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RITUAL CHURCH ASCRIPTION

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The Catholic Church is really a communion of Churches. We should move away from using the terms “Eastern Rite” or “Latin Rite” because “rite” refers solely to the style of worship, whereas the Churches differ not only in their worship styles, but also in their governance. We should use the terms “Ukrainian Church” and “Latin Church,” or to be really technical, “Ukrainian Church *sui iuris*” (having its own governance) to focus on the autonomy of each Church. The Latin Church is predominant but is just one of 23 different Churches, all in full communion with the Holy Father in Rome

4 Groups of Eastern Churches

- ✘ Eastern Orthodox: 105 million, in communion with the Patriarch (Ecumenical Pontiff) of Constantinople; they accept the first seven ecumenical Councils; reject the doctrine of Papal Infallibility; The split became definitive in 1054 A.D., though there have been efforts over the last 1000 years to heal the breach.
- ✘ Oriental Orthodox: 40 million, most in the Middle East, accept Councils 1-3 only.
- ✘ Assyrian Churches: 200,000, most in Iran and India; accept Councils 1-2 only.
- ✘ Eastern Catholic: 9 million world-wide, **in full communion with Rome**; all but the Maronites have a corresponding Orthodox or Oriental Church; were once called “uniates,” which is considered a pejorative title. See the attached page for a list of Eastern Catholic Churches and their presence and governance in the US

There are no “at large” Catholics. We each belong to a specific Church. Membership is decided by Baptism. Membership within a Church gives us certain rights, and also certain obligations. The Latin Code (promulgated 1983, abbreviated CIC) covers the rights and obligations of Latin Catholics; the Eastern Code (promulgated 1990, abbreviated CCEO) covers those of Eastern Catholics. There are some significant differences in the two Codes, and also some points of disagreement among canonists on how to apply them.

Ritual Church ascription, or affiliation is usually based on the common Church of the parents. Latin (or Western) Church parents’ children will be members of the Latin Church; Eastern Church parents’ children will be members of that Eastern Church. Parents who are of different Churches make the choice for the child, with the agreement of both parents. If there is no agreement, the child is ascribed to Church of the father.

Chrismation (Confirmation) takes place with Baptism in Eastern Church. “Communion” (Eucharist) is sometimes done at the same time, but sometimes done later. **Baptism records should be requested at the time of initial registration in religious education programs so that early on those of Eastern Church affiliation are made aware that they are already confirmed.** These children are not included in

Confirmation ceremonies in the Latin Church, not even “symbolically”, e.g. not receive a “blessing” which might simulate a “sacrament”. Parents may need help to understand that their child is already confirmed but there is value to his/her participation in Confirmation preparation classes. They may, of course, participate in the liturgy, and even be given a special role, as servers, lectors, attendants of the confirming bishop, etc. It would be good to ask the confirming bishop to acknowledge them, and congratulate them on completing the formation program with their class.

Regarding RCIA participants: those not baptized may choose their Ritual Church if past the age of 14; the parent affiliation applies to younger children. If already baptized, they are already ascribed to the Ritual Church of Baptism. Baptized adults coming to full communion in the Catholic Church are ascribed to the Church which is the parallel of their Church of baptism (e.g., a Russian Orthodox convert becomes, de facto, a member of the Russian Catholic Church *sui iuris*).

First Eucharist may be received in either Church but families should be strongly encouraged to practice in their local Ritual Church. If members of Eastern Churches, they should not be registered as members in the Latin parish Church where the children may be attending religious education classes.

Matrimony: in the case of different rituals of the persons, in the Eastern Church, only the female may change ritual for the purpose of family unity; in the Western Church either may change for the purpose of family unity. The ceremony may take place in either Church but the presider must be of the same ritual of at least one of the parties, e.g. a Latin priest cannot witness a marriage of two Eastern ritual persons. If an Eastern person is being married, the marriage must be officiated by a priest, and not a deacon.

In summary, Sacraments that can be received in either Ritual Church are Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick. Sacraments which must ordinarily be received in one’s Ritual Church are Baptism, Confirmation/Chrismation, Matrimony (must take place in the Church of at least one of the parties) and Holy Orders. Funerals may be celebrated by a priest of either Ritual Church.

Catholics are free to worship and receive Eucharist in any Catholic Church, even on a regular basis. They may become fully active in a parish of a different Ritual Church, even though they remain properly a member of their Church of ascription. We do need to be sensitive to the pastoral concerns of Eastern Churches. We should encourage families to attend their own Ritual Church. Unless done through marriage, **change of Ritual Church affiliation must be petitioned at the Metropolitan Tribunal of the Archdiocese.** Fr. Robert Williams is the person to whom such requests are made and is also available for questions regarding Eastern Churches.

(with thanks to Fr. Bob Williams, Adjutant Judicial Vicar and Pastor of St. Justin, Hazel Park, who prepared much of this information for a previous presentation)

Eastern Catholic Churches in the United States of America

Patriarchal Churches

Armenian Church	1 Eparchy for the US and Canada
Chaldean Church	2 Eparchies in the US
Egyptian Coptic Church	no governance structure in the US
Maronite Church	2 Eparchies in the US
Melkite Church*	1 Eparchy in the US
Syrian Church	1 Eparchy in the US

Major Archiepiscopal Churches

Malankara Church	1 Exarchy in the US
Romanian Church*	1 Eparchy in the US
Syro-Malabar Church	1 Eparchy in the US
Ukrainian Church*	1 Archeparchy, 3 Eparchies in the US

Metropolitan Churches

Ethiopian Church	no governance structure in the US
Ruthenian Church*	1 Archeparchy, 3 Eparchies in the US (also called the Ruthenian Church, or the Metropolia of Pittsburgh)

Eparchial and other Churches

Albanian Church*	no governance structure in the US
Belarusian Church*	no governance structure in the US
Bulgarian Church*	no governance structure in the US
Greek (Hellenic) Church*	no governance structure in the US
Hungarian Church*	under jurisdiction of the Ruthenian Church
Italo-Albanian Church*	no governance structure in the US
Krizevci Church*	under jurisdiction of the Ruthenian Church
(Serb, Croatian)	
Macedonian Church*	no governance structure in the US
Russian Church*	no governance structure in the US
Slovak Church*	under jurisdiction of the Ruthenian Church

* These Churches use a Byzantine form of liturgy, and often call themselves “Byzantine Catholics.” It should also be noted that (to further confuse matters), some of these nationalities have considerable numbers of Latin Catholics – e.g., only a small portion of Hungarian Catholics are members of the Hungarian (Byzantine) Church, most are Latin Catholics. So, just because someone is a Catholic of Albanian nationality does not mean he or she is a member of the Albanian Church.

If a Church has no governance structure here in the US, they as individuals or parishes are under the pastoral and juridical care of the local Latin Bishop.