

The Church Part Two: The Church is One.
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In the Creed we profess the four marks of the Church as “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic” but what do these really mean today? Let us begin by looking at the first one, the unity or oneness of the Church.

Many people make the common mistake of thinking that the Church is something we humans designed. They reduce it to a structure or polity and think that is all. But Catholic teaching has always held to the mystery of the Church as something both human and divine. Therefore, its source is not mere human ingenuity. The Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) tells us: “This is the sacred mystery of the unity of the Church, in Christ and through Christ, with the Holy Spirit energizing it various functions. The highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (n.2) Therefore the Church is One because of her source, and unity is the essence of the Church.

Here is where we as Catholics differ from many of our Protestant friends. Their experience of the Church grew from reforming movements that chose to be Church apart from or separated from other denominations. This is very difficult for us Catholics to accept because it seems to deny that Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. For the mystery of the Church cannot be divisive for if it is so we are saying that Christ himself is divided. While there are groups that do not see the unity of Christ as core to being the Church, we Catholics see unity in Christ as essential. It is understandable that some Protestant denominations who do not see this unity in Christ as essential are untroubled by the scandal of division. It is easier for them to work for a human sense of political consensus than to struggle for the visible unity Christ desires.

Often people have wrongly assumed that the unity that makes the Church One is a reduction to absolute conformity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us: “From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great diversity which comes from both the variety of God’s gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of the People of God, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures is gathered together” (CCC 814). I am always amazed at how reluctant people can be to work for this visible unity, preferring instead a fractured reality that fails us all. There are really three things that testify to a visible bond of unity: (1) profession of one faith from the Apostles; (2) common celebration of divine worship, especially of the sacraments; and (3) apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders, maintaining the fraternal concord of God’s family. (CCC 815)

Oneness or unity doesn’t happen in a vacuum but requires all of us. The Vatican Decree on Ecumenism tells us “The concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies”(n.5). The Church as One requires our working to be One. If you would like to work on this unity check out O.N.E.-Operation Neighborhood Ecumenism at <http://www.archdiocesasantafe.org/Offices/Ecumenical/Ecumenical.html>.