

## **ON THE CATHOLICITY OF OUR IDENTITY AND AUTHENTICITY OF OUR SACRAMENTS**

As members of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC) we do not need validation of our Catholic identity and the sacraments we celebrate, apart from the fruits of the Spirit evidenced in our midst and in our work as the body of Christ in the world.

Our five communities of the Rocky Mountain Region are named with other Independent Catholic Churches in a blog statement on the website of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Denver, labelling us as “So-Called Catholics.” As said statement insinuates that there is only one way to be Catholic and denies the validity of our ordinations and our sacraments, a response is warranted.

The Archdiocese is correct that we of the ECC are not in communion with the Pope or their local Archbishop—by conscious choice. Formed as a separate denomination in 2003, the ECC is comprised of some 45 progressive Catholic communities across the U.S.A. and in pockets of Europe, and is a member communion of the National Council of Churches. Striving for unity in faith, relationship and mission, and seeking inclusive ministerial collaboration with other denominations and church jurisdictions, our churches here in Colorado have been active members of the Colorado Council of Churches since 2016. Since 2018 the 301 Faith Partners of Ft. Collins (Mary of Magdala Ecumenical Catholic Community, St Paul’s Episcopal Church, and Trinity Lutheran Church) have modelled our work together toward common goals in ministry, education and worship, while in 2019 we entered into an agreement of collaboration with the Rocky Mountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) related to our shared eucharistic celebrations and liturgical ministries.

In 2021 we elected Bishop Kae Madden as our local shepherd and formed as an independent Region of our Communion. Our Apostolic succession, understood as the inherited deposit of faith handed down to us from the Apostles, is safeguarded by our bishops. That historic and spiritual connection grounds our sacramental living and worshiping in the ancient Catholic tradition, wherein the real and active presence of Christ is recognized in Word, Sacrament and Community. With roots in the Old Catholic tradition (in 1870 the member Churches of the Union of Utrecht separated themselves from Rome in response to the Vatican’s centralization of church authority), we are living out a synodal model of church wherein our laity, clergy and bishops share in governance and decision-making.

Our definition of catholicity is more nuanced and broader than that of the Roman Church. Literal interpretations of apostolic succession run counter to an understanding that the apostolic faith is passed down, and need not necessarily be a physical consecration-line. To assert that the latter is necessary fancifully imagines a consistent practice in the first centuries of the Christian community. Also, to maintain that our episcopal lineage was broken by an invalid consecration in the past ignores the fact that, ever since Adam and Eve, the harlot Rahab, the adulterous

murderer David, the reluctant Jonah and the “least of the Apostles” Paul, the Spirit has and continues to channel grace using imperfect vessels.

Authentic Sacraments flow from our relationship with Christ and through them we are empowered as the Body of Christ in the world. Admittedly, our married clergy, our ordained women, our affirmation of LGBT people and their relationships, and our laity's participation in church governance do set us apart from the Roman Church, as does our recognition of Christ's open invitation to the Eucharist for all who desire to be in communion with him and with us.

"Invalid?" "Illicit?" The Roman hierarchy has every right to state what is and is not appropriate for the members of their church. It is not within their authority to dictate what is and is not authentic for other churches. There is more than one way to be Catholic.