

CHRISTIANITY

Historically, Christianity can be considered and broken down into three main branches consisting of Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, as, respectively, within and outside the “mystical body” of the Church. However, the gradual movement toward ecumenism since the mid-20th century, particularly between the Roman Catholic and major Protestant Churches, has led theologians and popes to search for a more inclusive understanding of membership in the mystical body of Jesus Christ.

Catholicism:

The foundations of the Roman Catholic Church lie in the evangelical work of the Apostles of Jesus Christ in the first century CE. The Church comprises its people, forming the mystical body of Jesus Christ with Christ as the head and the people as the members; and the hierarchical structure centered in Rome. The Church is led by the pontiff and exists around the world under the leadership of local archbishops, bishops, and clergy in an episcopal form of government.

Historically, the Church has regarded the other two main branches of Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, as, respectively, within and outside the “mystical body” of the Church. However, the gradual movement toward ecumenism since the mid-20th century, particularly between the Roman Catholic and major Protestant Churches, has led theologians and popes to search for a more inclusive understanding of membership in the mystical body of Jesus Christ.

Religious Elements:

Scriptural and Doctrinal Sources

- The Bible, comprising Old and New Testaments, is venerated as the Word of God.
- Doctrine is promulgated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and is set out succinctly as a statement of faith in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.
- The Pope may issue guidance on questions of faith and morals from time to time, exercising the teaching authority granted by Jesus Christ to Saint Peter. When he does so, speaking or writing *ex cathedra* (that is, from the chair of Saint Peter), his declarations are taken as point of view of the church and must be accepted and believed by faithful Roman Catholics.

Sacraments

The Church recognizes seven sacraments:

- **Baptism:** Baptism is the sacrament of admission to the Church and incorporation in the body of Christ. It erases all sin, including the stain of original sin (the state of sin common to all humanity since the fall of Adam). Baptism is administered by the sprinkling of water over the head in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and is normally done shortly after birth or in infancy. Adult baptism is administered to converts.
- **Confirmation:** In confirmation, the bishop confers the Holy Spirit on a new member of the Church by anointing the person with holy oils and by laying on of hands. Confirmation is usually administered when children have reached adolescence, when they will be able to take an active part and play a charismatic role in the life of the Church.
- **The Eucharist:** The Eucharist is both a “sacrifice” and a sacrament. The elements of bread and wine are sacrificed, to become the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, commemorating both the Last Supper of Christ and His crucifixion and death on the cross for the sins of humanity. As a sacrament (Holy Communion), the faithful receive and consume the body and blood of Christ. Normally, the laity receives Communion in the form of bread only, whereas the celebrant (priest) consumes both bread and wine.
- **Penance and reconciliation.** This penitentialrite confers the forgiveness of sins. In the Roman Catholic Church, the penitent privately confesses personal sins to a priest, who grants absolution “in the name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” With permission of bishops, priests may grant general absolutions to penitent parishioners.
- **Anointing of the sick:** The seriously ill are anointed by a priest with holy oils on the sense organs (eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, and hands), in an act of absolution of sins. When the recipients are fully conscious and in control of their mental faculties, the anointing is preceded by confession and followed by Communion. The sacrament was formerly known as extreme unction.
- **Matrimony:** A consenting man and a consenting woman confer this sacrament upon each other by exchanging and accepting vows and establishing a partnership for life for their own good and for the procreation of children. The priest acts as a witness. Marriage is regarded as a state ordained by God that persists for the life of the participants and that only God can render null. The Church does not grant divorce to baptized couples but will grant an annulment where the marriage can be shown to have been defective and, therefore, a nullity from the start.
- **Holy orders:** This sacrament confers the power to administer the sacraments. It is conferred only by bishops on deacons, priests and bishops.

Moral Code

- **Natural moral law:** Humans, being capable of reason, are ordained by this law to do good and avoid sin. Natural law is universal in its precepts, and its authority extends to all humanity.
- **The law of God:** This comprises the old law, delivered by God to the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai (the Ten Commandments, or Decalogue); and the new law of Jesus Christ (His Commandment to love one another as He has loved us).

- Eight Beatitudes of Christ's Sermon on the Mount ("Blessed are the poor in spirit..."): These provide Roman Catholics with Christ's prescription for a moral life.

Houses of Worship

Roman Catholic churches in Canada vary in architectural style from early-settlement wood structures to neo-Gothic and modern buildings of stone and brick. The interior layout is patterned on that of the modified Roman basilica of Europe and North America and consists of a narthex (vestibule); a nave (large space for the congregation); and a chancel, or sanctuary (elevated space around the altar for clergy, choir, acolytes), which is separated from the nave by a rood screen or railing. The choir may be up in a loft. Some recent churches are semi-round, to minimize the distance of any congregant from the altar. The size of the building generally reflects the size of the congregation. Churches commonly have a bell tower or a steeple bearing a cross.

Devotional Practices and Services

- The Mass is the central service of worship and is a celebration of the Eucharist. It consists of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word, including scriptural readings and a homily or sermon; and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, comprising the offertory, Eucharistic prayer, and the consecration and distribution of the Eucharist. The Mass frequently includes the singing of hymns by the congregation, accompanied by music. Roman Catholics are obliged to attend Mass on Sunday (or Saturday evening, the beginning of the Sabbath) and on other obligatory days of observance.
- Other devotional services are prescribed for special days of observance, including vigil services at Easter.
- The rite of confession, in which the penitent seeks absolution of sins, is practised on regular occasions in all parishes.

Clergy, Organization, and Government

The clergy comprises priests, including the Pope, bishops and presbyters (the latter commonly referred to specifically as priests), and deacons:

- The Pope, bishop of Rome, is successor to Saint Peter, vicar of Christ and head of the Church on Earth. His seat of authority is Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, an independent city-state in Rome.
- The bishops, as direct successors to the Apostles of Christ (not as vicars of the Pope), are responsible for church governance, teaching the faithful, and propagating the faith within their regions, or dioceses.
- The presbyters (priests) are ordained to Holy Orders by the bishops to preach the Word of God and to administer sacraments, with the exception of Holy Orders (commissioning of a lay person to the priesthood or diaconate).
- The diaconate is a group of deacons ordained to carry out certain works of the Church. In recent times, the work of deacons has been extended to include baptisms, administration of Holy Communion once a priest has consecrated the elements of bread and wine, and preaching at Mass.
- All members of the Roman Catholic clergy must be male and unmarried. They take a vow of chastity.
- Additionally, orders and communities of nuns and brothers have been formed over the centuries to pursue (in religious, sometimes cloistered, communities) the vocations of contemplative prayer for humanity, teaching, and nursing. Religious communities whose members take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are called orders.

The Roman Catholic Church's seat of government is the Vatican. The pontiff (supreme priest), or Pope, is head of government of the Vatican and head of the Church. The Church worldwide, however, exists within the nations of the world, and for practical reasons of management as well as in recognition of the powers of the bishops as successors of the Apostles, it is organized below the Vatican level on episcopal lines, that is, under the administration of bishops:

- The Pope, as bishop of Rome and successor to Saint Peter in an unbroken line, is vicar of Christ and head of the Church on Earth. The Pope ordains bishops from the priesthood.
- Cardinals are archbishops or bishops appointed to a special office by the Pope. They meet collegially as the Sacred College of Cardinals, at the Vatican, to elect a new Pope after the death of the previous incumbent. They serve as principal advisors to the Pope and senior members of the Vatican bureaucracy (Roman Curia).
- Bishops, as heads of dioceses, exercise direct authority over the faithful. As direct successors to the Apostles, they speak with authority as interpreters of the teachings of Christ and the Church in the matters of faith and morals. Dioceses may be grouped for administrative advantage in archdioceses under the administration of archbishops. The bishops and archbishops ordain laymen to the priesthood.
- Presbyters (priests) are generally appointed as pastors by bishops to administer individual parishes and churches within the dioceses.

Propagation of the Faith

- Evangelization of non-Christians living in a diocese is the duty of pastors of parishes.
- The Roman Catholic Church maintains missions in remote regions of Canada and around the world to advance evangelization in countries and regions where the majority of people are non-Christian.

Major Celebrations and Observances:

Dates on which events are celebrated may vary from year to year according to variations in the liturgical calendar.

Days of Regular Observance

Roman Catholics are obliged to attend Mass on Sundays. In addition, the following are holy days of obligation in the Church:

- Feast of Mary, Mother of God: I January.
- Easter Sunday: Sunday after Passion Sunday; date is the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox.
- Ascension of the Lord.

- Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 15 August.
- All Saints' Day: 1 November.
- Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 8 December.
- Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day): 25 December.

Special Observances

Days of special observance include the following:

- Feast of the Epiphany: Sunday after Christmas.
- Passion (Palm) Sunday (commemorates Jesus Christ's entry into Jerusalem; the Last Supper; His betrayal, arrest, imprisonment, torture and trial before Pontius Pilate; and His crucifixion and death on the Cross): Sunday before Easter.
- Holy Thursday (traditional celebration of the Last Supper).
- Good Friday: Friday preceding Easter Sunday.

Dress Requirements

There are no dress requirements for laity. Clergy may be obliged to wear specific habits or articles of clothing.

Dietary Requirements

- There are no dietary requirements.
- Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, and Good Friday are mandated days of fasting. Roman Catholics traditionally abstain from eating meat on those days.
- Roman Catholics may practise limited fasting by voluntarily avoiding certain foods during the remainder of the season of Lent, as a form of sacrifice and devotion.

Medical and Health Requirements

- The Roman Catholic Church is opposed to abortion, believing the fetus at the earliest stage of life to be fully human and in possession of a soul.
- Roman Catholics have no theological or doctrinal objections to organ transplants, blood transfusion, or autopsies carried out for legal or scientific research. Life may be artificially prolonged when it is medically appropriate and is intended to aid the patient to recovery. Prolonging life artificially where there is no hope of recovery is not required.
- The Church is opposed to artificial insemination, considering it immoral. It is opposed to sterilization except where it is medically necessary for the health of the patient.
- The Church is opposed to artificial means of birth control.

Death and Burial:

- Roman Catholics, like other Christians, believe that death brings the end of earthly life and the beginning of new life in the Kingdom of God. Consequently, the Christian funeral is a liturgical celebration.
- The Church's *Order of Christian Funerals* prescribes three liturgies: one for the home, one for the church and one for the cemetery. The church celebration is normally a Mass.
- The dying must be given attention and care so that they can live their last moments in dignity and peace.
- Burial should occur in consecrated ground of a Roman Catholic cemetery, whenever possible.
- There are no theological or doctrinal objections to cremation, provided that it is not intended to demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body.

Orthodox:

Orthodox religions include the following denominations:

- Antiochian Orthodox Church.
- Armenian Orthodox Church.
- Greek Orthodox Church.
- Macedonian Orthodox Church.
- Russian Orthodox Church.
- Serbian Orthodox Church.
- Ukrainian Orthodox Churches.

The term *orthodox*, derived from Greek, means "right teaching" or "right worship." The gradual adoption of the term by the Eastern Christian Churches reflects their view of the correctness of their position in doctrinal differences with the Roman Catholic Church.

According to the patriarchate of Constantinople, it was the Apostle Saint Andrew who founded the Eastern Christian Church, now commonly known as the Orthodox Church, in the Roman Empire city of Byzantium. Saint Andrew was the brother of Saint Peter, who founded the Church in Rome. The ancient city of the Persian, Greek and Roman Empires was renamed Constantinople under the reign of Roman Emperor Constantine after he moved his capital there in 330 CE. Today, it is named Istanbul and is the capital city of Turkey.

By the 5th century, the Byzantine Church was one of the five major sees, or seats of authority, of the ancient Christian Church, which was then flourishing under the Roman Empire, by then called the Byzantine Empire. One of the sees, Rome, was Latin-speaking. The others, in Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, were all Greek-speaking. At the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, all had agreed to profess a common creed, the Nicene Creed. (It was later modified at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, in answer to heresies.) But by the 5th century, the claim of the Roman pontiff not only to primacy among the five patriarchs as first among equals, but also to ecclesiastical and doctrinal jurisdiction on grounds of his succession to Saint Peter, was hotly contested by the Greek patriarchs, who supported government by pentarchy, the rule of five equals.

The struggle for dominance continued for the next thousand years. As the control of the emperor in

Constantinople over the western part of the empire waned under successive invasions from Italy and other regions, so grew the separation of the Greek and Roman Churches. Because of the close religious and political connections between the emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople throughout that period, the influence of the patriarch of Constantinople grew among his Greek peers. Today, he is still recognized as “first among equals,” though the title grants little in the way of actual jurisdictional authority. Rather, it is a role of spiritual leadership. The rank is partially attributed by historians to the Council of Nicaea, which assigned him preeminence after the Roman pope.

Protestantism:

Protestant religions are a large group of denominations of Christianity, which include Lutheranism, Anglican, Reformed Churches, Presbyterian, Congregationalist Churches, Anabaptists, Brethren, Methodists, Pietists and Holiness Churches, Baptists, Apostolic Churches, Pentecostalism, Charismatics, African Initiated Churches, United and Uniting Churches, Quakers, Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, Southcottites, Millerites, and British-Israelism.

Lutheran (for example)

The Lutheran Church began in 1517 under the leadership of Martin Luther, a Catholic priest in Wittenberg, Germany. “The 95 Theses,” in which he set down his points of dissent with the doctrine, rituals and government of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as his Small and Large Catechisms, among other writings, formed the basis for the Lutheran Church’s doctrinal approach to Christianity. Luther’s act of protest against the Roman Catholic Church is generally regarded as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

It was Luther’s intention to bring about reform in the Roman Catholic Church, not necessarily to start a new Church. That proved impossible in the tide of popular dissent against Rome that swept through Europe in that period. Initially, at least, Luther remained a Catholic in spirit, if not in doctrinal belief, and the Church he began retains much liturgy in common with the Roman Catholic Church. Lutheran doctrine then, as today, differed in significant ways from Catholic doctrine. The two Churches have explored ways to reach ecumenism for decades, though little formal agreement has been achieved.

Lutherans share with most Christians the belief in the Trinity of Father, Son and, Holy Spirit. They also share a belief in the sacraments initiated by Jesus Christ: baptism and Holy Communion. They believe that salvation is obtained through faith in Jesus Christ and not through good works.

Religious Elements:

Scriptural and Doctrinal Sources

- Old and New Testaments (recognized as the written Word of God).
- Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the Lutheran Confessions, also considered the true and unadulterated Word of God).
- Apostle’s Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed.
- Small Catechism of Luther.
- Large Catechism of Luther.
- Unaltered Augsburg Confession.
- Apology for the Augsburg Confession.
- Smalcald Articles with the Treatise.
- Formula of Concord.

Sacraments

- Holy Communion: This sacrament is celebrated every Sunday and can be celebrated on special occasions, such as marriages and funerals.
- Baptism: A person can be baptized only once. Christians live and affirm their baptism through daily repentance, receiving forgiveness and renewal in the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a daily dying to sin and rising to newness of life. In the baptismal celebration water is used generously. A variety of modes are used; pouring and immersion are rich symbols of the nature of baptism.
- Though not regarded as sacraments, additional rites practiced include:
 - Private and public confession
 - Confirmation.
 - Marriage.
 - Ordination.
 - Commendation of the Dying.
 - Burial of the Dead.

Moral Code

- Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, particularly His commandment to “love one another.”

Devotional Practices and Services

- The worship service has a format similar to those of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches: principally, a celebration of the Eucharist, preceded by prayers of introduction, scriptural readings and a sermon.
- Many hymns are traditional; however, modern music is gaining favour in some congregations.
- Prayer is given to celebrate the Word of God.
- Holy Communion is celebrated every Sunday.

Clergy, Organization, and Government

- **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**
 - Local congregations are grouped in Conferences.
 - Conferences are grouped in Synods that are organized along regional lines across Canada.
 - Congregations, Conferences and Synods are led by elected councils.
 - Synods meet in the National Church Council.
 - Clergy are bishops, who lead Synods, and pastors who lead congregations.
 - A national bishop is elected by Synods to lead the National Church Council.
- **Lutheran Church – Canada**
 - Local congregations are grouped under one of three regional Conferences.
 - Conferences are grouped under a national Synod.
 - Representatives are elected at each level.
 - Clergy are pastors and deacons.

- Association of Free Lutheran Churches of Canada

- Congregations are independent, maintaining the national association for coordination and information dissemination.

- Clergy are pastors of congregations.

Major Celebrations and Observances:

Dates on which events are celebrated may vary from year to year according to variations in the liturgical calendar.

Days of Regular Observance

- Every Sunday (day of rest and worship).
- Advent (preparation for Christmas): begins four Sundays before Christmas Day.
- Christmas Eve and Christmas Day: 24 and 25 December.
- Epiphany (manifestation of Jesus; visit by the Magi): 6 January.
- Baptism of the Lord: third Sunday after Christmas.
- Transfiguration of the Lord.
- Ash Wednesday (beginning of Lent).
- Lent (period of fasting): 40 weekdays.
- Palm Sunday (Jesus enters Jerusalem): Sunday before Easter.
- Holy Thursday (the Last Supper).
- Good Friday (Jesus' crucifixion).
- Easter Vigil (first service of Easter).
- Easter Sunday (Jesus' resurrection): first Sunday of the first full moon after the vernal equinox.
- Ascension Thursday (Jesus' ascension).
- Pentecost (birth of the Christian Church).
- Holy Trinity Sunday.
- All Saints' Day: 1 November.
- Christ the King (or Reign of Christ).

Special Observances

- Reformation Sunday: 31 October or Sunday preceding that date.

All information is extracted from the following sources:

Religions in Canada. (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/pub/rc/index-eng.asp>

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