

The Church

- 811–12** There are specific unique characteristics of the Church, which, when taken together, reflect the understanding we have of the Trinity.
- For the Church is one, just as God is one; it is holy, as God is holy; it is catholic, meaning universal, just as the Spirit of Love is offered to all people; and it is apostolic because Christ has sent us out to undertake a mission of love, justice, peace, and holiness.

It is essential for us Christians to remain in unity.

The Church Is One

- 813** It is essential for us Christians to remain in unity because Christ prays for such unity in the Spirit of Love.
- Love, by its very nature, is communion, and communion is the bedrock of the Church.
- Unity is of the essence of the Church, which is a great mystery to us!
- 814** Even though the people of the Church receive many diverse gifts of the Spirit, all this diversity works together for the common good.

There are many cultures,
many backgrounds,
many traditions,
each rich
and each welcome.

It was in this context that the Church prays
in the Letter to the Ephesians
that we might make “every effort
to maintain the unity of the Spirit
in the bond of peace.”

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And what is that bond?
Charity above all.
A common profession of faith.
Everyday celebrations of worship.
An orderly succession of bishops
providing leadership and holy order.

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Having and maintaining this unity,
This sense of being *one*,
is essential for us to really live deeply
with Christ.

The Catholic Church,
under the mantle of Peter’s successors,
and together with the bishops,
is that one place of unity
where we believe the hope
expressed by Jesus is realized:

ut unum sint,
“that all may be one.”

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Down through the centuries,
there have been divisions and disagreements
for which people on both sides
were to blame.

Such ruptures wound the body of Christ
and are rooted in our own sins.

They cause heresies,
schisms,
disputes,
and deep divisions.

818 But we cannot blame those now living
who were born into these communities,
baptized in Christ and faithful to love.
The Catholic Church accepts all these other Christians
with respect and affection
as brothers and sisters in Christ.
They have a right to be called Christians
and are united in the Lord.

819 Furthermore, many elements
of holiness and truth
are found outside the visible confines
of the Catholic Church:
Scriptures,
the life of grace,
faith, hope, and charity,
gifts of the Holy Spirit.

God's love flows through these churches,
and they are a means of salvation for many.

820 It is up to us now to work for greater unity,
to pray for it and maintain it.
The desire to recover the unity of all Christians
is a gift of Christ
and a call of the Holy Spirit,
according to the
Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism,
published in 1964.

821 For unity to become a reality,
we must have the following:
a permanent renewal of the Church,
which is the driving force toward unity;
conversion of heart as the faithful try to live
ever more deeply in Christ;
shared prayer among our churches,
which is the very soul of this movement;
a greater understanding of each other,
ecumenical training for our respective clergy,
dialogue among our theologians,
and collaboration in service to humankind.



822 This unity is the work of the whole Church
and is rooted in the Spirit of Love,
enlightening us to see love
as it is revealed in Christ.

GROUP OR PERSONAL PROCESS

*What do you believe we Christians all hold in common with one another?
What are the chief obstacles to more profound unity among us?*

*Why is it essential for the churches to be unified? What harm does disunity
do to the work of the reign of God on earth?*