

Ecumenical:

PE - "Ecumenical. One of the decrees from Vatican II dealt with ecumenisms. The goal was to increase understanding between all Christians through dialogue, the study of scripture, and common prayer with the goal to unite members of the various churches, without conflict and competition."

Father.Victor - We are a community of communities which are ecumenical and catholic in that we celebrate a characteristically Catholic faith tradition that is not sectarian. We share a common theology and liturgical tradition with the Catholic Church. Our deacons, priests and bishops participate in the same historic apostolic succession as do the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and other apostolic Churches. We share the same historical developments as Western Christianity. We trace our modern roots to the emergence of the Old Catholic movement which began in 1870 as a response to the first Vatican Council's pronouncement of Papal Infallibility and the primacy of papal jurisdiction. The Catholics of our faith communities, though recognizing the importance of the Pope in his role as a sign of unity and as an important source of leadership within the Church, view the dogma of papal infallibility as a reinforcement of authoritarianism within the Church, and a misuse of power which runs counter to the spirit, example and teachings of Jesus. The dogma of Papal Infallibility, though an effort to create unity within the Church, has had the opposite effect. It now stands as an immense obstacle to the unity of the Church and diminishes the Pope as the successor of Peter and as a sign of unity. The dogma of Papal Infallibility and primacy of jurisdiction are, at best, sectarian and thus not truly catholic.

We recognize that each baptized person is an equal member of the Catholic Church. No bishop, priest, or deacon owns the Church, the sacramental ministry, or the grace of Christ. Therefore, lay people play an important and prominent role in the governance of the Church. All must respect, as well as actively seek to discern, how the Holy Spirit is motivating the faithful to act. In Catholic tradition this is called ascertaining the "sensus fidelium" --- the sense of the faithful.

As an Ecumenical Catholic Church we uphold the following practices:

- Invitation to the Sacramental Life.

Consistent with Catholic theology, especially as promulgated by the second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII, we recognize the baptism and faith of all our Christian brothers and sisters. By virtue of our common baptism, a genuine

unity already exists in Christ's Church. Therefore, we are pleased to make known to all our Christian brothers and sisters, regardless of denominational affiliation, Christ's invitation to partake in the Eucharist. All the baptized are welcome to receive and to celebrate the sacramental life in our communities. We recognize that the sacraments are not rewards for any human achievement or accomplishment but are divine gifts of grace to enable us to become the People of God.

- Invitation to Co-equal ministry

In our communities all the baptized, men and women alike, are given the opportunity to respond to a genuine vocation and to fully participate in the ministerial priesthood. As St. Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; all are one in Christ Jesus." We recognize and are acting to correct the injustice done by the long-standing practice of excluding women from ordained ministry, which unfairly diminishes women within the Church and also within the current world culture. Presently, within many of the communities of our Diocese, women are actively engaged in the ordained priestly ministry and we have already enjoyed benefits of the coequal ministry of women in our faith communities.

Similarly, we affirm those, whether lay or ordained ministers, who are called to serve the People of God in a variety of life states which include people who are single, or have taken promises of celibacy, commitment, or marriage.

- Invitation to Intimate Commitment

The experiences and insights of laypersons are nowhere more needed than in the area of intimate human relationships. We believe that the gift of sexual union is a source and celebration of love for couples, which allows for the special and safe sharing of intimacy. We consider it a danger to marriage and other intimate relationships to be denied sexual sharing. This has significant implications for Catholic practice, particularly as it applies to divorce and remarriage.

Divorce is traumatic for all who experience it --- spouses, children or extended family. Yet, in many circumstances, divorce is the best and most faithful response to permanently broken relationships. For many, whose marriages have failed, yet who still have the vocation of marriage, the co-joining in intimate love with another created in God's image and likeness, there is a void in not being able to fulfill that vocation. For most of these, we do not require participation in an ecclesial annulment process which may, in many cases, add further damage to the

health and wellbeing of an individual. We join our Eastern Christian brothers and sisters who have carried on the tradition of divorce and remarriage from the first eleven hundred years of our common history. We counsel the remarried to reflect upon all that has passed and to grow in all that will come during their new marriage. These new unions can best be nourished in the sacramental life of the Church.

- Invitation to follow conscience

The use of contraception and artificial birth control as a way of responsibly limiting the size of one's family is an issue of conscience to be decided by couples. We believe the use of contraception, if used responsibly, can be a positive good as a means of increasing the frequency of the gift of sexual union, reducing the incidence of abortion for unwanted pregnancies and limiting the spread of sexually transmitted disease.

We affirm the dignity of all human persons regardless of race, national origin, religious affiliation, gender, or sexual orientation. We strive for justice within the universal Church and the whole world. As a Community of Communities we follow the ancient wisdom of the Church as expressed in the words of St. Augustine, "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."