

“Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.”

**Pope John Paul II**

## **The Roman Catholic Church**

The Roman Catholic Church (officially called The Catholic Church) is the single largest grouping of Christians, comprising two thirds of all baptised Christians. The word 'Catholic' (from the Greek 'katholikos') means universal and came into general use during the fourth century (CE) to distinguish it from Christians who had separated themselves from the main body of the Church. The word 'Roman' was added by other Christians during the sixteenth century.

There are twenty-one different Churches within the Catholic Church who all follow various local traditions (e.g. Ukrainian Greek Catholic, Melkite Church in Syria, Chaldean Church in Iraq etc.) who all recognise the Pope (Bishop of Rome) as their earthly leader and guide. It is claimed that the Pope is the spiritual successor of St Peter, the leader of Jesus' twelve followers (the Apostles).

The teaching of the Catholic Church is based on two pillars, first the Sacred Scriptures (the Bible) and secondly on tradition (mainly the twenty-one Ecumenical Church Councils which have met over the last 2,000 years). When the Pope and the Bishops and other Christians meet, they interpret the teaching of Christ for the Christians of their time. This teaching authority is called the 'Magisterium'.

The central act of worship for Catholics is the celebrating of the Eucharist (usually called the Mass) when the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. In this way the faithful are in direct contact with Jesus Christ. There are seven sacraments or ways of making Jesus present to Christians: Baptism, Confession, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders (ordination of a bishop, priest or deacon) and Anointing the Sick.

Only priests ordained by the Bishop have been granted the authority to provide and lead sacramental services. The Church has maintained its historic position of not allowing the ordination of women. To become a priest within the Roman Catholic Church, or to join a monastic order, one must take a vow of celibacy.

The teaching of the Catholic Church divides the Church into three parts. First the Church on earth (militant - fighting to overcome evil), secondly the Church suffering (people who have died and are repenting for their sins in a state called purgatory) and lastly, the Church triumphant (those who worship God in heaven). Through prayer, Catholics believe they can be in contact with people in all these states. Frequently, Catholics ask Mary the mother of Jesus to intercede on their behalf with her Son or indeed invoke other people named as saints who share with Mary a place in Heaven.

The Church is organised at a local level into areas called 'dioceses' each led by a Bishop (a successor of the Apostles) and he works in co-operation with priests, deacons and lay people. There are twenty-two Catholic dioceses in England and Wales, and eight in Scotland. In addition, there are seven Provinces each with an Archbishop. Leadership in England is provided by the Archbishop of Westminster, in Wales by the Archbishop of Wales, and in Scotland by the Archbishop of Glasgow.

No introduction to the Roman Catholic Church would be complete without mention of the immense community and charity work carried out every day of every year right across the world. There are groups of thousands of men and women who belong to religious orders or movements who live in their communities in countless countries to pray, run missions, schools, hospices, hospitals, orphanages etc.

Calderdale forms part of the Diocese of Leeds and hence the Bishop of Leeds is the local leader of Catholics.

Further information:

[www.catholic-ew.org.uk](http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk)

Leeds Diocese website: [www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk](http://www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk)