

***SAINT MATTHIAS CATHOLIC CHURCH***  
***An American Catholic Community***

Saint Matthias Catholic Church is a Catholic Christian community that is committed to the person of Jesus Christ and to His teaching. We accept and believe the testimony of His apostles who were His first disciples and eye witnesses of His life, death, and resurrection from the dead. It was these same disciples that passed on to the church their own testimony about the person of Jesus and the events of His life. Embodied in their testimony are the very teaching of Jesus Himself.

***THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION AND THE GOSPEL***

We call this testimony of the first disciples the Apostolic Tradition. The word "tradition" means that which is passed on from one generation to another. The first disciples, whom we call apostles, proclaimed and taught the message of Jesus which is called the Gospel, which means Good News. Those who believed in the Good News were baptized and brought into a new community that was formed by the apostles. This community was called the Church. Within this community the Christians, as they came to be called, worshiped together, worked together, and took care of one another. They made every effort to follow the command of Jesus to love one another.

The apostles gave to this community their testimony, the Apostolic Tradition, to be passed on to succeeding generations. It was their desire that the newly formed Church would not forget this tradition. As Saint Paul writes, "So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by written letter." The Apostolic Tradition was passed on in the written letters of the apostles, which were collected into what we now call the New Testament. The Apostolic Traditions were also passed on by "word of mouth." This "oral tradition" is to be found in the community. The Liturgy, that is the Mass and the sacraments embody both the written and oral traditions of the apostles.

## ***THE HOLY SPIRIT***

Within the Christian community, people experience the very presence of God Himself. This presence of God is known as the Holy Spirit, It was the Holy Spirit that empowered the apostles so that they could continue the work of Jesus Christ in healing the sick and forgiving sins. Without the Holy Spirit, there could not be an authentic Christian community.

## ***THE CATHOLIC CHURCH***

With the passing of time, the message of Jesus spread and the Church grew. Very early, the Church came to be called the Catholic Church. The word "catholic" means universal. What Christians meant when they used the term "catholic" was that Jesus Christ was universal; that the Church embodied those Christians who lived in Rome or Antioch, as well as those who lived in Jerusalem, etc. It also meant that the Church includes those Christians of the past as well as those of the present. In other words, the community founded by the apostles is one and continuous in both time and space.

## ***THE CATHOLIC CHURCH EXPANDS***

The Church quickly expanded across the known world: eastward into Russia and India, to the West across Europe as far as England. There is much legend surrounding Christianity coming to England, but there is solid historical evidence of an active Celtic, or English, Church even from the time of St. Paul and St. Peter. There were British bishops at the early Councils of the Church, and the well-known St. Patrick was a British missionary to Ireland. Almost all of England was gradually Christianized through various sources.

In 664 A.D., the various bishops of England voluntarily agreed to come together under the leadership of the Roman Pope, out of obedience to the King and to further unify the entire Catholic Church.

***AND BRANCHES. . .***

By the time the Catholic Church was about 1000 years old, disagreements among Christians of the East and Christians of the West caused the Church to virtually split in half. Each half of the Church claimed to be the one true Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Eastern church became known as the Orthodox Church, and the Western church became called the Roman Catholic Church; yet, both remained Catholic.

The leaders of the Orthodox Church were called Patriarchs and resided in the then prominent cities of Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople. The Roman Catholic Church was lead by the Pope of Rome.

### ***THE ISSUE OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP***

One of the major disagreements that has caused the fractioning of the Catholic Church through her history, and was a major factor in the East-West rift, was the issue of Church leadership. Jesus commissioned His apostles to be the first leaders of His church. Before they died, they appointed others to lead the Church. These leaders were called bishops. This appointment was a sacrament called ordination. The Holy Apostles ordained the first bishops to be their successors. These first bishops in turn ordained others after them. This sacred line of leadership was called Apostolic Succession.

As the Church grew and developed, some bishops became more powerful than others. The bishops in the

church of the city of Rome acquired considerable influence. It was not long before the bishops of Rome, who began to call themselves Popes, began to insist that they were the head of the entire Catholic Church and that by Divine Right. Many bishops, particularly of the Eastern Church resisted the claim of the Roman bishops. This insistence finally provoked the first major rupture in the Catholic Church, which is now called the Great Schism of 1054.

## ***THE REFORMATION***

After the Great Schism, the Roman Catholic Church continued to develop in Western Europe. For the next 450 years, during Middle Ages, the Popes consolidated their power and extended their influence over Church and society. With the dawn of the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church was over laden with moral and political corruption. Many concerned religious leaders made efforts to reform the Church. These efforts at reform became known collectively as the Reformation. Two very different reformations resulted from these tensions. One became known as the Protestant Reformation which abandoned Catholicism, including apostolic succession and sacramentalism. The English Reformation was of a very different kind. The ancient Church of England never abandoned its fundamental Catholicism, but sought to restore it to its original purity. Although many mistakenly assume the Church of England was begun by Henry VIII, due to his desire to divorce his Queen in defiance of the

Roman Pope, this is not the actual truth. However unfortunate the circumstances of Henry's actions, the issue at the root was again one of church leadership. Roman leadership had at last become more oppressive than the English Church could tolerate. Henry at last broke the Roman yoke and returned the Church to the English bishops, under Royal Authority, more similar to the Orthodox Church.

The Church had now three major, ancient, fully Catholic expressions of the One, Holy, Catholic Apostolic Church.

### ***AN INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC CHURCH IN HOLLAND***

In the early half of the eighteenth century, a dispute between the Jesuits and the Archbishop of Utrecht, Holland caused a fourth branching in the Catholic Church. The Pope intervened in the conflict on the side of the Jesuits. Contrary to Church law, the Pope attempted to depose the Archbishop and sought to appoint a new archbishop for Utrecht. As a result, many Dutch Catholics remained loyal to the legitimate Archbishop and became an independent Catholic Church.

## ***VATICAN I PROCLAIMS A NEW DOGMA: PAPAL INFALLIBILITY***

In 1870, Pope Pius IX presided over a Church Council that came to be called Vatican I. It was at this Council that the notion of Papal Infallibility was proclaimed a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. Papal infallibility meant that when the Pope, by virtue of his office, speaks on behalf of the Church in regard to faith and morals, he speaks without error. In other words, it is impossible for the Pope to make a mistake when he speaks for the Church. This idea was made a dogma which means that every Catholic must believe it under pain of sin.

## ***THE OLD CATHOLIC MOVEMENT***

Many Catholics, especially in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, disagreed with the action of Vatican I. These dissenting Catholics believed that although the Pope may be the leader of the Catholic Church he is never infallible. Infallibility of the Pope is not an authentic Catholic belief nor was it ever a part of the teachings of Jesus Christ or of the Apostolic Tradition. Many of these Catholics who disagreed with Vatican I formed independent communities that came to be called Old Catholic. They were called Old Catholics because they sought to turn the clock back and adhere to the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church before all of the various schisms.

Old Catholic communities derive the Apostolic Succession for their leaders through the independent Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht. The Archbishop of Utrecht traces his Apostolic Succession all the way back to the Holy Apostles. The Old Catholics have a valid line of succession and, therefore, a valid priesthood with valid sacraments. This fact has never been denied by the Roman Catholic Church.

## ***INDEPENDENT CATHOLICISM***

Old Catholicism is closely related to other Catholic communities that became independent of Rome. These Catholic communities are growing throughout the world. For example, there are over five million independent Catholics in Brazil and nearly three million in the Independent Catholic Church of the Philippines. Other Catholic communities of this movement are called by various names such as the National Polish Church, the American Catholic Church or the Old Roman Catholic Church, etc.

## ***AN AUTHENTIC CATHOLIC COMMUNITY***

To be an authentic Catholic community, a group must be able to trace its Apostolic Succession back to the original apostles. That same group must maintain a faithful adherence to the Gospel of Jesus as expressed through Apostolic Tradition. Finally, that group must actively participate in the sacramental ministry of the historic Catholic Church.

## ***THE SACRAMENTAL MINISTRY***

Saint Matthias Catholic Church is Catholic in that it participates in the full sacramental ministry of the Church. The seven Sacraments of the historic Catholic Church are affirmed and practiced.

**1. Baptism** - we are washed clean of sin. Buried with Christ in the mystery of His death, we rise with Him to a new way of life.

**2. Confirmation** - Through the anointing with oil and the laying on of hands, the bishop or priest confers the Holy Spirit upon a Christian. In receiving the Spirit, the Christian is strengthened with the gifts he will need to take on an adult role in the Christian community.

**3. Holy Eucharist** - The celebration through which we renew and participate in Christ's birth, sacrificial death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. During this celebration we receive the actual Body and Blood of Christ, given to us under the forms of bread and wine for our spiritual nourishment.

**4. Reconciliation** - Along with Catholic and other Christian communities, we acknowledge that a sincere prayer of sorrow to our God will bring the response of His forgiveness. We also believe that Christ left us a special sacrament which is a powerful encounter with Jesus Christ and His loving forgiveness. Also called the sacrament of

reconciliation, Penance can be celebrated in two ways:

- A. Individual absolution is usually preceded by a Christian's confession of personal sins. The priest's prayer of forgiveness or absolution is said for each sincere penitent, at which time his additional gift of grace is imparted.
- B. General absolution is sacramental absolution, given once to a large number of people, especially when the number of penitents is too great to allow for individual confession of sins.

**5. Sacrament of the Sick** - consists of the anointing of sick members of the Christian community with oil, and prayers for their healing and forgiveness. The effects of this sacrament are strength and peace for the Christian in the face of his illness, and physical healing and recovery according to God's will.

**6. Marriage** - a man and woman join their two lives together into one. This sacrament is administered by the two partners themselves, with the priest or deacon acting as a witness on behalf of God and the Church. The Holy Spirit breathes God's own love into the couple's love, so that each becomes a source of grace for the other.

**7. Holy Orders** - is the sacrament through which the Church sets aside people for the special service of

ministry to the Christian community. This sacramental act is called ordination. There are three ranks or major orders in the ministry of the Church. They are deacon, priest, and bishop.

## ***DISTINCTIVES***

How does the American Catholic Communities differ from a Roman Catholic Church? Saint Matthias Catholic Church differs in the following ways:

1. The Catholics of our community do not accept the teaching of Papal infallibility and, therefore, are independent of the Pope's jurisdiction. As a result, The American Catholic Communities are not bound by some of the canons and regulations that are formulated and enforced in the Roman Catholic Church.
2. Priests and bishops are permitted to marry.
3. Women are encouraged to be more fully involved in the ministry of the Church. As Saint Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
4. Divorced people who remarry are able to be reconciled to the church through the grace of God and, therefore, are not excluded from the sacraments. Therefore, a divorced person may remarry with the blessing of the Church.
5. Artificial contraception is an issue of conscience between husband, wife and God.
6. Each Catholic is an equal part of the Church.

Therefore, lay people are encouraged to play a prominent role in the Church.

7. At Saint Matthias Catholic Church, no Christian is excluded from the sacramental ministry. All baptized Christians are invited to participate in the worship and sacraments of the Church.

## ***DISTINCTIVE MISSION***

The distinctive mission of Saint Matthias Catholic Church is two-fold. The brief history surveyed in this booklet serves to explain the particular call of the American Catholic Communities to bear witness to, or be a living active example of, the essential spiritual unity that exists among all the branches of Catholicism. Therefore, through our bishop, Saint Matthias Catholic Church is one of the founding diocese of the *Communion of Apostolic Sacramental Churches*. The *CASC* is an ecclesial communion commissioned to affirm, recognize and pray for all the branches of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and to embrace the clergy and laity of these branches as true brothers and sisters of Christ's One, Holy Church. In this, to be at least a prophetic pointer or prototype of unity in both an attitude of humility and charity, and in our works, worship and mission, that we may bear witness to that divine hope and calling, outwardly.

Secondly, we believe we have been called to draw all Christians into the fullest expression of Christ's church in

the convergence of sacramental ministry, charismatic power and evangelistic zeal in order to most fully portray the face of Christ's Church to the world.

Finally, Saint Matthias Catholic Church has a very special heart for those Catholics who for many reasons have felt separated from their Catholic roots and are seeking a valid and authentic way to be Catholic in today's world.

## **Appendix I**

### **Are We Really Catholic?**

First and foremost, the answer lies within the fact that the Old Catholic Church did not LEAVE the unified Catholic Church. They were initially separated by the issue of persecution. Therefore there has never been a real issue over the validity of the Old Catholics or their relationship with the Catholic Church.

Secondly, there have been repeated affirmations by the Roman Catholic Church through the Papacy and other governing bodies. Some of which are listed here.

### **Historical Affirmations Regarding our Validity by The Vatican**

- Utrecht receives Rights of Autonomy from Blessed Pope Eugene III in 1145.

- This Right is confirmed by Pope Leo in 1215 and becomes known universally as the Leonine Privilege.
- Privilege subsequently reconfirmed in two Church Councils in 1520 and 1717.

## **Most Recent Affirmations**

"The Roman Church recognizes the validity of Old Catholic Orders and Sacraments." 1974, Catholic Almanac, Our Sunday Visitor

A Concordat was signed between the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, and Archbishop Glazmaker of Utrecht in 1976, recognizing the Catholic status of one another and the validity of one another's Sacraments.

Dominus Iesus issued by the Roman Catholic Magisterium in the year 2000, signed by John Paul II on June 16, and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on August 6, states:

"The churches which, while not existing in perfect communion with the (Roman) Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by Apostolic Succession and a valid Eucharist, are true particular churches."

"The Old Catholics, like the Orthodox, possess a valid priesthood." Separated Brethren, William J. Whalen

"...Ordinations performed by the bishops of the Old Catholic Church are considered valid." A Practical

Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, Rev. Stanislaw  
Woywood, OFM, LLB

## Appendix II

### ***THE DECLARATION OF UTRECHT. A TRANSLATION OF THE PROFESSION OF FAITH, OR DECLARATION, FORMULATED BY THE OLD CATHOLIC BISHOPS ASSEMBLED AT UTRECHT. SEPTEMBER 24TH, 1889***

1. We adhere faithfully to the Rule of Faith laid down by St. Vincent of Lerins in these terms: "Id teneamus, ubique quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est; hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum." For this reason we persevere in professing the faith of the primitive Church, as formulated in the ecumenical symbols and specified precisely by the unanimously accepted decisions of the Ecumenical Councils held in the undivided Church of the first thousand years.

2. We therefore reject the decrees of the so-called Council of the Vatican, which were promulgated on July 18th, 1870 concerning the infallibility and the universal Episcopate of the Bishop of Rome, decrees which contradict the faith of the ancient canonical constitution by attributing to the Pope the plenitude of ecclesiastical powers over all Dioceses and over all the faithful. By denial of his primatial jurisdiction, we do not wish to deny the historic primacy which several Ecumenical Councils and the Fathers of the ancient Church have attributed to the Bishop of Rome by recognizing him as the *Primus inter pares*.

3. We also reject the dogma of the Immaculate Conception promulgated by Pius IX in 1854 in defiance of the Holy Scriptures and the contradiction to the tradition of

the first centuries.

**4.** As for other Encyclicals published by the Bishops of Rome in recent times; for example, the Bulls Unigenitus and Auctorem fidei, and the Syllabus of 1864, we reject them on all such points as are in the contradiction of the doctrine of the primitive Church, and we do not recognize them as binding on the conscience of the faithful. We also renew the ancient protest of the Catholic Church of Holland against the errors of the Roman Curia, and against its attacks upon the rights of national Churches.

**5.** We refuse to accept the decrees of the Council of Trent in matters of discipline, and as for the dogmatic decisions of that Council, accept them only so far as they are in harmony with the teaching of the primitive Church.

**6.** Considering that the Holy Eucharist has always been the true central point of Catholic worship, we consider it our duty to declare that we maintain with perfect fidelity the ancient Catholic doctrine concerning the Sacrament of the Altar, by believing that we receive the Body and Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ under the species of bread and wine. The Eucharistic celebration in the church is neither a continual repetition nor a renewal of the expiatory sacrifice which Jesus offered once for all upon the Cross, and it is the act by which we represent upon earth and appropriate to ourselves the one offering which Jesus Christ makes in Heaven, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews ix.11, 12 for the salvation of redeemed humanity, by appearing for us in the presence of God (Heb. ix. 24). The character of the Holy Eucharist being thus understood, it is, at the same time, a sacrificial feast,

by means of which the faithful, in receiving the Body and Blood of our Savior, enter into communion with one another (I Cor. x. 17).

7. We hope that Catholic theologians, in maintaining the faith of the undivided Church, will succeed in establishing an agreement upon all such questions as caused controversy ever since the Churches became divided. We exhort the priests under our jurisdiction to teach, both by preaching and by instruction of the young, especially the essential Christian truths professed by all Christian confessions, to avoid, in discussing controversial doctrines, any violation of truth or charity, and in word and deed to set an example to the members of our churches in accordance with the spirit of Jesus Christ our Savior.

8. By maintaining and professing faithfully the doctrine of Jesus Christ, by refusing to admit those errors which by the fault of men have crept into the Catholic Church, by laying aside the abuses in ecclesiastical matters, together with the worldly tendencies of hierarchy, we believe that we shall be able to combat efficaciously the great evils of our day, which are unbelief and indifference in matters of religion.

Old Catholic-several groups, including: (1) the Church of Utrecht, which severed relations with Rome in 1724; (2) The National Polish Church in the U.S., which has its origin near the end of the 19th century; (3) German, Austrian and Swiss Old Catholics, who broke away from union with Rome following the First Vatican Council in

1870 because they objected to the dogma of papal infallibility.

The formation of the Old Catholic communion of Germans, Austrians and Swiss began in 1870 at a public meeting held in Nuremberg under the leadership of A. Von Dolinger. Four years later episcopal succession was established with ordination of an Old Catholic German bishop by a prelate of the Church of Utrecht. In line with the "Declaration of Utrecht" of 1889, they accept the first seven ecumenical councils and doctrine formulated before 1054, but reject communion with the pope and a number of other Roman Catholic doctrines and practices. They have a valid priesthood and valid sacraments. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church notes that they have recognized Anglican ordinations since 1925, that they have full communion with the Church of England since 1932, and have taken part in ordination of Anglican Bishops.

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## *Our Mission/Vision*

You have come to a new parish community seeking to express the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Founded in Sacred Scripture, we seek to experience the full nature of the living, historic Catholic Church in its sacramental communion with a personal God; its charismatic joy in the Spirit; and its evangelistic zeal to share our blessed hope with all men. If in your personal journey to God, you seek a deeper experience of God in the sacraments, a more profound communion with His Spirit, spiritual growth, community with fellow believers, and service to a broken world, we welcome you to come with us: "Each one using whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."