BELIEFS OF CHRISTIANS
BELIEFS
OF
CHRISTIANS

Educational Services
Eparchy of Newton
West Newton, MA 02165
Acknowledgements

The concept of this booklet and the bulk of its contents are drawn from Fr. John Forliti, *Faith Without Anger*, copyright 1979 by Winston Press, Inc., 430 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis, MN 55403. Used with permission. All rights reserved. Contents may not be reproduced in whole or in part.


Cover photo credits (clockwise): 18th century Methodist circuit preacher (*The Pilot*); Melkite Patriarch Maximos V (*Sophia*); fraction, the Roman Catholic Mass (*The Pilot*); Martin Luther, initiator of the Protestant Reformation (*Religious News Service*).
Introduction to the First Edition

When dealing with Christians of other traditions, it is often helpful to have a reference point from which to discuss divergences of faith and/or practice. While the core of the Gospel is substantially intact in all the historic traditions of East and West, there are important differences, particularly with the Protestants. These elements most deeply influence the spiritual life of believers, and upon them the spiritual tradition of the respective Churches depends. Accordingly, these questions deserve to be clarified for the members of our community as well as those seeking to know about us.

While the topics considered and the terms in which the questions are phrased clearly come out of the post-Reformation Western experience, the comparison may be useful to those who come from these traditions to our Church. This approach may also be useful to those raised within our Church as an aid in clarifying the differences between the historic Churches and those groups of Reformation origin.

Persons using this approach as an instructional reference should first show the place of the issues treated in the scale of priorities of our entire Tradition. They may then approach each question individually, seeing how it is answered by the various positions represented and contrasted with the practice of our own Church and the individual’s own personal faith.

Rev. Fred Saato
Since the above was written we have had a number of opportunities to use this booklet with persons looking for a spiritual home. In such cases we have found it a useful technique to ask these individuals to begin this process by answering the same questions which the authors treat. We have included a duplication master which can be photocopied and completed by the participant(s) before addressing the contents of the articles in this booklet. We have also prefaced to each article a brief description of the origin of the church and tradition being discussed. The articles themselves are written by clergymen of the respective churches; the descriptions of origin are written by this author.

Also in the past decade we have seen an increase of interest on the part of Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christians in the Eastern Churches. More than one grouping of Evangelicals has in fact joined an Orthodox Church. Since this booklet deals with the so-called "mainline" or Reformation era Protestants, persons interested in comparing the Eastern tradition with Evangelical beliefs may consult Jordan Bajis, Common Ground: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity for the American Christian (Minneapolis, Light and Life Publishing, 1991). Although somewhat arbitrary in identifying the Eastern position, this is a useful comparison of Western, particularly Evangelical and Fundamentalist perspectives on the Bible, authority, the Church and the sacraments with the tradition and mentality of Eastern Christianity.

F.S.
Part I

Western Christian Traditions
United Methodist Beliefs

by the Rev. Larry Gilmore

Originally a movement of piety in the Church of England, the Methodists had become a separate denomination by 1795. After several splits in the nineteenth century, there have been a number of Methodist groups reuniting to form the United Methodist Church.

What is your church's belief about the Lord's Supper? How important is its celebration in your church, and what aspects do you emphasize?

For United Methodists, the Lord's Supper represents the mystery of God and his relationship to man. In it is present our Redemption; we are claimed by God and brought into relationship with him by his action. The Lord's Supper is also a memorial of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. And it is a means by which Christians are joined together by faith, with thanksgiving.

How does your church describe the role of the Bible in the life of the believer? Its importance? What do you believe about the Scriptures? How do you use them in daily life?

The role of the Bible is central in the life of the believer. It reveals all of the Word of God necessary for our salvation. It is seen as the true rule and guide for faith and practice. We believe in the "priesthood of all believers" which means Scripture has relevance for and can be interpreted by all men.
**What are the important beliefs in your church about the confession and forgiveness of sins?**

It is clear to United Methodists that, in the light of the New Testament, one must repent, confess and acknowledge his desire to be independent from God. Such independence is sin (separation from God). Also, we believe that we cannot turn back to God by our own strength or good works, but we must depend on God's Spirit and grace to work with us in confession.

When one turns to God in true repentence by faith, we believe that he is renewed, saved, sanctified. We are then enabled to love more fully, walking in closer relationship with Him. Confession is a prescribed event to be included in every act of public worship. We recognize the corporate nature of sin and the need for general, congregational confession for the whole group as well as for self.

**For members of your church, what is a sacrament? How many do you have and why these?**

We believe that the sacraments are symbols (outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace). In the sacraments we become aware of God's grace and good will for us and his work in us. This causes us to be strengthened in the faith, leading us towards a purposeful life. United Methodists believe in the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper because they have a sacramental quality in Scripture.

**How do authority and leadership "work" in your church? In whom or in what group does the ultimate responsibility for the church's well-being exist?**

In order for Methodism to be an effective unit throughout the world, it is the duty of the bishop, district superintendents and local pastors to organize and administer their parishes in accordance with *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*. This book is the "constitution" of our
Each geographical area has an Annual Conference to coordinate and lead its mission activities. And each parish has an Annual Charge Conference to guide and lead its local mission.

**TO WHICH HISTORICAL FIGURES DO MEMBERS OF YOUR CHURCH LOOK FOR AN EMBODIMENT OF YOUR DENOMINATIONAL TRADITION OR "SPIRIT?"

Those great figures of history to which our members look for embodiment of our tradition are John Wesley (who gave inspiration to British Methodism), Francis Asbury, Philip William Otterbein, Jacob Albright and Martin Boehm (early American formulators of Methodism).

**IN YOUR CHURCH HOW DOES A PERSON COME TO KNOW WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG IN MORAL BEHAVIOR? WHAT "HELPS" CAN HE TURN TO WHEN HE FINDS HIMSELF WITH A MORAL QUESTION?

There are few specific rules for right or wrong conduct as a member of the United Methodist church. But our heritage is one of concern for social welfare. This concern springs from the Gospel and from the labors of John Wesley who ministered to physical, intellectual and social needs of people. Our Social Creed gives basic guidelines for moral behavior and social involvement.
Lutheran Beliefs

by the Rev. Harlan Robbins

The "original" Protestants, Lutherans trace their identity to 1520-21 when Martin Luther definitively broke with Rome over a number of issues. Under the protection of favorable German princes, he encouraged the formation of national churches reformed according to his principles.

WHAT IS YOUR CHURCH'S BELIEF ABOUT THE LORD'S SUPPER? HOW IMPORTANT IS ITS CELEBRATION IN YOUR CHURCH, AND WHAT ASPECTS DO YOU EMPHASIZE?

In the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are received "in, with and under" the bread and wine. The sacrament was instituted by Christ himself for us to eat and drink so that we might be assured that our sins are forgiven and that we are participants in salvation and eternal life.

It is God's Word and not man's act that accomplishes these benefits. Through this food we are united with Christ and with our fellow believers. Jesus Christ is giver, gift and benefit all at the same time.


The sole norm of all teaching in the Lutheran tradition is the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Both belief and practice are governed by the Gospel as it is pro-
claimed in the Scriptures. Understanding this principle of sub­jecting everything to the authority of the Scriptures is essential for understanding the beliefs of Lutherans. From this point of view, then, there are no distinctive "Lutheran doctrines"; there are only biblically based teachings that present the truths of the Christian faith.

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT BELIEFS IN YOUR CHURCH ABOUT THE CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS?

Men are sinners and are unable by nature to have a true faith in God. Sin is demonstrated by open rebellion, work­righteousness and despair. Before God we should confess that we are guilty of all sins, even those which are not known to us, as we do in the Lord’s Prayer.

Private confession affords the opportunity to confess those sins which are especially troublesome to heart and mind. They are confessed to the pastor who then gives the absolution which means forgiveness as from God himself.

FOR MEMBERS OF YOUR CHURCH, WHAT IS A SACRAMENT? HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE AND WHY THESE?

A sacrament consists of the combination of the word of promise with a sign or symbolic act. The symbolic act must be instituted by God. Therefore, Lutherans recognize only two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. For only in these is there both a sign instituted by God and the promise of the forgiveness of sins. The sacrament is nothing without the Word. It has no other content and no other effect than does the word of promise.

HOW DO AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP "WORK" IN YOUR CHURCH? IN WHO OR IN WHAT GROUP DOES THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CHURCH’S WELL-BEING EXIST?
The highest authority in the Lutheran Church is the convention, a duly constituted decision-making body which is made up of both pastors and laymen. Decisions reached at convention in matters both spiritual and practical provide the guidelines for Lutheran faith and life. At the local level, pastors and synod presidents or "bishops" exercise priestly and executive functions in caring for members and carrying out convention decisions during interim periods.

To which historical figures do members of your church look for an embodiment of your denominational tradition or "spirit?"

The torchbearer for Lutheran tradition is Martin Luther (thus the label "Lutheran"). In the sixteenth century Luther reacted against questionable practices in the Roman Catholic Church which he observed as a priest and teacher. While Luther’s original intent was to reform the Roman Catholic Church, the result of his protest contributed to bring about the Protestant Reformation.

In all of Luther’s teaching and effort at reform the central theme was salvation by faith alone. As revealed in Scripture, only faith in Jesus Christ brings eternal life and salvation to the believer.

In your church, how does a person come to know what is right and wrong in moral behavior? What "helps" can he turn to when he finds himself with a moral question?

Once again, for the Lutheran, Scripture becomes the norm for moral behavior. All human thought, emotion and activity are subjected to the yardstick of Scripture as opposed to reason, philosophy or work-righteousness. To know the right and wrong in a specific moral question, one prayerfully implores the Spirit of Christ to reveal truth as it is to be found in the Gospel.
Presbyterian Beliefs

by the Rev. Robert Simpson

A second major Protestant thinker was John Calvin (1509-64), whose teachings became prominent in France and other parts of western Europe. Opposing all forms of authoritarian rule, he opposed government of the church by either bishops or princes. The Presbyterian Church is the (Calvinist) Church of Scotland and its offshoots.

What is your church's belief about the Lord's Supper? How important is its celebration in your church, and what aspects do you emphasize?

The Lord's Supper is an act in which Christ's followers remember him and experience his presence with them. It is very significant in the life of the church. It is usually observed four to twelve times a year, as each local church decides. Emphasis is upon the grace of God extended to men and the fellowship of the Spirit in the believers around the table. Also stressed is the symbol of the sacramental quality of all of life, the mystery of God's ways and the outgoing love of Jesus Christ which is to be carried by his believers into all the world.

How does your church describe the role of the Bible in the life of the believer? Its importance? What do you believe about the Scriptures? How do you use them in daily life?

The Bible is a record of the living God acting in history, in which we can discover the Word of God for our day. It is our primary authority. When there are disputes about belief or
action, the response is, "Show me by the Scriptures where I am wrong." There is strong emphasis that every believer understands the Scriptures and hence a long tradition of education for both clergy and lay people. Members are urged to study the Bible regularly both in church and at home.

**WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT BELIEFS IN YOUR CHURCH ABOUT THE CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS?**

We believe that sin causes man's separation from God and other people. Confession is the turning around a man must do to appropriate the loving forgiveness of God continually extended to him. Our worship includes corporate prayers of confession, and individuals are urged to confess their sins directly to God in prayer.

**FOR MEMBERS OF YOUR CHURCH, WHAT IS A SACRAMENT? HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE AND WHY THESE?**

Presbyterians recognize two sacraments, Baptism and Communion. We believe that the Church exists where the Word is rightly taught and the Sacraments properly administered. Baptism and Communion are two outward signs of inward and spiritual grace established by Jesus as essential elements of the Church's life. Other acts, such as marriage, ordination and confirmation are important but not called sacraments.

**HOW DO AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP "WORK" IN YOUR CHURCH? IN WHO OR IN WHAT GROUP DOES THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CHURCH'S WELL-BEING EXIST?**

The authority and leadership is that of representative democracy. Each congregation is ruled by the Session, which is composed of the pastor (or teaching elder) and the lay representatives (or ruling elders). Over the Session is the Presbytery, composed of ministers and representative (elected) ruling elders in an area. The next division is the Synod, and topping
the whole structure is the General Assembly, a representative body of the entire church. The principal authority is with the Presbytery. From the beginning, a tradition of resistance to autocratic authority in both church and state has been maintained.

**TO WHICH HISTORICAL FIGURES DO MEMBERS OF YOUR CHURCH LOOK FOR AN EMBODIMENT OF YOUR DENOMINATIONAL TRADITION OR "SPIRIT?"**

We look to two men for the Presbyterian "spirit": John Calvin, a Frenchman who spent his important years in Geneva, Switzerland and John Knox, a Scotchman who studied under Calvin and then succeeded in making Scotland Presbyterian. We look upon Calvin as one of the most logical and systematic teachers the Christian Church has ever developed.

**IN YOUR CHURCH, HOW DOES A PERSON COME TO KNOW WHAT IS RIGHT OR WRONG IN MORAL BEHAVIOR? WHAT "HELPS" CAN HE TURN TO WHEN HE FINDS HIMSELF FACED WITH A DIFFICULT MORAL QUESTION?**

Presbyterians emphasize the individual conscience. The church seeks to help its members understand their responsibilities and obligations as Christians and act upon them in all areas of life. This help would include denominational directives (approved at the General Assembly), sermons, classes, prayer and individual counseling and guidance by the elders and other leaders.
Episcopalian Beliefs

by the Rev. Benjamin I. Scott, Jr.

King Henry VIII caused the separation of the Church of England from Rome in 1532 in the midst of attempts to dissolve his marriage and wed Anne Boleyn. Calvinist influence was especially felt under his successors, Edward VI and Elizabeth I, definitively marking the Church of England as a Reformation body. The Protestant Episcopal Church is the American descendant of the Church of England.

What is your church’s belief about the Lord’s Supper? How important is its celebration in your church, and what aspects do you emphasize?

The celebration of the Lord’s Supper, common known as the Eucharist, the Holy Communion or the Mass, is the central act of worship in the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church is one branch of the Anglican Communion, a group of self-governing churches which grew out of the English mother church. Each member of the Anglican Communion has its own liturgy, based on the original English Prayer Book liturgy, which is frequently updated.

The purpose of the Eucharist is to offer praise and thanksgiving for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to provide a means of sacramental participation in the mystery of salvation. The Episcopal Church holds the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine without defining the manner in which the change occurs.
In some portions of the Episcopal Church, the tradition has developed of substituting the Daily Office of Morning Prayer for the Eucharist as the primary act of worship on many Sunday mornings.

**How does your church describe the role of the Bible in the life of the believer? Its importance? What do you believe about the Scriptures? How do you use them in daily life?**

The Old and New Testaments are the source of doctrine for Episcopal theology. The Episcopal Church neither believes in the literal interpretation of the Bible nor in individual interpretation. The church, which encourages biblical scholarship, is the final authority in biblical interpretation. Episcopalians are encouraged to read and study Scripture.

*The Book of Common Prayer*, which includes all of the church's official services, is largely made up of biblical material. Thus, the Bible is related both to the individual's daily prayers and to the major events in his life.

**What are the important beliefs in your church about the confession and forgiveness of sins?**

The Episcopal Church teaches three ways to confess personal sin. First, the individual in private prayer may seek personal forgiveness of individual sins. Second, the individual in the sacrament of Penance may confess sin to God through the mediation of a priest who then administers penance, counsel and absolution. Third, the corporate sin of a gathering of Episcopalians is confessed in public worship by praying the General Confession. The individual may recall personal sin during the General Confession and receive the general absolution of the corporate gathering.
For members of your church, what is a sacrament? How many do you have and why?

The Catechism of the Episcopal Church teaches two major sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. Reception of these sacraments is necessary to be an Episcopalian and for personal salvation. In addition, the Episcopal church administers five other sacraments when they are sought by church members: Penance, Unction, Holy Orders, Confirmation and Marriage.

How do authority and leadership "work" in your church? In whom or in what group does the ultimate responsibility for the church's well-being exist?

Authority in the Episcopal Church lies within the three orders of the ministry. The bishop is in Catholic and Apostolic succession and is the ultimate authority in his diocese. The priest, or presbyter, holds the authority within the local congregation. The deacon is assigned by the bishop to do specific, nonsacramental functions. The administration of this authority at the national, diocesan and parish level depends upon the leadership of laymen who act within the elective, representative structures to carry out the ministry of the church. In the Episcopal Church, each diocese is autonomous (self-governing), and the bishop of that diocese has the final responsibility for the church's well-being within his Jurisdiction.

To what historical figures do members of your church look for an embodiment of your denominational tradition or "spirit?"

Emerging out of the Reformation, the Episcopal Church has no one person from whom it has received its tradition. Members of the Episcopal Church find models of spirituality in the saints of Catholic Christianity and in the historic leadership of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church. Episcopalians receive a heritage and a tradition of worship, theology and ministry from the Church of England.
In your church, how does a person come to know what is right or wrong in moral behavior? What "helps" can he turn to when he finds himself faced with a moral question?

In morals and ethics, the Episcopal Church has hesitated to legislate the conduct of its members. Through theological examination and the democratic process of its structures, the church states principles upon which the individual conscience may act. These actions are then accountable to God and to society. The Episcopalian is referred to his parish priest or to the agencies and the institutions of the church for assistance in making moral choices.
Roman Catholic Beliefs

by the Rev. John Forliti

There was a Christian community in Rome at the time of the Apostles, of whom the most prominent, Peter and Paul, would die there. Enjoying a double prominence as an apostolic Church and as the Church of the imperial capital, Rome was recognized as the first Church of Christendom in the patristic age. The only Apostolic Church in the West, it is the mother Church of western Europe and the countries Europe would conquer.

What is your church's belief about the Lord's Supper? How important is its celebration in your church, and what aspects do you emphasize?

For Catholics, the Eucharist (Mass) is the most important sacrament. In it, under the sign of bread and wine, Christ is truly present, perpetuating the sacrifice of Calvary and nourishing the faithful with the gift of himself, the Bread of Life. The Mass is both sacrifice and meal. The faithful are joined to Christ in the offering of himself to God (sacrifice), and they are united to God and to each other by sharing in the "breaking of the bread" (meal).

How does your church describe the role of the Bible in the life of the believer? What do you believe about the Scriptures? How do you use them in daily life?

The Bible is understood as "God's word in man's language." Catholics hold the Scriptures in high regard and give them a pre-eminent position in prayer and worship. Catholics
believe that the Scriptures need the church for their correct interpretation. Though the individual is encouraged to read the Bible for his own spiritual benefit he looks to the church for guidance in understanding it.

**WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT BELIEFS IN YOUR CHURCH ABOUT THE CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS OF SIN?**

Catholics believe that generally sin has a social as well as an individual dimension. Therefore, in the sacrament of Penance (confession) a person admits his sins to a priest who represents the community of the church and receives the forgiveness of God through the ministry of the priest.

Catholics believe that God has designated certain "signs," like Penance, through which his power works. Though Penance is not the only way in which forgiveness is received, it is the principal sacramental means of obtaining reconciliation with God and the Church community.

**FOR MEMBERS OF YOUR CHURCH, WHAT IS A SACRAMENT? HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE AND WHY THESE?**

Sacraments are sacred signs and actions in which Jesus Christ bestows his Spirit on the faithful. Catholics believe in seven sacraments: Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance, Matrimony, Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick. In each one, it is Christ himself who acts. The church, with its ministers serving as instruments of Christ, has the responsibility of administering the sacraments.

**HOW DO AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP "WORK" IN YOUR CHURCH? IN WHOM OR IN WHAT GROUP DOES THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CHURCH'S WELL-BEING EXIST?**

The ultimate authority in the Catholic Church rests with the Pope as the successor of St. Peter and chief bishop, and with the bishops from all over the world gathered in council.
The local church looks to the bishop or archbishop as its head. He has the responsibility to lead and direct its functions and to preach the Gospel to all the members of his church. Other clergy and lay members of the church help him in this task.

TO WHICH HISTORICAL FIGURES DO THE MEMBERS OF YOUR CHURCH LOOK FOR AN EMBODIMENT OF YOUR DENOMINATIONAL TRADITION OR "SPIRIT?"

Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is the founder of their church. Moreover, Catholics have traditionally given the saints of past ages a prominent place in their faith-life. Not only those publicly acclaimed for holiness and virtue, but everyone who "has died in the peace of Christ" belongs to the Communion of Saints, that is, to the Body of Christ. The feast of All Saints is a celebration honoring all those who remained faithful to their baptismal calling and who are destined to enjoy "everlasting life" in union with God the Father.

IN YOUR CHURCH, HOW DOES A PERSON COME TO KNOW WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG IN MORAL BEHAVIOR? WHAT "HELPS" CAN HE TURN TO WHEN HE FINDS HIMSELF FACED WITH A MORAL QUESTION?

Catholics believe that the ultimate subjective norm of right and wrong is the conscience of the individual. The individual person has considerable help in determining right and wrong from the Scriptures, the teaching of the Church, the pastoral guidance and counseling of other members of the Church, and from the Spirit's presence within the person himself. However, Catholics believe in an objective morality, that is, standards and rules of behavior that apply to all men. They look to the Magisterium (the teaching authority) of the church for guidance in determining this objective morality.
Part II
The Eastern Christian Tradition
For over 1000 years Rome was the only Christian center of significance outside of the East. Christianity began in the Holy Land, in the culture of the Middle East. Its principal centers, Jerusalem (where Christ died and rose), Antioch (where the term "Christian" was coined), and Alexandria (home of the first Christian schools and monasteries) were recognized as patriarchates along with New Rome, Constantine’s Eastern capital. The major families of Eastern Christian Churches today are the Byzantine and Oriental (Armenian, Coptic and Syrian) Orthodox, the Church of the East (Assyrian) and their counterparts in communion with Rome (Eastern Catholic).

What is your church’s belief about the Lord’s Supper? How important is its celebration in your church and what aspects do you emphasize?

Like most Christians, we consider it a remembrance on our part, a grateful recollection of the entire divine plan for our salvation, especially the death and resurrection of Christ. Like most "high church" bodies, we also believe it is a divine action, by which God mystically re-presents the paschal mystery, so that we as individuals may consciously take part. Thus God takes our memorial rite and makes it an arena in which his grace works.

Like Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, we see this divine presence chiefly in terms of the real presence. Thus we believe that the bread and wine offered are transformed into
the very body and blood of Christ. We differ slightly from them in that we see this transformation as worked by the Holy Spirit in answer to the prayer of the priest, rather than by the simple repetition of Christ's words.

Again, like most Christians we see this sacrament as a means of deepening our relationship to the Lord whom we receive and also as uniting all who share the one loaf and the one cup to one another in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's Supper, which we call the Divine Liturgy (literally, "God's Work on behalf of the people") is the principal act of worship in the church, offered every Sunday and feast day, if not daily. Sharing in this sacrament is the chief, but not only, means for us of keeping holy the Lord's Day.

**How does your church describe the role of the Bible in the life of the believer? What do you believe about the Scriptures? How do you use them in daily life?**

Like most Christians we see the Bible as the record of God's activity among men, revealing all that is necessary for our salvation. It is a primary source and guide for faith and practice of the Christian life. All are encouraged to read and study the Scriptures both as source of our knowledge of God's eternal plan and as relevant to our individual lives. Naturally, the Scriptures are read in all divine services and much of our church hymnody is based on Scriptural imagery.

Unlike many Christians, however, we believe that the Scriptures are primarily an expression of the Church's life. It is the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which first composed and collected, and continues to understand and interpret the Bible as an essential expression of its faith in what God has done. We do not believe that the Church in one age has a "different" Spirit from that of any other, and so we recognize a continuity of expression of God's revelation (Tradition), reaching back to the early church Fathers. The contemporary church submits itself to that Spirit-inspired tradition, for it was the same Spirit guiding the Fathers that
guides the church today. Needless to say, as the whole contemporary church must subject itself to the tradition of the Fathers, the individual must do so as well.

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT BELIEFS IN YOUR CHURCH ABOUT THE CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS?

Like most Christians we believe that mankind was subject to sin and death before Christ and that his saving death and resurrection are the source of our life. Unlike Augustine, Luther, Calvin and most western Christians, we do not believe that the guilt of the original sin has been passed on to us, rendering us guilty. Rather we see the original sin as the wedge through which death entered the world. Fear of the power of death moves us to further sins and so it goes. By accepting Christ in faith and by being baptized into his death and resurrection, the person is freed of the power of sin and death and saved from the strangle-hold it has on him.

For the daily sins the Christian commits, there are many ways of asking and receiving forgiveness: private prayer, receiving the Eucharistic Christ in faith (often called the "purifying live coal," after Isaiah's vision), penitential services and rites. In the sacrament, where we confess specific sins directly and publicly to God with the priest as witness, the priest represents the community and prays for the forgiveness of sins. We believe that this prayer is unfailingly answered, for it is the prayer of the Spirit working in the Church.

For sins committed overtly against one another, reconciliation and mutual forgiveness are expected. Every Eucharist has the rite of reconciliation before the offering of the gifts, in line with Matthew 5:23-4. Likewise, Lent is preceded by "Forgiveness Sunday" on which it is expected that all enmities be reconciled. We cannot stand before God with rancor in our hearts for anyone.

FOR MEMBERS OF YOUR CHURCH, WHAT IS A SACRAMENT? HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE AND WHY THESE?
Like most of the churches in this survey, we see the sacraments as outward and visible signs of God's grace working within us. Thus they are of divine institution. Like Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, we accept seven sacraments. Some, such as Baptism, Eucharist, Forgiveness of Sins, come from Christ; others, such as Orders, Chrismation (confirmation), Unction of the Sick, come from the Holy Spirit inspiring the apostles. Their presence in the historical churches of both East and West attests to their universal acceptance in the undivided church.

**How do authority and leadership "work" in your church? In whom or in what group does the ultimate responsibility for the church's well-being exist?**

There are three orders of ministry in the church as among Episcopalians and Roman Catholics. The bishop is the chief pastor of the church in a given area. The priest assists in the bishop's ministry by pastoring the local congregation. The deacon concerns himself with the church's charities and temporal affairs besides having an important role in assisting with the church's worship.

Organizationally, Byzantine churches - whether Catholic or Orthodox - are fellowships of churches sharing a common liturgical and spiritual tradition which stems from the Greek-speaking Christian communities of the Byzantine Empire. Each national church has a chief bishop, usually called a patriarch ("first father") who is its honorary head. The Synod of bishops, over which the patriarch presides and which meets annually, determines the general thrust of church life.

Each diocese functions somewhat autonomously under its bishop. The bishop is assisted by a presbyteral council (of clergy) and a pastoral council (of laity). These councils have an advisory capacity.

The parish priest is the spiritual leader of the ordinary congregation, assisted by a parish council, which acts in an
advisory capacity to the pastor in all matters concerning the good of the parish.

**WHICH HISTORICAL FIGURES DO MEMBERS OF YOUR CHURCH LOOK TO FOR AN EMBODIMENT OF YOUR TRADITION AND SPIRIT?**

Like Roman Catholics, we look primarily to the saints and church teachers of earlier ages as outstanding examples of Christian living. For our theological teachings we look especially to the biblical interpretations of the Fathers of the undivided church, especially the Greek Fathers. For our liturgical and spiritual sources, we rely on the Byzantine or Greek tradition of our ancestors which embodied the deepest and most coherent theological and liturgical expression of its day. We feel that this tradition, despite its antiquity, or rather because of it, is closer to the basics of biblical teaching and spirituality than many schools or theologies of more recent origin.

**IN YOUR CHURCH, HOW DOES A PERSON COME TO KNOW WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG IN MORAL BEHAVIOR? WHAT "HELPS" CAN HE TURN TO WHEN HE FINDS HIMSELF FACED WITH A MORAL QUESTION?**

Like most Christians, we find the person's own conscience the ultimate subjective guide for his own behavior. We do believe that there are objective standards of conduct and presume that the serious Christian will apply himself to determine the church's traditions and thus form his conscience according to the mind of the church.

First and paramount of these standards are the Scriptural writings, particularly the teachings of Christ. They are those interpretations and decisions of Fathers and Councils which have come to be regarded as normative over the centuries. It is the task of the church's present day spiritual leaders to relate these Scriptural and traditional teachings to contemporary life and problems.
The Eastern Churches are, nonetheless, noted for their application of the principle of *economy* which is a pastoral concern for human weakness. In light of this principle, the highest ideal is always considered the norm, but it is a goal to be reached for, more than a precept to be assiduously fulfilled at all costs.
What Are Your Beliefs?

What is your church's belief about the Lord's Supper? How important is its celebration in your church and what aspects do you emphasize?

How does your church describe the role of the Bible in the life of the believer? What do you believe about the Scriptures? How do you use them in daily life?

What are the important beliefs in your church about the confession and forgiveness of sins?
For members of your church, what is a sacrament? How many do you have and why these?

How do authority and leadership "work" in your church? In whom or in what group does the ultimate responsibility for the church's well-being exist?

Which historical figures do members of your church look to for an embodiment of your tradition and spirit?

In your church, how does a person come to know what is right and wrong in moral behavior? What "helps" can he turn to when he finds himself faced with a moral question?