

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

## *GENERAL QUESTIONS*

1. How did you choose your name?
2. Why do you meet at Gethsemane Lutheran Church?
3. Why is it important to call yourselves "Roman" Catholic, and not just Catholic? Or why not just become Episcopalian or Protestant?
4. What is your relationship to the canonical church (Diocese of San Diego and the Vatican)? Why are you not recognized by them? *See also About Us/How We are Different.*
5. How do we join the community and become members? Can we worship at MMACC and a diocesan parish? *See also Become Involved/Membership.*

## *QUESTIONS REGARDING THE LITURGY (See also About Us/Inclusive Language)*

6. Why do you use language about God that is different from the "traditional" language?
7. Why don't you just say "he" for God? What's wrong with "Lord?"
8. Why are the readings sometimes different from the Revised Common Lectionary used in other churches?
9. Why do you use a different creed after the homily and not the Nicene or Apostles' Creed?
10. Why does the Assembly participate in the Eucharistic Prayer and say aloud the words of the Consecration?
11. Why are other languages sometimes used during the Eucharistic Prayer?
12. Why is the language of the "Our Father" different from what I know and grew up with?
13. Why are there options for grape juice and gluten free bread at Communion?

## *RESPONSES TO GENERAL QUESTIONS*

### **1. How did you choose your name?**

Jane Via and Rod Stephens, co-founders of MMACC, facilitated the community's process in choosing a name for itself. We called for names (about 50 were submitted). We put out those 50 names and the community voted them down to 5. Then at a community meeting, parishioners voted (by a wide margin) for Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community. Mary Magdalene is called "the apostle to the apostles." "Apostle" means "one who is sent." In all the Gospels, Mary is among the women at the tomb (or in John the only woman) who learn of the resurrection and are sent to proclaim the good news. In Matthew and John, she is met and sent by the risen Christ himself.

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## **2. Why do you meet at Gethsemane Lutheran Church?**

From the beginning we have shared sacred space with other congregations by renting from them. We are not in a position to purchase space. In addition, "pitching our tent" affords adaptability and mobility as the community's needs change. Sharing sacred space resonates with the Exodus experience and echoes the itinerant experience of the first followers of Jesus. The ecumenical relationships forged, opportunities for joint services, and the theological exchanges that come of sharing sacred space are enriching. Criteria including location, liturgical space, affordability, and most important, freedom to exercise our mission and ministry in our worship space to all our members led a search committee to Gethsemane Lutheran Church, where all of the sacraments can be celebrated by all MMACC members, including Holy Unions and same-sex weddings.

## **3. Why is it important to call yourselves "Roman" Catholic, and not just Catholic? Or why not just become Episcopalian or Protestant?**

Our community consists primarily, although not entirely, of individuals who were born and reared in the Roman Catholic Church. We believe that the Roman Catholic Church is in need of dramatic transformation. The Roman Catholic Church exercises authority worldwide in a manner that detrimentally impacts women and children, both socially and culturally. As a result, the concept of manhood which the church promotes also damages men. The Pope and his leadership wield extraordinary power which, as Christians of conscience, we seek to challenge and change. Patriarchy and its totalitarianism and secrecy foster the abuse of both women and children in countries where Catholicism has a strong presence. The magisterium, the administrators of the Roman Catholic Church, is largely disinterested in self transformation in accord with Gospel values and in progressive movements in churches outside of its own institution. Claiming "Roman" is also an effort to reclaim the Church because we are the Church. Because we love the Church, we refuse to let injustices claim it: Rather than leave the church, we work to change it.

## **4. What is your relationship to the canonical church (Diocese of San Diego and the Vatican)? Why are you not recognized by them?**

The leadership in the Roman Catholic Church does not yet recognize 1) the ordination of women as valid, and 2) a married or optional celibate priesthood for both heterosexual and homosexual priests.\* MMACC actively embraces women priests, married priests, homosexual and heterosexual priests for its priesthood of servant leaders. Thus we are not recognized as a canonical parish by the Diocese or the Vatican. Furthermore, MMACC strives to be democratic in its governance, empowering the people of God and accountable to them, whereas the canonical church is strictly hierarchical, allowing only ordained males to participate in shaping the self-understanding of the Roman Catholic faith community. We are open to dialogue with and recognition by the diocese and the Vatican. See also "About Us/How We Are Different" on the web-site.

*\*The Roman Catholic Church currently permits heterosexual, male, married priests to convert to Roman Catholicism from the Anglican or Episcopalian traditions and does not require that they divorce in order to retain their ordained status as priests for priests who oppose women's ordination as priests or bishops.*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

### **5. How do we join the community and become members? Can we worship at MMACC and a diocesan parish?**

To become a member you sign up. (See "Become Involved/Membership" on our website). We would like to get to know you as you get to know us. Some of our members do not live locally, but attend seasonally. Membership at MMACC is not exclusive. Many of our members also attend a canonical parish or another faith community, including house churches or other denominations.

## *RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS REGARDING THE LITURGY*

### **6. Why do you use language about God that is different from the "traditional" language?**

The language we use about God matters. Language affects how we view God, the world, and one another. It is our framework. At the same time, all language about God is metaphorical, pointing to more than what any word is or can convey. It becomes problematic if religious language is interpreted and understood literally. If we limit our language only to what we have known in the past and to what can be contained by our words, we limit God to our capacity for understanding, instead of opening our minds to God's dimensions. This applies to all religious language – whether it's found in scripture, writings on spirituality and theology, hymns, or the words used in liturgy and worship. With the many discoveries made in our lifetimes (scientific, medical, human, religious), our understanding of God and everything sacred has been expanded beyond the boundaries of literal interpretation still clung to by many within the Christian tradition. In the same way, our language and images of God must expand and evolve out of their previous limitations to better express a living faith in a living God. By embracing this modern understanding of metaphor and its essential role in religious language, we open ourselves to deeper religious experiences and more profound religious understanding than the literal interpretation of religion could provide.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

## 7. Why don't you just say "he" for God? What's wrong with "Lord?"

We believe that sexism is sin. Although most mainstream Christian theologies state that "God is Spirit, neither male nor female," exclusively male and patriarchal language about God is jealously upheld as if God is, indeed, male. Exclusively male language for God and for human beings literalizes the language of ancient texts, resulting in idolatry in Christian theology. It's as if we are more attached to the maleness of God than the divinity of God. Therefore, in Liturgy at MMACC, we do not say "he" for God unless we also say "she."

We also work to take emperor language and ritual out of Roman Catholic liturgy while preserving its beauty. The imitation of emperors' rituals came into the church in the 4th century when the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity a legal religion of the Roman Empire. Under the Emperor Theodosius I, in 380CE, Christianity became the religion of the Empire. We do not use "Lord" for God or Jesus, because it was a title for the Roman Emperor and, therefore, monarchical. It is also patriarchal, and therefore exclusively masculine, in addition to classist. We also do not say Father for God unless we also say Mother. From about 30,000 BCE, many ancients believed women held the mystery of life and created new life alone. Consequently, worship of goddesses and female fertility deities was notable. From approximately 6,000 BCE, people began to believe that the seed of the male contained the whole human, and the woman's contribution to procreation was only nurture. A Creator god, therefore, became identified with "father." These beliefs were based on a lack of understanding of how procreation occurred. Modern science has taught us that the ovum of woman and the seed of man are both necessary to procreation. Neither woman nor man create new life alone. Therefore, the image of an intimate Creator God must contain aspects and qualities of both female and male human beings, some of which can also be found in the Scriptures. While we use maternal and paternal language and images for God, we do not use the metaphor of God as parent exclusively because doing so can promote the attitude among believers that we are mere "children," not responsible for our faith, belief and actions in the world: We are co-creators and co-caregivers of creation with God. We thus also explore creatively the mystery that is God in order to seek and find images and language beyond that of Mother/Father, beyond masculine and feminine, and beyond gender that express the deeply personal - as well as unfathomable dimensions - of our Cosmic God.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

## 8. Why are the readings sometimes different from the Revised Common Lectionary used in other churches?

The lectionary is a list of biblical texts to be read each weekday and Sunday. It is used predominantly by Catholic churches, and a very close version is used in several other Anglican and Reformed churches too. The lectionary includes a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, a Psalm, a reading from the New Testament letters/treatises, and a Gospel reading. Over a three year cycle, it seeks to cover most of the content of the gospels, many psalms, foundational stories of the Hebrew Bible, and essential passages from the letters and other writings of the early church. However, many important stories are missing. It is no coincidence that very few stories about the matriarchs are included. For example, there are no readings from the book of Ruth on any Sunday, even though Ruth is listed in Jesus' genealogy. Jesus' continual and counter-cultural actions on behalf of and relationships with women are significantly understated. The fact that Peter had a mother-in-law, and so was married, is glossed over. Readings about many women deacons and house leaders of the early church are not included in the lectionary readings, or their service – if included – is minimized in translation. And some of Paul's most inclusive theology and beautiful ecclesiology take a back seat to issues that were controversial in the early church and remain unresolved tensions in the New Testament literature. The scripture itself bears witness to those tensions, including the evident corruption of certain texts where originality is questioned by most scholars. And yet some of those texts are included in the lectionary while more reliable passages are not. Our revision of the lectionary seeks not only to unearth the stories of women in the Bible, but also to reclaim the feminine images of God found there. It also attempts to draw out alternate aspects of theology found in scripture that we often don't hear or know are biblical.

## 9. Why do you use a different creed after the homily and not the Nicene or Apostles' Creed?

*The Nicene Creed* was first adopted at the General Council of Nicaea in 325 CE as those in attendance at the council were, for the first time, attempting to cement a Christology. This creed was written using Greek philosophical concepts that no longer accurately reflect how we experience and understand the world. The origins of *the Apostle's Creed* are less clear, though they seem to be put together from disparate lines in Scripture and the writings of early church fathers. It finally appeared in the 8th century in a form similar to the one known today. Both the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed were written in exclusive language and were products of their times. At MMACC, we use a creed first crafted by Benedictine, Joan Chittister, which we have adapted slightly. It is a contemporary profession of faith that expresses in inclusive and expansive language the fundamental tenets of our Catholic faith.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

## **10. Why does the Assembly participate in the Eucharistic Prayer and say aloud the words of the Consecration?**

During the Eucharistic Prayer, community members voice parts of the prayer. This participation in the liturgy reflects the priority of the presence of community for communion. As Vatican II taught, the laity shares in and exercises the priesthood of believers. The consecrating spirit is alive and at work because the community is gathered in Jesus' name. The entire community shares in the words of Consecration, bringing this sharply into focus. Our community, gathered, is an expression of the Body of Christ.

## **11. Why are other languages sometimes used during the Eucharistic Prayer?**

Some of the prayers are spoken by community members who are fluent in languages other than English. An important reason for this practice is to emulate the universal experience of Pentecost. Hearing our common faith articulated in other languages also reminds us of our connection to the world-wide Church: We remember the whole Body of Christ, the communion of saints. As we listen to the prayers, we reach beyond our own community and become a living symbol of connection and relationship inspired by the Eucharistic table.

## **12. Why is the language of the "Our Father" different from the one I know and grew up with?**

The Prayer that Jesus Taught Us is found in the Gospels of Matthew (6:9a-13) and Luke (11:2a-4). The words and phrasing of the prayer are not identical in the two gospels, which indicates gospel writers knew different versions of the prayer, or understood it as a model to use in prayer that each adapted: Each writer may have taken some literary license with the prayer as each knew it. Most modern scholars agree that the evangelists we know as "Matthew" and "Luke" were not eye-witnesses to the ministry of Jesus, and were not present when Jesus taught the prayer. The gospels were written in Greek. Jesus' native tongue was probably Aramaic. We don't even know with certainty in what language Jesus prayed this prayer (perhaps Aramaic or Greek). Any English version is a translation of the Greek versions. Throughout the last 2,000 years, the prayer has been translated and rendered variously and adapted creatively. A good translation strives to capture not the literal interpretation, but the meaning. Good translation requires not only familiarity with the original language, but with the geography, history, culture and literary conventions of the time, as well as the context in which a passage appears. The translation of the "Our Father" currently recited in the Roman Catholic Church is not a verbatim rendition of either New Testament version of the prayer. The English version of the "Our Father" commonly used is closest to the one found in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer that was published in 1662 using the language of its day. After the publication and dissemination of the Book of Common Prayer, the "Lord's Prayer" (and most liturgical prayers) became more established. Because of printing and usage, it stuck, whereas it had previously enjoyed a wide variety and evolution of interpretation, translation, and use. You will find us using a contemporary version of this prayer in inclusive language. We hope sharing this version with us will deepen your experience and understanding of the prayer.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)**

### **13. Why are there options for grape juice and gluten-free bread at Communion?**

In our continuing effort to include all and honor the community gathered in our midst as the Body of Christ, MMACC provides a communion cup of white grape juice for those who abstain from alcohol. An increasing number of people also cannot or do not eat gluten for health reasons. We therefore offer a gluten-free alternative to the unleavened wheat loaf. This enables the full participation in the Eucharist of all who are present at liturgy.