

In February 2010, Holy Family Catholic Church hosted an Inter-Faith Panel Presentation. Nearly 200 participants gathered to listen to a Catholic priest, and Jewish rabbi and a Muslim imam. Many written questions were submitted and we are happy to present the responses we received below.

### **Questions for the Catholic Presenter, Fr. Alan Weber**

What are the main differences between being a Catholic and a Christian (Baptist)?

Response: Catholics are Christians, but they are not Christians of the Reformation. The churches of the Reformation constructed identities for themselves that were specifically designed to be not-Catholic. As a consequence, there are many differences in belief and practice between the two groups. The Baptist churches, for example, are the spiritual descendents of the Dutch Reformed Church. The primary differences between the Catholic Church and the Baptist Churches are the different ways in which the two groups understand Grace, salvation and the nature of church community.

Is your religion open for all to study?

R: Yes, all Catholic parishes offer instructions in the Faith. These instructional programs are primarily for the benefit of those who wish to become Catholic, but the first few weeks of these programs provide basic information, and are open to anyone.

What does it mean to be a Catholic?

R: In short, it means to believe and practice the beliefs, teachings and values taught and proclaimed by the Catholic Church.

Would you (Catholics) ever consider getting an understanding of other religions?

R: Many Catholics find it helpful to grow in their understanding of other religions. However, there are probably too few opportunities for this.

What do you consider part of the visible authority structure? All clergy? Only bishops?

R: In the Catholic Church, Bishops hold the office handed on to them by the Apostles and their successors. As such, Bishops are responsible for Church unity and for handing on the Faith. Other ordained ministers (priests and deacons), play a role in the Church's mission, as do the Church's non-ordained employees and volunteers. Bishops, however, are the only ones who exercise authority in the Church.

Regarding the Trinity – I felt your description was confusing. Do we not believe in all three equally – Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

R: Yes, we believe in a Triune God, that is, One God in three Persons. The three divine Persons subsist in the unity of the single divine substance. The three divine Persons are distinguished among themselves solely by the relations which they have with one another. We come to know the three divine Persons by means of the relationships that they create with us, in which we worship them equally, but distinctly.

When will the Pope and Bishops admit their silence and conspiracy with dealing with the sexual abuse (and) power usage and clericalism?

R: You'll have to ask them. Priests have no voice in the handling of these issues.

How would you start to re-educate the Catholic population as to their faith?

R: There are time-tested strategies that the Catholic Church has used for two millennia that do a very adequate job of communicating the Faith. Two of these are the Lectionary and the Catechumenate. The Lectionary provides (in the Sunday cycle of readings), not only exposure to the major themes in the Scriptures but also to the major beliefs and practices of Catholicism. There are already existing several good Lectionary-based instructional resources that can be used effectively with adult believers. Secondly, while the Catechumenate is

intended for use for instructing new initiates, it provides a very helpful structure and strategy for on-going education. Both of these things can be easily implemented by any parish as the materials, staff and familiarity with them already exist.

Please give more specific foundational policies of Catholicism.

R: I'm not certain that I understand the request. The foundational beliefs of the Church can be found in the Creeds. Policies tend to change, and are published in various, scattered documents.

You speak of 20<sup>th</sup> Century “renewals” of faith traditions from the early days of the church (e.g., the catechumens). Married priests were accepted in the early days of the church. Why doesn't the Catholic Church consider that renewal? Or at least acknowledge it's a man-made church now and not descendant from Jesus' days?

R: If I understand the final sentence correctly, I have to say that I disagree with the sentiment. Ecclesial renewal efforts are the responsibility of the Pope and the College of Bishops. Changes in discipline and practice will only come from that source.

What concrete efforts does the Diocese of St. Petersburg make for interaction and/or dialog with Jews and Muslims?

R: I am not aware of any organized effort from the diocesan Chancery, but there has been a very successful, and long-standing, dialogue committee sponsored by St. Leo University (located in the diocese).

Why are you a Catholic?

R: I was born into a Catholic family, and received the Faith from them. I remain a Catholic because I find great comfort, strength and wisdom in Catholic spirituality.

## **General Questions for All Three Presenters**

What role do women play in your religion?

R: A very important role: we wouldn't be here without them. Women do not perform ordained ministry in the Church, but many women perform invaluable roles in Church leadership and ministry.

How does your faith tradition form its members in respect for life (promoting the unborn, the elderly, prisoners on death row, genetic engineering, etc.)

R: The Catholic Church has a fairly consistent and understandable ethical stance on these moral issues. All human life is sacred, from the time of conception to the time of natural death. Consequently, all human beings are entitled to respect, adequate care, just treatment and the opportunity to live in peace and freedom.

What are the biggest differences between the faiths?

R: The single issue that determines that differences between various faiths is the way in which each religious tradition conceives of the nature of God.

What are the biggest similarities between the faiths?

R: A commitment to serve the spiritual needs of their adherents.

Do the holy books share scriptures or passages?

R: Christianity has always used the Hebrew Scriptures as our Faith depends on its Hebrew ancestry.

Do any faiths other than Catholicism celebrate sacraments? [The Catholic sacraments are: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist (sacraments of initiation); Holy Orders and Marriage (sacraments of vocation) and Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick (sacraments of healing)]

R: Some of the other Christian churches practice rituals for baptism, confirmation, eucharist, marriage, ordination and burial. However, there are many significant differences between Catholic and non-Catholic beliefs about the significance and effect of these rituals.

Do the faiths share any common prayers?

R: Catholic liturgy uses many quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures, but I don't know of any instances of the use of Hebrew prayers in Catholic liturgy - the obvious exception to this being the Psalms.

What is the difference between a marriage in the Catholic faith and marriages in other faiths?

R: The Catholic Church views marriage as a relationship established by God for the good of the couple and for the good of having a family.

Do any of the faiths believe in life after death?

R: The Catholic Church believes in the resurrection of the body and eternal life.

How does each religion view the Eucharist?

R: The Catholic Church views Eucharist as the real and local presence of the Risen Christ. The other Christian denominations do not hold this belief.

Would you say your religion is simple to understand?

R: It is simple enough to practice, but one can spend a lifetime of study and never have mastered all its complexity.