

6. WHAT IS CHURCH?

The church is the body of Christ—all the people who accept Christ's gift of salvation and follow Christ's teachings. It is much more than a building.

Being part of the body of Christ means we are called to be continually shaped to be more and more like Christ. This happens by letting the Word of God, the Bible, guide our faith and our lives, by worshiping God and celebrating the sacraments that Jesus gave us, and by living in community with each other.

Becoming a member of the church means that you belong to Jesus Christ and that you belong to the people of God. The church is also called "the bride of Christ," emphasizing that the church is joined in a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus, and is bound to him by a covenant similar to the covenant of marriage.

THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST.

In the Bible, "church" never refers to a building. It always refers to people—the people who follow Jesus Christ.

The presence of Christ is the key to the life of the church. It is in and through the church that Christ encounters, calls, transforms, equips, and sends his people into the world. God uses the church to introduce salvation to those who don't know him, and to nurture the faith of believers. The church is God's instrument for expressing his compassion and concern for the world. The church is indispensable for Christian believers.

In the church, Christians are inseparably bound to each other. The picture of an individual Christian alone with God is alien to the New Testament. Christians are taught to call God "our Father"—not just "my Father." The importance of community in the Bible can't be overemphasized. The church as one body implies that Christians not only belong to Jesus Christ, but also to one another. Fellowship with Christ and with each other makes believers a single family united in love.

In the church, each individual is needed and important. 1 Corinthians 12 describes the church as a body, with each part (or person) playing an important role. Each person's gifts enrich the church and enable it to carry on its work in the world.

And within the church we're all held accountable to each other. We take care of each other, support each other in developing better relationships with Christ, and ensure that we gently ensure—through love and patience and understanding—that we remain true to our beliefs, even when we may be severely tempted by the sins present in the world.