



Who We Are...

Most people and many Catholics are generally unaware that they have millions of coreligionists who are not themselves part of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church directly under the jurisdiction of Rome is properly and canonically termed the Latin Church. All official Church documents simply use the term, "Catholic Church." And contrary to popular belief, most of the day-to-day work performed by the Holy Father is not in his role as pope and pastor of the Universal Church but in his position in the Latin Church as the bishop of Rome and the patriarch of the West.

So who are these "other" Catholics? They have their own hierarchies and liturgies, as well as their own distinct apostolic lineages. They may look and act like Eastern Orthodox churches, but they recognize the pope of Rome as the head of the visible Church on earth and have suffered for the cause of that unity.

According to the Constitution on the Church, the Catholic Church is understood to be "a corporate body of Churches," united with the bishop of Rome, who serves as the guardian of unity. The other Catholic Churches are not merely Catholics with papal permission to use different liturgies. They were also founded by the apostles and are particular, autonomous Churches of their own rightful existence. Any individual Catholic may freely attend and receive the sacraments in any of them. After all, Catholic is Catholic.

Because we believe in "one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church," some might object, "There is only one Church, so how can we speak of many 'Churches?'" It's helpful to consider an analogy used by the Church Fathers: While there are three distinct Persons who share the One Divine Essence, there are likewise many autonomous individual Churches that make up the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. As it is with the Triune Godhead, we must be careful not to blur true and important distinctions of the individuals in order to emphasize their unity.

When Christ founded His Church, He commissioned the apostles to go out into the world to preach and baptize. Most Catholics are familiar with the founding of the See of Rome by Peter. The primacy of that Church was sealed with the blood of Peter and Paul, and the succession of bishops continues to the present day. What many do not know is that the other apostles themselves founded churches, and that their own successions of bishops continue as well.

We as Ukrainian Catholics, belong to the Universal Catholic Church. There are twenty-four **distinct** *sui juris* (autonomous or self-governing) Churches which together form the universal Catholic Church: the Western or "Latin" Church, which nearly all Canadians are familiar with, and the Eastern Churches, of which there are a total of twenty-three. As Vicar of the Universal Church, the Pope is shepherd of the rites of the West and the East. The eastern rites which have a separate code of canon law are completely equal in dignity with the rites of the West.

Ukrainian Eastern Christianity took a firm root in Ukraine in 988 when Vladimir, prince of Kyivan Rus', embraced the Christian Faith and was baptized. Soon afterwards many missionaries from the Byzantine Empire were sent by the Patriarch of Constantinople to preach the Gospel.

The Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople severed ties with one another in the 11th century." Although the Church of Rus' was under the supervision of the Patriarch of Constantinople, it **nonetheless maintained ties with Rome and the West** for centuries following the great Schism of 1054. Northern Rus' would eventually sever its union with the Roman Pontiff. In 1595 at the council in Brest-Litovsk, however, the Church of Rus' (present-day Ukraine), guaranteed that their Byzantine tradition and Liturgy would be respected and recognized by Rome, **reconfirmed her communion** with the Pope of Rome. From that time forward, the Kyivan Church – now known as the Ukrainian Church – was divided in two: the Ukrainian Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church." Father Athanasius McVay in an interview with Zenit, May 2012.

By 1700, two-thirds of Ukraine had become Catholic. But as Orthodox Russia expanded its control into Ukraine, Catholicism was gradually suppressed. In 1839, Tsar Nicholas I abolished the union in all regions under Russian rule, but the Ukrainian Catholic Church thrived in areas under Austrian control. Later, the Soviet Union forced the Ukrainian Catholic Church into the Russian Orthodox Church. Under Communist rule, Catholics in Ukraine were persecuted; many were imprisoned and murdered. The Church became a "Church of the Catacombs". In 1945, all the Ukrainian Catholic bishops were arrested or killed. It wasn't until the fall of the USSR, that the Ukrainian Catholics in Ukraine emerged from the catacombs.

In the 19th century many Ukrainian Catholics began immigrating to North America, bringing their traditions and Liturgy to Canada and the United States. They supported their brothers and sisters in the catacombs by their prayers and faithfulness to their Eastern Catholic Rite.



Today, the Ukrainian Catholic Church is the largest Eastern Catholic Church, with about 4.5 million faithful. It is led by His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk. His election was confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI on March 25, 2011. Shevchuk is popularly given the title of Ukrainian Patriarch, but this title hasn't been approved by Rome due to sensitive relations with the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox.

"We are an Orthodox Church, with Orthodox theology, liturgy, spirituality and canonical tradition that chooses to manifest this Orthodoxy in the spirit of the first Christian millennium, in communion with Rome."

+ His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk

Many Ukrainian Catholics see their church as an ethnic religion. It is the faith of their ancestors: the church loved by their parents, grandparents for generations. But it is much more. Many non-Ukrainians have joined because of the beauty and richness of the Liturgy and the other services. As Patriarch Sviatoslav has said, our Church is open to all, and we welcome anyone who wants to experience our beautiful Byzantine faith and traditions.

Adapted from: [The Other Catholics: A Short Guide to the Eastern Catholic Churches](#); Copyright © 2005 [Crisis](#); [Ukrainian Catholic Church](#)

For more information see: [Ukrainian Churches in the Canadian Prairies](#); [Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church](#) [Being Ukrainian Catholic](#)