

Catholic Tradition, Mission, and Practice



THE CHURCH
OUR STORY

PATRICIA MORRISON DRIEDGER

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Somewhat like the twenty-five young people whose reception into the Church is described in the first pages of this book, I became a Catholic as a graduate student in 1940. The decision to take that step was the most important of my life; every major decision I have subsequently taken has rested upon it. To this day I remain at heart a convert, passionately attached to the Church. For me, however, the Church has never been an end in herself, but only a means of union with Jesus, the Lord of the Church, and with the triune God. The Church is the place where God is preeminently to be found.

In Unit 1 this book begins, as we all should, with the Church as a mystery—that is to say, a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. Because the Church is a mystery, we can never describe her exhaustively; she remains ever open to new and deeper exploration. Different aspects of the Church are illuminated by the various biblical metaphors presented in Unit 2 of this volume. While taking on different forms in different ages and cultures, the Church remains ever herself, one and catholic, as stated in Unit 3. In Unit 4, the book treats the creeds and dogmas that bind the Church unconditionally to the truth of Christ, her divine Teacher. As a herald, the Church is commissioned to preach the truth of Christ to all nations of the world. The sacraments of the Church, treated in Unit 5, are privileged points of encounter with the living Lord. Although her sacraments are reserved for her own members, the Church labors for all. Just as Christ came not to be served but to serve, she strives to bind up the wounds of a broken humanity (Unit 6). Her goal is to overcome alienation and establish a universal communion of faith and love in which the barriers of selfishness and greed are overcome. Unit 7 describes the Church as a communion of saints striving to reach this goal.

All of these aspects of the Church are luminously set forth in this very comprehensive text. I hope and pray that it will lead many students to a richer understanding and deeper love of the Church. By entering more fully into that mystery they will progressively put on the mind and heart of Christ.

—Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J.

F O R E W O R D





U N I T O N E

W H A T I S C H U R C H ?



WHAT IS CHURCH?

The word “Church” may elicit many definitions and images, from the most elementary of your early religious education formation, to those laced with positions the Church takes on contemporary issues, to the descriptions offered by Church documents, especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

But consider how St. Joan of Arc once described the Church: “About Jesus Christ and the Church I simply know they’re just one thing, and we shouldn’t complicate the matter.”

Our faith in the Catholic Church depends entirely on our faith in Jesus Christ. According to one of the favorite images from the Church Fathers, the Church is like the moon, all of its light reflected from the sun.

When the Church proclaims the Gospel to all people, it also shines light on itself. Jesus Christ is the light of the Church.

The Church is also a place where, in the words of St. Hippolytus, “the Spirit flourishes.”

Our Catholic creeds describe our belief that the Church is holy and catholic, and also one and apostolic, and that it is inseparable from belief in God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But as we learn more about the Church, it is important to attribute all the gifts of the Church—including the four marks of the Church described in detail in chapter 1—as from God.

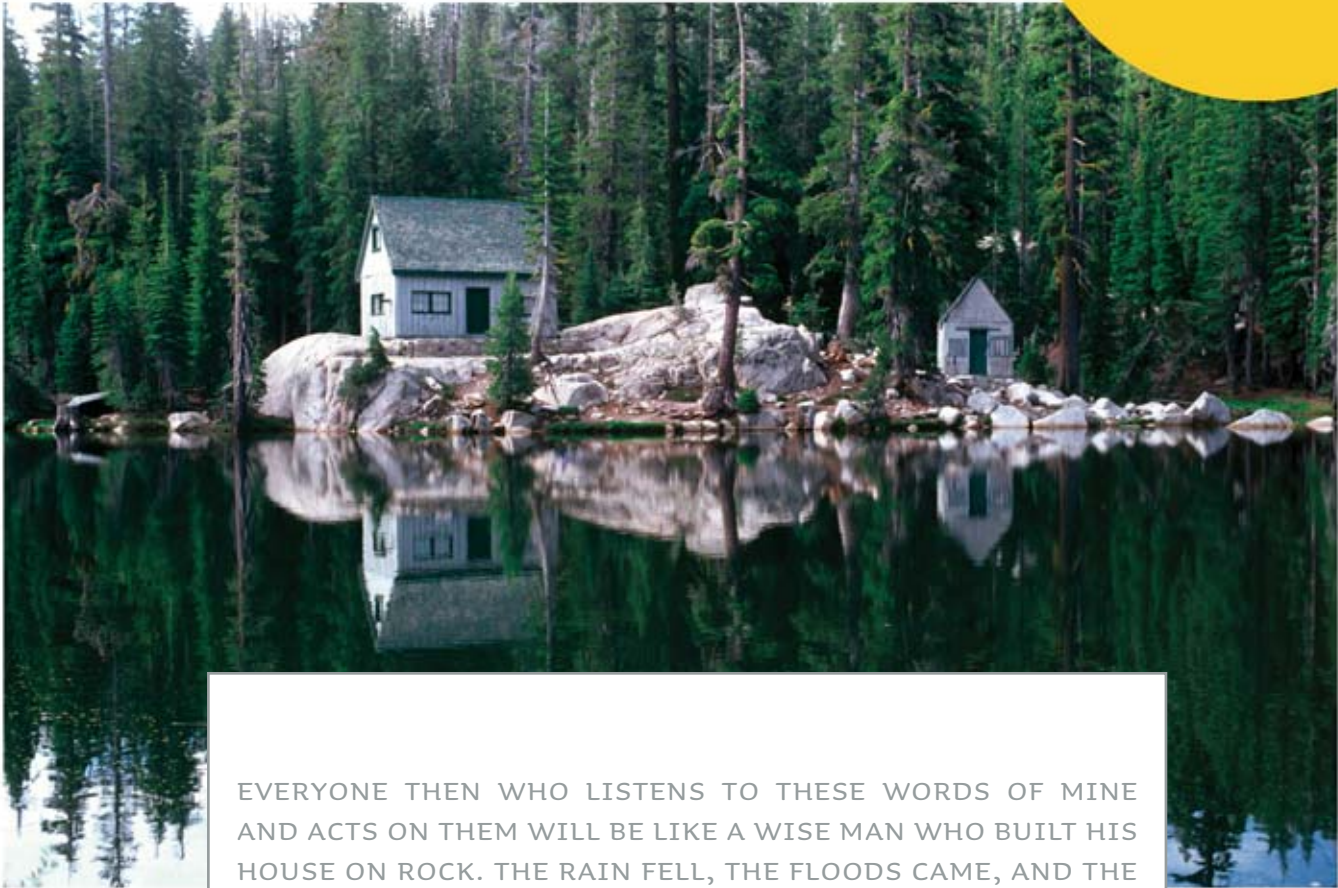
And remember the words of St. Joan of Arc: Jesus Christ and the Church are just one thing.

When you have completed Unit 1, you will be able to

- explain the relationship between faith in Christ and membership in the Church;
- define faith and explain how the Church fosters and supports faith;
- summarize the role of the Church in the world;
- evaluate your own willingness to answer God’s call to “come out of the world and into the community of faith”;
- name and define the four marks of the Church and explain why these marks are essential;
- propose ways and take steps to improve or strengthen your relationship with the Church.

A HOUSE on a ROCK

1.1



EVERYONE THEN WHO LISTENS TO THESE WORDS OF MINE AND ACTS ON THEM WILL BE LIKE A WISE MAN WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON ROCK. THE RAIN FELL, THE FLOODS CAME, AND THE WINDS BLEW AND BUFFETED THE HOUSE. BUT IT DID NOT COLLAPSE; IT HAD BEEN SET SOLIDLY ON ROCK.

—*Matthew 7:24–25*

I BELIEVE AND PROFESS . . .

Outside, the prairie winds rattled the doors and whistled through the gutters, while the sleet pelted the stained glass windows. Inside, the flame on the eight foot candle spat and sputtered as it burned through the last remaining drops of snow and rain surrounding its wick. This was not the way anyone had imagined Easter would



be, and yet, inside St. Thomas Aquinas Church in central Iowa no one doubted that it really was Easter. Somehow, in that dark, cold, slightly smoky church, the joy of the resurrection seemed almost tangible. Perhaps that was because of the six newly baptized adults in long, damp robes who were standing in the church sanctuary and grinning from ear to ear, in spite of their wet

hair. Or perhaps it was the confident joy of nineteen others who stood with them, mostly university students, who also called out for all to hear, "I believe and profess all that the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God."

"I believe and profess all that the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God." As those words echoed back through the church, I couldn't help wondering how many of us who have been Catholic all our lives would have the courage to stand before a congregation and proclaim the same thing. Moreover, how many would do it with the joy and enthusiasm of those twenty-five? I asked myself how they could be so sure of what they were saying. Were they just naive? Were they unaware of all of the imperfections of the Catholic Church and of all the tensions among its members? For a moment I was able to comfort myself with the thought that these twenty-five people gathered in the church sanctuary could do what I would find difficult because they did not know what I know. But then I looked at their sponsors.

I knew most of those sponsors well. They were people of faith, but also people with doubts. They were people who sometimes struggled with the Catholic Church, and I knew that they had not hidden those struggles from the ones they were sponsoring. Yet all of their struggles and all of their doubts had not changed the desire of these twenty-five to embrace the Catholic Church and to commit their lives to it. I had to ask "Why?" What is it that we as a Church have that these people wanted? In a world that encourages us constantly to try new things and keep our options open, in a world that encourages us to let go of the past and look to the future, in a world that places entertainment and comfort above almost everything else, what attracted twenty-five very different young adults to a Church that expects commitment, is slow to change, is

guided by the past, finds value in suffering, and makes no significant effort to keep people entertained?

Yes, I knew these people were attracted by the fact that we have Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit, and we have the love of God the Father. But that isn't what made them Catholics, only what made them

Christians—and nineteen of those young adults were already Christians in other denominations. So why were they coming to the Catholic Church? What new understanding of living out their faith had they found? More importantly, what did they have to teach and to remind me?

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT



- WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?
- WHAT DO YOU FIND DIFFICULT ABOUT BEING CATHOLIC?
- WHAT MAKES YOU CATHOLIC?

FAITH AND THE CHURCH ARE CONNECTED

Those new Catholics remind us of the connection between faith and the Church. Faith and the Church should not be treated as two independent things. Many people do seem to believe that Christian faith and participating in the Church can be separated. It is not uncommon to hear people say,

- “I believe in God, but I have no use for Church.”
- Or, “As long as you accept Jesus, the question of whether you belong to a church is irrelevant.”
- Or even, “Don't commit yourself to any church. Churches get in the way of real faith.”

From a Catholic perspective, however, Christian faith cannot be separated from a relationship with the Church because where the Church is, God is.

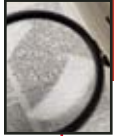
The Catholic faith is rooted in faith in God who became incarnate in history in the

person of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus, people were able to touch, listen to, and speak to God directly. In Jesus, people came to know God's healing and forgiveness in an immediate way. In Jesus, God's offer of salvation and fullness of life became a tangible reality. Following Jesus' passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, salvation and fullness of life became accessible to all people through the Church. Jesus breathed his Spirit into the Church so that the Church could become his body on earth. Because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church is able to be God's continuing physical presence in the world.

If the Church is indeed the visible presence of God, then it is obvious that we cannot separate our response to God's call from our relationship to the Church. The very word “Church” reveals the connection between answering God's call and being part of a community. The Greek word for “Church,” used in the New Testament, is *ekklesia*, meaning “to call out of.” *Ekklesia* was commonly used to refer to any legislative assembly; when it was used in the Scriptures, it referred to the community called out of the

world by God to live and act in a way that was different from others. But God's call does not invite us as isolated individuals. The meeting place is not a private dinner with God. Rather, God's call resounds through all creation, summoning those who hear to

gather in an assembly and to act together on behalf of and in the name of God. God's call is a call to be united with Christ, to be part of his body. In other words, God's call to faith is a call to be Church.



STUDY QUESTIONS

- WHAT DOES THE WORD "CHURCH" MEAN?
- WHY CAN FAITH AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP NOT BE SEPARATED?

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT



- HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER SOMEONE'S CLAIM THAT "CHURCHES GET IN THE WAY OF REAL FAITH"?

FAITH IS A HUMAN ACT

In order to accept and live out our role as the body of Christ on earth, in order to be Church, we need **faith**. Pope John Paul in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater* says that faith is "contact with the mystery of God."¹ Faith is a free gift from God, and without God's help we could not believe. But faith is also an authentically human act. It is our response to God's gift, a surrendering of ourselves to God. When we believe in, or surrender ourselves to the mystery of God which has been revealed to us, our faith is

deepened. Before we can act as members of the body of Christ, God must touch us with the gift of faith and we must respond. Then, and only then, will we experience the fullness of faith which is unity with Christ, the head of the body.

Each individual member of the body of Christ needs to believe in Christ if he or she is going to act on behalf of Christ in the world. To believe in Christ means "to abandon ourselves to Christ,"² that is, to allow ourselves to be shaped by Christ and to let go of those things which keep us from listening to and following him. No one can act as part of the body of Christ who does not have a faith which connects him or her to Christ.

faith—Contact with the mystery of God. Faith begins as a freely given gift from God.

How the Gift of Faith Begins

The gift of faith can begin in many ways. It may begin with a single life-changing event or it may begin with the commitment of parents to raise their children in a way that is shaped by Jesus. Faith may come in a moment or it may be part of a longer process in which the person gradually takes ownership of all that has been taught to him or her. In either case, believing is not something that happens once and for all time. Since God never takes away our freedom, we are always free to stop allowing Christ to shape our lives. We can separate ourselves from the body of Christ either through a deliberate decision, or by gradually developing habits that move us further and further from Christ. For this reason, we must nourish our faith if we are to remain committed to what we believe. Faith needs to be sustained by prayer, study, reflection, and the regular reception of the sacraments. And, faith needs to be exercised in loving action.

The Need for Community

No one acting alone can be the body of Christ. Each one of us is only a single member of that body. A true disciple of Christ must join with others. Our faith must be communal as well as personal. We must believe in Christ not only as individuals but also as groups—families, groups of friends, parishes, and communities. In other words, we cannot really answer God’s call unless the

groups that we form and the way those groups function are shaped by Christ.

It is not easy to surrender our lives to Christ as individuals; it is even more difficult to do so as members of communities in which the many different individuals have different concepts of what it means to surrender. Nonetheless, the Church believes that we can be united in faith. As Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). As Christians we trust that as we are blessed in our personal relationship with God, so we will be even more deeply blessed in our communal relationships with God. It is only in the context of a community that we can really come to know and understand the God who “is love.”

Christians in general, and Catholics in particular, believe in a



CONVERSION

The Church is comprised of remarkable stories of those who have converted to the Catholic faith and been baptized—from St. Jerome and St. Augustine to Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton.

Research information about a famous Catholic who was a convert. Explain whether their *epiphany* to the faith was gradual or came about all at once. Also, interview a Catholic convert who you know. Ask the person to explain why he or she chose to be Catholic. Report on all of your findings.



God who acts through (or is mediated by) the created world. Our belief is rooted in the ancient Israelites' belief that anyone who looked upon the face of God would die. God is so much beyond human comprehension that we cannot cope with a direct encounter with the divine. Even in moments of deepest prayer and personal communion, we are only able to see God indistinctly as if in a dull mirror (1 Corinthians 13:12). In order that we might know, understand, and experience God better without being overwhelmed, God has chosen to be mediated to us through that which is familiar and understandable. God

has chosen to make his love and fidelity known to us through one another when we gather in his name.³

Our faith is deepened and fortified by the community's faith. Our community's faith also makes it possible for us to do what God calls us to do: to know and love God more fully and to live, not as isolated individuals, but as members of the one body of Christ. The faith of the community exists wherever two or more people gather to share their faith, to pray, or to support and encourage one another out of love rooted in love for God.



STUDY QUESTIONS

- DEFINE FAITH.
- WHAT IS NEEDED TO SUSTAIN FAITH?
- WHY MUST FAITH BE COMMUNAL AS WELL AS PERSONAL?



FAITH IS SUPPORTED BY FORMAL STRUCTURES

Because the community of faith—that is, the Church—is made up of sinful individuals, the Church can easily fall into sin. Just as individual Christians can be blinded to and caught up in the secular culture of their day, so too the Church. Christian communities often accept and adopt the methods of operation and patterns of group interaction of the culture around them. Some of those patterns and standards may be so common that Christians do not notice that they are contrary to the gospel.

For this reason the Church needs to develop formal structures that help preserve essential truths. These formal structures take the form of creeds, doctrines, and rituals. The formal aspects of Catholicism have ensured that the faith given by Jesus Christ has survived even when the Church itself has sinned.

The formal structures help both individuals and communities establish, express, and maintain their identities as believers. The formal structures make our communal relationship with God visible and tangible. The task of defining and interpreting these formal structures of faith is held by the Church's magisterium. The magisterium refers to the bishops in communion with the pope who is the successor of St. Peter. Unless we commit ourselves to the formal structures of faith, we may find

that we are picking and choosing our faith in such a way that it no longer shapes and challenges us. If we reject the formal structures of faith we will probably end up selecting those which demand the least of us and which are most in keeping with the secular culture in which we live.

There are those who, in the name of **ecumenism**, will try to ignore the formal structures of faith which separate one church from another. They seem to think that the truth of Christian community can be found in its lowest common denominator. In fact true ecumenism—the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the Church—involves the efforts of all. More importantly we must remember that achieving this unity transcends human powers and gifts and is in the hands of God.

ecumenism — The movement and activities which seek to promote religious unity within the Christian Church and among all the people of the world.



STUDY QUESTIONS

- HOW DO THE FORMAL STRUCTURES OF THE CHURCH SUPPORT FAITH?
- DEFINE ECUMENISM. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RECONCILIATION OF ALL CHRISTIANS IN THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH?

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT



- HOW HAS GOD REVEALED HIS PRESENCE TO YOU THROUGH ANOTHER PERSON?
- TELL SEVERAL WAYS THAT THE GROUPS YOU BELONG TO—FAMILY, SCHOOL, FRIENDSHIP, AND CHURCH—ARE SHAPED BY CHRIST.

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

“I believe and profess all that the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God.” On that Easter vigil night in March, twenty-five young adults, nineteen of whom were already baptized Christians, committed their lives not only to God but also to the Catholic Church. They committed themselves to a church because they knew that they could not answer God’s call to be the body of Christ without making such a commitment. They committed themselves to the Catholic Church because in the formal structures of Catholicism as it exists today they



Nicene Creed—A statement of the Church’s beliefs issued at the first ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325 and later confirmed at the Council of Constantinople in 381. It taught that Jesus is of the same substance as God and thus divine.

marks of the Church—One, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

found the most complete expression of what it means to be the body of Christ.

The notion that the Church must have certain specific characteristics dates back to early Christianity:

- Saint Paul wrote of the importance of unity among members of the Church because of their membership in the body of Christ.
- A few years later Saint Ignatius of Antioch (d. AD 107) wrote that there could only be one Church and that that Church was known by its unbroken connection with the apostles whom Christ appointed.

- Saint Irenaeus of Lyon (b. AD 130) wrote that the role of the Church is to unite people with Christ.

The teachings of Paul, Ignatius, Irenaeus and many others were formalized in the **Nicene Creed**. This creed is shared by most Christian churches; it (along with the Apostles’ Creed) is understood to contain the most essential truths of Christianity.

In 381 at the first council of Constantinople the words “[we believe] in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church,” were officially added to the creed. Those who were gathered at this second ecumenical (all Church) council—the council of Nicaea was the first—pointed out that one could not separate faith in the Trinity from a belief that the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.”⁴ The nature of the Church is not something that can be changed to suit the wishes of different people in different times and places. The nature of the Church is an expression of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ makes the Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These characteristics are known as the **four marks of the Church**. The Church does not possess them of itself, but from Christ who is their source. The Church will manifest these qualities in different ways at different times according to the culture in which it exists. And because those who belong to the Church are imperfect, sometimes these qualities will be imperfectly expressed.

As Catholics, we believe that the Church is the first sacrament of

THE HOPIS AND IQ

There is a story told of the Native American Hopi people that can help us understand what it means to truly live as one. Years ago, when the concept of an intelligence quotient (IQ) test to measure potential was first developed, a variety of preliminary test groups were selected from different regions. One of these groups was selected from the Hopi nation. On the day of the test the examiner explained the instructions and then handed out the test questions. He was shocked when people immediately started to discuss the questions with one another; he quickly explained that it was essential that each person answer all of the questions on his or her own, otherwise the test results would be useless. The Hopi test group was outraged and refused to continue with the test. They had no interest in measuring themselves against one another. Since no two people were the same or should be the same, there was little to be gained by comparing them. What was important was not what each person knew and could do on his or her own, but what all of them knew and could do together. No one could do everything well alone, but if they pooled their strengths, they could do great things together. The Hopi saw no point in a test that could only make them appear less than they were. They were not isolated individuals who needed to prove that they could each make it alone; they were a people who would move forward together. The weakness of one was the responsibility of all, and the strength of one was the gift of all.



Christ.⁵ In other words, the Church is a symbol and instrument of God's presence on earth and movement through time. The Church makes Christ visible to people and provides a means by which they can come in contact with the Holy One. Therefore, the Church must be constantly shaped by Christ through the Holy Spirit. The four marks of the Church, described in the sections that follow, help us to understand how the Church is the sacrament of Christ.

The Church is One

The Church is one because of the unity in the Trinity of one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁶ The Church is one because of its founder, Jesus Christ, who came to restore unity among all people and between all people and the Father. Christ is the principle of the Church's unity. The Church is one because of the Holy Spirit who brings about the communion of the faithful and joins them in Christ.⁷ The "true Church of Christ," that is, the Church which Christ entrusted to Saint Peter and the other apostles, "subsists in the Catholic Church" which is governed by the pope and the bishops in communion with him.⁸

Unity and true peace are essential characteristics of Christ's



FOUNDATIONS OF DOCTRINE AND CREEDS

Choose and complete one of the following projects:

- Research and report on the words of St. Paul, St. Ignatius of Antioch, and St. Irenaeus of Lyon on the importance of unity in the Church.
- Report on the issues addressed at the First Council of Constantinople. See www.newadvent.org/cathen/04308a.htm.
- Present background information about the culture and needs that led to the development of at least two creeds in the Church. For example, the Apostles' Creed; the Athanasian Creed; or the professions of faith at certain Councils such as Toledo, Lateran, Lyons, or Trent.

kingdom. Unless our life as a Church is characterized by our solidarity with one another, we have distanced ourselves from Christ and his mission. Without a commitment to unity we cannot act effectively as the body of Christ on earth.

Living in unity with one another is not the same thing as agreeing about everything, or doing everything in the same way. Throughout its history, the Church has been marked by a great diversity stemming from



both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them.⁹ The diversity of the Church is not opposed to its unity, though sin and its consequences have threatened the gift of unity. As Saint Paul reminded Christians to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3), the unity of the Church is also maintained by certain structures which support unity.

Unity Is Not Uniformity

The formal structures of the Catholic Church underscore the importance of unity and help us to make our unity visible in our daily lives. As Catholics we are united by a

profession of one faith received from the Apostles, common celebration of divine worship, especially the sacraments, and apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders.¹⁰ Catholics from every culture, every race, and every nation profess the same faith, can understand and participate in one another's worship (even if they do not speak the same language), and are guided by pastors who can all trace their ministry in an unbroken line back to the apostles.

Our unity as Catholics does not, however, result in a uniformity in the way we live out our faith. Within the unity of the Church, a multiplicity of people and cultures is gathered together. Contrary to a popular misunderstanding, Catholic unity does not even depend on a uniform religious ritual. There are seven non-Roman ecclesial traditions which are in union with Rome. The Armenian, Byzantine, Coptic, Ethiopian, East Syrian (or Chaldean), West Syrian, and Maronite rites are all part of the one Catholic Church. Certain local churches and religious orders also have their own rites which have been recognized by the Catholic Church. Within each of these rites the essence of the sacraments is the same as it is in the Roman rite, but the form used in celebrating the sacraments is not the same.

The very nature of the Catholic Church helps us to understand that the call to be "one" is not a call to lose our individual identities; rather, it is a call to develop our individuality while still maintaining our commitment to the unity shared with us from Christ through the apostles. As Saint Paul reminds us, diversity is as necessary to the body of Christ as unity is. A body cannot function without unity among its members, but it also cannot function without diversity. "If [all the parts of the body] were one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body" (1 Corinthians 12:19–20). The unfathomable mystery of Christ can never be exhausted by a single liturgical rite or a single spirituality, nor can it

be limited to the concepts and modes of expression of a single culture or a single philosophy.¹¹

From the Saint Thomas Aquinas parish during the celebration of the Easter vigil, it was easy to see how one could be drawn to the Catholic Church because of its unity in the midst of diversity. In the pews were three students from Indonesia, one from Panama, and one from Cuba. There was a woman from India dressed in a sari, a professor from Italy, and a family from France. Mixed together throughout the church there were people who prayed the Rosary every day, others who belonged to charismatic prayer groups, and still others who were most comfortable with the Thursday night teen liturgies where homilies were often combined with dialogue and everyone sat on the floor. There were scientists, engineers, farmers, business executives, and artists. There were Republicans and Democrats and even a few Socialists. There were peace activists and

those who served in the military. There were two men who lived on the streets and a family that owned the nicest home in town. There were people who thought that the Church was changing too fast and others who thought it was changing far too slowly. But all of these people were Catholic. All of them belonged to the one body of Christ and recognized the others as members of that same body.

Despite their differences, none of these people had chosen to leave the Catholic Church to join another denomination of more like-minded people. God's call to be one in our diversity is fundamental to Catholicism. As Catholics we believe that we must remain together, challenging and submitting to one another out of love. In many other denominations it is a common and accepted practice to form new congregations, or even new denominations, when the differences among members become uncomfortable. This is not an option for Catholics.



STUDY QUESTIONS

- WHY IS THE CHURCH ONE?
- WHICH OF THE CHURCH'S STRUCTURES SUPPORT UNITY WITHIN THE CHURCH? HOW IS THIS SO?

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT



- RELATED TO BEING A CATHOLIC, WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN UNIFORMITY AMONG MEMBERS AND UNITY AMONG MEMBERS?

The Church Is Holy

The Church is holy because it is the body of Christ—the Holy One of God. The Church is also holy because the Holy Spirit dwells within it. Holiness means “to be set apart.” All holiness has its root in God who alone is truly holy. God alone is totally other. God alone is completely set apart from all of creation because God alone is uncreated. The Church is holy or set apart from the rest of creation because of its intimate connection to God.

In the Old Testament God was called the “holy One of Israel.” Holiness was understood as God’s innermost essence. Holiness expressed the perfection of God and referred to God’s majesty, power, and transcendence. But God’s holiness was not something that distanced people from God; in fact, it was something that was only revealed to those who drew near to God. God showed his holiness only to those who came close enough to be made holy themselves.

When people were made holy, or sanctified, they were set apart by God for a special purpose. They were given the task of expressing the essence of divine holiness through their lives. The people of Israel understood that they had been made holy by God. They had become “a people set apart,” a people whom God had claimed for his own. They had become a people who were committed to living in such a way that others would realize and confess that the God of Israel was indeed the true God. They were a people committed to doing God’s will and bearing witness to God’s abiding presence, even when that meant being different from everyone around them.

From its earliest days the Church has understood itself to be the heir of the people of Israel. It too has been set apart by God for a special purpose. The members of the Church, like the people of Israel, have been given the task of living in a way that is different from those around them. We have been chosen by God to make his presence and his holiness visible to the world through the actions of our lives.



ANSWERING A CALL TO HOLINESS

On August 8, 1948, Sister Teresa left the convent of her Loretto, France sisters. She was to continue in the religious life, but it was to be under the Archbishop of Calcutta (India).

To symbolize her new lifestyle and mission, Sister Teresa had

laid aside her religious habit and clothed herself in a white Indian sari with a blue border. She wanted to serve the poor purely for the love of God, and she was soon to find out that God was going to bless her in ways she had never dreamed.

In 1949, one of her former pupils, Shubashini Das, a Bengali, came to her and said that she wanted to become a religious and work with Sister Teresa as a nun. One by one Indian girls came to surrender themselves to God and to serve the poorest of the poor—“to give their all to God” as Sister (now Mother) Teresa described.

Thus Mother Teresa and her little group, which would eventually become the worldwide religious community of men and women called the Missionaries of Charity, came to live in the slums of Calcutta amid all the dirt and disease and dying.

Later in her life, Mother Teresa described her work as “love that seeks to serve.” She said:

Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action and that action is service.

I never look at the masses as my responsibility.

I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed only one person at a time.

Just one, one, one.

You get closer to Christ by coming closer to each other. As Jesus said, “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me.”

So you begin . . . I begin.

I picked up one person—maybe if I didn’t pick up that one person I wouldn’t have picked up 42,000.

The whole work is only a drop in the ocean. But if I didn’t put the drop in, the ocean would be one drop less. Same thing for you, same thing in your family, same thing in the Church where you go.

Just begin . . . one, one, one.

Mother Teresa died on September 5, 1997. She is a candidate for sainthood.

The Church is holy. The Church is not perfect. The Church is the assembly established by Christ to be God's presence in the world and to continue Christ's own work. The Church is the bride of Christ, his partner in bringing to birth the kingdom of God. It is the very essence of the Church to be holy—to be set apart as the community united with Christ. As the people of Israel were set apart to reveal the One true God, the Catholic Church is set apart to reveal that this One God has become incarnate in Jesus and is present in the Spirit. If the Church is not holy, it is not the Church.

This does not, however, mean that if the Church is not perfect it is not the Church. The Church is holy because it has been set apart to reveal God. And the God whom the Church reveals is love.¹² Therefore we say that the soul of our holiness is love, and where there is love there is holiness.¹³ As long as the Holy Spirit is within the Church, love will be present and the Church will be holy. Nonetheless, even though love is present, it may be poorly expressed. The love of the Church can only be expressed through the members of the Church, and these members are all sinners. The weeds of sin are intertwined with the wheat of the gospel in each person in the Church.¹⁴ Each one of us will at some point obscure the holiness of the Church by failing to live in love; yet, as long as some in the Church continue to live in love, the Church will be holy.

There have been times in history when the Church has done some atrocious and unloving things. However, at no point in

history has the Church been without people who showed tremendous love precisely because they were members of the Church. Even though her holiness has sometimes been clouded, the Church has always been holy. Unfortunately, some have mistakenly believed that if the Church is holy then everything that is done in the name of the Church is also holy. Those who have believed in this way have fallen into the sin of **idolatry**, substituting the Church for God. They have wrongly equated life in the Church with life in the kingdom of God.

But the Church can never be the kingdom of God. In fact, when the kingdom of God comes into its fullness, the Church as we know it will pass away.¹⁵ The Church has been chosen by Christ to be his spouse. The Church is Christ's partner in giving birth to the kingdom. The Church is the sign and reality of the kingdom of God, even as a pregnant woman is the sign and reality of a new life. But the Church is not the same as the kingdom, any more than the pregnant woman is the same as the new baby.

Three Ways the Church Supports Holiness

Three aspects of Catholic faith and practice are particularly important in giving form to holiness. These are: the moral teachings of the Church; the **evangelical counsels** and the witness of those who live by them; and the sacraments. Each of these will be dealt with in greater detail in later chapters, so we will address them only briefly at this point.

idolatry—The practice of honoring or revering a creature instead of God, whether it be gods or demons (for example, satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. (see CCC, 2113.)

evangelical counsels—Poverty, chastity, and obedience. The aim of the evangelical counsels is to help a person remove everything from his or her life which might hinder the ability to love as Christ loved. They are vows taken by sisters, brothers, and religious priests, but they are also recommended for all the faithful.

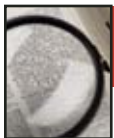
The Catholic Church has a body of moral teachings which helps clarify many of the practical aspects of living as a “community set apart.” Certain attitudes and behaviors which are common in the world are unacceptable for Catholics because they have been judged to be fundamentally opposed to the truth which God has revealed in Jesus. Catholic moral teaching challenges us to do what is right and helps us to stand apart from sin.

The evangelical counsels also call Catholics to stand apart from temptation and to give witness to the love and justice of the kingdom of God. There are three evangelical counsels: poverty, chastity, and obedience. Each of the counsels stands in opposition to something which can draw us away from God and into the world which has separated from God. A commitment to poverty frees one from the temptation to sin for the sake of material wealth. A commitment to chastity frees one from the temptation to sin for the sake of physical pleasure. A commitment to obedience frees one from the temptation to sin for the sake of power. While the evangelical counsels are lived in a specific way by men and women who are members of a religious order, they are held up as ideals for all Catholics.

The greatest witness to and support for holiness within the Catholic Church comes from the sacraments. The sacraments all

point to the essence of a life lived in holiness: cleansing from sin, life in the Spirit, unity with Christ, unity with others, healing and wholeness, and fidelity and service. The sacraments also give us the grace which we need to give holiness concrete form in our lives. One of the things that distinguishes Catholic theology is our understanding of the power of the sacraments to change people and make them more holy.

Why did twenty-five young adults join the Catholic Church in Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish? Why did thousands more join the Catholic Church that same evening in other parishes all around the world? Because in the Catholic Church they heard God’s call to holiness, and in the Catholic Church they found the support which they needed to answer that call. They found the sacraments. They found the witness of many who had vowed to live according to the evangelical counsels. And they found a consistent and solid ethic rooted in the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. They joined the Catholic Church because they believed that being a Catholic is significant. Anyone who chooses to become Catholic likely does so because he or she believes Catholics are a people set apart, a people who live differently because of their faith, a people whose communal structures help them to bear witness to God.



STUDY QUESTIONS

- WHY IS THE CHURCH HOLY?
- DEFINE HOLINESS.
- WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD?
- WHICH OF THE CHURCH’S STRUCTURES SUPPORT US IN OUR EFFORTS TO BE HOLY?

The Church Is Catholic

Catholic means “universal.” Catholic also means “in totality” or “in keeping with the whole.” To say that the Church is “catholic” is to say that it is whole; it is complete. The totality of the body of Christ is present in the Church. There is nothing that is good, no virtue, no spiritual gift, no wisdom, no cure for sin that exists outside of the Church but not inside it. There is nothing of God that is lacking in Christ, therefore there is nothing that is lacking in Christ’s body, the Church.

To say that the Church is “catholic” is also to say that it is for all people. Christ came to bring salvation to all people, and Christ established the Church that it might be “the universal sacrament of salvation.”¹⁶ Jesus said, “Go . . . and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).

It is from God’s love for humanity and God’s desire that all are saved and come to knowledge of the truth that the Church gets its missionary motivation. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the truth through the promptings of the Holy Spirit are on the path of salvation. It is the Church’s missionary mandate to go out and meet those on the way to truth, and to bring them to the truth. It is also important to remember that it is the Holy Spirit who leads the Church on its missionary path. As Pope John Paul II put it, the Holy Spirit is “the principal agent of the whole of the Church’s mission.”¹⁷



The Church travels the same journey as all of humanity. In this way, the Church is called to be leaven in the world. Because of the presence of the Church in the world, the whole world will be transformed into the family of God—reunited with God and with one another. Without the leavening of the Church this transformation would not occur. For this reason we say that the Church is necessary for salvation. Furthermore, all who recognize and understand the necessity of the Church for salvation are obligated to be part of that Church. Any who reject the Church with full knowledge of the role which God has given the Church are rejecting God.

Because the Church is “catholic,” it has a role everywhere and in every situation. There is no region or culture in which the Church cannot belong. In fact the presence of the Church can help the spiritual qualities of every age, nation, and culture to blossom more fully.¹⁸

Furthermore, there is no walk of life from which the Church is excluded. The faith of committed members of the Church can make a positive difference in every profession from farming, to science, to medicine, to literature, to music. Likewise the faith of the Church can challenge and bring out the best in every political, social, and economic system.

Church Teaching Is Based on the Whole of Revelation

Finally, to say that the Church is “catholic” is to say that what the Church teaches is based upon the whole of Revelation: all of scripture, the teachings of all of the apostles, and the understanding and witness of Christians from all times and all places. The early Church first started describing itself as “catholic” to highlight the

differences between it and many of the heretical sects that were springing up, in particular those involving **Gnosticism**. Each of the gnostic groups claimed special, privileged knowledge of God and of God's will. This knowledge supposedly originated from the secret teachings of one of the twelve apostles. The "catholic" Church, on the other hand, claimed a broad-based foundation for its teachings, saying that they were based on the testimony of all of Jesus' apostles. As time went on this broad base of authority for Church teachings came to refer not only to the common witness of all of the apostles, but also to the common witness through history of all of the successors to the apostles.

It is this final understanding of the term catholic that particularly distinguishes the Catholic Church from other denominations today. The Catholic Church—the Church in union with the pope, the bishop of Rome—bases its teachings on the understanding of Revelation which has developed through history. Its claim to authority is based on the consistent witness of every generation of the faithful. Many of the Christian denominations which have their roots in the Protestant reformation base their teachings on the witness of the early Church, on the reformer's interpretation of the witness of the early Church, and on modern theology. They feel no particular obligation to maintain a connection with the understanding of Revelation in other periods of history. These Protestant Christians are free to disregard the things which Christians of other generations have professed to be true if those truths no longer make sense to them. Catholics, on the other hand, are never free to disregard those things which have been declared truths of faith by the Church in earlier generations. The Catholic Church places a strong emphasis on the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church in all generations. The Catholic Church does not ignore the faith of any of the generations of the Church because all of the generations are a part of the whole.

When people join the Catholic Church they are committing themselves to a community which can never disregard past or future generations. They are also committing themselves to a community which can never disregard anything or anyone within the present generation. Those who join the Catholic Church are joining a community that has a universal vocation and mission. They are joining a community that knows that it is called to change the whole world, and they are accepting personal responsibility for facilitating that change. They are saying that as members of this Church they are willing to act as leaven. Through their words and their actions they will do their best to bring the Gospel to every person they meet and into every situation in which they find themselves.

Before the Sacraments of Initiation were celebrated at the Easter vigil on that stormy night in Iowa, the whole congregation joined in a spirited litany of the saints. They called upon holy men and women from every generation to join with them in celebration:

*Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us.
 Saint Peter and Saint Paul, pray for us.
 Saint Mary Magdelane, pray for us.
 Saint Perpetua and Saint Felicity, pray for us.
 Saint Joan of Arc, pray for us.
 Saint Francis, Saint Claire and Saint Dominic, pray for us.
 Saint Thomas Aquinas, pray for us.
 Saint Jean Vianney, pray for us.
 Saint Martin de Porres, pray for us.
 Saint Olga and Saint Vladimir, pray for us.
 Saint Kizito, pray for us.
 Saint Elizabeth Seton, pray for us.
 Saint Paul Chong Hasang, pray for us.
 Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, pray for us.
 All holy men and women, pray for us.*

As their prayer rose to a crescendo, they acknowledged the fact that we are a universal Church, a Church for all times and all places. We are a Church that is apostolic, governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him who have received from Christ the power to

act in his person. The pope and bishops have received from Christ, who founded the Church, the power to act in his person and to guide the Church in every age. We are a universal Church, a Church of all people and a Church for all people.

Gnosticism—One of the earliest Christian heresies. It stressed the importance of secret knowledge passed on to a select few. It denied the goodness of creation and the material world.



STUDY QUESTIONS

- WHAT DOES THE TERM “CATHOLIC” MEAN?
- NAME THREE THINGS THAT WE ARE SAYING ABOUT THE CHURCH WHEN WE DESCRIBE IT AS “CATHOLIC.”
- WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO COMMIT TO A CHURCH THAT IS “CATHOLIC”?

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT



- WRITE A PLAN FOR YOUR DAY EXPLAINING HOW YOU WILL BRING THE GOSPEL IN WORDS AND ACTIONS TO EVERY PERSON YOU MEET AND IN EVERY SITUATION.

The Church Is Apostolic

Jesus was sent by the Father. He in turn sent the apostles, giving them a mission to continue his work on earth and transform the world. The word apostolic means “having been sent.” The Church is apostolic because it has been sent into the world by Christ; unless it remains apostolic, it cannot remain the Church. The Church has an identity and a reason to exist only because it has been sent by Christ with a purpose. If the Church were to forget the One who sends it or the reason for which it was sent, it would become nothing more than another assembly within the world. It is the apostolic nature of the Church which keeps the Church from being swallowed up by the secular world.

The Church remains faithful to its apostolic nature in three ways:

- First, the Church remains faithful by recognizing that it is built upon the foundation of the apostles who were appointed by Jesus. We reveal our apostolic nature when we point to Jesus as both the source and the focal point of all we do.
- Second, the Church remains faithful to its apostolic nature by following the guidance of the Holy Spirit; adhering to the foundation laid by the apostles and written down in the scriptures; and faithfully interpreting, living, and teaching what the apostles taught. Every member of the Church bears

WITNESS TALK

All Catholics are called to witness daily to the gospel by their words and actions. Prepare a personal testimony (about a ten minute talk) explaining why you believe in Jesus. Include in your talk some or all of the following points:

- the occasion of the reception of the sacraments;
- your family's history as Catholics;
- a special occasion when you became aware of Christ's presence in your life;
- how you plan to share the Lord with others in the future.

Share your witness talk with classmates, younger students, a youth ministry group, or family members.

witness to the apostolic nature of the Church by teaching and modeling the faith of the apostles in situations where no one else can.

- Third, the Church remains faithfully apostolic by accepting the continued guidance of the apostles through their successors and, in particular, by accepting the guidance of Peter's successor—the pope. We point to the apostolic nature of the Church when we allow the teachings of the pope and the bishops to challenge us despite our personal beliefs or preferences.

For many from other Christian denominations who join the Catholic Church, this final way of remaining faithfully apostolic is the most difficult to understand and to accept. Some ask why it should matter that each priest and each bishop can trace his ordination back to the apostles. Why must each bishop be ordained by others who are already bishops and who in turn were ordained by others who were already bishops? Others accept this notion of apostolic succession, but wonder why it is necessary that one of the apostolic successors be given a role that is greater than that of any of the others. Some answers to these questions follow.

Apostolic Succession in History

The emphasis on apostolic succession has its roots in the history of the early Church. In the

years after the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity spread rapidly, drawing converts from very diverse places and backgrounds. Because of this the Church was enriched, but it was also challenged. Each person and group that joined the Church brought elements of their old beliefs and world views into Christianity. Some of these world views were compatible with Christianity, others were not. Those with incompatible views threatened the very foundations of Christian faith.

These difficulties were exacerbated by the tendency of the time toward **syncretism**. The Greco-Roman culture of the Church's first centuries, much like modern American culture, encouraged the choosing and combining of bits and pieces from a variety of religious and philosophical traditions rather than the whole-hearted adherence to any one system. As a result, many different groups were claiming Christ and yet drastically changing his message. One of the most significant examples of this was found in the teachings of the gnostics.

The gnostics claimed to have a secret mystical knowledge which was necessary for salvation but which had been given to only a select group of people with superior understanding. The gnostics claimed they had been made aware of the "fact" that the physical world was an evil illusion which trapped the good spirit. In contrast to Jewish tradition, the gnostics claimed

syncretism—The practice of blending all religions and faith traditions into one.

that the world was not created by God, but rather by one of the spiritual creatures of God who had tried to turn away from God. According to the gnostics, the physical universe was thus the result of sin and had no lasting reality or value.

In response to the gnostics the Church began to formalize many of its structures. Over time a universally accepted canon, or list of approved scriptures, was developed. Furthermore, around the year A.D. 150 the Church compiled the basic outline of the Apostles' Creed as a summary of the beliefs which any person seeking Baptism must affirm. But a canon and creed were not enough to respond to the gnostics. The real issue was not who had a canon and who had a creed, but whose canon and creed were right? The Church and the gnostics each claimed to be the true interpreters of Jesus, but they could not both be right. The question was: Who really spoke with the authority of Jesus?

It is at this point that the notion of apostolic succession began to take on fundamental importance. The Church argued that if Christ really had a secret knowledge which he wished to pass on, he would have given that knowledge to the same apostles to whom he gave the Church. These apostles in turn would have passed that knowledge on to their successors—the bishops. Since all the direct successors to the apostles rejected the notion of any sort of secret knowledge or plan, such a knowledge and plan must not exist.

It then became important for the bishops of the early Church to prove that they were indeed in direct line from the apostles. This was not too difficult. Most local churches already had records connecting their current bishops to one of the apostles. If a church did not have such a record it was considered apostolic as long as it was in agreement with a church that did have a bishop proven to be a direct descendant of an apostle. What was

crucial to apostolic succession was that a local church be able to demonstrate that its bishop had not broken with the fundamental teachings of the apostles.

In principle, apostolic succession requires that no bishop teach anything that is contrary to what has been handed down to him by his predecessors. Apostolic succession protects the Church against the influx of ideas that are antithetical to Christianity. It ensures that no one group of people will claim to have been given some secret revelation or means to salvation that has not been given to everyone else by Christ. Apostolic succession protects the true teachings of the Church.

Apostolic Succession Today

The notion of apostolic succession protects and preserves Christianity as much today as it did in the early Church. Once again we live in a world in which people are inclined to pick and choose different aspects of different religious traditions and create whole new systems of belief. The name of Christ is often linked to beliefs and practices which are contrary to all that Christ said and did.

To protect against this some Christians insist on a literal reading of and adherence to scripture. They believe that a dependency on scripture alone will protect them from anything that is contrary to Christ. Unfortunately, the scriptures were written by human beings in another language, in another culture, and in another age. The scriptures cannot be directly applied to our language, culture, and age without interpretation. In trying to interpret the scriptures for our own situation, even those with the best intentions can be swayed too much by the forces of the culture in which we live if we do not have something on which to anchor our interpretation, something like the unbroken apostolic witness.

As Christ gives the apostles a share in his own mission, the successors of the apostles, the bishops in union with the pope, are able

to guarantee that the teachings of the Church will never be detached from the teachings of Christ, and that the teachings of the Church will never threaten the true Revelation of God made known in Christ.

But Why the Pope?

Many who accept the value of apostolic succession still question why Catholics would rely so heavily on the pope.

In order to answer this question, we must complete a circle and return to the first mark of the Church—its oneness. The pope is the



“perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of bishops and of the multitude of the faithful.”¹⁹ As Catholics we believe that without the pope the unity of the Church would be severely threatened by local churches and bishops addressing competing

national and cultural issues. There have been many times in the history of the Church when such national issues did seem to compromise the unity and universal nature of the Church. In some of these instances, the personal, national ties of the reigning pope have contributed to the problem, yet the formal institution of the papacy has always stood for a unity which supersedes these ties. Even after the most troublesome periods of Church history, because of its institution by Christ, the papacy has always been maintained as an institution that is not subject to any one nation or culture, and as an institution that draws us into a unity which goes beyond national and cultural boundaries. As the successor of Saint Peter and head of the college of bishops, the pope is the pastor who watches over the whole Church and each of its members throughout the world.²⁰

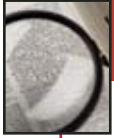
Each diocese or “local church” is led by its own bishop, who has also been established by the Holy Spirit. This bishop has the primary responsibility for interpreting and handing on the apostolic tradition within his own diocese and also for keeping his diocese united to the universal Church.²¹ Each bishop must adapt the Church’s teachings to the particular culture and particular needs of his own diocese. Yet when these necessary and lawful adaptations are made, it is important that the unity of the Church be maintained. The fidelity of each individual bishop, and of all of the bishops together, to the bishop of Rome (the pope) helps ensure that unity is not lost.

The role of the pope is not limited to the preservation of the Church’s unity. The pope also has the task of giving voice to the universal mission and vocation of the Church. The pope calls Catholics everywhere to remember their responsibility to all of God’s people and not just those in their immediate vicinity. The pope also calls Catholics everywhere to remember that there

are certain Church teachings which cannot be adapted to suit the local culture. There are issues—such as the protection of the rights of the most defenseless—that are fundamental to the universal vocation of the Church; they

must not be ignored or denied by any who wish to call themselves Catholic.²²

IN CONCLUSION



STUDY QUESTIONS

- HOW IS THE CHURCH FAITHFUL TO ITS APOSTOLIC NATURE?
- WHAT HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES LED TO THE CHURCH'S EMPHASIS ON APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION?
- WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE POPE?

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT



- WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR LOCAL BISHOP. DESCRIBE YOUR FAITH IN GOD AND THE CHURCH. TELL HIM SOME OF THE PLANS YOU HAVE FOR YOUR LIFE.

Interviewing newly baptized Catholics provides a great source for understanding why people choose to be Catholic.

Some choose the Catholic Church specifically because it stresses the value of continuity with the past. Many people know how easy it is to be caught up in the present and to ignore the wisdom of the past. One recent convert to Catholicism went so far as to say that his primary reason for joining the Catholic Church was its respect for the past: "The world wouldn't be in such a sorry state if more people followed the Catholic Church and paid attention to Tradition." Another expressed agreement and added, "If you won't build on the knowledge and understanding of the generations that went before you, you end up spending all your time reinventing the wheel. For the most part

churches that want to reconsider the basics of faith in every generation never have time and energy for service to the rest of the world." No catechumen is naive enough to think that Catholics are perfect, but most do believe that a respect for and willingness to be taught by the past was part of a Catholic's identity, and they want to embrace it and pass it on.

Other new Catholics find comfort and security in the presence of the papacy. For them the papacy provided an assurance that the Catholic Church would not be reduced to a conglomeration of independent congregations who worked in opposition almost as often as they worked in cooperation. The papacy is a sign and source of mutual commitment, even in the face of discomfort, in a world in which commitment is increasingly disregarded.

At the Easter vigil, a multitude of catechumens express for all to hear, “I profess all that the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God.” What they are saying is what all who remain in the Catholic Church are called to say daily through their words and actions. That is:

- I profess my faith in one God: Father, Son and Spirit. I surrender myself to that God and to the assembly which God has called to make his presence visible and tangible.
- I surrender myself to a Church that is one. I commit myself to working with, rather than separating from, other members of the Church with whom I may disagree. I commit myself to living in solidarity with those who are in need. I agree to worship with others in a manner suited to the community as a whole, not just to me as an individual. I accept the profession of faith which belongs to the Church as a whole. I accept the ethical framework of the Catholic community. I will allow others to challenge and shape me.
- I surrender myself to a Church that is holy. My faith will affect the way that I live. I commit myself to doing all that

I can to reveal the presence of Christ. I will try to understand and follow Catholic ethical teachings. I will strive to incorporate the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience into my life. I will participate in the sacraments and accept the grace that Christ offers to me through those sacraments.

- I surrender myself to a Church that is catholic or universal. I will not discount anyone on the basis of race, culture, age, or financial situation. I will acknowledge the right of people from other traditions, cultures, and ways of thinking to shape the Church into something to which we can all belong as equals.
- I surrender myself to a Church that is apostolic. I know that I have been sent by God to make God’s presence visible and tangible in my life. I accept this mission. I acknowledge the importance of the role of the pope and the bishops. I accept the pope and the bishops as the authoritative interpreters of Jesus’ teaching.

LEARN BY DOING

Research each of the following Church

heresies and explain what they involved. Tell how and when the Church responded to each of these heresies with authentic teaching.

- Gnosticism
- Arianism
- Nestorianism
- Monophysitism
- Pelagianism
- Novatianism and Donatism

PRAYER

BLESSING OF THE CATECHUMENS

Let us pray.

Almighty God,
Lord of all,
through your Son
you cast Satan from his throne
and freed mankind from its captivity
by breaking the chains that bound it.
We thank you
in the name of these catechumens
whom you have called.
Strengthen them in faith
that they may know you, the one true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you sent to us.
Keep them clean of heart and make them grow in holiness
so that they may receive baptism
and share in the holy mysteries.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

—from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

NOTES

1. #17
2. *Redemptoris Mater*, #14.
3. We will discuss this concept in greater depth in Unit 5 when we speak about the sacramental life of the Church.
4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #750.
5. See Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, #48.
6. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #810.
7. *Ibid.*, #813.
8. *Ibid.*, #816.
9. *Ibid.*, #814.
10. *Ibid.*, #815.
11. *Ibid.*, #1201.
12. See 1 John 4:16.
13. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #826.
14. *Ibid.*, #827.
15. See *Lumen Gentium*, #48.
16. *Ad gentes*, #1 as quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #849.
17. *Redemptoris Missio* as quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #852.
18. See *Gaudium et Spes*, #58.
19. *Lumen Gentium*, #23.
20. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #936–937.
21. *Ibid.*, #938.
22. We will discuss papal authority in greater detail at a later point.