

## A Letter of Inquiry Concerning the Ecumenical Catholic Communion

Bishop Hickman:

My name is Claire, and I am a sophomore in high school. I recently stumbled upon your website and was immediately intrigued. I first sent this email to your associate pastor, but he never replied. I have never heard of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, so, as you probably understand, I have a few questions. Please note that I do not intend for any of these questions to imply disrespect. I am on a sincere search for the truth, and your answers will provide a great deal of information for me. Thank you in advance.

- 1) I understand your church derived from the Old Catholic movement who denounced the first Vatican council's declaration of papal infallibility and the primacy of papal jurisdiction. Why do you use the second Vatican council's translation of the mass into native language, when you do not accept the first Vatican council's teachings? Also, I saw in your videos that you use the Roman missal, but not the new Roman missal translation. Why is that?
- 2) Do your ordained ministers have something like a seminary? Are there other religious life opportunities besides priests, deacons, and lay people in the ECC? For example, nuns or monastic life?
- 3) How large is the ECC?
- 4) Do you believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist?
- 5) Does the ECC offer Reconciliation?

I would also like to bring to your attention that on your website in the "What Kind of Catholic Are You?" quiz section, it states that Roman Catholics "believe that gay and lesbian people are 'disordered.'" This is not true. Roman Catholics believe that people are not in control of their desires. Whether it be a sexual desire to a male or female, humans are made to find beauty in every person. Sexual desire is a good thing. However, all people are called to chastity, and the gift of sex is to be saved until marriage.

Thank you for reading. I would greatly appreciate a reply.

Sincerely,

Claire

Greetings Claire!

Thank you for your interest in our church. I am very pleased to know that someone at your age is seriously thinking about the state of Catholicism in our day. I very much appreciate your questions and I will do my best to answer them:

- 1) I understand your church derived from the Old Catholic movement who denounced the first Vatican council's declaration of papal infallibility and the primacy of papal jurisdiction. Why do you use the second Vatican council's translation of the mass into native language, when you do not accept the first Vatican council's teachings? Also, I saw in your videos that you use the Roman missal, but not the new Roman missal translation. Why is that?

It is true that we do not receive the teaching of Vatican I concerning the definition of Papal Infallibility and Primacy of Jurisdiction as a dogma of historic Christianity. As conscientious Catholics we do not believe that this definition can be supported by the previous 1900 years of the historical teaching and tradition of the Catholic Church. The teaching of Vatican I is what is called ultra-montanism, an idea that had been around among some Catholics since the middle ages but never universally accepted by the Catholic faithful. There is another Catholic understanding that is much older and broader than that of the Ultra-Montanists. This majority view is called Conciliarism which is a much stronger tradition historically and is also shared by the various Eastern Orthodox Churches. Conciliarism teaches that the highest authority in the Church is the Ecumenical Council and that even the bishop of Rome, the Pope, is subject to the authority of the Ecumenical Council. As Old Catholics we still see ourselves as members of the same Catholic Church of which the Church of Rome is an important part. We just do not recognize that we are subject to the jurisdiction of the Church at Rome. We see the Roman Church as a local Catholic Church, albeit an important church, that has attempted to impose the extravagant claims of her bishops (popes) upon all the other local Catholic Churches in a vain attempt toward unity through juridical coercion. We are not the only Catholics that have rejected this Ultramontane teaching of the Roman Church. Presently, the majority of Roman Catholics also reject this teaching in practice when they ignore the recent papal teaching of *Humane Vitae* which forbids the use of artificial contraception in limiting the size of their families. Therefore, as conscientious Catholics we do not recognize Vatican I as a validly convened Ecumenical Council. However, we still see ourselves as a valid part of the Catholic Church in the Western European tradition that we share with Rome, as well as with Canterbury (the Worldwide Anglican Communion). Unlike Vatican I we applaud the teachings of Vatican II and we welcome the teaching and renewal of the Catholic liturgy of Vatican II to be consistent with Conciliarism and a move away from the error of Ultramontanism. Therefore, we are happy to use the liturgical reforms of Vatican II because it reflects a more ancient form of liturgical practice that is in our tradition as well. The Vatican II liturgy is a revival of our common liturgical tradition and is not a "new" liturgy created by the Council. The latest revision of the Roman use of the liturgy is a usurpation of the authority of the Vatican II by the Roman Curia and is being imposed upon the local churches of the English speaking world. This action of Pope Benedict XVI is an attempt at returning to the thinking and practice of Ultramontanism. Therefore, many Old Catholics, and especially the ECC, reject the use of this liturgy. (By the way, not only do we have a great love for Pope Saint John XXIII who convened Vatican II, but we also love Pope Francis for the same reason: they both seem to be Conciliarists as opposed to Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI who seem to be of the Ultramontane party.)

2) Do your ordained ministers have something like a seminary? Are there other religious life opportunities besides priests, deacons, and lay people in the ECC? For example, nuns or monastic life?

The majority of the priests of the ECC received their formation in Roman Catholic seminaries and universities. The ECC does not have an established school for ministerial formation. However, we are developing an online school of theological studies. We do believe that an appropriate theological and ministerial education is essential for any who feel a call to ordained ministry among us. We do believe that ordination should be open to both men and women, the married and the unmarried. Within the ECC we have two religious orders: the Franciscans of Reconciliation and a Benedictine community.

3) How large is the ECC?

The ECC is a small Old Catholic jurisdiction among many others. Within our communion there are about 50 faith communities with a total population of almost 10,000 members worldwide. We have only been in existence as an organized ecclesial body since 2003. We prefer to be called Ecumenical Catholics rather than Old Catholics.

#### 4) Do you believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

Yes, we believe that the risen Christ is present in the Eucharistic action and the bread and wine when consecrated during the celebration of the holy sacrifice of the mass. We believe that receive the whole life and person of Jesus Christ, body and blood, soul and divinity, when we participate in the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharist is the mystical supper of the Lamb of God. With the exception of the teaching of Vatican I and the 1854 encyclical of Pope Pius IX we share in the same theological teaching tradition of the Roman Catholic Church.

#### 5) Does the ECC offer Reconciliation?

Yes, we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation and affirm the traditional seven sacraments of the Church. We also share the same understanding of the use and practice of what is called sacramentals, holy water, icons, Marian devotions and the Communion of Saints, etc...

I would also like to bring to your attention that on your website in the "What Kind of Catholic Are You?" quiz section, it states that Roman Catholics "believe that gay and lesbian people are 'disordered.'" This is not true. Roman Catholics believe that people are not in control of their desires. Whether it be a sexual desire to a male or female, humans are made to find beauty in every person. Sexual desire is a good thing. However, all people are called to chastity, and the gift of sex is to be saved until marriage.

I quite agree with your view of human sexuality and human sexual desire. However, the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, as affirmed by Pope Benedict XVI remains the same: That a homosexual person is intrinsically disordered. I do not recall if this teaching has ever been officially rescinded. However, I am encouraged by the new attitude of Pope Francis and I am hopeful that such a view will be done away with. This remains to be seen.

Claire, again, thank you for your interest and for giving me an opportunity to respond to your questions regarding the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. May God bless you on your pilgrimage of faith. Perhaps you might consider visiting one of our faith communities in order to further the conversation. You would always be most welcome.

Respectfully yours in Christ Jesus the Lord,

Bishop Peter Elder Hickman