



**WHY**  
**WE NEED THE**  
**CHURCH**



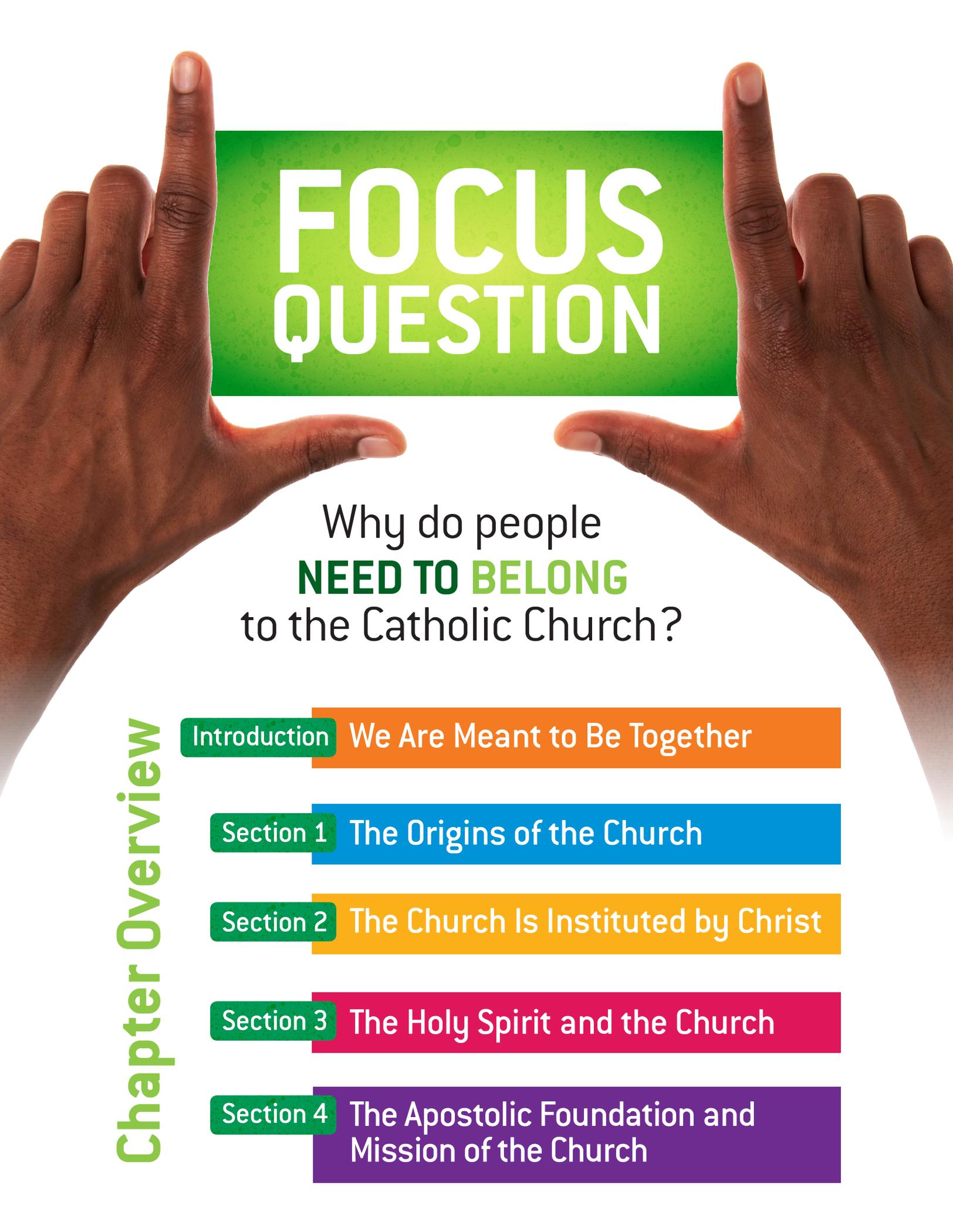
# “I’m Spiritual BUT NOT RELIGIOUS”

A recent survey of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds noted that they described themselves as “more spiritual than religious.” One respondent explained: “I don’t need to define myself to any community by putting myself in a box labeled Baptist, or Catholic, or Muslim. When I die, I believe all my accounting will be done to God, and that when I enter the eternal realm, I will not walk through a door with a label on it.”

Others said they are “spiritual but not religious” because organized religion denigrates itself with power struggles that often involve ego and money. Religion, they said, was associated with church attendance and commitment to orthodox beliefs.

Father James Martin, S.J., said the term “SBNR” (spiritual but not religious) may also be associated with something else: egotism.

“Being spiritual but not religious can lead to complacency and self-centeredness,” Martin said. “If it’s just you and God in your room, and a religious community makes no demands on you, why help the poor?”



# FOCUS QUESTION

Why do people  
**NEED TO BELONG**  
to the Catholic Church?

## Chapter Overview

Introduction We Are Meant to Be Together

Section 1 The Origins of the Church

Section 2 The Church Is Instituted by Christ

Section 3 The Holy Spirit and the Church

Section 4 The Apostolic Foundation and  
Mission of the Church

## INTRODUCTION

# We Are Meant to Be Together

### MAIN IDEA

The Church calls and gathers people together to support them in achieving their fullest sense of identity.



Three childhood friends, now college freshmen, Nick, Terry and Mike, took advantage of their mutual spring break to go backpacking together at Big Bend National Park. The park is located along the Rio Grande River, which serves as the border between Mexico and Texas.

They had a hard time explaining the attraction of Big Bend to their other friends. It was the stark beauty of the place that convinced them to fill their week with an arduous hike rather than party with some other college kids at a beach resort. At the end of their first day, the group made it to the top of the south rim of the Chisos before sunset. From there they gazed out for miles toward Mexico. They walked to the very edge of the rim, peered down to a drop of thousands of feet, while also watching the sun disappear on the horizon, creating an exploding backdrop of purplish red hues.

They were all silent for several moments, before Terry tried to put it all into words. “You want to talk to me about God? There’s God,” he said pointing to the majestic sunset. “*This* is my church.”

Terry’s remark elicited familiar groans and rolled eyes from his friends. They had heard him make comments like this before. Nick and Mike were both practicing Catholics, and Terry once was. All three friends went to Catholic grade school together. But Terry had stopped going to Mass and practicing his faith after that. From time to time he would also bring up “issues” he had with the Church on some of the core Catholic beliefs. And, he would always fall back on similar words as he expressed on the south rim of the Chisos: “I am a spiritual person. I don’t need to go to church to be with God.” Pointing to his heart, Terry would often say, “My religion is right here.”



## NOTE TAKING

**Collating Examples.** As you read the section, create a chart like this to help you list positive and negative examples of individualism and consumerism. Use examples from the text and from your own experience.

	Positive Examples	Negative Examples
Individualism		
Consumerism		

You may wonder about the sighs and concern coming from Nick and Mike. What was wrong with Terry's perspective? Certainly a tenet of Catholicism is that God is Creator of the universe and he can be experienced in the beauty of his handiwork. And, at the center of Catholicism is God's incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, who calls each person to a personal, heartfelt relationship with him. Aren't all Catholics called to be "spiritual people"?

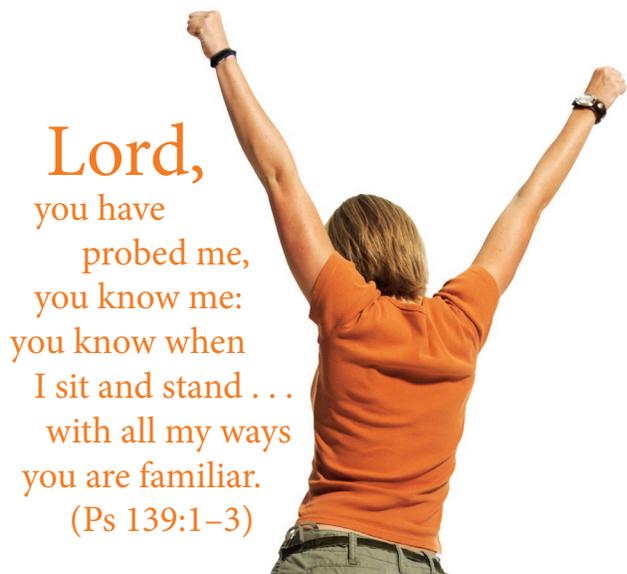
What bothered Nick and Mike was not Terry's desire to be spiritual. Rather, they took Terry's words and actions to mean that he didn't feel a need any longer to be a member of the Catholic Church, or any church, for that matter. Nick and Mike understood that being part of the Church is essential for an authentic relationship with God that leads to a Christian life. Because, as Pope Francis tweeted in September 2013, "We do not become Christians by ourselves. Faith is above all a gift from God which is given to us in and through the Church."

Yet Terry's attitude is a common one today. Various surveys reveal that a majority of people in developed nations like the United States believe in God, but fewer than half of them attend a place of worship on a regular basis. More and more people, including those in the eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-old category now, like Terry, describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious." This group includes those who hold to maintaining only a "private relationship with God" or who may blend writings, beliefs, and practices from several religions together to form their own strand of faith and practice.

In order to understand more about how this "SBNR" phenomenon arose in recent times, it's helpful to look at two forces in modern life: *individualism* and *consumerism*.

## Individualism and Religion

There is nothing wrong with promoting and celebrating your individuality. God created you uniquely in his own divine image. God knows and loves each person as *distinct* and *unique*. Being made in God's image, you possess "the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone" (CCC, 357). The Book of Psalms recognizes how God values the individual:



Jesus, too, reminds us of the personal interest God takes in each of us:

Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God. Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. (Lk 12:6–7)

Individualism only becomes a problem when it drives people apart from one another. When this happens, the individual creates his or her own definition of self and of the world. The person may not be willing to listen or dialogue with others. Perpetuating the value of "going it alone," modern media and culture have sometimes celebrated the more romantic types of individualism. Think about the "heroic loner" you have seen in film or on television who ignores people in authority and institutions, and plays by his own rules.

In fact, people in modern society today prize personal freedom and will fight for individual rights (e.g., the right to a free education, the right to own property). However, they may be slower to embrace common commitments (e.g., voting, paying taxes, assisting the poor). Put it this way: many people believe they have a right to a trial by jury, yet don't want to serve on one!

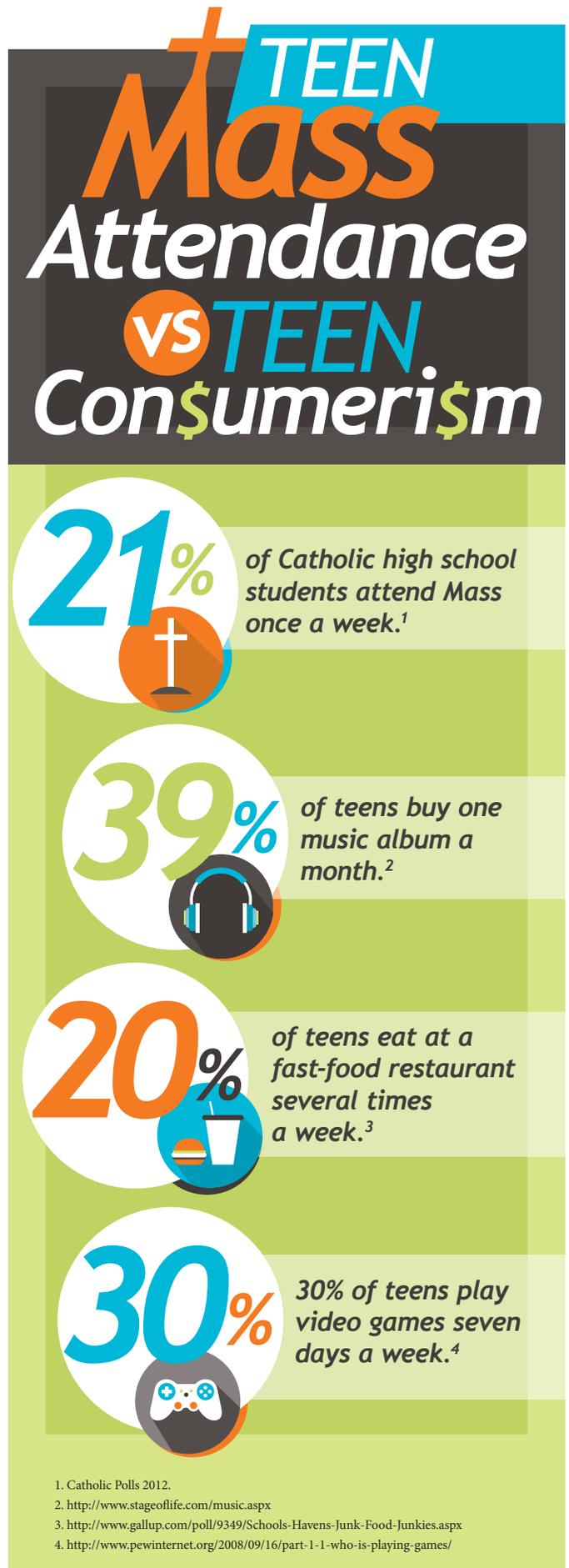
This individualist philosophy translates to the experience many people have of religion and Church. They may feel compelled to join with others who believe in God to worship, pray, socialize, and serve, but when they find themselves disagreeing with an aspect of the faith, they may retreat back to their autonomous world. Or, alternatively, they may simply grow tired or bored with the effort it takes to join in with the others. The bottom line is that many people do not feel that belonging to a church is vital to their maintaining a relationship with God.

## Consumerism and Religion

Along with individualism, consider the far-reaching impact of how consumerism (the practice of an ever-increasing acquisition and consumption of goods) factors into how people participate in religion.

God created a good world to sustain us. Consumerism turns the goodness that God has provided into “packaged products” or material goods for personal enjoyment, with little or no reminder of the generosity of God or the effect on others. Consumerism also fosters an “upgrading mentality.” To understand, just think of the frequent cell phone upgrades many people seem to require.

What does consumerism have to do with religion? Put simply, from a consumer's perspective it is easy to think of religion and religious experience as a kind of product to be consumed with little thought of its connectedness to its tradition and doctrine or to faith. The upgrading mentality comes into play, too.





Some people search out a church with better music or a more glitzy media presentation or a pastor who preaches a message more to their liking. The upgrading mentality also leads others to cobble together a personal spirituality that may combine the Christian story with myths, symbols, and rituals drawn from other religious traditions. Such a person might attend a contemporary retreat that includes participation in a Native American “sweat lodge” ritual. The person’s prayer might begin with a meditation on a Buddhist koan, followed by some spiritual reading from a poem of the Sufi sage, Rumi. It’s easy to see how this type of religious consumerism coupled with individualism

could lead a person to describe himself or herself as more “spiritual than religious.”

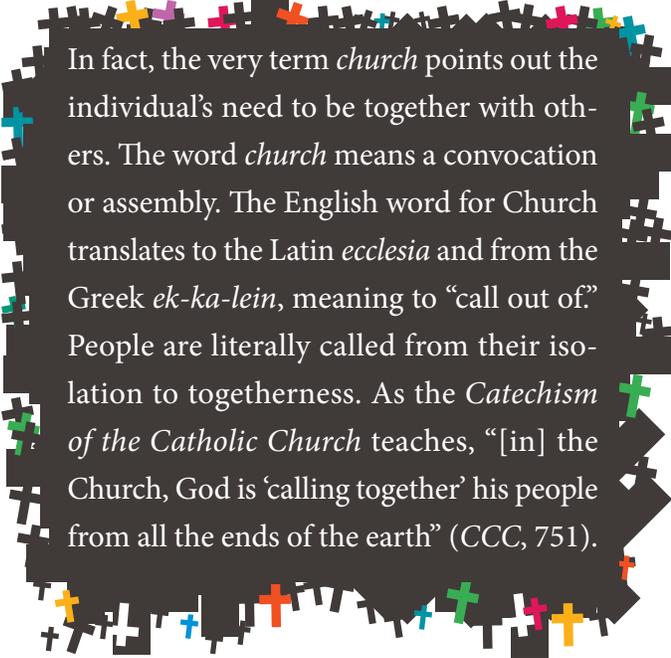
Another problem with viewing religion from a consumer perspective is that worship, prayer, and community can be subtly transformed into a religious product to be consumed and not a communal religious practice and system of beliefs that bind people together with others in a common commitment to God and neighbor.

## Called to Church

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul describes the Church as the “Body of Christ”:

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. (1 Cor 12:12)

St. Paul explained that just as the various parts of a human body (arms, legs, eyes, ears, etc.) rely on one another to function as a human body, so the members of the Church must rely on one another if they are to live as God intended. St. Paul's understanding of the Church stands in stark contrast to the notion of people coming together for a short time to fill up and satisfy their needs, only to return to their solitary lives unchanged. Such a sense of Church would have made no sense to St. Paul, who did not believe that individuals define the Church; but that the Church is what gives individuals their fullest sense of identity. In other words, St. Paul believed that individuals participate in the life of the Church because, at the very core of our being, everyone *needs* the Church.



In fact, the very term *church* points out the individual's need to be together with others. The word *church* means a convocation or assembly. The English word for Church translates to the Latin *ecclesia* and from the Greek *ek-ka-lein*, meaning to "call out of." People are literally called from their isolation to togetherness. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "[in] the Church, God is 'calling together' his people from all the ends of the earth" (CCC, 751).

## SECTION ASSESSMENT



### NOTE TAKING

Use some of the examples in your completed chart to help you answer the following questions.

1. What are some positive reasons people may attempt to remain autonomous in their faith life?
2. What does consumerism have to do with religion?



### COMPREHENSION

3. What did St. Paul teach about the oneness of the members of the Church?
4. What is the meaning of the word *church*?



### CRITICAL THINKING

5. Provide examples of how the individualistic mentality is present in the life of your peer group.
6. Describe an occasion when you encountered religion as a product rather than a way of life.

## SECTION 1

# The Origins of the Church

### MAIN IDEA

The Church's origins lie in the eternal plan of the Holy Trinity that unfolded over time in response to sin entering the world.



The Catholic Church has more than 1.2 billion members worldwide. This makes the Church one of the largest institutions in the world. Indeed, when people

think of the Catholic Church, they may be as likely to think in terms of her institutional structure, and her visible dimension, such as the hierarchy (pope, bishops, priests), schools, or parish churches, as with the sacraments, Scripture, Mary and the saints, and Jesus himself. Although the Church has a human and visible structure to support her spiritual dimension, to understand the Church, one must look past what is visible and look to her origin in the Blessed Trinity.

To understand the origins of the Church, you can meditate on the Church “in the Holy Trinity’s plan and her progressive realization in history” (CCC, 758). What does this mean? Simply, the creation of humankind was always a part of God’s eternal plan. This plan continues to be carried out in history.

God created the world with people in mind, intending that everyone live in loving relationship with him and one another. When sin entered the world, God did not abandon humankind. Rather, he gradually formed humans into the family of God, believers in his Son, Jesus Christ, and the Church. This was done so that all people might be saved. Second-century theologian Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) wrote:



## NOTE TAKING

**Sequencing Events.** As you read this section, create a chart like this one to help you label the following events in chronological order for founding of the Church: Sinai covenant, New Covenant, covenant with Abraham, Babylonian Exile, Protoevangelium, Prophets, and monarchy. Write brief notes to explain each event’s significance.

Events	Notes
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	

Just as God's will is creation and is called "the world," so his intention is the salvation of men, and it is called "the Church."

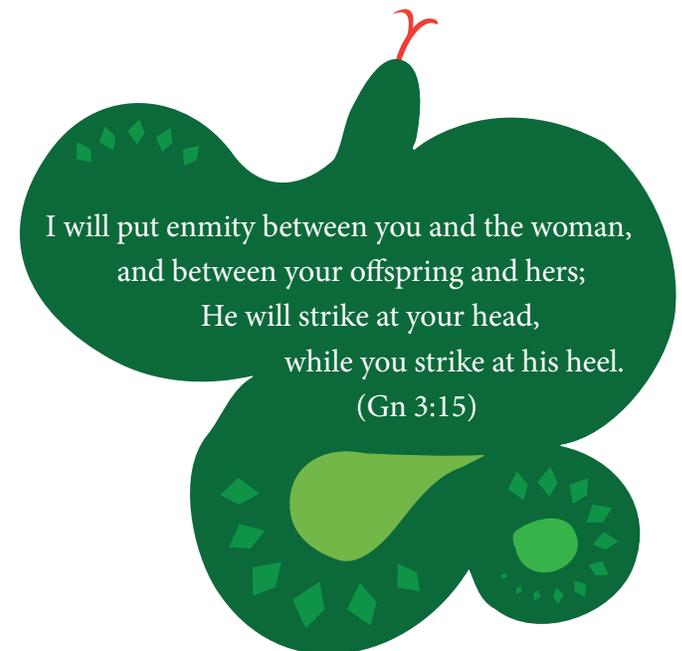
The Second Vatican Council reemphasized the important truth that the Church was foreshadowed or "already present in figure at the beginning of the world" (*Lumen Gentium*, 2), echoing the words of an ancient Christian writer that "the world was created for the sake of the Church." It is the Church that makes your communion with God possible.

## Preparation for the Church in the Old Testament

The teaching of the creation accounts in the Book of Genesis is that God created the first humans in his own image, and endowed them with both *intellect* (an ability to ask questions, to wonder, and to learn) and *free will* (the power to make choices with the possibility that they could love God and one another). God made himself known to Adam and Eve from the time of creation, offering his intimate communion with them and clothing them "with resplendent grace and justice" (CCC, 54).

When the serpent tempted the woman to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree in the garden, it was with the promise that "your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad" (Gn 3:5). Instead of living lives of harmonious relationship with God and with one another, the first man and first woman sinned by believing they might find fulfillment in possessing perfect autonomy and control over the world, that is, that they could be "like gods." Adam and Eve's sin, which is called **Original Sin**, damaged their relationship with God and with one another. It also would affect these same relationships for all the human family.

Yet, from the chaos created by sin, God began to gather together the Church. After speaking to Adam and Eve, he said to the serpent:



This passage in Genesis is called the **Protoevangelium**, or first Gospel. It was the first announcement that God would send a Messiah and a Redeemer, who is a descendent of Eve. From then on, God began to gather those who feared him and did what was right and acceptable in his eyes (see Acts 10:35).

## Preparing with a Covenant

The *remote* preparation of the Church began when God called Abraham, a nomadic farmer, and promised that he would be "father of a host of nations" (Gn 17:5). Although Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were advanced

**Original Sin** The sin of disobedience committed by Adam and Eve that resulted in their loss of original holiness and justice and their becoming subject to sin and death. Original Sin also describes the fallen state of human nature into which all generations of people are born. Jesus Christ came to save all people from Original Sin (and all sin).

**Protoevangelium** A term that means "the first gospel," which is found in Genesis 3:15, when God revealed he would send a Savior to redeem the world.



God said: "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Gn 26:4).

in years, God promised them a son. They and their descendants were invited to enter with God into a mutually binding **covenant**. God willingly bound himself forever to this group of people and gave them a unique and pivotal role in his plan for the world. Catholics today are counted among Abraham's descendants, whom God promised would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

The Church's *immediate* preparation began with God's covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The origins of Israel's sense of itself as a community began not with any human act, but with God's initiative. The Israelites were *chosen* or *elected* by God and became his

**Covenant** The open-ended contract of love between God and human beings. Jesus' Death and Resurrection sealed God's New Covenant of love for all time.

Chosen People bound by a covenant. He told Moses that they were to be a priestly or consecrated People:

Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people. (Ex 19:5)

The Hebrew word used to describe the special relationship God had with Israel is *hesed*, which means "steadfast love." This steady, permanent, and faithful love of God for his people provided the basis for the Israelite's sense of community. This love was experienced concretely by the Law, which Moses received from God on Mount Sinai.

From the Law, the Israelites learned not only of a proper relationship they were to forge with God, but how they were to treat one another. For example, they were to show special concern for widows, orphans, and strangers:

You shall not oppress an alien; you know well how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. (Ex 23:9)

While other ancient religions affirmed an obligation to care for the poor and powerless (e.g., the ancient Babylonian Code of Hammurabi demanded that the king show concern for the poor), Israel was unique in its conviction that the responsibility for the well-being of the vulnerable in the community be shared by all people, and not just those in leadership.

Israel's history did not proceed without division and sinfulness. After a time of unification under one king, political disputes led to the division of the Chosen People into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. The ensuing years were marked by infidelity to God and ignorance of the needs of the poor. As a result, both the Southern Kingdom (Judah) and the Northern Kingdom (Israel) were plunged into periods of exile where the people were removed from their holy homeland and taken captive by foreign nations.



# The MYSTERY of the Church

The Church is a mystery because her nature can never be grasped by the power of reason alone. The Church is a visible, tangible, historical reality, but she also embodies spirit of the invisible, intangible God.

Chapter I of the Second Vatican Council document *Lumen Gentium*, or the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” describes the mystery of the Church. Read the chapter. Outline the eight sections of the chapter using three concise sentences for each section. Two examples (for sections 1 and 5) are listed below.

## SECTION 1

- Christ is the light of the nations and he is present in the Church.

## SECTION 5

- Christ inaugurated the Church by preaching the Good News of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Display your report as a graphic organizer.

In response to these abuses, God sent prophets to both warn the people of their sinfulness and to announce a *new and eternal covenant*. In practice, such rededication first translated to a restoration of the “survivors of Israel” in order to make them “a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6).

This special vision of Israel’s place among nations had another effect on its understanding of community. In the period after the Babylonian Exile, Israel began to separate itself from its neighbors due to the belief that the Chosen People had been punished for previously intermingling with Gentile nations. Yet, this was not the only understanding or practice.

The Book of Jonah imparts that after the prophet Jonah was charged with bringing judgment on a sinful, pagan people, the Ninevites, he was surprised to find his announcement met with their communal penance for their sins. Accepting the repentance of this pagan people, God relented and did not carry out the evil that he had threatened to do to them (see Jonah 3:10). The message of this story is that God’s compassion is not limited to Israel; it extends to all who are open to the call of repentance. Israel was to be a model of what God intended for *all* people.

In the Old Testament, God acts over and over to form a people who are chosen not because of merit, but simply because of his compassion and love for them. Though as a people, the Israelites (later called “Jews”) frequently abandoned the demands of a loving relationship with God, he refused to abandon them. They were a people bound by a promise, a covenant that was not of their making.

In fact, in spite of their ongoing sinfulness, God announced through the prophets this new and eternal covenant. He was committed to the Jewish people as the faith community from which his own Son, Jesus, would be born. When the proper time came, God himself became a member of that community. The only

Son of God was entrusted not only to this Chosen People, but to humanity itself. In the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity came down from Heaven and assumed human nature. It was through this great gift that Christ instituted the **New Covenant** specifically through his **Paschal Mystery**:

he called a people together made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to flesh, but in the Spirit, and it would be the new people of God. (*Lumen Gentium*, 9)

**New Covenant** The climax of Salvation History, the coming of Jesus Christ, the fullness of God's Revelation.

**Paschal Mystery** Christ's work of redemption, accomplished principally by his Passion Death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension. This mystery is commemorated and made present through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

## SECTION ASSESSMENT



### NOTE TAKING

1. What event began the immediate preparation for the Church?
2. What was the new message from the Book of Jonah regarding the experience of God's compassion?



### VOCABULARY

3. Define *Protoevangelium*.
4. Explain how Original Sin put into motion the beginning of the Church.



### COMPREHENSION

5. Summarize the prophets' announcement on the nature of the People of God.



### DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

6. What can people do today to promote the message of justice found in the Book of Jonah?
7. Meet with a partner. Take turns brainstorming words associated with the Church. Write all of the suggestions. Circle three that are most prominent to you. Write about one of the words. What does it say about the meaning of the Church?

## SECTION 2

# The Church Is Instituted by Christ

### MAIN IDEA

The Church was born from Christ's self-giving love that was expressed perfectly in the Paschal Mystery.



In a Catholic high school religion class, a student studying the differences in chronology and themes among the four Gospels commented to his teacher: “Jesus should have just written his own Gospel and saved us all of this trouble!” The teacher responded succinctly: “Jesus didn’t write a Gospel because he was too busy founding a Church!”

The point is well taken. Jesus called, taught, and formed a group of **disciples** who would carry on his mission. In doing so, Jesus instituted the Church by ushering in the **Kingdom of God** on earth.

The Kingdom of God might be thought of as “the world as God would have it to be.” Or, think of it this way: the Kingdom of God is in a state of “already, not yet.” What this means is that in Jesus of Nazareth, the Kingdom of God is *already* present in a new and

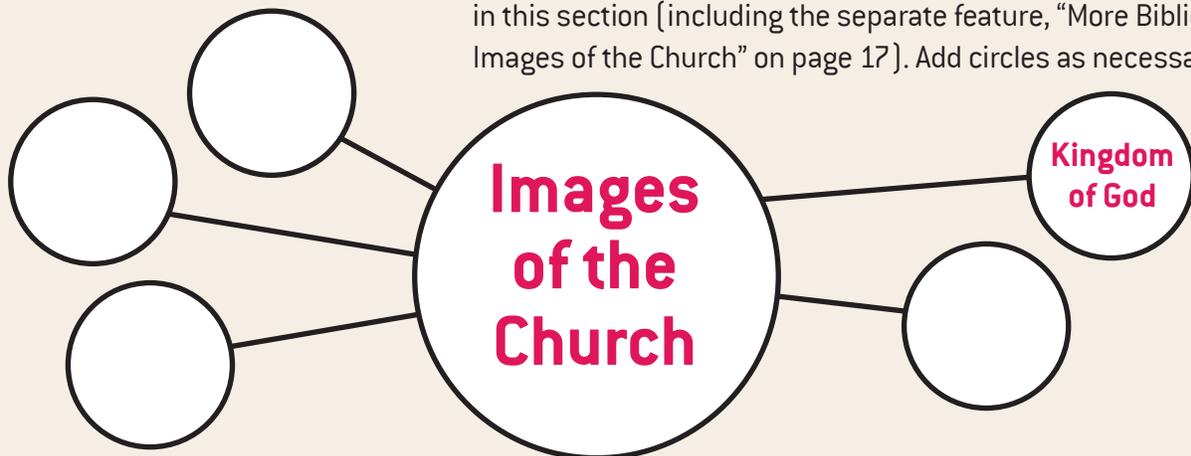
**disciples** Followers of Christ. A disciple is someone who learns from and follows Jesus and who accepts a share of his ministry in the world.

**Kingdom of God** The reign or rule of God. The Kingdom of God has begun with the coming of Jesus Christ. It will exist in its perfect form at the end of time.



## NOTE TAKING

**Identifying Images of the Church.** Use a concept web like the one below to record several images of the Church mentioned in this section (including the separate feature, “More Biblical Images of the Church” on page 17). Add circles as necessary.



unprecedented way. At the same time, God's Kingdom has *not yet* transformed all creation; that will not take place until the end of all history. In the meantime, the Church is the "way to Salvation." This "already, but not yet" quality of the Church is evident in many of the parables Jesus told about the Kingdom. For example, in one parable Jesus said that the Kingdom of God

is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade. (Mk 4:31-32)

It is also important to remember the Old Testament origins of the Kingdom and the Church. The Church's foundation is in the Chosen People and the Law of Mount Sinai of the Old Testament. Christ did not come to abolish the Law. But he did preach a

radically new understanding of it. Jesus emphasized that in the faithful application of the 613 laws of the Torah, the command that expresses the inseparability of love of God and love of neighbor must guide all of the other laws. His preaching and ministry became a threat to many, both for political and religious reasons. The occupying Romans were doubtless concerned that Jesus of Nazareth would destabilize their hold in the region. Some of the Jewish leaders, particularly those associated with the Temple, saw Jesus' message as a threat to their own religious authority.

## The Church Is Born on the Cross

Another ancient tradition affirms that the Church, in a certain sense, was born on the Cross. The concerns and actions of the Romans and some of the Jewish leaders led to the events of the Paschal Mystery. The



*Catholics usually display (and wear) a crucifix with Christ present on the Cross rather than an empty Cross as a reminder of the saving act of his Death.*

Second Vatican Council connected Christ's Death on the Cross with the founding of the Church:

For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the "wondrous sacrament of the whole Church." (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 5)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adds:

As Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam's side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross. (CCC, 766)

Jesus freely chose to go to the Cross. In so doing, he demonstrated the breadth and depth of the Father's love for his people. On the Cross, Jesus' complete gift is dramatically witnessed. Jesus' entire life was an act of complete self-giving love and it is this perfect expression of divine love of the Cross that brings about Salvation of humankind.

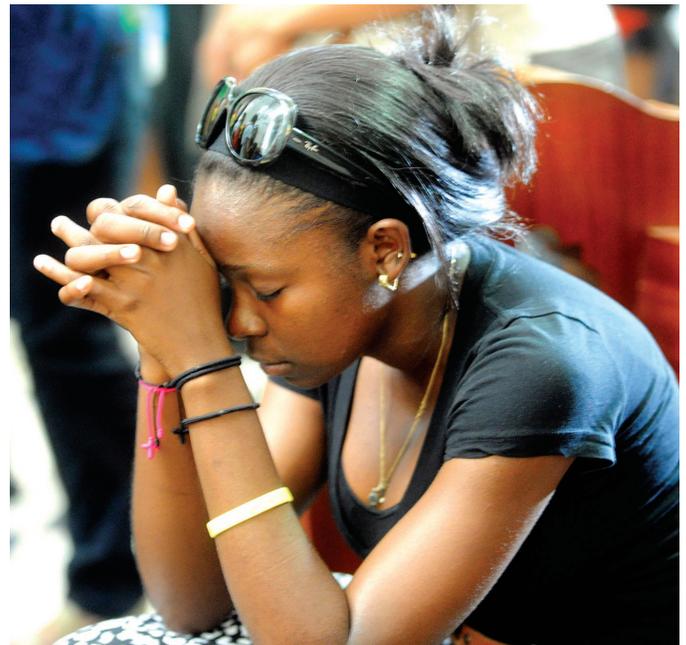
However, the full meaning of Christ's saving work does not *end* with the Cross. Jesus was crucified to atone for human sinfulness. A mystery of the Cross is that it finds its fulfillment in the Resurrection of Jesus. It is the Resurrection that reveals that the power of God's love, incarnate in Christ, triumphs over the power of death. In a world created good by God, sin, evil, and death cannot have the final word. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a God of the living, not of the dead (see Mark 12:26–27). What the Father accomplished in Jesus, he can accomplish in you through your participation in the life of the Church. Your own resurrection is one of the fruits of Christ's Death and Resurrection.

The love of God encountered in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus is now present in human history through the ministry of the Church. Catholics today share in both the struggles and graces of the Cross. They are Christ for the world.

## Jesus Remains Present in the Church

Today, Jesus remains truly present in the Church, though not in flesh and bone. The Church is the Body of Christ in which Christ himself is the head. "Not only is she gathered *around him*; she is united *in him*, in his body" (CCC, 789). Christ is present in several ways in the Church but "most *especially in the Eucharistic species*" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7). In the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained*" (Council of Trent: DS 1651). This presence of Jesus is called the **Real Presence**.

Jesus' presence in the Church is a great blessing and privilege for all Catholics. The Church is where you are able to be with Jesus and, in turn, be sent out by him as his follower.



Catholics sit and pray before the Blessed Sacrament. They bless God because he first blesses them. They adore his Real Presence in the Eucharist as a reminder that he is God and they are his creations. Blessing and adoration lead to praise.

**Real Presence** The unique and true presence of Christ in the Eucharist under the species or appearance of bread and wine.

While there are certainly contemporary people who might imagine themselves as able to be Christian disciples apart from the Church, this really isn't possible. At some point most people realize that despite their best intentions and their many gifts and talents, there is a real limit to anything they can accomplish on their own. This is also the case in their search for God himself. When St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* that "our hearts are restless, Lord, until they rest in you," he had already found God *in the Church*.

Through Baptism, Catholics "are incorporated into Christ and integrated into the People of God" (CCC, 897). Jesus continues to invite all people into relationship with God the Father through the Church that he instituted. It is in the Church that people are able to

continue to know and experience the healing and forgiving love of God. It is in the Church that you believe and witness to your faith in what Jesus revealed, that is:

- he came from God the Father
- he and the Father are one
- he has returned to the Father
- you will share in this love

This is the Good News of Jesus Christ, given to the Church in Faith. You respond to God's gift of Faith with free assent to what he has revealed in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Your response, guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit, is offered to God and shared with the world through the life of the Church.



# The Kingdom of GOD is like...

Create a PowerPoint or video presentation on the Kingdom of God. Create your own metaphors and similes for the Kingdom that can be illustrated with back-to-back slides. For example:

**Slide A**

**The Kingdom of God is like**

**Slide B**



Intersperse other descriptions of the Kingdom of God from the Gospels into your presentation. See, for example:

- Matthew 13:31–32
- Matthew 13:33
- Matthew 18:1–5
- Matthew 18:23–35
- Mark 4:26–29
- Luke 7:18–23

Choose accompanying background music to intersperse with your presentation. Share the final results with your classmates and peers.

# MORE BIBLICAL IMAGES OF *the Church*

The Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—offers several other images of the Church. Each of these images helps us to understand more about our communion with other Catholics and our communion with God in the Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



## BODY OF CHRIST

The Church as the Body of Christ is the most complete image. The origin of this image comes from Jesus himself who taught that what we do to others we do to him (see Matthew 25:40). St. Paul highlighted this image further when he wrote: “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it” (1 Cor 12:27).

To St. Paul, there was no such thing as a solitary Christian. Life with Christ is always a *shared life*. Though all the parts of the body share a common existence, they could not exist when severed from the whole. For example, a hand is only able to function as a hand when it is part of the rest of the body. He emphasized that Christians are bound together by Faith and Baptism. Paul also believed that the relationship to the Church established in Baptism was further nourished through the celebration of Eucharist.

You may have encountered some Christians who describe their faith in individual terms, such as an experience of being “born again” or of “accepting Jesus as my personal Savior.” Although it is important to cherish the value of a personal relationship with Christ, this way of describing the relationship can miss an important point. Christian living is not about “inviting Christ into *my* life”; rather, it is about being drawn into *Christ’s* life, principally through initiation into Christ’s Body, the Church. French theologian Yves de Monthceuil explained: “It is not Christians who, in coming together, constitute the Church; it is the Church that makes us Christians.”



## VINE AND BRANCHES

Jesus used the image of a vine and branches to describe his relationship to each of us and to the Church:

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:5)

As with the image of the Body of Christ, the image of Church as a vine with branches teaches that all are members of the Lord's Body, each with individual talents and duties, but all united in the Holy Spirit to Jesus. The vine and branches image of Church emphasizes common goals, ideals, and intimate sharing. The Church forms a community with a life, tradition, and story of her own. The Church is responsible for continuing God's work of building up the community and serving others.



## BRIDE OF CHRIST

The Old Testament established the image of Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride. For example, the prophet Hosea in remaining faithful to his harlot wife, Gomer, represents God's covenantal fidelity to the spiritual philandering of Israel (see Hosea 2:21–25).

The bride of Christ image is likewise referred to in the New Testament. John the Baptist named Jesus as the Bridegroom, "the one who has the bride" (Jn 3:29). In Ephesians 5:21–32, St. Paul compared the relationship between Christ and the Church as a husband and wife being of one flesh (quoting Genesis 2:23).

In a covenantal marriage two people commit themselves to one another for the rest of their lives. For this reason, Christ instituted the Sacrament of Matrimony. A man and a woman become living symbols of God's love for his people.

Christ has entered a similar covenant with the Church, and has filled her with his grace. Headed by Christ, the bridegroom of the bride, the Church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The Church completes the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit on earth.

# SECTION ASSESSMENT



## NOTE TAKING

1. What is your favorite image of the Church?
2. What do each of the images of the Church presented in this section have in common?



## VOCABULARY

Fill in the blanks of each of the following definitions with a glossary term from this section.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ are those who learn from and follow Jesus and who accept a share of his ministry in the world.
4. God's saving love is most fully revealed in the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The \_\_\_\_\_ will exist in its perfect form at the end of time.



## COMPREHENSION

6. Explain the dimensions of the Kingdom of God as "already, not yet."
7. What was Jesus' understanding of the Law of Mount Sinai?
8. What does it mean to say that the Church was born on the Cross of Christ?



## CRITICAL THINKING

9. How does the life and history of the Church model the Parable of the Mustard Seed?