

# A Mission Church

## The Church: What Is It?

Since "Church" is identified in many ways, many people find it difficult to understand, and sometimes equally difficult to accept. Jack Patnik is a Adult Faith Formation Catechist of our parish. His approach to this subject comes from one who asked the same questions as you and I concerning Church. Don't get overwhelmed with the references to scripture. They are presented to provide validity to what we as Catholics believe, indicated in Jack's writing by CCC (Catechism of the Catholic Church). A suggestion (good for any of these Mission Church inserts) is to read it at least twice. Enjoy.

### What is this thing we call Church?

#### How are we to relate to it?

#### What should it mean to us?

These are all questions that are intimately intertwined with the purpose of our lives – the search for truth. So the answers to these questions are crucial to our fulfillment of our lives' greatest longings. The concepts involved are so intertwined and mystical that I apologize in advance for what appears to be disjointed ramblings.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 752) tells us that: "In Christian usage, the word "church" designates 1) the liturgical assembly; but also 2) the local community; or, 3) the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. "The Church" is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She (the Church) exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the Word of God (scripture) and the Body of Christ (Eucharist), and so herself becomes Christ's body."

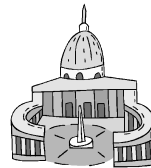
### Church as Body of Christ

Now where did the Catholic Church come up with this idea of the Church being the Body of Christ? That's pretty heady stuff and tough to accept since the Church is overrun with sinners and has all these "man made" rules that are so outdated. Well Scripture leads us to this conclusion. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:18 that "He (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church" and also in Ephesians 1:22-23 "And he (the Father) put all things beneath his feet

and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way." (Also see Rom 12:5; 1Cor 12:12; 1Cor 12:27; Eph 3:6; Eph 4:12; Eph 5:23; Col 1:24; Col 3: 15.)

Okay, so Scripture shows us that the Church is the Body of Christ, but does this make sense? Yes, in a mystical way. But even with our limitations we can grasp this mystery. We are called to share in the life of the Trinity. Jesus came to earth to reconcile us to the Father so that we could come to share in the life of the Trinity. He assumed a body to be one of us so that we could be one with him. He established his Church, and through his Church gave us his body and blood in the Eucharist so

that he would remain with us after his ascension to the Father in heaven. So yes, it makes sense that Jesus would incorporate us into himself (his body) through the Church. This has some pretty critical ramifications that are easily overlooked. We'll take a look at those later.



**PART I**  
*And we're not talking about the church as a building.*

### Church as Bride of Christ

We also see from Scripture that the Church is "the Bride of Christ". (Refer to Matt 22: 1-14; Matt 25: 1-13; Mark 2: 19; John 3: 29; 1Cor 6: 15-17; 2Cor 11:2; and Eph 5; 21-33.) If she is a bride, as understood in New Testament times, we see her as Christ's treasured beloved – his pure and spotless mate. Again this is a tough concept to accept when we see the sinners that make up the Church. But would Scripture lie to us? I think not. We accept that the Church is both physical and spiritual. So maybe we need to look at the Church not only physically but also spiritually/mystically. Again there are critical ramifications to the Church being Christ's beloved that we'll look at later.

### Church as The New Jerusalem, God's Kingdom

And finally we see in Revelation 21:1-22:5 (particularly 21: 12-14) that the Church is the new Jerusalem, the people of God and the Kingdom of God. This means that the Church as God's Kingdom is where God lives, where God rules and where God defends his house. That gives me pause when I think that maybe I know better than the Church and that perhaps the Church should listen to me rather than vice versa.

**Part II will be included in next week's bulletin.**

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