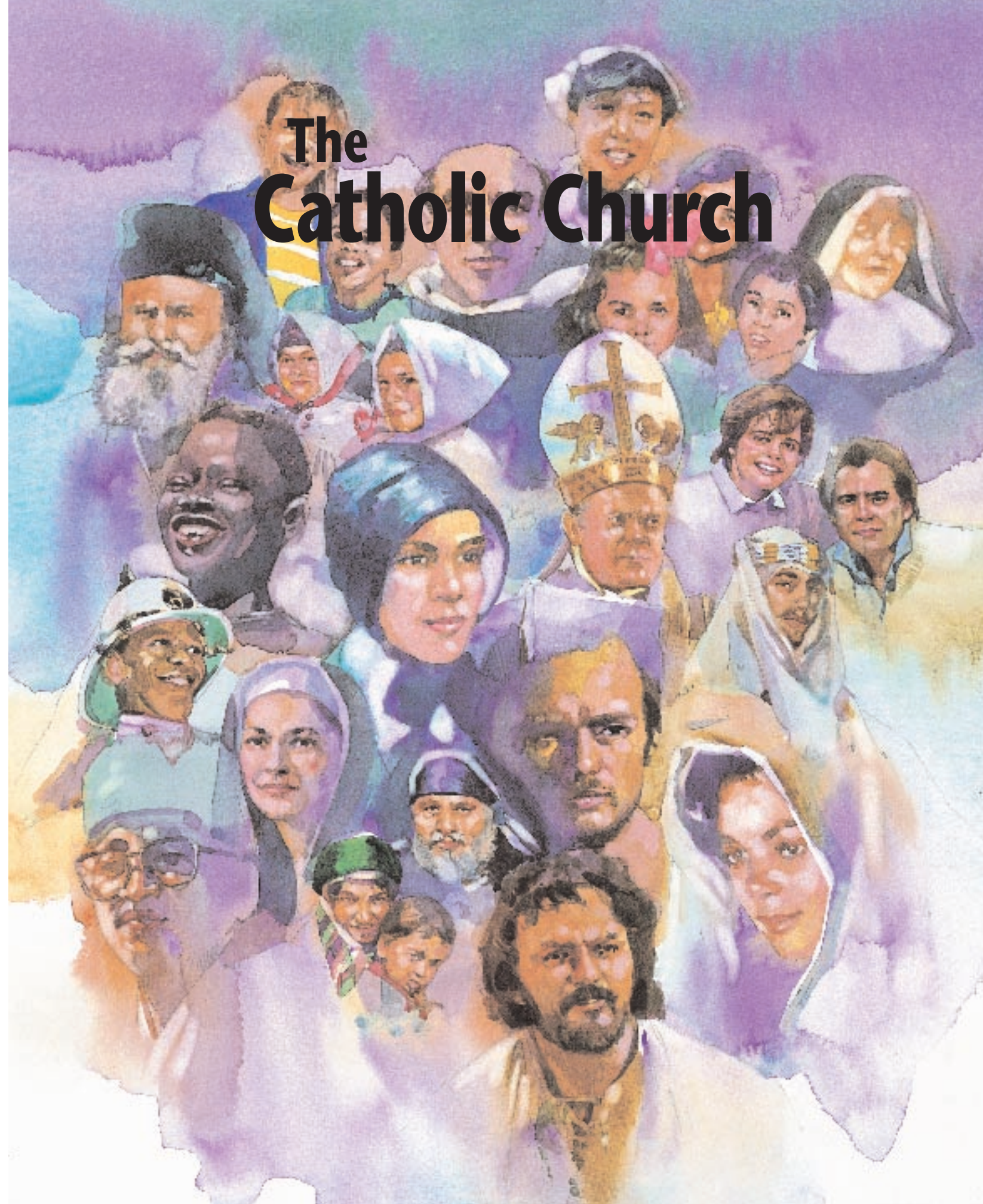


The Catholic Church



Nihil Obstat: Rev. William T. Magee
Censor Deputatus
21 June 1993

Imprimatur: †Most Rev. John G. Vlazny, DD
Bishop of Winona
7 July 1993

The publishing team included Barbara Allaire, development editor; Julia Ahlers, Stephan Nagel, Robert Smith, FSC, Gregory Sobolewski, and Michael Wilt, consulting editors; Susan Baranczyk and Rebecca Fairbank, copy editors; Barbara Bartelson, production editor and typesetter; Penny Koehler, photo researcher; Evy Abrahamson, designer; Ken Call, color illustrator; Tom Wright, cartoonist; Elaine Kohner, line art illustrator; Roderick Robertson, FSC, icon illustrator; Maryland Cartographics and Gary J. Boisvert, mapmakers; McCormick Creative, cover designer; and Alan M. Greenberg, Integrity Indexing, indexer.

The acknowledgments continue on page 333.

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Printed in the United States of America

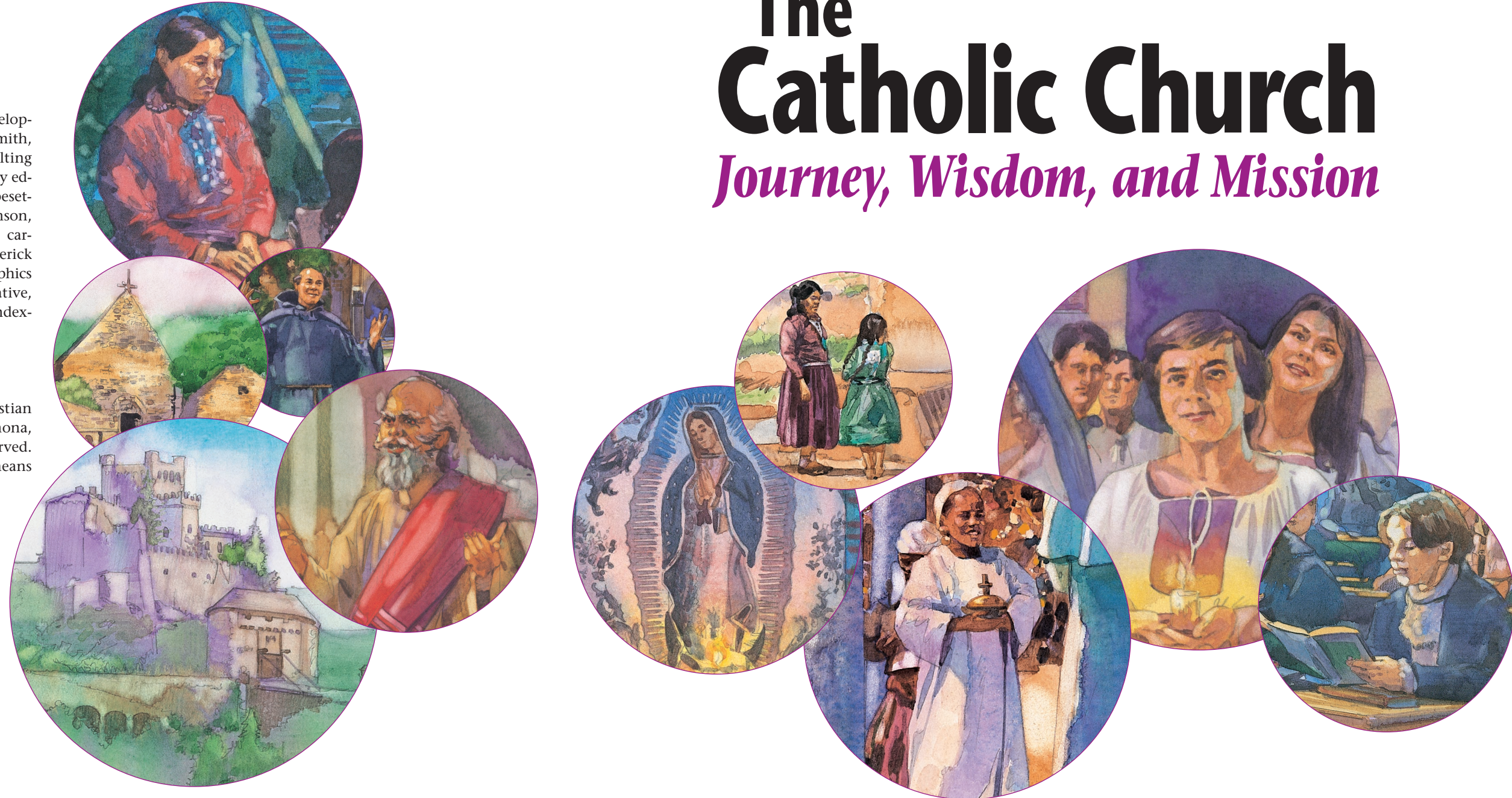
Printing: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Year: 2002 01 00 99 98 97 96 95 94

ISBN 0-88489-298-0

The Catholic Church

Journey, Wisdom, and Mission

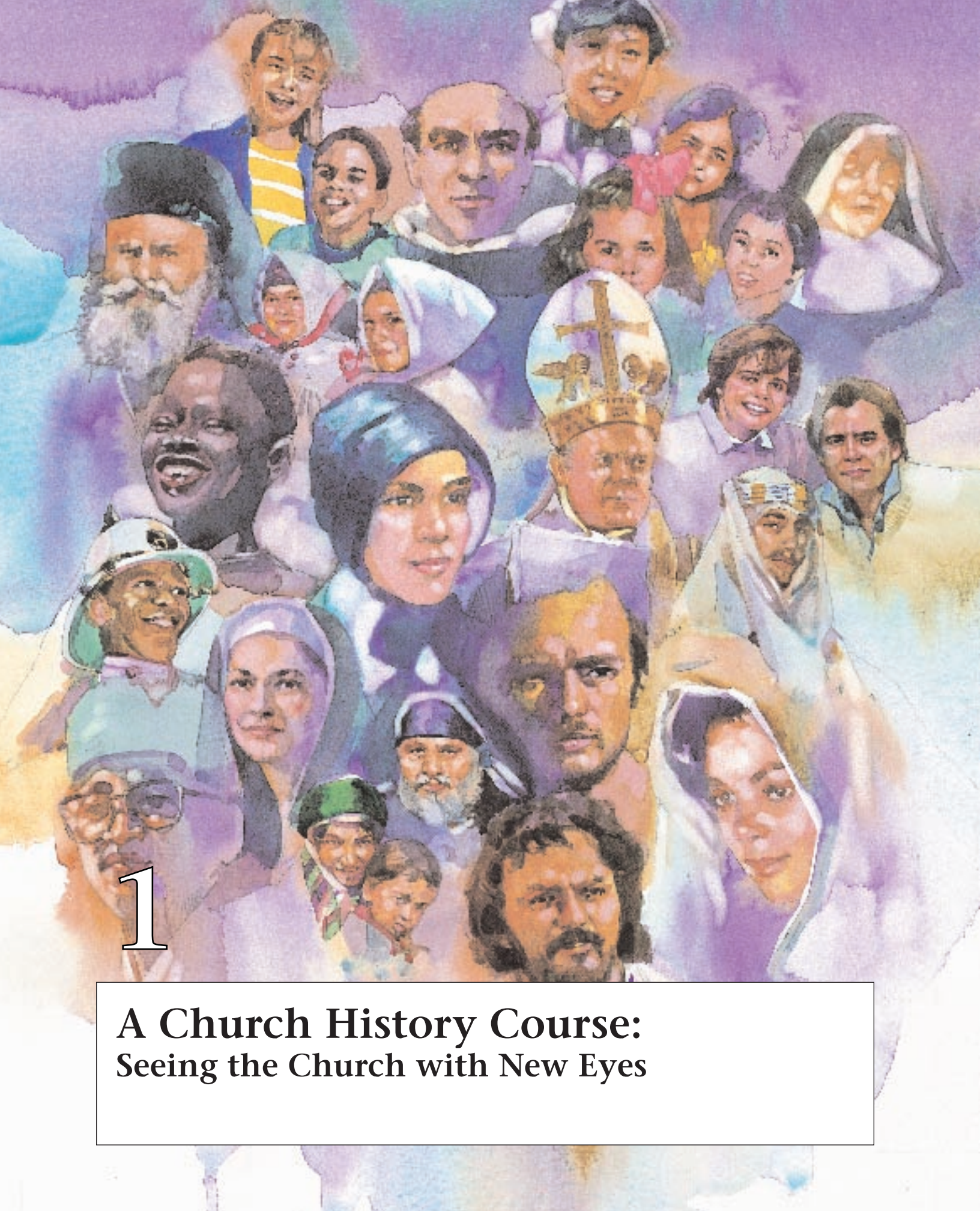


Saint Mary's Press™

Carl Koch

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1

A Church History Course: Seeing the Church with New Eyes

SUPPOSE THAT YOU had no idea of your own personal history, that you suddenly found yourself without any memory of your past. The following story gives some notion of what that would be like.

A woman in her twenties had been found nearly dead at the edge of a highway. With a severe concussion and other injuries, Jane Doe, as the woman was called, had gone into a deep state of amnesia. In the weeks following her rescue, doctors determined that Jane would have to relearn even elementary actions like how to dress herself and tie her shoes. Because she could not read or write, her teachers started from the ABCs. Without identification, she would not be able to register for a driver's license, open a bank account, request school transcripts, or fill out an application for a job. People perceived her as an adult, but in effect, she often functioned as a child. What was even more disheartening was that Jane had no known family or friends—no one to depend on in a world that was unfamiliar to her.

On one trip outside the hospital with her occupational therapist, Jane lingered at a flower stand. On a whim, the therapist bought Jane a bouquet of daisies with a few roses mixed in. Tears of delight and gratitude brimmed in Jane's eyes. The next day, when the therapist arrived at Jane's room, she was startled by what she saw. The ordinary bouquet of flowers had been arranged creatively—professionally. Amazed, she asked Jane who had done the arrangement.

"I did. What do you think of it?"
"I think we just found out what kind of work you did before your memory loss."

Police investigators began calling florists. Eventually, they found, in another state, the floral shop where Jane had last worked. From there, they discovered her true identity as Clare Forrest, a woman with a real



past, including devoted family and friends who had been searching for her for months. These people were eager to welcome her back into their world.

A week later, Clare's father, sister, and two brothers, along with several aunts, uncles, cousins, and assorted friends, crammed into her hospital room for a grand reunion. For hours, they reeled off family memories, helping her piece together the story of her life. They told about the time when, as a three-year-old, Clare had jumped into the neighbor's pool and nearly drowned (was that why she was afraid to get into the hospital whirlpool?). Clare heard about her own starring role in the high school musical and her aspiration, back then, to sing on Broadway (no wonder she loved the sing-alongs at the hospital and had to fight off the strange impulse to jump up and lead the singing!). Sadly, her visitors relayed that her mother had died when Clare was only ten and that Clare had taken it hard (did that explain the tears that overcame

Illustration, facing page: Church history is full of stories of fascinating people whose lives are part of the communal memory of the church. In this course, you will meet some of those people.

Photo: Suppose that you had no idea of your own personal history. . . .

her the other day as she observed a little girl in the lounge waiting to visit her mother in the intensive care unit?). Clare's relatives and friends told her about themselves too: who was married to whom, where they worked, what they and Clare used to do together when they were kids.

Over the hours, Clare's life began to come into focus for her. Memories flashed through her whole being. It would be a long time before her entire past would become clear to her, but she was beginning to remember. So much about herself and her reactions to things around her had seemed mysterious. Now she could understand why she was the way she was. She sensed that she was not living in a vacuum, that she was a person with a history and could therefore figure out where to go with the rest of her life. And this wonderful discovery had started with a simple bouquet of daisies and roses.



Photo: We gain a sense of personal identity from the memories we have of experiences in our family.

Why Study History at All?

Clare's experience of losing her memory and then regaining it can offer insight into the value of knowing our history, at both the personal and the societal levels.

Memory: A Key to Personal Identity

Finding Out Who We Are

Clearly, for all of us, our memory of our personal history plays a key role in telling us who we are and enabling us to function. And with a family and all the information they give us about ourselves over the years, we have recognition of our talents and our virtues. In short, we have a sense of our own identity.

We learn our identity from relating with other people. For instance, if you feel that you possess athletic ability, it is probably because over the years your family, and maybe some neighbors and coaches, said things like, "You can really shoot and dribble well." The more this aspect of your identity was reinforced by others' making similar comments, the more your identity as "athlete" became a part of who you are.

Of course, as a person suffering from amnesia, like Clare, you would lose this understanding of yourself as an athlete, and you would have to discover it all over again. Just as Clare did not know she was a natural performer, you would not recognize your athletic skill. Your memory would not automatically give you the confidence that comes with knowing where you have come from and what you can do. **1**

Knowing the Why of Things

Besides giving us an understanding of who we are, a sense of personal history enables us to discover *why* we are the way we are, how it is that we have certain traits, reactions, or stumbling blocks. When Jane Doe discovered her history as Clare Forrest, a world of understanding opened up to her. She could then see the reasons for her fear of water, her love of singing before a group, her sadness at a little girl's emotional distress. What had been mysterious and cloudy came into focus, and Clare could see the why of the present. **2**

Choosing Wisely

Knowing our personal history can also help us make better choices for the future. If you have a history of success in math courses, you can select a college major accordingly. Clare, knowing that she lost her mother at ten years of age, might take spe-



cial measures to make sure she is nurtured as an adult and not haunted by feelings of deprivation. When we know the why of things, we have the tools to figure out what to do in the future.

Group Amnesia and Group Recall

Every family needs to cherish its own history as a family. Even though we may sometimes be embarrassed or bored by the old, well-worn tales that relatives tell at family reunions, each telling reminds us of who we are as a family. Some of the stories evoke tears: "I'll never forget Uncle Joe's last words, right before he died. He looked at me and whispered, 'Promise me you'll tell Helen I've always loved her and I always will, even when I'm gone.'"

1

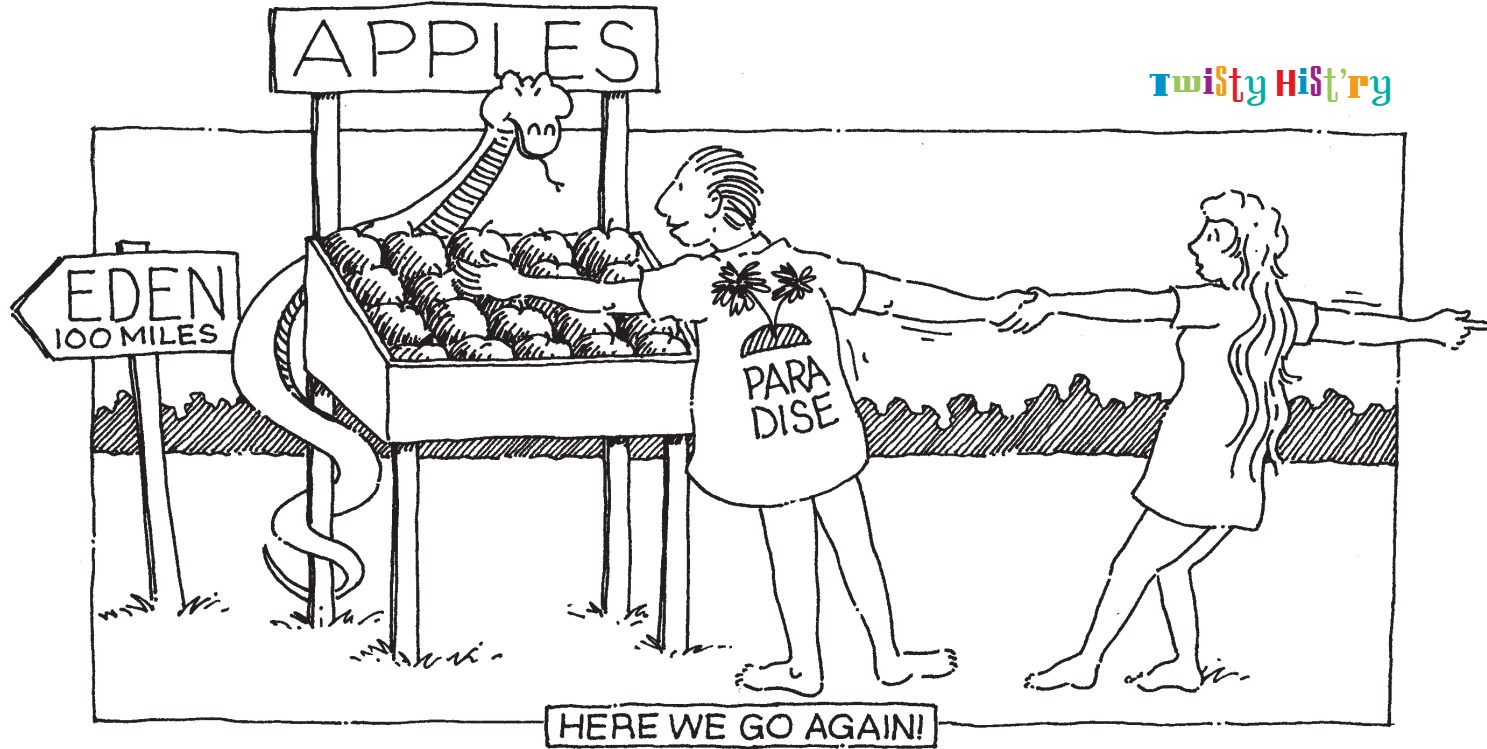
List personality traits, positive and negative, that your family frequently applies to you—for instance, "neat and orderly" or "grouchy."

2

Recall from your life history an event that you believe has affected how you think, feel, or act now. In writing, describe the event and its effects in detail.

Photo:

Family gatherings and reunions help the family cherish their own history.



Other family stories urge us into laughter: “Remember when we were at Mass in the front pew of Saint Louis Cathedral and Jay got his mitten tangled in the collection basket? Yeah, Mom and Dad didn’t know anything was wrong until they heard people laughing. Then they saw that there was Jay, stuck trying to get his little legs over the pew so he could chase the usher down for his mitt.” Even such funny memories remind us of who we are as a family.

Forgetting Who We Are

Not only do families need to remember who they are, but cultures, societies, and nations must carry the memory of where *they* have come from

and what *they* have experienced. Without this memory, they are doomed to forget who they are and repeat terrible mistakes. For instance, Christians must always keep before them the memory that Jesus was a Jew and that the roots of Christian faith are in Judaism. For centuries, some people who called themselves Christian persecuted Jewish people—most horribly in the *Shoah* (the Hebrew, preferred term for the Holocaust) of six million Jews, which was perpetrated by the Nazis under Adolf Hitler. But how can it be possible to hate Jews without hating Jesus, who was a Jew? Today, anti-Semitism (prejudice against Jewish people) is still a problem in many parts of the world, including our own society.

Collective Insight into the “Why”

Back in the 1970s, a remarkable miniseries appeared on television. Called *Roots*, it was the story of one family’s history, from the capture of an ancestor in Africa through centuries of slavery and oppression in the United States. In a sense, it was the history of all African Americans. With that popular miniseries, viewed by an enormous TV audience, a new understanding of race relations in North America was reached. As many white people came to understand, black people had not had a history at all like the history of other immigrant groups. Thus it was pointless to make unfavorable comparisons between immigrant groups who had succeeded financially in America and the great number of blacks who remained in poverty. People could not assume that blacks should react to the urban immigrant experience as the Irish or the Germans had. The anger and despair that produced race riots in cities during the 1960s could be better understood by a country that had been exposed to the history of black Americans through *Roots*.

Understanding the history of a culture, society, or ethnic group can give us insight into why things are as they are today.

Societal-Level Choices

A keen awareness of history can be liberating. By understanding the reasons for the way things are, societies and nations are in a better position to make wise choices. If we take the lessons of history to heart, we see how certain choices in the past led to certain outcomes, and we avoid the worst of both. Put another way, “those who forget the mistakes of history are condemned to repeat them.”

For example, U.S. military leaders and politicians learned the following strategic lesson from the failure of U.S. strategy during the Vietnam war, of the

1960s and 1970s: “We cannot win a ground war in an unfamiliar foreign land against a guerrilla force. Never try it again.” Unfortunately, some of the ethical lessons about the folly and inhumanity of war may not have been learned as well as the strategic lessons. **3**

So why study history? Knowing about history gives us a sense of our personal and cultural identity. It gives us insight into why things are as they are today. How fascinating it is to discover where a situation came from, to see that our conditions are not carved in stone and unchangeable just because they are “there.” The present developed out of past events and can likewise be shaped and transformed by our own actions. Such an understanding of the why of things can be liberating; it can help us avoid making the same mistakes that were made in the past, because we see more clearly and understand our options more completely. In the words of the nineteenth-century author Oliver Wendell Holmes,

When I want to understand what is happening today or try to decide what will happen tomorrow, I look back.

For Review

- Explain three reasons that it is important for us to have a sense of our own personal history.
- For each reason given in your answer to the preceding question, provide an example of how the reasoning applies at the level of cultures, societies, and nations.

3

Find a news article that tells of an event demonstrating either (a) that people learned from a previous mistake or (b) that people failed to learn from a previous mistake and so repeated it. In a paragraph, tell why you

think the lesson from the past was either learned or not learned.

Why Study *Church* History?

Christianity is a historical religion, based on the life of a historical person: Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels offer us faith-filled accounts of Jesus' life. Likewise, the story of the church, its history, provides us with a perspective on how Christians have lived out the Gospel message over the centuries. In fact, learning about the church is learning about the presence of Jesus Christ throughout history. Christ acts through and in the church's people; he lives in people's hearts and is seen in the actions of those who work in his name. Clearly, not all the actions of the church's members are Christlike—after all, the church is composed of regular, limited human beings. However, these same people have at times been the signs of the Lord's presence. Thus, knowing the church means knowing Jesus through his people.

Understanding Catholic Christian Identity

If you are taking this course as a Catholic, this study of Catholic church history can deepen your sense of identity as a Catholic Christian. You can see yourself as a member of a great religious movement that began with twelve disciples almost two thousand years ago and has grown to about one billion Catholics in the world today.

If you are taking this course as a non-Catholic Christian, much of the history described in this course, at least from the earlier periods until Christianity divided, will actually be your history as well. So the course will inform you about the parts of your own church's history that are shared with the Catholic church.

If you are taking this course as a non-Christian, you can gain some appreciation for the Catholic Christian identity of your school and of many of your classmates. So this course is intended in part to enable you to understand Catholic identity. **4**

Learning the “Whys” of Catholic Faith and Practice

During the 1960s, many Catholic Christians were surprised to find significant changes in their church's liturgical practice. Many changes came as a result of a worldwide council of bishops, the Second Vatican Council, which met from 1962 to 1965.

New Developments in the 1960s

The altar, which formerly had been positioned against and facing the back wall of the church, was brought forward and turned around so that the priest could celebrate Mass facing the people. The language used in the Mass was no longer Latin but



■ **Photo:** The Mass underwent significant changes after Vatican Council II, emphasizing community participation. Most Catholics who understood the historical roots of these changes welcomed them.

4 In writing, explain two ways that the Catholic church influences you or your family right now.

the local language. Instead of listening to a choir singing Latin chants, the congregation was supposed to join in the music—sung in the language of the people and accompanied by guitars, piano, drums, flutes, and other popular instruments. In some cases the names of the sacraments changed: penance became “the sacrament of reconciliation,” and extreme unction was renamed “the anointing of the sick.” Priests and members of religious orders adopted secular, or common, dress. The position of deacon, which had previously been restricted to men preparing for the priesthood, became open to married men. Also, deacons could serve in parishes, preaching at Sunday Mass among other duties.

These developments were quite disturbing to many Catholics because they thought that the essentials of their religion were being tampered with. They had thought that their church was unchanging—a steady sacred rock in the midst of a swirling sea of secular change. **5**

Insight into the Historical Roots

Catholics with a good sense of the history of the church were not distressed by the changes in church practice, and their identity as Catholic Christians was not threatened. Wherever changes were introduced with an explanation of the historical roots of the changes, most Catholics not only accepted but welcomed the developments. They found out that the changes were an attempt to put the church back in touch with its roots in the faith and vision of the early Christian communities.

For instance, when Catholics during the 1960s discovered that the language of the liturgy was originally intended to be understandable, not mysterious, changing the Mass from Latin to the local language made sense to them. It was useful for Catholics to learn that Latin had come into use for

5 Interview a Catholic adult who remembers what the church was like before and during the 1960s. Find out which changes in church practice the person reacted to most strongly, either liking or disliking the changes, and the

reasons for his or her reactions. Write up the results of your interview.

the liturgy around the year 400 in the western part of the Roman Empire, because Latin was the language of Rome. It eventually became the official language of the Roman Catholic liturgy, and it remained so until the 1960s, even though most Catholics did not understand it. Yet, in the early decades of Christianity, the Apostles probably celebrated the Eucharist in Aramaic, not in Latin. And Saint Paul probably broke bread and wrote his Epistles using the Greek that was the everyday language of the communities he served.

Similarly, Catholics of the modern era were able to appreciate and accept new developments in the ordained ministry after knowing these facts: In the early centuries of the church, married deacons ministered to the people. The role of deacon was not just a step to the priesthood but was a permanent role. And up until the year 1200, many priests were married.

A Sense of the Essential

By learning the reasons for various church practices and how certain traditions originated, we can better sort out what is essential and unchangeable in Catholicism from what is not essential and therefore changeable. Besides, it can be just plain fascinating to discover how things got to be the way they are. **6**

Choosing for the Church of the Future

Understanding church history can liberate us to see more clearly what is required for the church. That is, if we understand how present realities came to be and we can distinguish the essential from the inessential, then we can choose more wisely for the future.

6 Brainstorm a list of essentials for the church—things that cannot be changed. Then brainstorm a list of things that *can* be changed in the church. Compare the lists and write about how they differ.

The church, over its long history, has been moved and shaped by the Spirit of God, acting in and through human beings like ourselves. We can shape the future by who we are to and for others, and by the care with which we choose the course of action for our lives. **7**

Like Building a Friendship

Perhaps the best way to approach the study of the history of the church is to think of the effort as similar to building a friendship with someone. Ordinarily, the process of making friends begins with becoming acquainted. We ask people we meet what their name is, where they are from, what subjects they are interested in, where they live. As we spend more time with these new persons, we may begin to ask more personal questions: How do they feel about current issues? Who are they going out with? What is their family like?

Over time, we also have a chance to see these persons in action. Behaviors tell us about their personal qualities. Do we want to discuss our problems with them? Can they be trusted? What do they need help with? What are some of their limitations? Without adequate knowledge of other people, our decisions about them will be unfair or unreasonable. **8**

The history of the church is the story of a relationship between Jesus and the believers who have followed him over the centuries. As you read the history of Catholic Christianity, you will learn about people—those who have shaped the way that the world and the church are today. Some parts of the history may disturb you. Other parts may inspire you. Just remember that as in a friendship, we need to know about and learn from both the good and the bad. We need to be able to ap-



preciate the church with all its limits, as we would learn to accept a friend who has faults as well as attractive qualities. Fundamentally, Catholics believe that God’s Spirit has been with the church through good times and bad, guiding it in the most difficult and disastrous periods as well as in the apparently glorious eras.

For Review

- How can this course be helpful to you if you are taking it as a Catholic? as a non-Catholic Christian? as a non-Christian?
- Cite two changes in Catholic church practice that occurred in the 1960s and were rooted in the early history of the church.
- How is studying church history like building a friendship?

7 Recall a choice you made wisely because you understood why things had already developed as they had. Describe in writing how your insight into the past enabled you to choose well for the future.

8 Write down the name of a close friend, along with at least five significant pieces of information you know about this person. Then answer this question in a paragraph: *How important has it been to building your friendship to*

have this information about your friend?

Six Ways of Seeing the Church

Just as friendships are exciting because we always learn more about our friends, so exploring the church’s life can be fascinating because we learn more about God and people. We can study the church, all the while realizing that it is so full of God’s presence that we will never thoroughly know it. Ultimately, like a friend, the church is a mystery that cannot be completely analyzed or explained.

Although we can never totally know the church, we do have ways of studying it that can help us appreciate it more. While learning about its history, we can try to examine the church along a number of different dimensions, or models. In other words, we can see the church according to its various aspects.

Think of the **models of the church** as a device somewhat like the engineering plans for a new building. An engineering firm could make a number of drawings of the different aspects of the building. Perhaps one drawing would diagram all the electrical wiring, another drawing would show all the plumbing, and still another would indicate the steel frame and the placement of windows and walls. No single drawing would give us a complete picture of the building, but each one would add to our understanding of it. Taken together, all of these different drawings would give us a fairly good picture of the structure and inner workings of the building.

Let’s consider six models of the church, with each one highlighting or emphasizing a different dimension of the complex, ultimately mysterious reality that we call the church of Jesus Christ.

1. The Church as Body of Christ or People of God

“We are related to one another as a family.” In the Christian Testament, the church is often described as the **Body of Christ**. The community of believers—professing Christian faith, caring for one another, celebrating the Eucharist together, serving the poor—becomes the body of Jesus on earth. And the different parts of this body of Jesus are related to one another in the same way that members of an actual physical body are intimately dependent on one another.



Photo: The different members of the Body of Christ depend on one another; they are intimately connected, just like the parts of an actual physical body.

Why These Terms for the Christian Bible?

When Christians refer to the **Bible** or the **Christian Scriptures**, they mean a whole collection of sacred writings that comprises what Christians have commonly called “the Old Testament” and “the New Testament.” The Scriptures of the Old Testament are central to the Jewish faith and were originally written in Hebrew. Out of sensitivity to our Jewish brothers and sisters, we will call the two parts of the Christian Scriptures the **Hebrew Scriptures** and the **Christian Testament**, rather than terming them “old” and “new.”

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul says that all members, each with a different function, are important to the Body of Christ, the church. Therefore, just as people would care for their own body, they must take care of one another. No person alone can do everything necessary to *be* the embodiment of Christ in the world, but together, the church as a whole body can be the fullest expression of Christ. **9**

In addition to being called the Body of Christ, the church community goes by another name that expresses a similar reality—**People of God**. This name recalls the identity of the Israelites as the

Chosen People of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Christian Testament, Jesus calls all people to God’s love. Thus, those who believe become the People of God, members of God’s own family.

2. The Church as Institution

“We are organized through formal structures.” The word *institution* is used in a variety of ways. We speak of colleges and hospitals as institutions (meaning that they are highly complex and formally structured organizations). We hear praise for the institutions of democracy (meaning, in the United States, the secret-ballot elections, the three branches of government, and so on). In neither of these cases does *institution* mean simply a building. Rather, the term refers to the organized patterns, rules, and social structures that have developed to help carry out a group or movement’s purposes. **10**

Humans tend to “institutionalize” groups and movements that they hold as important and valuable. A group wants to maintain itself in an orderly way and accomplish its goals without constantly wrestling over how to proceed or who is in charge. Thus the church over time developed an institutional aspect, with rules, roles, and an authority structure. In fact, the church as **Institution** is probably the most familiar model of the church to us, because we associate the church with a hierarchy, or authority structure, of pope, bishops, and priests. When we speak of the church, we often mean the “official church,” the church of the Vatican in Rome or of the diocesan office locally. We forget that this formal, institutional aspect is only one dimension of the church.

Even at its very beginning, the church was developing institutional patterns, although the first followers of Jesus would not have thought of



themselves as an institution. Jesus gave Peter authority as leader and commissioned the Apostles to preach the Good News, which was a way of passing on authority to them. They in turn commissioned others. Formal roles—of bishop, deacon, and then priest—were established to do the work of the early church. Processes for entry into the church, as well as for being banned from the church for grievous offenses, had to be worked out. Forums such as church councils were developed for settling conflicts, even as early as the time of Saints Peter and Paul.

The institutional dimension of the church is the human way of ensuring that the church will be maintained and its mission will continue: the needy will be cared for, God will be worshiped, and the Gospel will be preached.

3. The Church as Sacrament

“We are a visible, tangible sign of God’s love.” Human beings need tangible, flesh-and-blood reminders that God is with them. For this reason, Catholicism stresses the sacramental quality of

9

Complete the following statements:

- Today, I can be the mouth of Christ by . . .
- I can be the hands of Christ by . . .

- I can be the eyes of Christ when I . . .
- I can be the ears of Christ when I . . .

10

Think of an informal group you know of that gets together regularly for some purpose. Identify any tendencies to introduce rules or patterns of authority. Consider in writing whether these developments are helpful or not.

■

Photo: Saint Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican in Rome, Italy, is the home of the institutional Roman Catholic church.

life—that we find God in the concrete, the ordinary, the physical reality of existence. The seven official Catholic sacraments (baptism, the Eucharist, and so on) convey God’s love through physical, tangible actions like pouring water, sharing bread, massaging with oil, and laying hands on a person.

Similarly, Jesus is sometimes referred to as the Sacrament of God, because in his human, physical existence here on earth, he embodied and was a sign of God’s loving action in the world. Now the church, as the extension of Jesus in historical time, continues being a sign of God’s presence in the world. Therefore, the church is a **Sacrament**, a physical sign of God’s saving love. When the people of the church worship, serve, and preach, God’s

saving power is revealed as present. The people remember what Jesus was all about when he was on earth and thus what God is all about.

As a Vatican Council II document expressed it, the church “is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind” (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, number 1). We see this unifying action of the church in the celebration of the seven sacraments themselves. For instance, at the Eucharist, in sharing the body and blood of Christ, Catholics become united with God and with one another in Jesus. This sacrament expresses the reality of an actual living community—real people at a specific place and time, affirming their identity through activities they do in unison. Just as a volleyball team



Photo: When Catholics celebrate the Eucharist and share Jesus’ body and blood in Communion, they express the reality of the church as a Sacrament, or a physical sign of God’s saving love.

is identified as a team because it plays games regularly together, the Christian community maintains its identity through its liturgical celebrations. **11**

4. The Church as Herald of God’s Word

“We proclaim the Good News.” You may have seen movies about medieval European castles and towns and the people who lived in them. When rulers wanted to send an official message to the people, they sent out a herald. The herald would blow a horn, ring a bell, or yell loudly to call people together. Usually the message was for everyone to hear, and it was considered very important.

The church is the **Herald** of Jesus Christ. It is the official messenger to proclaim the word of God to all people everywhere. The first Christians spread the word by going out from Jerusalem to tell the Good News of Jesus to anyone who would listen. Eventually the Apostles proclaimed the Gospel as far as Rome. Later generations of Christians, right up to the present, have brought the Gospel “to the ends of the earth”—to every continent and every nation.

Belief in Jesus Christ and his Gospel comes about through hearing the word of God preached by credible witnesses to the Gospel. People will not believe in something they have never heard about, nor will they have faith in a vision that does not seem to affect the lives of the ones proclaiming the message.

The church acts as Herald in several ways. Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). So, on a simple level, any gathering at which Christians read the word of God or pray together is the church acting as Herald. During the liturgy of

the word at Mass, for example, the church is Herald. Many church publications, TV programs, and radio programs herald the word. Missionaries still preach the Gospel to people who have not heard it. Finally, the loving, committed actions of Christians herald the Good News. **12**

5. The Church as Servant

“We are at the service of God and therefore of all humankind.” The night before Jesus died on the cross, he gave the Apostles an example of how to live and relate to others. Jesus, who was the disciples’ “lord and master,” washed their feet, taking the customary role that a servant would have in a Jewish household. In doing so, Jesus modeled for his followers the kind of persons that they must be—servants who give themselves and make sacrifices for others.

At another time, Jesus made it clear that when his followers serve others with compassion, they are really serving God:

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” (Matthew 25:35–36)

The church, like the Apostles, is called to be a **Servant** to the world, to offer itself to humankind directly and compassionately out of love for God. The church serves human beings through its institutional structures but also through the efforts of individual Christians who put their life at the service of others.

The ways in which people become servants may vary a lot. Everyone has different talents, positions, and circumstances—from the laboratory researcher

11

If someone who was unfamiliar with the Catholic church came to your school Masses, what sort of remarks do you think the person would make about the experience? Describe in writing the

ways in which the person might be able to perceive God’s love from your school liturgy.

12

Television acts as a herald, proclaiming a message repeatedly. Answer these questions in writing: On whose behalf does television speak? How would you characterize the main message—as good news, bad news, or something else?

studying the effects of pollution on the environment, to the parent welcoming the neighborhood kids in for some snacks and fun, to the teenager offering to help a classmate with a difficult course. Christians need to look at their own abilities realistically and use whatever talents they possess in the best ways for the greatest good. People make their marks on history mostly through the service they give to humankind. In this way they also live out the reality of the church as Servant.

As an institution, the church has established many service organizations. Worldwide, the Catholic church educates millions of students in grade schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. Thousands of Catholic hospitals and clinics treat sick people. The church runs orphanages and homes for aged and chronically ill persons. It also operates literacy programs, agricultural development projects, publishing houses, and so on. At one time, when slavery was common, some religious orders dedicated themselves to freeing those in bondage. As needs arise in the world, the church seeks to meet those needs. **13**

6. The Church as Community of Disciples

“We are followers of Jesus.” A disciple is a devoted follower of a teacher or master; a disciple strives to live according to the beliefs and lifestyle of the person followed. Jesus’ disciples took on his way of life; they learned his values, traveled with him, and dedicated themselves to his vision. As a consequence of following Jesus, they went against the grain of the wider society. Eventually all of them suffered for their beliefs, and most of them died for those convictions.



Any group of people who feed the hungry, love one another, share their goods, stand up for those treated unjustly, and live simply, peacefully, and with respect for their environment are bound to stand in contrast with the rest of society. Because they do not follow the standards of the rest of the world but instead look to an alternative vision, they may not be successful in terms that the rest of the world understands. They may be failures economically; they may even get in trouble for challenging injustice when they see it.

Such is the call of the church—to be a **Community of Disciples** of Jesus, a people whose lifestyle stands in contrast with the rest of society. Overall, Jesus’ message and way of life are immensely challenging, and not necessarily popular.

Jesus never imagined that his disciples would have it easy. Life for them would be fulfilling, yes. Easy, no. The cost of following Jesus over the centuries has often been paid in blood by martyrs, who have died for the cause of the Gospel. In our own time, committed followers of Jesus suffer consequences, in some instances even torture and death, for the lifestyle they commit themselves to. But more typically in our society, the consequences of following Jesus are likely to be seen in situations such as less material success or loss of popularity because of the stands one takes.

13
Bring to class a news article that shows the church acting as Servant, and bring another article that shows an area or problem where people could use the help of a serving church.

■
Photo: As disciples of Jesus, Christians may take unpopular stands because they believe these stands reflect Jesus’ values.

Six Models, One Church

In the real world, the models of the church do not exist as separate entities. Rather, the dimensions of Body of Christ or People of God, Institution, Sacrament, Herald, Servant, and Community of Disciples can often be seen together in one instance of the church’s life. The models do overlap. For instance, when the church is being the Body of Christ (the members are relating to one another as one body or family), it is also often acting as Servant (looking after the needs of others) as well as Sacrament (a visible sign of God’s love).

Likewise, at such times the church is often at its best as Community of Disciples (following Jesus’ way of life and taking the consequences for it). And when the church is following the way of Christ, its voice as Herald of the Good News is most credible and most likely to be heard by a world that desperately needs credible people who witness to their faith. Even the model of Institution can often be seen in the most seemingly informal instances of church action, because such action does rely on the recognition of leadership, common mission, agreed-upon ways of proceeding, and so on.

The following news article demonstrates the presence of all these models of the church in one example of what the church is and can be.

On a chilly December evening in Phoenix, about 400 men, a half-dozen women and one couple with a baby wait on a downtown sidewalk for the only group in town that serves

dinner to homeless people who have not taken refuge in shelters.

Precisely at 6 p.m. a pickup truck pulls up in front of the crowd. Ten people get out and silently prepare to break the law. . . .

They are church volunteers who believe it is more important to dish out beans, sandwiches and hot coffee to the less fortunate than to pay attention to Phoenix laws that forbid such mass gatherings on public sidewalks and serving large quantities of food without a permit.

Not that Father Mark Van Wassenhove, a Holy Cross priest who directs Phoenix’s Andre House of Hospitality, would not like his organization to also obey the law each night when it serves 500–1,000 meals. . . .

“But the bottom line is there is a need to be met,” said Van Wassenhove. . . . “Our mission is to do the gospel works of charity, and one of those is feeding the hungry.”

A crackdown by Phoenix this year has forced the Andre House to stop serving dinner at the downtown homeless shelter. . . .

Andre House volunteers began their mild form of civil disobedience by moving their nightly food line down the street from the shelter to an area where police are too busy to be interested in ticketing a church group and hundreds of people too poor to pay fines. (“Let Them Eat on Street—But Not in This Neighborhood,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 21 December 1990)

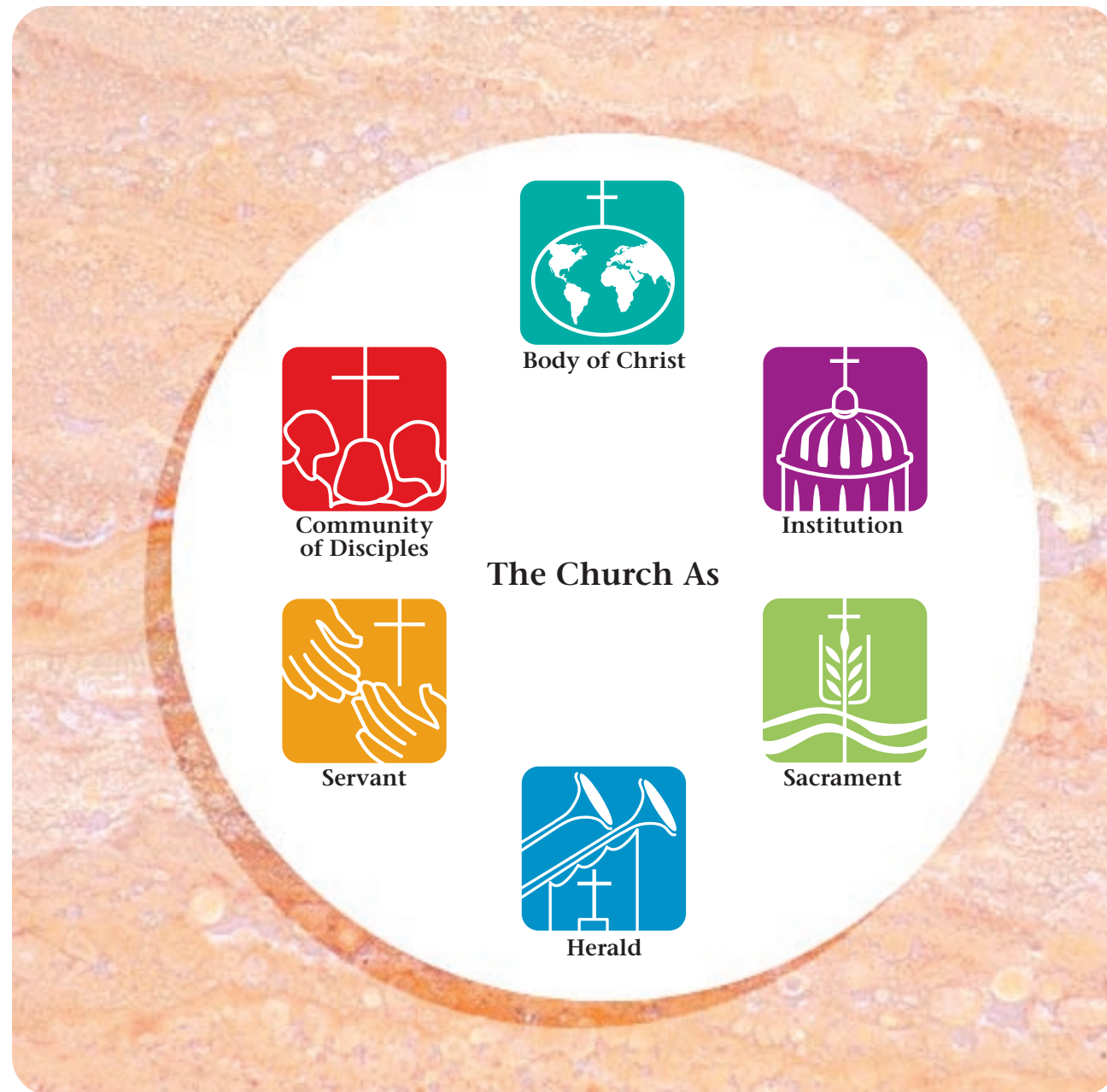


Illustration: The models of the church are dimensions or aspects of the church. In different eras and circumstances of church history, various dimensions of the church's life can be seen. Throughout the remaining chap-

ters, the above symbols will appear periodically in the text to highlight which model of the church is especially apparent in a given era or circumstance.

To believe in Christ and work for his vision of peace and justice and love demands sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. The church as Community of Disciples bears witness by its own lifestyle that the "good life" is about more than television sets, expensive cars, the latest fashions, smooth skin, a nice body, a great sound system, and a high-status job.

The church as Community of Disciples may be the most challenging dimension of being church. But faithful, hopeful, and loving people have chosen to be different, have chosen to be disciples of Jesus throughout the almost two thousand years of the church's history. **14**

Church History and the Models

As we study the history of the Catholic Christian church in this course, we will refer to these models to highlight different dimensions of the church's role in history—as Body of Christ or People of God, Institution, Sacrament, Herald, Servant, and Community of Disciples.

We will see that over the centuries the church has developed in different directions and according to a variety of emphases. For instance, as the church has grown, the Institution model has become much more obvious. At particular times, the missionary activities of the church have highlighted the Herald model. Most of the adaptations in the church through history have come about so that it could be a more effective Body of Christ, Institution, Sacrament, Herald, Servant, and Community of Disciples. Yet we must keep in mind that the church is more than the sum of its parts—more than all the models put together. Ultimately, the church remains a fascinating mystery.

14
From your own experience or that of someone you know, write about an incident in which a person had to take difficult consequences for doing what was right or Christlike.

At various points throughout this book, you will notice that a given development in the church is identified in the lower margin of the page with a symbol, or icon, of the model that is expressed by that development. The recurring symbols will serve as a reminder that the church has been alive with the Spirit in every age, but with different models of the church more apparent at different times.

For Review

- What does it mean to say that ultimately the church is a mystery?
- How can using the six models of the church help us appreciate what the church is?
- Name the six models of the church and describe each one briefly in a sentence.

Conclusion

This course aims to help you see the church with new eyes. Like someone on a fascinating search to find his or her family's roots, perhaps you will discover with surprise some insight into who you are and why "the family" of the church is the way it is today. You may be troubled to find stories of family tragedy or conflict, delighted to discover brave and inspiring ancestors, and appreciative of the struggles that have shaped the family over the years. You may find dimensions of the family that you never noticed or that you took for granted. Finally, you may find that this journey into the past will enable you to see the future more clearly and commit yourself to it with a wiser mind and heart.