte Costa	Igreja Catolica Apostolica Brasileira RC Bp of Botucatu, Brazil
Sebastiao Leme da Silveira Cintra	RC Bp of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Other Ecclesiastical "Cousins"

Luis Soares. Bishop Donald Jolly's first consecration was by John Lawrence Brown of the Free Protestant Episcopal Church of the Philippines. Bishop John had been consecrated by Albert Fuge of the Free Protestant Episcopal Church (in England), who had in turn been consecrated by Charles Dennis Boltwood. Bishop Charles had been consecrated by William Hall, who in turn had been consecrated Herbert James Heard. Bishop Herbert, originally ordained an Anglican deacon, was involved in several Independent Catholic churches in England in the beginning of the 20th century. Among his three consecrations, Herbert was consecrated by Luis Mariano Soares, Mar Basilius, Bishop of Trichur and Metropolitan of Ceylon for the Ancient Church of the East (sometimes known as the Syro-Chaldean Church in India). The Syro-Chaldean Church in India had originally been a part of the Roman Catholic Church using the Syro-Chaldean Rite, but it split in the 1860s.

Herbert Heard also consecrated William Bernard Crow, who later was the first consecrator of Hugh George de Willmott Newman. Hugh Newman was consecrated numerous times and also consecrated numerous bishops, being one of the major sources for orders within English and American Independent Catholicism. Among those who trace orders through Newman was gay-activist Bishop Mikhail Itkin.

Joseph Vilatte. Before Giuseppe Pace was consecrated by Milton Cunha, he had been consecrated by Walter Myron Propheta of the American Orthodox Catholic Church. Bishop Walter had been consecrated by Joachim Souris, who in turn had been consecrated by four bishops in 1951. One of these bishops was John Cyril Sherwood, who had been consecrated by George McGuire among others. George McGuire had been consecrated by Joseph Vilatte. Bishop Joseph was consecrated in Ceylon in 1892 and was one of the other major sources of Independent Catholic apostolic succession

in America.

In addition to consecrating Walter Propheta, Bishop John Sherwood consecrated George Augustus Hyde in 1957. In 1946 as a priest George Hyde had founded the Eucharistic Catholic Church in Atlanta, Georgia, the first primarily gay ministry in the United States. Bishop George later founded the Orthodox Catholic Church of America and consecrated his successor, Bishop Alfred Lankenau.

Daniel Dahl. On December 13, 1994, Bishop Mark and Bishop Daniel James Cyril Dahl laid hands upon each other and ratified each other's prior consecrations. This event took place at the grave of St. Jeffery in Kaneohe, Hawaii. Sacramentally this represents a mingling of apostolic lines of succession. Bishop Dan had been consecrated in 1977 by Joseph Anthony MacCormack, primate of the Old Catholic Church in America. Bishop Dan is no longer associated with the OCCA and has formed the New Catholic Communion in Honolulu.

ECC Diocesan Bishops

On July 8, 1995, four additional bishops were consecrated. These are the Most Reverend Richard John Cardarelli, Bishop of Maritime New England; the Most Reverend Michael Robert Frost, Bishop of the Atlantic, the Most Reverend Robert Wayne "Marty" Martin, Bishop of the Mountains and Plains, and the Most Reverend Denis Armand Martel, vicar general of the denomination.

At the ceremony Mark Shirilau was also recognized officially as archbishop and vested with an *omophorion* (pallium) as a symbol of his archiepiscopal office. (The omophorion had been made by Bishop Dan Dahl and presented to Archbishop Mark on his previous visit to Hawaii.) At the sixth clergy conference held just before the consecrations, a clergy committee recommended the title of patriarch also be given to Archbishop Mark as

founder of the church. While the titles "primate" and "archbishop" will be passed along to Mark's successors, "patriarch" will remain his alone.

Bishop Donald Lawrence Jolly, now with the Orthodox Charismatic Catholic Church, participated in the consecrations. Also assisting was Bishop John Ellis "Jack" Isbell, the pastor of Diablo Valley Metropolitan Community Church, and an Episcopal priest. Bishop Jack had been consecrated into apostolic succession in 1974 by Bishop Robert James Cunningham, another Metropolitan Community Church pastor who holds apostolic succession from the Essene Coptic Catholic Church.

The Reverend Janet Elizabeth Suess-Pierce, northwest district coordinator for the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches also participated. Although not a bishop in apostolic succession, her position of district coordinator is functionally equivalent to that of a bishop, and her full participation in the ceremony enhanced the ecumenical roots of the Ecumenical Catholic Church.

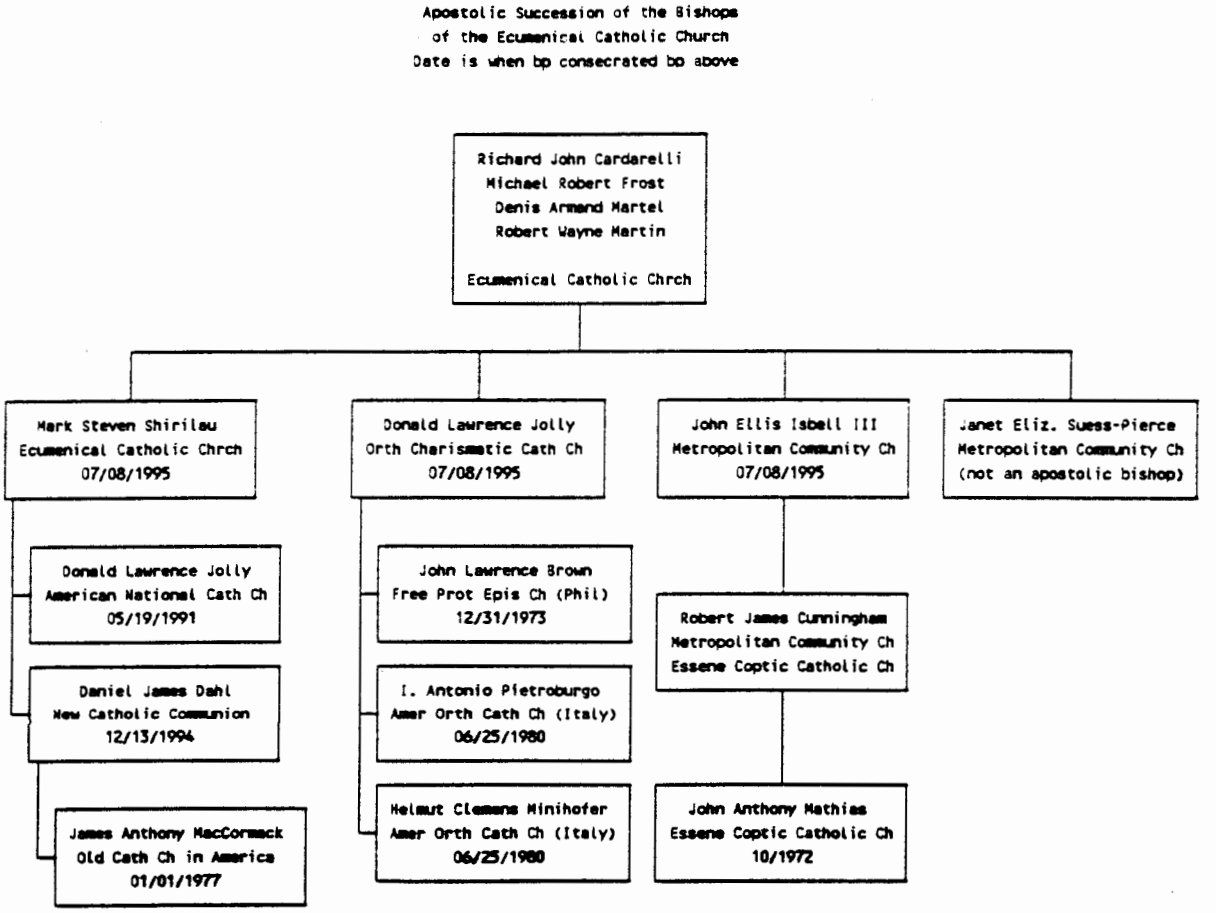
Furthermore, the ceremony was attended by clergy from a variety of denominations, including the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, various Independent Catholic churches, and a large contingent from the Metropolitan Community Church.

Chart of Succession

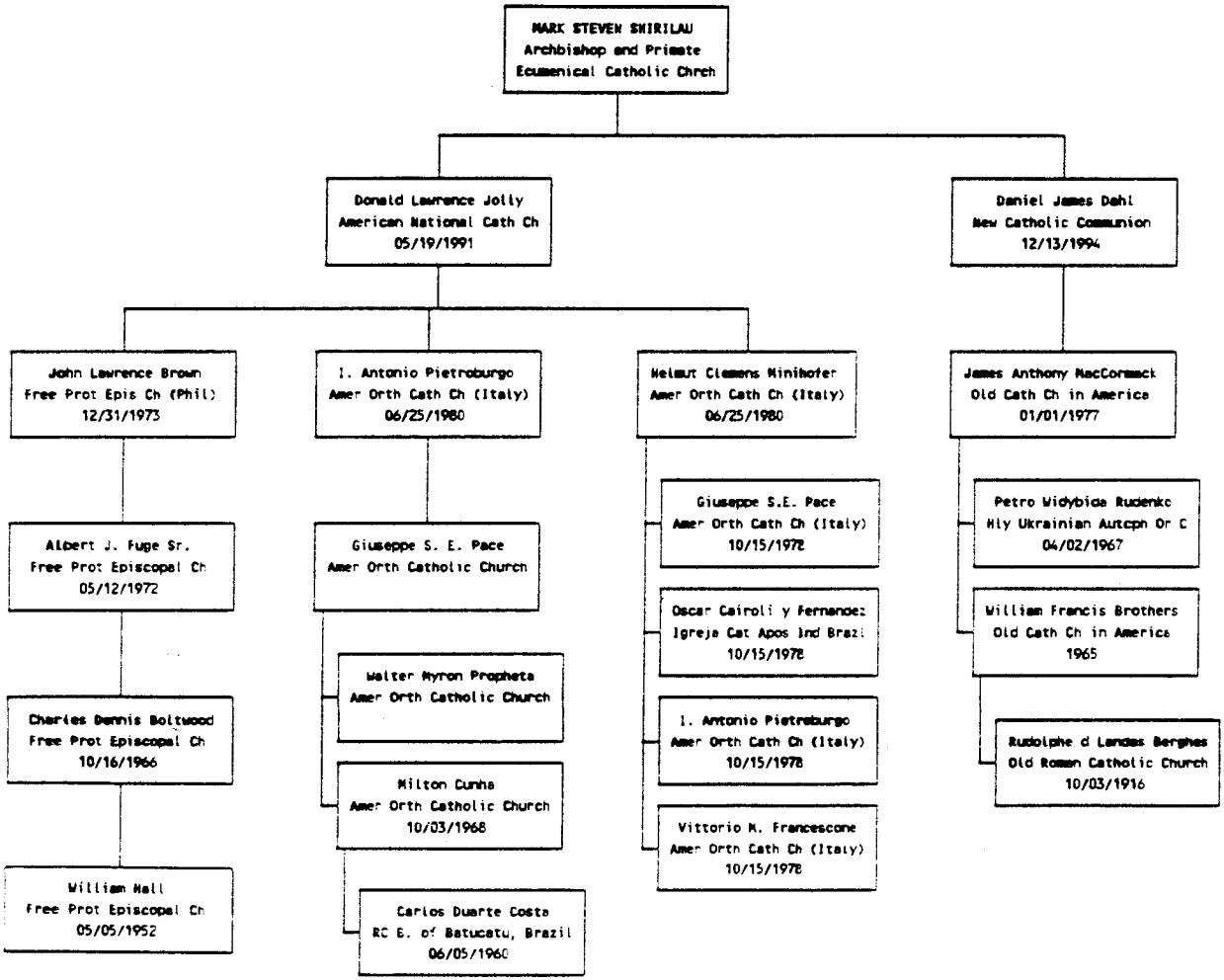
The following page provides a convenient chart of the apostolic succession of the Ecumenical Catholic Church. The chart reads from top to bottom, with the apostolic "ancestors" being listed below those whom they have consecrated. In some cases assisting consecrators have been left off in order to make the chart sufficiently simple to understand.

Dates of consecration are listed in the box of the *consecrating* bishop.

For example, 05/19/1991 is listed in the box of Donald Jolly, indicating that as the date that Bishop Donald consecrated Bishop Mark. Church affiliation of the consecrators are indicated. It should be noted that many bishops have changed affiliation through time.



Apostolic Succession of the Archbishop
of the Ecumenical Catholic Church
Date is when bp consecrated bp above



DOCTRINAL POSITIONS

The following chapter briefly discusses some of the doctrinal positions of the Ecumenical Catholic Church. It is useful to demonstrate the basic orthodoxy of ECC faith as well as show some of our salient positions on certain social and moral issues. The positions delineated here are personal reflections of Archbishop Mark and have not necessarily been debated or discussed in the councils of the church. While they are consistent with the church's teaching, if they should disagree slightly in nuance or wording from the officially issued doctrinal policies of the church, the doctrinal policies should take precedence.

Trinity

The central tenet of Christianity, indeed the most basic of all truths, is that God is One Being in Three Persons. YAHWEH, the God of Love, could not have been a solitary Person before creation and yet be Love. God's infinite Love requires both a Lover (Father) and Beloved (Son), and from this perfect Love-Bond proceeds dynamic Love, the Holy Spirit. With the rest of the Christian Church, the Ecumenical Catholic Church confesses One God in the Three Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the "Athanasian" Creed[35] says, "This is the Catholic Faith: That we worship One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity." The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal and coeternal. They are consubstantial, or *homoousios* ("same Essence"), with Each Other.

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35. The *Quicunque vult*, once erroneously believed to have been written by St. Athanasius, but actually a work of the early Middle Ages. This Latin creed gives a concise and detailed description of the Trinity and Christology. It is accepted as authoritative in these areas by many Western churches, but does not have the uniformly binding blessing of an Ecumenical Council as does the Nicene Creed, nor is it as ancient and widely accepted as the Apostles' Creed.

One common way to relate to the Persons of the Trinity is through Their primary relationships with us: the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier. The Bible also makes it clear that all Three were involved in the act of creation (Genesis 1 and John 1). In creation, then, we can know that the Father is the Ultimate Cause, the One Who willed creation into existence. The Son is the Architect and Designer of creation, "without Him [the *Logos*] was nothing made that was made." The Holy Spirit is the Agent of creation, the One Who "brooded over the waters [of chaos]" and brought forth the ordered universe. If creation were a building, we could think of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the Owner, Architect, and General Contractor. In this sense, then, we can sing with the ancient hymnographers, "Behold the world's Creator wears the form and fashion of a slave" (Coelius Sedulius, died *c.* 450) and "Creator Spirit, by Whose aid the world's foundations first were laid" (Rhabanus Maurus, 778-856).

Thus, while it is descriptive to refer to God as "Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier," these terms are not fully equivalent to "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" and should not become substitutes. The most important reason is because God is *personal*. He exists as Three *Living Persons*, not just three resultant activities.

God the Father

God the Father is our Creator and the Cause behind all that exists. The Father begot the Son in heaven before creation. God is eternal, timeless, infinite, and dimensionless. Hence we can speak of the Father begetting the Son and yet cannot say "there was when He [the Son] was not."[36] God also was the Father of Jesus Christ in the sense that it was He Who sent the Holy

36. One of the statements specifically anathemized (forbidden) by the Council of Nicaea, June 19, 325.

Spirit to Mary the Virgin in order that she might conceive the Word of God in flesh. It was by the Father's will and act that Mary bore her Son.

Just as important, the Father is our Father, our Loving Parent. Not just a Creator Who put everything together and let it happen, but a living, loving, caring Parent Who wants the very best for us and who feels pangs of hurt when we hurt ourselves. He is to us just as an ideal human father or mother would be -- always caring, always knowing what's best, always hoping for our success, helping out where possible, but knowing that we are individuals and must learn to love by ourselves, because love by nature cannot be forced. Jesus taught us to call God "*Abba*," which means "Daddy" in Aramaic.[37] Likewise, the prayer that we share with Jesus, as we all know, begins, "Our Father in heaven." It is truly a very special blessing to be able to share this relationship to God the Father with Jesus.[38]

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is both divine and human. He is the Word (*Logos*, Expression, Son) of God made flesh in human form. God the Father so loved His creatures that He sent forth His Beloved Son to become one with us, to die for us, and to rise in triumph from the grave. The Eternal Word took on human nature and was born as a Baby on the first Christmas Day. He lived among us and taught us the Way of Love. Human society could not tolerate God's Pure Love, and Jesus, our God made Man, was nailed to the Cross and killed. On Easter Day He rose again from the dead, and God showed us that Love indeed is more powerful than all the sin and all the hatred that Satan, the universe, and human beings could ever put forth

37. Matthew 14:36, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6.

38. We do not share many other relationships, "Creator," being perhaps the most significant, since the Son is "not created, but begotten." For this reason, we *cannot* pray "Our Creator in heaven" and have that still be the *Lord's* Prayer.

against Him. Because of Jesus' Sacrifice and Resurrection, we are assured through Baptism that eternal Life waits for us.

The Holy Spirit

As the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is *homoousios* (of One Being, consubstantial) with both the Father and the Son. The Nicene Creed[39] teaches that the Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Western Church (Roman Catholic and from there, Protestant) added the word *Filioque* to the Latin text, meaning the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. While this was an excuse used by the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople to excommunicate each other in the 11th century, in practical purposes it is trivial and either position can be supported. The Ecumenical Catholic Church originated from Western roots (Roman, Anglican, and Lutheran), and hence often uses the *Filioque* in its translation of the Creed. We realize, however, that this is not in the historic original, and we expect that the next major ecumenical modification of the liturgical texts will address this issue and revert to the original.

What "proceeds" really means is that the Holy Spirit is the Love of God overflowing from the Bond between the Father and the Son. In other words, because God loves in such an eternal and infinite manner, He not only must exist as a Lover and Beloved, but that Love must even overflow. Once God created, and even in the act of creation, this Love interacted with the creation on a continuing basis. This is the Holy Spirit Who proceeds into the universe as Deity from Deity, Love from Love.

The Holy Spirit, as God the Interactor in the universe, accomplishes

39. Actually, the creed of the Council of Constantinople of 381, which is an enhancement of the creed of the Council of Nicaea of 325. But this is the Creed used in the Eucharistic liturgies of the Church and commonly called simply the "Nicene Creed." "Nicenoconstantinopolitan Creed" would be a more accurate title.

many things. The Spirit was present at creation, inspired the prophets, and effected the Incarnation of God the Son within Mary's womb. Furthermore, the Spirit descended upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost and brings many gifts to the people of God. It is the Holy Spirit Who makes the sacraments have their effect: filling us at Baptism, changing the bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood, and continuing to bless us as we participate in the minor sacraments. The Holy Spirit guides the Church as it evolves in Truth.

Gender of God

God is a Spiritual Being Who does not have a physical body. Gender and sexuality are part of the physical creation, and therefore are not attributes of God. God is not a man or woman, nor is God male or female. God has personal and emotional attributes, and we may from time to time stereotype these attributes as masculine or feminine, but this should not be confused with seeing God as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or a combination of the above. These terms are just as irrelevant as debating whether God was black or white, blue-eyed or brown-eyed.

Unfortunately, English, like many languages, has pronouns and terminology which are gender-specific. Language, therefore, may appear to imply gender when in fact it does not. Speakers of Spanish are used to using *ella* ("she") for a table (*la mesa*, a "feminine" word) and *el* ("he") for a book (*el libro*, a "masculine" word) without thinking of tables as females and books as males. For hundreds of years "he" has been a default pronoun used when the gender of a person was unspecified or unknown, and "man" has been the generic term for humanity.

So it is with this in mind that we can understand calling God "He." It is not that God is masculine, but that *he* is the nonspecific personal pronoun. This is really not that difficult a concept to understand, and in fact we doubt

that many people get confused by this matter. Yet there are those who consider it sexist to use masculine pronouns for God or to use terms such as *Father* and *Son*. This is a point we neither refute nor support.[40] We do, however, believe that good theology is more important than alleged sexism in language. The use of masculine pronouns for God has been done since when the Bible was written. It is not our place to change Scripture just because we would have said it in a different manner. That would be like rewriting Genesis to include modern scientific knowledge. The alternatives are either bad grammar ("God gave God's Child...") or something even more distracting than the original ("God gave Her ...")[41]

Many terms that are sometimes used to replace *Father* are relational rather than personal. *Creator* is a good example. This book could call me "creator" but not really "father." The danger of using only relational terms is that we start to lose our personal relationship with God. We become creatures rather than children.

For these and other reasons, the Ecumenical Catholic Church rejects

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40. The evolution of language is complex, not well documented, and not easily understood when it comes to ancient cause and effect relationships. Some argue that using *he* as a generic is a result of a sexist, male-dominated society. Often this argument is followed by the belief that continuing to use such language perpetuates the sexism. They fail to understand that education and owning of the terms is a more natural and viable approach than trying to force linguistic change. Radical and forced changes to language seldom work, as a language is a growing, evolving thing. Regardless of the underlying reasons for our language being as it is, one can still proclaim that "He," when referring to God, is not a term that implies gender, but rather one that implies personality.

41. Technically, *She* could be used as an ungendered pronoun as well as *He*. However, this is not standard English and tends to add even more emphasis to gender if for no other reason than its novelty. The goal is to emphasize God's genderlessness, not confuse the issue. Some feminists are especially fond of using *She* for the Holy Spirit, based upon many justifications, including the fact that the Hebrew word for "spirit" (*ruach*) is feminine. The use of *She* remains nonstandard, though, and continues to add emphasis to gender when none exists. The Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is neither masculine nor feminine, but is God, eternal and pure Spirit.

the excessive use of so-called genderless "inclusive language" when referring to God. We continue to use the traditional terminology and pronouns for God, while at the same time emphasizing that God does not have gender. We support occasional use of expansive language that brings feminine imagery into our worship and prayer. We are not opposed to using inclusive language when referring to people (*e.g.*, "people" in place of "men"), so long as it does not become obsessive and distracting.[42]

The Bible

We believe that the Bible is the word of God in the sense that it tells us of God's relationship with the people that He loves. "Word of God" does not mean that God sat down and gave dictation to Moses or the prophets or the apostles. It is absurd to believe that a book written over a span of thousands of years of history by hundreds of different people, edited time and time again, and translated from ancient dialects of different languages, would be literally inerrant.

The Bible is a book of faith. It is a book to lead us to the truth on theological issues. Most importantly, it is a book to tell us about God's Love, about Jesus Christ.

It is not a science book or a history book as we know it. From a theological standpoint, it is not important whether Genesis 1 provides a scientifically accurate description of creation. Nor is it important that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 provide two different accounts which cannot be reconciled with each other from a *scientific* basis.[43]

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42. One of the ironies of "inclusive" language is that its proponents often become so obsessed with its use that they offend persons who prefer normal language and make them feel uncomfortable and excluded. There seems to be no academic study as to whether "inclusive" language is a net gain or loss when it comes to offending people.

43. Genesis 1, for example, says that people were created after the animals, while

The Bible cannot also be the end-all in ethics and morality. It provides a valuable input, but we must remember that it was written by and for people who lived two to four thousand years ago. The principles of love and compassion remain the same, but the details of things like eating animals, making sacrifices, and avoiding certain pagan practices[44] must be reinterpreted for modern times.

The Bible is part of our heritage. It is at once a foundation upon which the Church is built and also the work of the Church. It was the Church's councils that decided what is and what is not the Bible. We are commanded to study the Scriptures, to take them into our lives, to learn from them and grow from them. But they are neither our God nor our goal. God is our God and Love is our goal. The Bible is simply a tool to help us understand that more. Everything within the word of God (Scripture) must be interpreted in the light of the Word of God (Jesus).

Tradition, Reason, and Truth

The Ecumenical Catholic Church recognizes three primary sources in our quest to understand the Truth. The first of these is scripture, the history of the ancient people of God and their relationship with Him as recorded by their various prophets and historians.

The second pillar of Truth is tradition, the continuing evolution of the Church as the growing Body of Christ. The Creeds are the most definitive and concise statements of tradition. The liturgy is also a part of tradition by which we are enmeshed in Truth. So are the seven sacraments. If we believed in scripture but not tradition, we would believe that the Holy Spirit

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Genesis 2 says that the animals were created by God for Adam, who had already been created by God.

44. Many of the sexual prohibitions in the Bible are actually prohibitions against pagan religions and their ceremonies.

was either dead or sleeping. On the contrary, we believe that the Holy Spirit has guided the Church throughout history and is still guiding us today.

This guidance today is related to reason. The Holy Spirit interacts with us as individuals, encountering both our rational minds and our emotional souls. The tradition of tomorrow will be based upon the discoveries of today. While it may well be that certain truths were set down in Biblical times ("God is One," for example) and knowledge evolved somewhat later ("God is Three in One," for example), there are other truths that are still evolving. Our understanding of Love is one of those. Our world is changing every day in its growing knowledge of creation and human ability to use creation. This is causing us to have to deal with issues that never came up before. We are gaining new understanding every day, and the Holy Spirit continues to work with God's people today as our understanding, knowledge, and wisdom grow.

The Ecumenical Councils

As the Church grew, it began to wrestle with ever more detailed questions of theology. Jesus did not sit down and explain His exact ontological relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit in concise terminology. Yet, the Bible is full of references which, when taken together, allow one to define a precise concept of God as Three-in-One. The Greeks and other Western cultures which the Christians began to encounter were far more interested in such philosophical precision than had been the ancient Hebrews. If the Church were to grow and become a world-wide organization, it would have to have a technically accurate vision of God, down to the finest detail.

By the fourth century, Christianity was finally legal. In 325, bishops from all over the world convened in Nicaea to make some definitive decisions for the Church. They represented all of Christendom, and the Holy Spirit was in their midst. They formulated a Creed which explained that

Jesus Christ was not just *like* God, but *was* God. They condemned a very tempting and powerful heresy called Arianism which threatened the true faith because it was in some ways easy to comprehend. Although this heresy was condemned, it still appears today in quasi-Christian sects such as the Mormons (who believe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate gods) and the Jehovah's Witnesses (who believe that Jesus is not really equivalent to Jehovah).

Again in 381 a council met, this time in Constantinople. This council ratified the Creed of Nicaea and added the details about the Holy Spirit. To this day throughout Christendom this Creed is confessed as the very basic article of faith. The Holy Spirit had led the leaders of the ancient church, and they formulated this Creed word for word. We usually call this Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed simply the "Nicene Creed."

The Church continued to meet in councils. The bishops met at Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451. These two councils formulated greater definitions of the *humanity* of Jesus Christ. The Definition (Creed) of Chalcedon points out that Jesus was not just consubstantial with the Father, but also consubstantial with us. It also calls Mary *Theotokos*, or "God-Bearer," because Jesus was True God.

We accept the doctrinal statements of these four ancient councils. The Nicene Creed forms the underlying basis for defining what is and what is not Christian. Along with both the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Catholic) churches, we accept the decisions of Ephesus and Chalcedon as well. There are a few ancient churches in the Middle East (often termed "Oriental Orthodox") which do not accept Ephesus and Chalcedon. By today, however, these people who do accept the Nicene Creed have reasons more historical than theological for maintaining their old position.

These Oriental Orthodox Christians are good examples of the fact that the later councils became less and less ecumenical and less and less

doctrinally important. By and large, Christianity had been *defined* at Constantinople. From then on it was a matter of refining "proper" faith, but not basic Christianity. Those who deny[45] the Nicene Creed are not Christian. Those who deny Chalcedon might technically be called heretics, but they are still Christian because they confess the Nicene Creed.

Three additional councils (making a total of seven) are generally accepted by both the Eastern Orthodox and the Western churches. We fall into that category, although we contend that the later councils were of minor importance. The Roman Catholic Church continued to hold councils (such as Trent and Vatican I and II) and call them "ecumenical," but in fact they were not. They were not attended by either Eastern Orthodox or Protestant leaders, and hence could not have represented all of the Church. As the Church appears to be moving closer together, reversing the trend of the last ten centuries, we believe that the time might come in the future when another Ecumenical Council will convene. Such a council would have to be a meeting of the bishops and leaders of all of the world's Christians -- Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant.

Ecumenical Creeds

In 381, the Council of Constantinople ratified the early Creed of Nicaea and added statements about the Holy Spirit. At both of these councils, words were debated on an individual basis so that the Creed would be precise in its definition of what was and what was not "Christian." Unlike the Bible, the Creed was written with the specific intent that it be taken literally, that it means exactly what it says at every level, word for word. The Creed was, of course, written in Greek, but it was a precise Greek that is

45. *Deny* in an active sense. Many Protestants for a variety of reasons do not accept the authority and binding nature of the Creed, but the majority of these people accept what it teaches. It is one thing to say that creeds are unnecessary, and a different thing to say that the Nicene Creed is false.

relatively easy to translate.

Today we call this Creed the "Nicene Creed." It is accepted by Oriental, Eastern, and Western Christians. It is the definition of Christianity. In other words, a person who believes what it says is Christian, and a person who does not believe what it says is something else. We confess this Creed in our Mass every Sunday.

Three other creeds form an important part of our doctrinal heritage as Christians. The first and most important of these is the Apostles' Creed. During the middle ages it was believed that this creed was written by the twelve apostles. This is not actually true, but the creed can be traced back to very ancient times, even predating the Ecumenical Councils. It derived from the questions asked people at baptism: "Do you believe in God the Father?" etc. This was done at least from the early third century. Gradually the answers to these questions became standardized and uniform. Thus today, as in ancient times, we use the Apostles' Creed in conjunction with baptism and confirmation. It is called the "Baptismal Creed." It is very similar to the Nicene Creed in form and is consistent in theology. In fact, the Nicene Creed was written by bishops who knew the Apostles' Creed.

The Athanasian Creed, or *Quicunque vult* (its first words in Latin) is the third of the "Ecumenical Creeds" discussed by the Roman, Anglican, and Lutheran churches. It is a Western development which details the relationship of the Persons of the Trinity. At the time of the Reformation, it was commonly (though erroneously) believed to have been written by St. Athanasius, the Patriarch of Alexandria who attended the Nicene Council and championed Christianity against Arianism. Together with the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, it was taken by Luther and other reformers to be a doctrinal basis of Christianity that stated some of what they held in common with the Roman Church. We accept the Athanasian Creed as "a valid

statement of Trinitarian theology and christology."[46]

The fourth creed which is important is the Definition of Chalcedon written by the council in 451. This creed details the relationship of Jesus' Divinity and humanity and prohibits theologies which make Jesus a God Who merely acted human. It is accepted as binding by both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches and is binding upon us as a result of our recognition of the doctrinal statements of the first four Ecumenical Councils.[47]

The Virgin Birth

For a doctrine so clearly stated in both the Bible and the Creeds, the Virgin Birth of Jesus is one of the most widely disputed by modern liberal theologians. We see no reason to be a part of that debate. If Jesus were truly God and truly man, it makes sense that He would have one Divine Parent and one human parent. It is important to note, however, that this fact (Jesus' dual Nature) is the reason why the Virgin Birth is important. Perhaps it is the only reason why it is important.

Whether Mary was "ever virgin" is not even relevant. The Bible and even the Creeds are silent on this issue. There is nothing wrong *per se* with believing that Mary died as a virgin, but there is a very dangerous conclusion which can be made by combining some Roman Catholic doctrines about

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46. Canon III, Article 3. The two things in the Athanasian Creed that we reject are (1) that anyone who does not believe exactly as this creed says is going to hell and (2) that those who do good will go to heaven and those who do evil will go to hell. We believe that heaven and hell are choices, but heaven is neither earned by a detailed and exactly correct theology nor an exemplary, "good" life, much less a proper combination of both.

47. Canon I, Article 5. We do not reject the fifth, sixth, and seventh councils, or even the later Roman councils, but regard the first four (Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon) as the only ones absolutely binding upon us as Christians.

Mary. That conclusion is that sex is sinful. Some would say that Mary was without sin (discussed later) and then conclude she was always virgin, as if not being a virgin would be sinful. We reject that conclusion as sex-negative and erroneous. That conclusion can be rejected without rejecting either Mary's sinlessness or her perpetual virginity.

Mary the Virgin

As discussed above, we affirm the Virgin Birth of Jesus. Thus Joseph is "guardian of our Lord," not His father. Whether Mary remained a virgin is neither clear nor relevant. It is left a matter of individual faith. We reject the notion that virginity is a sign of purity, godliness, or sinlessness.

So likewise the immaculate conception of Mary and her assumption into heaven are matters of personal faith. The immaculate conception must be distinguished from the virgin birth. Immaculate conception refers to Mary's conception without sin in the womb of her mother Anna (though this is not a virgin conception, as Mary had a human father, Joachim). Mary, thus, is viewed as free from sin. Some theologies hold this as an important precursor to Jesus' being sinless, but that requirement for Mary is somewhat illogical without having to carry it all the way back to Adam and Eve through immaculate conceptions. We take a middle position. We do not consider the immaculate conception an important matter of doctrine as do the Roman Catholics. Nor do we condemn it as unscriptural as do many Protestants. It is a possibility, but it is not important.

Mary's assumption into heaven supposedly follows from her sinlessness. This doctrine states that after her normal death, Mary's body was taken directly into heaven. This resulted from her being sinless and therefore immune to death. This doctrine is a little more difficult to accept than the immaculate conception because it makes a direct correlation between sin and death. Although there is an ancient understanding of this

correlation, we do not believe it is necessarily accurate at a literal level. Death is the result of sin in a generic sense -- death is a part of nature so that we could evolve and grow both as individuals and society and then live forever in heaven. To claim that death on an individual basis is a result of sin is not so accurate. Jesus Himself died, though clearly sinless.

We have no problem with asserting that Mary went directly to heaven upon her death. That could be termed her "assumption," and celebrating this day (August 15) as her saint's day is clearly appropriate. To argue that Mary's body floated up into heaven in a different and more physical way than that of any other dying saint, regardless of whether she was ever-virgin, sinless, and/or immaculately conceived, is not consistent with our theology of sin, death, and dying.

Atonement

The basic fact of the Incarnation is that God became Man. The basic reason is that He did this to overcome, forgive, and wipe out the world's sins, the world's refusal to walk in love with God. Only something of real, intrinsic value could be the payment; life itself is the only thing with intrinsic value. Only something of infinite value could with certainty cover all the sins and evils of everyone in every place in every time. Only God's Life has infinite, intrinsic value.

Jesus' Sacrifice was completed on the Cross on Good Friday. On Easter Day the Victory was completed and good totally triumphed over evil. Although evil still exists, it is fatally wounded and will ultimately die in totality.

The forgiveness, Sacrifice, and Triumph of the Cross are made a real part of our lives today through the Eucharist. Although the Sacrifice and Victory were finished in history on Calvary, we ourselves become participants in the event by receiving Jesus' Body and Blood in Communion. We not only

feed on the true Body and Blood, but *become* the Body of Christ, living today in Eternal Life.

Grace or Works

Our salvation is entirely God's act. It is God Who chose the Manger, Cross, and Empty Tomb. It is God Who fills a newly baptized person with His Spirit. It is God Who will receive us into heaven.

By faith we incorporate these acts of God into our lives, and so our lives tend to respond with good works. The works do not save, but often result from God's saving Grace.

It is important to note that some Christians turn faith into a work. Curiously these people are often the first to denounce "works righteousness," but they cannot see that their simplistic methodology of salvation is itself nothing more than a work. The "four steps" (or any other number) to salvation one sometimes sees in some tracts printed by Evangelicals are themselves a type of works righteousness. Praying "Jesus be my Lord" is a human action -- a work. While such a prayer may be desirable, it (or anything like it) cannot be considered a requirement to salvation.

How is a person saved?

Salvation is by God's Grace through Jesus' Sacrifice of atonement.

Sacraments

We accept the seven traditional sacraments of the Church: Baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, ordination, marriage, reconciliation, and healing. Baptism and the Eucharist are clearly the most important; they are direct demands of Jesus and are requirements for every Christian's life. It is through these two sacraments that we are incorporated into Christ's Body

and assured eternal Life.

The other five sacraments are means by which God blesses us through the course of our lives. This blessing occurs when we make commitments of service (confirmation, ordination, and marriage), when we ask for forgiveness, and when we are ill or dying.

A sacrament is a visible sign of God's saving Grace. Sacraments are acts of God, and our role as either conveyor (priest) or recipient is relatively minor. It is God Who comes to us and makes a change in our lives.

Baptism

"Baptism is the primary Sacrament, the act by which God accepts a person as His reborn child and sends to that child the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a rite of the whole Church, not of any denomination or congregation, and as such determines membership in the Universal Body of Christ, the Kingdom of God. It washes away all prior sin and is an outpouring of God's Grace that can never be repeated. By its nature as God's free gift and action, it is freely available to all from the time of birth, regardless of age or mental capacity."[48]

Baptism is done in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit with water. At this same time God baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism occur simultaneously. As with the vast majority of Christian churches, baptism in one denomination is valid in others. It would be a denial of God's power (and thus a form of blasphemy) to baptize a person again. We reject the idea of "believers baptism," that a person must be a certain age or do certain things in order to be baptized. That makes it our action, not God's. God is the Actor in baptism, accepting us, forgiving us, and adopting us.

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48. The answer to the question, "What is Baptism?" in the ordination of a bishop, *The Holy Eucharist and Other Sacramental Rites*, p. 332.

Born Again

All Christians are "born again of water and the Spirit" at their baptism. It is technically redundant to say "born again Christian." Many of us may experience various times of revitalization in our lives, moving out of depression, anxiety, lack of faith, or whatever. These changes, no matter how positive and no matter how strongly they seem to strengthen our relationship with God, are inconsequential when compared to the permanent sacramental change which happened at our baptism, when God the Holy Spirit filled our lives. Regardless of whether we remember this event, it is *the* key changing point in our life. Since baptism makes us Christians and we are reborn at our baptism, all Christians are born again.

The Eucharist

"The Eucharist is the Sacrament through which the baptized are fed with the real and substantial Body and Blood of Christ. It is our present participation in the historic Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross, and it constitutes the essence of Christian worship. Communion is an outpouring of God's Grace and is a unifying act, bringing together all of God's People at one Table of thanksgiving, establishing on earth the Community of Heaven. When we go to the Altar of God, we go solely as baptized people, individually yet in union with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, void of all other affiliations, relationships, and status. Our tables must, therefore, always be open to all the people of God's Kingdom."[49]

We believe in transubstantiation -- the substance of bread and wine become the Substance of Christ's Body and Blood. In order to understand transubstantiation, it is important to understand what *substance* means. It

49. The answer to the question, "What is the Holy Eucharist?" in the ordination of a bishop, *The Holy Eucharist and Other Sacramental Rites*, p. 332.

does not refer to chemical composition, but to the spiritual reality, that which "stands under" the outward chemical signs. We do not find blood cells in the consecrated Cup. We do find the Blood of God in as certain and mystical way as we would find God's Blood pouring from Christ's pierced side on the Cross. Transubstantiation is a type of incarnation, a means by which God makes Himself physically present for us to taste and see and smell and eat. We take God's Life into our lives through the intimate, physical acts of eating and drinking.

The Lutheran concept of consubstantiation is difficult to distinguish from transubstantiation, and Luther was firm on insisting on Christ's Real Presence. There is no real reason to debate the fine details of how the Real Presence is effected. On the other hand, while we understand that part of each Communion is remembering the life of Christ and what He did for us, we reject the Reformed idea that it is *primarily* a memorial and the Anabaptist concept that it is merely an "ordinance." Communion is the very act through which we not only consume, but *become* the Body of Christ incarnate on earth. It is the vital, physical link between the Church, the Body of Christ, and Jesus Christ Himself.

Open Table

We believe that Baptism is the sole indelible mark of a Christian and that, therefore, all of the baptized are welcome to the Table of God. It is a tragic mockery of God's Love for one denomination to declare exclusive rights to the Table or to exclude Christians of other denominations. The Eucharist is effected by God, not by pastors, priests, bishops, or popes. Jesus Himself invites us all to the table.

As a corollary to this basic belief, we follow the ancient practice of infant Communion. Anyone who is baptized, including a baby, is welcome at the Altar of God. The suggestion that one should understand what is

happening is flawed on two accounts: (1) it implies that some of us understand Communion in a full sense, and (2) it is similar to saying that babies should understand the digestive system before we feed them regular food.

Likewise, we do not "excommunicate" for moral reasons. Communion is a means of forgiveness, a means of coming to peace with God and receiving God's Grace. It is perhaps the most morally degenerate who are in most need of this Grace at any given time.

Nor do we set guidelines for coming to the Table. We practice confession, both private and corporate, and corporate confession is part of the liturgy leading up to Communion, but confession is also directly between God and an individual. We do not presume that one cannot be in confession while walking up to the Altar. All of the baptized -- sinners, saints, regularly faithful and seldom seen -- are welcome to God's Table.

Bread and Wine

The Eucharist was instituted with bread and wine. We commune with both kinds in our churches, although we believe that God's Grace is received fully through each element. Thus, receiving only the Bread or only the Wine is making a valid and full Communion.

We also use a common cup. This is a symbol of unity. The people come up to the altar and receive One Lord. The type of bread and the type of wine used is not relevant. Communion with grape juice is valid but both nontraditional and unnecessary. Jesus used wine; we use wine. To argue that grape juice is superior because of the alcohol in wine is essentially to deny the meaning of Real Presence. The wine is now the Body of Christ; the

spiritual side of the alcohol has been transformed.[50]

Communion reception practice in our churches may vary, but usually either kneeling at the altar rail (as most Episcopalians and Lutherans do) or coming up to a standing minister to receive the bread and wine (as most Roman Catholics do) are the common practices, depending upon the physical layout of the church. We come forward to Christ to receive Him and genuflect to our Lord really and substantially present in the Sacrament. The essence of Communion is conveyed in the simple words of the minister: "The Body of Christ (broken for you / the Bread of heaven)" and "The Blood of Christ (shed for you / the Cup of Salvation)." Prayers, blessings, anointings, healings, and other individual acts may be done within the context of the liturgy, but not at the time of Communion, as the Communion interaction with God supersedes all others.

The Kingdom of God

"The people of God's Kingdom are those who are baptized and believe the Christian Faith. Age, race, color, mental capacity, gender, sexual preference, nationality, socioeconomic status, and other nonspiritual matters have no bearing on citizenship in God's Kingdom. The citizens of the Kingdom are called to live as a true community, sharing with each other their joys and their pains, in true vulnerability and love, even as God so shared with us in Jesus Christ."[51]

The Kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future fulfillment. It is both earthly and heavenly. The Kingdom is here on earth, established by

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50. Chemically, of course, ethanol is still present, but most people do not consume a significant amount of wine during Communion, so the physical interaction of this amount of ethanol with the human body is at best trivial.

51. The answer to the question, "Who are the people of God's Kingdom?" in the ordination of a bishop, *The Holy Eucharist and Other Sacramental Rites*, p. 333.

the Miracle of Easter through the Holy Spirit's Power at Pentecost. It is the people of God, washed in Baptism and fed at the Eucharist. The Kingdom is growing on earth and will, by God's Grace, someday encompass all people.

The Kingdom also exists in heaven, where we go as Christ's children upon death. This is the Kingdom in perfection. When the Kingdom is fully realized on earth through the growth promoted by the Spirit, there will be little distinction between earth and heaven, and the return of Christ on the altar will be indistinguishable from His coming in glory.

We reject the notion that evil is still in ultimate control; Easter contradicts that thought. We reject the idea that Jesus must come and do battle on earth; the battle was won already on the Cross and in the Resurrection. We believe that Jesus comes to us again and again in the Eucharist, that He comes to us as individuals when we die and the world ends for us, and that He will come in glory at the fulfillment of time when the Kingdom has grown to completion.

Death and Heaven

For Christians, death is a celebration of life. The funeral liturgy is a celebration of Baptism and Easter. Christianity revolves around the single most important event of human history, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Likewise, a person's own life as an individual revolves around the single most important event of that person's life, his baptism.

When we die as Christians, we enter into the presence of God. This is called heaven. Heaven exists *external* to the universe. That is, heaven is a spiritual realm in which the physical attributes of space, time, matter, and energy do not exist. This is very crucial as we try to understand heaven.

As humans we are both spiritual and physical. It is an error to think that these two do not mix or that they are opposed to one another. They are

simply different. We know that they mix because "the Word was made flesh" -- God Himself took on a physical nature in Jesus Christ. The dichotomy which appeals to so many of a "good" spirit and an "evil" flesh is just not correct. Our propensity toward either good or evil is part of our spiritual nature, part of our creation as beings that have free will, which is what it means to be "created in God's image." Without free will, there could be no love.

Anyway, at death our connection as spiritual beings is broken from our physical body. We therefore depart the *universe* and enter heaven or hell. Again, it's not just earth we depart, but the universe, the entire physical creation that includes all the planets and stars and galaxies. We also depart *time*. It is hard for us to comprehend existence without time, and we often don't think of time as "physical," but modern relativistic physics tells us that space and time and matter and energy are all related.

Many confusions about heaven, even from different portions of the Bible, are related to our failure to understand its *timelessness*. From a practical standpoint, from our time-bound perspective, people go to heaven or hell as soon as they die. Let's now look at some specific points and ideas.

Rapture and the Millennium

The "rapture" is a concept that involves the physical departure of Christians from the earth either prior to or as part of the second coming of Christ. This false doctrine was invented by John Nelson Darby, the founder of modern fundamentalism, in the early 1800s. Many evangelicals and fundamentalists still teach this doctrine as part of their premillennialist eschatology.[52]

52. ***Premillennialist*** **refers to the belief that Jesus will return to earth in physical form and set up an earthly kingdom and reign for 1000 years (one millennium). Though the Church evolved away from this belief in the 400s, a literal reading of Revelation, Daniel and other parts of the Bible can lead one to a variety of detailed**

Essentially, premillennialists believe that Jesus did not finish the work of salvation on the Cross and that there will be a future battle between good and evil, the Battle of Armageddon. This belief is derived from various literal readings of Revelation, but even the literalists have widely divergent interpretations. The Church Universal has never taught this concept. While many people in the early Church expected Jesus to return in glory during their lifetimes, they did not have a complicated theology of the end times. When the Church finally did develop its theology of the end (its eschatology), the apocalyptic stories of the Bible were taken in allegorical manner.

When I die, that is the end of the world *for me.* What happens in the future history of the physical world is no longer relevant to me. My salvation was guaranteed because the battle *is already over*, and Jesus won on Easter Day.

Reincarnation

Reincarnation, the idea that a person's soul enters into another body when that person dies, is another belief that is not consistent with Christianity. Reincarnation is a basic theological tenet of Hinduism and thereby pervades many "New Age" philosophies. It seems reasonable on the surface, but in fact it denies God's ability to save. Like the "rapture" and Armageddon, reincarnation is a denial of Easter. It is saying that we can *earn* salvation through growth and education and development in a series of lives. Obviously one life is not enough, but maybe any number of them will do the trick.

Belief in reincarnation is clouded, but pure, works righteousness.

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conclusions, many of which are contradictory to one another. *Eschatology* is simply the technical word to describe theologies of the end.

Reincarnation means that my soul will work its way to heaven. Christianity says that Jesus earned heaven for me, so I have *no need* for a series of lives. God *created* my soul at my conception, and after death I will go immediately to the timeless spiritual realm.

Purgatory

The medieval Church developed a complicated concept of purification which existed before a person actually entered heaven. Purgatory was conceived of as existing in time, so persons spent x number of years there. One could buy a friend's way out by giving to the Church. It was financially self-serving, but theologically erroneous. Certainly we are purified before entering heaven, but this must occur in timelessness, and will be an instantaneous process. We will be aware of our whole lives, including what we did wrong and how we failed to love; that will hurt, and we will be sorry for our offenses. But it will be a cleansing, not a punishment, and before we really know it, we will be in heaven. From our standpoint on earth, we cannot see this process because it is timeless. We cannot question whether a departed person is in purgatory or heaven, because purgatory appears instantaneous in our time-bound universe.

Hell

Heaven is a gift of God related to Baptism. Is is possible (but not certain) that God presents other options to the unbaptized when they die. However, because we believe in free choice, we have to accept hell, because God would never *force* us to go to heaven and love Him.

The choice is probably presented so clearly upon death, however, that most, if not all, will choose heaven over hell, heaven being the place of eternal worship and endless love and joy, and hell being the place of eternal loneliness and separation.

We do not go to heaven or hell based upon what we did on earth. We are offered heaven because Jesus died to save *all humanity*. We will be offered the chance to go to heaven. For those who have lived loving lives centering around the worship of God, the choice will be very natural. For those who have never had God in their lives or are so petrified by the thought of love, the choice will be tough, and I suppose some will choose hell rather than change. Again, it is not because God is angry or punishes, but rather because love cannot be forced and still be real.

The Church

The Church is the Body of Christ living on earth and the part of the Kingdom of God existing as a present reality. It is made up of baptized persons who continue in a faithful relationship with God through worship and the Eucharist.

Unity of the Church

There is one God, one Lord, and one Baptism, hence one Church. All of the Christians of the earth are part of this Body. We share a common Baptism and eat at a common Table. We are children of God together.

The Ecumenical Catholic Church is committed to the outward unity of the Christian Church. We consistently try to work together with Christians of other denominations in proclaiming the Love of God and the Gospel of salvation.

Historically, the Church has developed denominations as a result of differing outlooks and philosophies. The Ecumenical Catholic Church is neither unique nor special in this matter. We exist because our outlook on some social situations is different than that of most other denominations. We have few if any important theological or liturgical differences from the

mainstream of the Christian Church.

We believe that as the Church evolves, we shall see greater and greater cooperation. We are committed to the unification process so long as it does not compromise theological or social principles. As part of the growth of the Kingdom on earth, the Church will continue to spread the Gospel through the world and will gradually work closer and closer together within itself. Eventually, the Church will again be fully one in a structural manner, but for now each of the various denominations are being used by the Holy Spirit to teach important lessons to the greater Body.

Holiness of the Church

The Church belongs to God and is therefore holy. This does not mean that it is without human error or does not sometimes sin. No denomination is either perfect or sinless. All of them, including the ECC, can and will make mistakes.

As a church group we strive, however, to be guided by the Holy Spirit as much as possible. As individuals we invite the Spirit into our lives on a daily basis. Through this grace, we can move forward bringing the Truth to the world.

Catholicity of the Church

Some people confuse the term *Catholic* with the Church of Rome. In fact, ***katholikos*** is a Greek word that relates to the Church's being meaningful and available to all people. It is one of the terms used in the Nicene Creed to describe the Church, so in one sense any church that believes the Nicene Creed is a catholic church. Even most Protestants use this term in their confession of the Creed.[53]

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53. Some churches substitute the word *Christian* as a translation of ***katholike***. This was

Nothing in the term *Catholic* relates to the Pope or to the Roman Church. While the Roman Church certainly is catholic, it is not the only church which is catholic. The Eastern Orthodox denominations have always considered themselves catholic. The Anglican churches and various Independent Catholic churches are also part of this tradition.

There is virtually no difference between our liturgy and that of the Roman Catholic Church. Our theology differs only on minor points. We observe the same seven sacraments and extend the same meaning to them as do the Roman Catholics. Our apostolic orders are ultimately derived from a modern Roman Catholic bishop. The ECC is, in every sense of the word, a Catholic Church.

Apostolicity of the Church

"Apostolic" means at least two different things, both of which relate back to the twelve apostles. First, it means that the Church is doctrinally and historically continuous with the Church founded by the apostles. The Christian Church has evolved as a body without falling away from the Truth. This truth is summarized in the Creed. Confessing and holding firm to this faith therefore makes a person or a denomination "apostolic."

Secondly, "apostolic" refers to the apostolic succession of holy orders. This is the concept that Jesus laid hands upon the apostles and consecrated them (as bishops), and that they in turn consecrated other bishops. In theory this line can be continued down through the ages. While the ECC is within this historic line of apostolic succession and intends to firmly maintain this succession, we believe that the doctrinal continuity is a more important

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based upon Martin Luther's translation of the Creed into German. However, the ecumenical text which is becoming more and more standard across the whole spectrum of the Church uses the original "catholic" in the English translation.

means of identifying ourselves as part of the True Church.

Unconditional Love

The main difference between the Ecumenical Catholic Church and other denominations is our firm belief that God loves everyone unconditionally. God loves us as we were created, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation. We don't have to become something other than what God created in order to be loved by God. Prejudice and bigotry are sins. We are commanded by Christ to love, not to hate. This general outlook of Love's primacy leads to several positions which are somewhat unique among Christian denominations.

Human Sexuality

We believe God created human beings in diversity. We are not identical clones of one another or of Adam and Eve. This diversity exists not only in race, but also in many other facets of our creation, including our sexual orientation, which is God-given and not chosen. (It does not matter whether it is genetic or appears early in childhood; sexuality is nonetheless a gift of God.)

The ECC accepts all people as they are. All are God's creations, and all are entitled to live in the full sacramental life of the church. This includes both ordination of gay people and the celebration of gay marriages. Christians have blessed animals and battleships; it is absurd to deny marital blessing to two men or two women who truly love each other in a meaningful and committed relationship.

Sexual activity can be healthy and is as natural to us as breathing. It is therefore not necessarily sinful. We were created to be sexual. It is how we are motivated to be sexual that matters. We won't get into heaven just

because we are virgins or celibate. We won't go to hell for having sex. God did, however, create us to be higher than the animals, and we are called to celebrate our sexuality within the restraints of mature, responsible, love-affirming behavior.

Marriage

Marriage is one of the simplest, yet least understood sacraments. That is because society, and many within the Church, think first of the reproductive, sexual, or even relationship aspects of marriage rather than the sacramental aspect of its ministry. Marriage is a sacrament that derives from the commitment of Baptism. God pours out grace upon the persons married in order that together they may be better servants, both of God and of the world. This is why marriage is a sacrament and not just a rite. All the other attributes of marriage, while often important, are not related to its sacramental nature. This is why Jesus used marriage as a symbol of His loving relationship with the Church, because it is a sacrament of ministry, of service.

Married couples are intended to love each other. They have a sexual relationship. In some cases they form a reproductive unit. But the reason they come together in church and have the Holy Spirit descend upon them in grace is because together they will be a team of servants in and for the Church. Through this grace they will balance each other, encourage each other, help each other, and thus do more for God and the Church than they would have done separately. As in confirmation and ordination, *God has* called and blessed ministers.

Given that basic definition of marriage, there is no logic behind limiting it to male-female couples. Two men or two women can just as effectively make a team of loving, sexually bonded ministers. Thus the sacrament of marriage between gay men or lesbians is exactly equivalent and equally

blessed as that between a man and a woman. In all three examples, God can and will take something very natural, part of the ordinary world, and use it for blessing the world. Just as wheat and grapes become the Essence of Christ, so the bonds of love and sex become the glue of this ministerial team. The common is made holy. Just as surely as God can consecrate red or white wine, wheat bread, wafers, or pita, so can God take gay, lesbian, or heterosexual love and consecrate them in the matrimonial bonds of ministry.

Divorce

Jesus' decree against divorce is one of the most perplexing statements of Scripture. There is obviously widespread disagreement about whether it applies today, and it is also one of the most significant sources of hypocrisy in the church.[54]

Divorce is, in fact, a sign of the brokenness of the world. It is a result of sin, although the act of getting a divorce may not itself be sinful. There are many instances when getting a divorce is the most loving of the possible actions to be considered. While it is wrong to break a solemn commitment, it is also wrong to force people to live lives of misery. There is probably a wide gray area between the secular attitude of easy divorce and its total lack of respect for commitment on one hand and the strict interpretation of forbidding divorce on the other.

However, the ECC does not place itself in the practice of judging. Some people may divorce because they are selfish. Others may divorce for truly valid reasons. It is inappropriate to deny a person full participation in

54. The Roman Catholic practice of annulment in many cases is essentially a divorce. Annulments are granted for all kinds of trivial excuses, many of which amount to "ancient history" within a long-term marriage. The Roman Church would be more honest if it either accepted divorce or refused to grant most of the annulments it proclaims. Likewise, even churches that accept divorce often treat the divorced as second-class citizens. They should either forbid it or accept it.

the sacramental life of the Church because of marital relations or failures thereof. A priest would be wise to counsel a seven-times-divorced person very strongly before considering solemnizing another wedding[55], however that person would certainly be welcome at Communion.

Abortion and Birth Control

As with most moral issues, our denomination has an approach which could be labeled "pro-choice." This is not to say that we support abortion or even believe that it is ever the appropriate choice. Rather, we believe that individuals must come to their own moral decisions rather than have those decisions forced upon them by the government. Having an abortion is a decision that belongs to the parents, not the law. Furthermore, even though most of us believe abortion is seldom if ever the appropriate choice, we do not condemn people for the choices they have made. Because we know that God loves everyone, we also realize that He makes the sacraments of grace available to everyone. No one, therefore, would be turned away from Communion for having an abortion.

With regards to birth control, we diverge even more sharply from the Roman Catholic position. Our world is seriously overpopulated and babies are dying every day for lack of food. It is socially irresponsible to preach against birth control. Furthermore, we believe that if birth control were freely available and universally taught in school, there would be great reductions in teen pregnancy and also a great reduction in the number of abortions among women of all ages and social sectors. If a church really wanted to reduce abortion, it should promote birth control.

55. And in fact, ECC canon law would require the bishop's permission for such a wedding.

Euthanasia and Suicide

God is a God of Love, and He does not get a thrill out of the needless suffering of the terminally ill. We believe in a death with dignity for those who are facing ultimate death. When they are sufficiently competent mentally to make their own decision regarding the quality of their lives, people should be allowed to decide under what circumstances they wish to continue living. We also believe that responsible and ethical medicine demands that doctors be available for this assistance if possible.

Medical science has brought us far beyond the times, even just a few decades ago, when people died promptly. We have been able to prolong life under many conditions, but often at the cost of extreme pain with little emotional reward for the dying. This progress in and of itself can be good, but progress cannot be one-sided. It is not fair to insist that a person's life be prolonged far past what is "natural" and then also insist that the dying person hold on as long as medicinal science can facilitate. If life is truly sacred, it must be honored, not worshiped. An extra week or month of severe pain might not be honorable in every case.

"Thou shalt not kill" was written before we ever dreamed of "Thou shalt prolong life as long as possible." AIDS, cancer, and other diseases give doctors ample opportunity to extend life months or years beyond the time when their patients would have died had they lived in Moses' time. This is good. With that good, though, comes the responsibility to allow for decisions, including the decision not to hold on to this world at all cost. When God is calling us home, it is all right to say "I'm ready." Medical ethicists must realize that science has created scenarios where artificial life support has some continuing effects, even after "the plug is pulled," and actively assisting a patient in his journey home may not only be acceptable, but laudable.

This, of course, must be sharply distinguished from the suicide of a

healthy person. We are talking about someone who is soon going to die of a fatal disease and is presently in great pain and suffering. We are not talking about depression or financial disaster or having a spouse leave or other emotional trauma. We're talking about death that is already pending.

HOW WE COMPARE TO OTHER DENOMINATIONS

Sarum Episcopal Church

The denomination which is most closely identical with the Ecumenical Catholic Church is the small Sarum Episcopal Church, headquartered in San Bernardino, California. This denomination maintains itself within the Catholic tradition and has an open and directed ministry to gay people. The worship style is slightly different, as the Sarum Episcopal Church bases its liturgy on the old rite of Sarum (Salisbury, England), while the ECC liturgy is based upon the Vatican II Mass. The Ecumenical Catholic Church and the Sarum Episcopal Church signed a formal decree of intercommunion on Epiphany Day, January 6, 1994.

Orthodox Church of the Moors

The Orthodox Church of the Moors is a small Independent *Catholic* church headquartered in Seattle, Washington. It has special ministries to both the gay and African American communities. It has formally adopted the ECC liturgy and is in the process of approaching the ECC for intercommunion.

Metropolitan Community Church

The Metropolitan Community Church is the largest and most widely recognized denomination with a direct outreach to the gay community. Although made up of Christians from all backgrounds, the MCC is thoroughly Protestant in both its polity and liturgy. The government of the denomination is congregational in nature and the liturgy is typically a blend of "mainline" worship. While MCC liturgy includes the Eucharist, it is often not focused around the Eucharist as the central act of worship. The denomination does not have a fixed liturgy, so parishes are often left to the whims and mercy of marginally trained liturgists.

Furthermore, while the bylaws of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches accept the Nicene and Apostles Creeds, these Creeds are rarely used in worship, and doctrinal conformity to their teachings is often not enforced.[56] We differ from the MCC, therefore, by having a fixed and traditional liturgy and by striving to live fully within the Creedal theology of the Universal Church. The ECC is, in many ways, the "Catholic equivalent of the MCC."

Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church is the major denomination that is closest to the Ecumenical Catholic Church. Its theology is orthodox and its liturgy is traditional. Like the ECC, it ordains women and is relatively liberal on social stands. While the Episcopal Church (as most others) has a great number of gay people within its clergy, some of them quite open, the denomination has yet to categorically authorize the ordination of gays or even to enforce

56. Some MCC clergy and laity are influenced by Wicca, feminism, and other non-Christian theologies. The denomination seems unable or unwilling to control even such radical diversions from Christian orthodoxy within its midst, in spite of the reference to the Creeds in its own bylaws.

uniform and total acceptance of its female clergy. Unlike the ECC, the Episcopal Church restricts the sacrament of marriage to that segment of the Body of Christ which is heterosexual.

Roman Catholic Church

Our liturgy, polity, and theology are very close to the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, an honest Roman Catholic would find it difficult to find a *major* difference between us, except perhaps that we leave the immaculate conception and assumption of Mary as items of individual faith, rather than mandatory dogmas.

On many theologically trivial but socially vital issues, however, we are diametrically opposed to the teachings of Rome. Most importantly, we do not believe that maleness, celibacy, or heterosexuality have anything to do with one's qualifications for priesthood. Furthermore, we do not believe that heterosexuality really has anything to do with marriage. Both of these sacraments are spiritual commitments that should not be denied the people of God for irrelevant reasons.

Unfortunately, many people are very poor judges of the relative importance of doctrines. They would see the differences between us and Rome as major differences when in fact they are not. From a personal standpoint, however, particularly for someone who is not within the categories favored by the Roman Church, these differences may in fact be very important. Many people who have been condemned by Rome would be welcomed into the ECC, and a growing number of ECC members are people who had long been disenfranchised by the Roman Church.

Old Catholic Churches

Many of the Independent Catholics, including those who consider themselves "Old Catholics," have separated from the Roman, Anglican, or

other major denominations for theological or liturgical reasons. Some of these groups hold on to older worship forms (such as the Latin Mass or the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*). Others differ over relatively minor points of theology (such as the immaculate conception). For these reasons, these groups often dwell in the past and do not readily associate with the parent bodies.

On the other hand, the Ecumenical Catholic Church is separate for *social* reasons. Our worship is contemporary and congruent with the mainline liturgical denominations. Our theology is both traditional and modern. We are inspired by the opportunities to work side-by-side and along with the mainline churches, so long as our open and all-inclusive ministry, witness, and love are not hindered.

Most of the Independent Catholic churches are related in some way. If by no other means, the lines of apostolic succession resemble European royal genealogy. Everyone is related to everyone else, regardless of how they may see each other.

Lutheran Churches

We share a very important position with Martin Luther. The Ecumenical Catholic Church stands in direct protest to the Roman Catholic Church's narrow-mindedness on social issues. Like Luther, we are in agreement with the vast majority of Roman Catholic doctrine, liturgy, etc., but there are extenuating practices of the Roman Church that force us to remain separate.

Because these issues are social in nature, rather than theological, we stand in opposition to most of the Christian denominations on these vital points. Homophobia, heterosexism, sexism, and sex-negativity are certainly not uniquely Roman Catholic. The Orthodox and fundamentalists are at least as guilty if not more so. Even the generally liberal mainline Protestants

have not successfully corrected the problems.

Generally, the Lutheran Church is liturgical but not as directly focused on the Eucharist as are we (and the other Catholics). Lutherans are very firmly rooted in their Baptism, and we share this heritage with them. Knowledge of God's personal love through Baptism was important to Martin Luther. This is what also gives us strength to persevere.

With the modern Lutheran Church we share a theology that Truth must stand up when wronged. Like Martin Luther nailing his Ninety-Five Theses on the church door, we are boldly making our claim against the homophobia which pervades not just the Church, but our whole society. In a few corners of their church they are standing forth against the old errors. We hope that this struggle for Truth will overcome the Lutheran Church very soon.

OUR MISSION

The Ecumenical Catholic Church strives to bring the Gospel to *all* people through orthodox theology, traditional but modern liturgy, and direct acceptance of all people. We strive to hold on to what is truly Christian, while rejecting the social biases and prejudices that restrict God's Love and Gospel.

We open our doors to everyone and pray to become an all-inclusive community. Yet we realize that sexism and heterosexism are so deeply ingrained in our society that their elimination brings discomfort, even to some who are harmed directly by these social ills. It is sad but true that standing firm against these social diseases may frighten some and hinder our own all-inclusiveness. As prophets, however, we must stand for Truth and Love, welcoming *all* who come our way, but never giving up on our special witness to those who feel abandoned or unloved because of their sexuality or gender.

SACRED TIME, SACRED SPACE, SACRED DUTY

A homliy by Archbishop Mark

At the Episcopal Consecrations, July 8, 1995

We're here today to celebrate another major step forward in the life of the Ecumenical Catholic Church. As I look back on the history of the church, it seems as if the summers of odd-numbered years have been particularly eventful. It also seems that many of these events, particularly recently, have caught us by surprise -- coming far sooner than we would have expected.

1985 -- ten years ago -- I graduated from seminary on May 18. It was the Methodist seminary in Claremont, a suburb of Los Angeles. Hence the our roots are firmly ecumenical -- a Lutheran turned Episcopalian graduates from a seminary operated by the United Methodist Church.

Honestly, I can say I had no idea then exactly what lay ahead for me. I had once wanted to be a worker-priest for the Episcopal Church, but politics, economics, supply, and demand said that the Los Angeles Diocese already had too many. Then I began wrestling with my calling and realized that it was not within the Episcopal Church. I didn't know where it would be, but I knew somehow it was different. I do remember very well the graduation ceremony, though. Most of the other students were slated to be Methodist ministers. There were a few Episcopalians like myself who had gone the final year at the Methodist school to get our accredited master's degree. Most everyone had ordinations soon ahead of them. The graduation ceremony spoke heavily of commitment and ministry, quite unlike my earlier graduations from engineering and MBA school had been.

1987 -- two years later -- Jeffery and I had formulated a new plan. The Ecumenical Catholic Church was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation, and on June 3, the IRS issued our tax-exempt status. We were now a church -- at least on paper. We had come to realize that the Episcopal Church would wrestle with sexuality issues in committee forever. The Metropolitan Community Church had solved those issues, but its theology and liturgy were too informal for me. We attended both churches, and Jeffery would probably have been happy in the MCC, and I would probably have been happy as an Episcopalian. But together we paved the way toward that "market niche" that was so visibly empty -- the liturgical, theologically conservative, but socially liberal church.

It was a great idea on paper. The business part was the safest for me, involving the least risk. The canon law that we use to this day was written prior to submitting the incorporation papers. Only minor changes have been made since. We had a structure, but no church yet. The future looked bright.

In many ways, 1987 was the time when I most envisioned today. The canons from the beginning have allowed for dioceses and bishops and an archbishop. Today -- 8 years later -- that is becoming a reality. Back then my vision was pure and not yet deluded by the harsh realities of life. It was interesting how the Spirit moved us forward. In one way it was odd to sit down and create this structure which would facilitate a whole denomination nationwide, when I hadn't even begun holding daily services. On the other hand, it was very natural.

As we look back today, we see that God's plan was being set down. The details that lay ahead were not clear, but the long-term vision was.

It took until the very end of 1987 for me to be ordained and to begin ministry. Things started out slowly, as we knew they would. It was still exciting; we had a big chapel in our house and advertised and had Mass every

Sunday morning.

By the summer of 1989 things had started to get depressing. Soon after starting we reached an attendance average of 5 or 6, and we were still holding the same. My vision of a quickly growing parish had proven nonexistent. At this rate it would be 1,000 years before the canon law was anywhere near an accurate description of what we are. Frankly, it was depressing.

Yet, true to form, the summer of 1989 proved to be a key point in the history of our church. On July 10, Jeffery and I drove to Los Angeles and I baptized Robert Simpson in his home, celebrating the sacraments with his mother, his lover, and few friends. Robert died of AIDS two weeks later.

This was a great time of validity in my ministry. I had begun to doubt the need and importance my ministry, which at that time meant the whole denomination. Yet Robert called us and through us received God's endless grace.

He was from a Catholic background but had never been baptized. He wanted everything in order before he died, and he wanted to share his faith with his friends. On the drive up I-5 from Santa Ana to his house near downtown LA, we passed three or four MCC's and countless Roman Catholic churches. Surely he could have found acceptance and love at the MCC and any of their pastors would have come and baptized him. Surely also there were a large number of Roman priests that would have done it as well. And there was always the Episcopal Church, which has at least three or four very gay-friendly parishes in the LA area.

Yet Robert saw our ad somewhere, and that spoke to him. A catholic church that ministers openly and lovingly to the gay community. That was a true turning point for me. It was validation that the dream of the ECC was important. In spite of the lack of parish growth, and the continuous feeling that the people don't care about what we're trying to do, there was someone who really did care. To stand and celebrate a baptism, and then two weeks

later to come back and celebrate essentially the same liturgy at his funeral, in the very same living room, was a focal point on my mind.

The parish continued to waffle along at 5 to 10 each week, with a few times when Jeffery and I were alone. We left Santa Ana and moved up here to the Russian River around Christmas of 1990, having to shut down St. John parish. The few loyal members went to other churches, and I am still in contact with a couple of them.

Meanwhile, while trying to get St. John Parish up and active, we had run several ads in various publications in the LA area. One day I received a letter from a college professor in Pocatello, Idaho, that was interested in becoming a priest. He had seen one of our ads while down visiting his sister. There had been a couple of self-styled priests come our way at St. John, and I was leery at first. We investigated this one with a fine toothed comb. Everything started looking good, and he was showing signs of ordination. I developed 10 questions to help him think about his call and share it with us, and those same 10 questions have brought thought, inspiration, and perhaps a little torture to everyone of our clergy here today.

On July 27, 1991, about four years after the church's founding, I ordained Bruce LeBlanc as a priest for the ECC. The ceremony was at the Episcopal Church in Pocatello, Idaho. Jeffery and I drove up, and it was a great celebration. There is nothing quite like the welcome a bishop gets from the altar guild ladies of an Episcopal church. It was exciting for everyone.

The church had grown. Not at all like I envisioned. God was starting to show me that He, not I, was in charge. It was a strange thing happening. Little did I know that this would be a pattern.

When Bruce was ordained -- four years after our founding -- I had no idea that four years later we would be here consecrating four bishops because we actually needed them.

The next two years were times of a small amount of national growth. They were critical years. Jeffery and I were settling into our new home, and we were beginning to deal with his progressive illness. Yet the church continued to sprout up. Marty Martin and Randy Lyde were ordained, and Oklahoma City became our next place of ministry, and thus our longest continuously running parish. We were going to ordain deacons in Oklahoma City, and I moved the ordinations up to make sure Jeffery would be able to attend. He became suddenly ill and hospitalized and missed those ordinations.

Then again in the summer of an odd-numbered year some major changes happened. I was flying to Boston to ordain two priests in Plattsburgh, New York. I had never even heard of Plattsburgh, New York. Just at the end, though, Jeffery decided to go, and we drove around New England and the Middle Atlantic states on our trek to visit all the state capitals. We got to Plattsburgh, and Mike Frost and Denis Martel were ordained to the priesthood.

Little did I know then that this was the stepping stone to an even bigger leap forward than before. Again, God was going to show me the way, and it would not be at all what I would guess.

We flew home and turned right around and flew to Phoenix to attend the MCC's national convention. Troy Perry introduced Jeffery and me to the general assembly as his good friends, and this was another high point in our validation. In many ways Troy is our father in faith, the first to really successfully pave the way of gay-positive Christianity. Again, it was a validation, and a valuable friendship.

Then we came home and were getting ready to go to Hawaii at the end of August for Jeffery's 40th birthday party. A few days after returning from Phoenix he told me we'd have the party, but he wouldn't be there. Jeffery died on August 9, and the last time I celebrated mass in this place we are

assembled today was his funeral on August 21. The last two weeks of his life were such beacons of faith and hope that all of us around him in person or by phone were propelled forward, much as a space ship can be propelled by gravity around a planet. We did bury him on Oahu on his birthday and celebrated with a party. Many of our clergy flew to Honolulu for this great celebration, and Father Marty had come here to Santa Rosa for the celebration here.

Thus at this altar the ECC has two very sacred steps forward in its life. From here its first saint was commended to God, and from here its first diocesan bishops are commended to the world. This is sacred space for us, amongst our friends, the United Church of Christ, the first mainline Christian church to openly affirm its gay members and people.

Jeffery left lots of money for the church. That was something else we had planned back in 1987 when we learned of his HIV status. That enabled me to travel without the burdens of a job. And travel I did, probably about 150,000 miles between then and now, mostly visiting ECC parishes throughout the country.

Those two things facilitated our growth. Of course, we thought the money Jeffery left the church would have funded it for many years. It grew so fast that we just had to wrestle at clergy conference on how to fund us now that the money is gone. That's hard on one hand, but such a great sign of success on the other. We have ministries in nearly half of our states now. Much of that is due to what happened in 1993 -- Mike Frost developing the seminary, Denis Martel taking vocations and really developing new clergy, and Jeffery's legacy of perseverance and inspiration to the end.

Little did I know as I laid hands on Mike and Denis or said goodbye to Jeffery that I would be here today, consecrating four such wonderfully qualified people to assist me in this great task. Little did I know that we would really need it. I had long ago given up on the original dream reflected

by the structure of our canons. And now it is becoming reality.

God is full of surprises. We are His pawns and His tools. We have a sense of our direction, but we are sometimes kept away from the full plan. We know we are going forward. I can honestly say today, in the summer of 1995, ten years after graduating from seminary, eight years after our incorporation, six years after Robert's baptism, four years after Bruce's ordination, and two years after Jeffery's death, that I have absolutely no clue what the summer of 1997 will bring us, but I know it will be terrific, I know it will be exciting, and I know that God will be calling the shots.

Marty, Mike, Denis, and Richard, you are now in this game with me. You see what goes does to us who wear these funny pointed hats. You see that we are called and directed and sent. We know the plan, but not all the strategies. Be prepared and look out.

Thomas Edison patented his incandescent light bulb in 1879. In 1882 his electric company had 203 customers in Manhattan. After seven more years, there were just 710 customers. Today, just over 100 years later, the combined number of customers of the electric utilities is in the hundreds of millions.

Our logo is *phos* and *zoe*, light and life. We are called to be the light of the world. Think about what the future has in store for you, and be prepared! That is our duty as bishops, to carry out God's call and plan. It is a duty you share with the clergy and all the people of God.

Amen.

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