

**HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/24/2024**  
**Catholic or Christian**

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, June 25 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who are suffering from the extreme heat in our world. Ask GOD to send resources to assist these people in their time of need. Pray that we find and implement significant ways to reduce the effects of global warming.*

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Occasionally, I am asked if I am, or our church is “catholic or Christian.” I usually answer, “Yes, it is.” The question is troubling and reveals another great misconception that exists among many believers today going back to the beginning of the Reformation.

First, the term “catholic,” with a lowercase “c,” means “worldwide” or “universal.” It refers to the Christian Church that exists throughout the world. Those who ask if we are catholic are referring to the Roman Catholic Church with a capital “C” in “Catholic.” The Roman Catholic Church is the worldwide church with headquarters in Rome, now a state called Vatican City. The Lutheran Church, like many others, is a church that exists all over the world, so it is catholic, small “c.”

Second, the Roman Catholic Church is Christian. Christianity is a major religion based on the teachings of JESUS, who was called the CHRIST. “CHRIST” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word “MESSIAH” and the English word “SAVIOR.” It is not JESUS’ last name. Christians believe that GOD became human in the person of JESUS and died for the sins of all. Those who do not believe JESUS is GOD are not Christian. Roman Catholics do. They are Christians.

The question of “catholic or Christian” goes back to the Reformation when there was so much animosity between the Roman Catholic leadership and the followers of Martin Luther and other reformers. The goal of the Reformation was to “reform” the Roman Catholic Church, not replace it. Rome however resisted the call to change and rejected those who followed the reformers resulting in the formation of Protestant denominations that “protested” the accusations and some of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran Church is among those Protestant denominations. But the hostility that existed between the Reformation denominations and Rome was so great that each group accused the other of not even being Christian, which they were. That misconception about Roman Catholics continues among some today resulting in the question about “catholic or Christian.

It is easy to focus on the differences between denominations almost in an attempt to say, “We’re right and they are wrong.” That is contrary to the goals JESUS had for HIS followers. We are one Church with many different parts. We have different ways of living into this faith in CHRIST, but we share “one LORD, one faith, one baptism, one GOD and FATHER of us all” (Ephesians 4:5-6). This is what unites us. Rather than concentrating on our differences, though we may acknowledge them, our emphasis should be that which unites, our shared faith in JESUS CHRIST.

I like to say that if I were GOD, I would have done it differently. Everyone would know exactly what to believe and how to worship. But thank GOD I’m not GOD. GOD’s plan for the Church includes many ways for people to have access to our loving GOD. Instead of trying to identify the ways we might be different, let us celebrate the ways that we are the same.

In CHRIST's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey