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Images of the Church

INTRODUCTION

Since the Church, in Christ, is a sacrament—sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race—it here proposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the entire world, to describe more clearly, and in the tradition laid down by earlier councils, its own nature and universal mission.

—*Lumen Gentium (Constitution on the Church)*, no. 1

Chapter 4 explores images of Church that the Church has used since apostolic times to help her members understand the divine–human mystery that is the Church. Many of these images point to the intimate relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church. They also provide deeper insight into the role that all the baptized have in the ongoing mission of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4 is developed under five major headings:

- ◎ **ATTEND AND REFLECT:** Why are there so many images for the Church?
- ◎ **HEAR THE STORY:** Church as mystery
- ◎ **EMBRACE THE VISION:** The Church: a communion of love
- ◎ **THINK IT THROUGH:** The Church: the seed of the Kingdom
- ◎ **JUDGE AND ACT:** (Activities and exercises that encourage the young people to integrate what they have learned in the chapter into their daily lives)

Theological Background for the Teacher

ONE CHURCH, MANY IMAGES

In chapter 1 we examined the innate human need for community and how this need reflects the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. In this chapter we further present to the students that this innate human need has both a spiritual as well as a physical dimension. People are religious by nature and are in need of a faith community from which they can both grow in

their understanding of their faith tradition as well as be supported in the living of that faith. Our faith community is the Catholic Church. This chapter presents the numerous biblical images of Church from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This chapter also highlights the teachings on Church given by the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The *Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* teaches:

In the Old Testament symbols are often used to convey the revelation of the kingdom and similarly the inner nature of the church is now made known to us in various images. Taken either from pastoral life, agriculture, construction work, or from family life and betrothal, these images are prepared in the books of the prophets.

—*Lumen Gentium*, no. 6

PEOPLE OF GOD. As we discovered in chapter 1, the image of the ‘People of God’, which we use for the Church, is rooted in the Old Testament in the Covenant that God and the people of ancient Israel entered. Through a series of key encounters God and his chosen people entered into a covenantal relationship. Some of these encounters also have a symbolic resonance to the images of Church found in the New Testament (see below) and in Tradition. For example, St. Augustine compared the Church to Noah’s Ark:

The Church is ‘the world reconciled’. She is that bark which ‘in the full sail of the Lord’s cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world.’ . . . [S]he is prefigured by Noah’s ark, which alone saves from the flood.

—Quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, no. 845

The ‘community’ that is the Church is also clearly seen throughout the call of Abraham and the election of Abraham and his descendants as the People of God (see Genesis 12:2, 15:5–6). These Old Testament images prefigure the fulfillment of the covenantal relationship uniting God and his people in Jesus

Christ, the Son of God and the new and everlasting Covenant.

BODY OF CHRIST. A central image for Church, for the bond uniting God and his people, is St. Paul's teaching that the Church is the Body of Christ (see Galatians 3:25; 1 Corinthians 12:12–30; Romans 12:4). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:

The comparison of the Church with the body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and his Church. Not only is she gathered *around him*; she is united *in him*, in his body.

—CCC, no. 789

The image of Church as the Body of Christ can help the young people understand the significance and importance of *all* the individual members of the Church contributing collectively to building up the Church. The image of the Body of Christ also celebrates the diversity that is at the heart of the unity, or oneness, of the Church. Each member of the Church receives gifts and charisms from the Holy Spirit for the good of the 'whole Christ' (*Christus Totus*). (See CCC, no. 795.)

TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. In the New Testament the Church is also revealed to be the 'Temple of the Holy Spirit'. The Holy Spirit is the 'soul of the Mystical Body, the source of its life, of its unity in diversity, and of the riches of its gifts and charisms' (CCC, no. 809). In this chapter we remind our young people that this teaching of Scripture also reveals them to be 'temples of the Holy Spirit', in and through whom the Holy Spirit is at work every day of their lives. This same Holy Spirit, gifted to his Church by Christ at Pentecost, brings us all into communion with the one God, who is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

BRIDE OF CHRIST. The image of the faithful love uniting spouses as an image of the faithful love of God for his people is rooted in the Old Testament. The New Testament builds on this image and speaks of the Church as the Bride of Christ. The image of Christ as Bridegroom and the Church as Bride emphasizes how 'he has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant, and never stops caring for her as for his own body'. (See CCC, no. 796; Ephesians 5:25–33.)

OTHER BIBLICAL IMAGES. The people of biblical times were people of the land, and so, quite naturally, the world of agriculture provides the setting for other key images of Church. In John 15:1–10 Jesus presents himself as the true vine, with the faithful Church as the branches. The fruitfulness of the branches

depends on how we nourish the living Spirit within us. Similarly, the Church is:

... a cultivated field, the tillage of God. On that land the ancient olive tree grows whose holy roots were the prophets and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been brought about and will be brought about again. That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly cultivator. Yet the true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us, who through the Church remain in Christ, without whom we can do nothing.

—CCC, no. 755

Such images clearly show the necessity of our daily response in living as disciples of Jesus, bearing fruit—as members of his Body.

The good shepherd is an image for God used by the writers of the Old Testament and an image that Christ used for himself. The image of a 'good shepherd' evoked the sacrifice, fidelity and intimacy of a good shepherd for his flock. The images 'sheep' and 'flock' for the Church reveal the bond uniting God and his people, Christ and his Church. (See CCC, no. 754; John 10:1–16.)

The Church is also called the building of God. 'The Lord compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles and from it the Church receives solidity and unity' (CCC, no. 756).

MARY, MOTHER AND PERFECT REALIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Mary is the first disciple of Christ and the first disciple to receive and announce the Good News of Salvation. The *Catechism* explains:

At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church: 'The Church indeed ... by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse.

—CCC, no. 507

The Church is a mystery; it is a mystery that the study of the many biblical images the sacred writers used for Church will help the young people grow in their understanding.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 56, 541, 669, 753–801, 845, 1219, 1655–1658; *United States Catholic Catechism of Adults*, chapter 10, ‘The Church: Reflecting

the Light of Christ’; *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 147–160; *Lumen Gentium (Constitution on the Church)*, chapters 1–2; Blessed John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia (Rich in Mercy)*, November 30, 1980.

CHAPTER OUTCOMES

See general note on page 19 of this resource.

Learning Outcomes

As a result of studying this chapter and exploring the issues raised, the young people should be able to:

- ⊗ know the strengths and limitations of ‘image’ language in describing the Church;
- ⊗ understand the biblical image of ‘the shepherd and the shepherd’s flock’;
- ⊗ relate the human need for community to the spiritual need for a community of faith;
- ⊗ understand the Church as mystery, in terms of ‘visible and invisible’, ‘human and divine’;
- ⊗ recognize how images of Church change through time and history;
- ⊗ recall and understand Jesus’ image of Church as ‘vine and branches’;
- ⊗ understand Church as the sign and sacrament of the reign of God;
- ⊗ have some understanding of the different roles and structures within the Church;
- ⊗ understand how the Church is a sign and instrument of communion and unity;
- ⊗ identify biblical images that point to the Church as a ‘people’, the ‘New People of God’;
- ⊗ understand the meaning and value of the ‘domestic church’;
- ⊗ understand Church as the ‘Body of Christ’;
- ⊗ understand the image of Church as ‘seed of the Kingdom’;
- ⊗ understand the image of Church as a pilgrim people;
- ⊗ understand the concept of responding to the signs of the times, as promulgated by Blessed Pope John XXIII;
- ⊗ learn from the example of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman;
- ⊗ understand the role of the laity in the Church.

Faith-formation Outcomes

As a result of studying this chapter and exploring the issues raised, the young people should also:

- ⊗ become more discerning of how they can contribute to the Church;
- ⊗ critique their own images of Church;
- ⊗ come up with a new contemporary image of Church;
- ⊗ grow in their understanding of the nature of their relationship with Jesus;
- ⊗ value the Church as the family of God;
- ⊗ develop a greater sense of belonging to the Church;
- ⊗ feel that they can significantly contribute to the pilgrim journey of the Church;
- ⊗ develop a greater appreciation of the role of young people in the Church.

Teacher Reflection

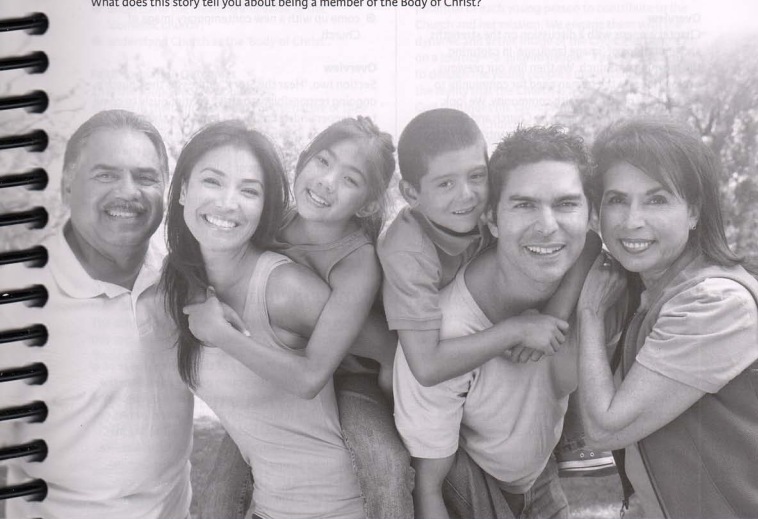
As we prepare to engage our young people in a study of the connection between themselves, Church and Christ, take a moment to remember that you are part of this sphere too. Each of us has a role to play and it is up to us to discern that role. Read the following story and allow it to speak to you.

Once upon a time, there was a man and woman who had seven children, five sons and two daughters, and they were constantly fighting and quarrelling with one another. Finally, the parents were so tired of intervening and listening to the dissension that they gathered them together and told them to go out and find stout sticks. Each of them returned with about four or five—they thought they were collecting tinder to start a fire. When they returned their father gathered all the sticks together, binding them tightly with a cord. Then he handed it to the oldest and told him: 'Break it!' He couldn't. One by one they tried and none had the strength. They tried the suggestion of the girls, to break it over their knees or bang it against the side of the wall. Finally, exhausted, they turned to their parents. Their mother took out single sticks and handed one to each of them. 'Now', she said, break it!' And each one broke the stick easily. But then they were told: 'If you will just stay together, help one another, remember the others and be careful of each other, no one will be able to break you. You will know the strength of all of you and more besides. But separate, each of you can be broken easily, and it is easiest when you are divided among yourselves, quarrelling and at odds with one another. Together you are almost invincible, and the more you draw into your company, the stronger you will become. Remember.'

—Megan McKenna

REFLECT

What does this story tell you about being a member of the Body of Christ?



Notes and Guidelines for Student Activities

ATTEND AND REFLECT

Why are there so many images for the Church?

Learning Outcomes

That the young people would:

- ⊗ know the strengths and limitations of 'image' language in describing the Church;
- ⊗ understand the biblical image of 'the shepherd and the shepherd's flock';
- ⊗ relate the human need for community to the spiritual need for a community of faith.

Faith-formation Outcome

That the young people would also:

- ⊗ become more discerning of how they can contribute to the Church.

Overview

Chapter 4 opens with a discussion on the strengths and limitations of 'image language' in capturing the meaning of Church. We then link our previous explorations on the human need for community to our spiritual need for a faith community. We look at the reasons why we need the Church and the responsibility each one of us has to contribute to the work of the Church.

Supplementary Activities for 'Attend and Reflect'

Worksheet 1: 'The Community of Faith in the Bible'

(page 92 of this resource) is a Scripture activity in which the young people both study biblical passages containing images of Church and give their personal responses.

Worksheet 2: 'Why Do You Need the Church?' (page 94 of this resource)

provides the young people with questions and images that prompt them to reflect more deeply on their own relationship with the Church.

HEAR THE STORY

Church as mystery

Learning Outcomes

That the young people would:

- ⊗ understand the Church as mystery, in terms of 'visible and invisible', 'human and divine';
- ⊗ recognize how images of Church change through time and history;
- ⊗ recall and understand Jesus' image of Church as 'vine and branches';
- ⊗ understand Church as the sign and sacrament of the reign of God;
- ⊗ have some understanding of the different roles and structures within the Church.

Faith-formation Outcomes

That the young people would also:

- ⊗ critique their own images of Church;
- ⊗ come up with a new contemporary image of Church.

Overview

Section two, 'Hear the Story', addresses the Church's ongoing responsibility to strive continuously to come to a deeper understanding of herself as she moves through time and history. We examine some of the images that seek to convey the mystery that the Church is the sacrament of Salvation and of God's reign in the world. We look briefly at some of the roles of the members of the Church that help make her an effective, visible instrument of God's grace. We also encourage the young people to reflect further on their own role within the Church.

Supplementary Activities for 'Hear the Story'

Worksheet 3: 'The Mystery of the Church' (page 96 of this resource)

invites the young people to explore the wisdom that the Second Vatican Council document *Lumen Gentium* (Constitution on the Church) passes on about the Church as a mystery of faith. The full text of *Lumen Gentium* is available on the Vatican website. You will need a copy of chapter 1 of *Lumen Gentium*, 'The Mystery of the Church', which is divided into eight sections. The worksheet activity requires the

young people to form eight groups, with each group studying and responding to one of these sections.

Worksheet 4: 'Signs of the Times—Documents of the Second Vatican Council' (page 98 of this resource) invites the young people to familiarize themselves with the names and general themes of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The text of all the documents is available on the Vatican website.

EMBRACE THE VISION

The Church: a communion of love

Learning Outcomes

That the young people would:

- understand how the Church is a sign and instrument of communion and unity;
- identify biblical images that point to the Church as a 'people', the 'New People of God';
- understand the meaning and value of the 'domestic church';
- understand Church as the 'Body of Christ'.

Faith-formation Outcomes

That the young people would also:

- grow in their understanding of the nature of their relationship with Jesus;
- value the Church as the family of God;
- develop a greater sense of belonging to the Church.

Overview

Section three, 'Embrace the Vision', aims to lead the young people to a deeper understanding of Church as the family of God—a community of adopted sons and daughters of God, of brothers and sisters of Jesus and of one another. We introduce the young people to the term 'domestic church', or the 'church of the home'. The other dominant image of Church that we study in this section is the Pauline image of the Church as the 'Body of Christ'.

Supplementary Activity for 'Embrace the Vision'

Worksheet 5: 'The Church—the World's Next Top Image' (page 100 of this resource) is an exercise in creative thinking. Based on the concept of a popular TV reality show, the young people respond to the

search for the next 'image' for Church that speaks to the modern world.

THINK IT THROUGH

The Church: the seed of the Kingdom

Learning Outcomes

That the young people would:

- understand the image of Church as 'seed of the Kingdom';
- understand the dynamic image of Church as a pilgrim people.

Faith-formation Outcome

That the young people would also:

- feel that they can significantly contribute to the pilgrim journey of the Church.

Overview

Our goal in 'Think It Through' is to emphasize the potential of each young person to contribute to the Church and her mission. We engage them with the dynamic and active image of the Church as people on a journey—a 'pilgrim people.' The exercise aims to deepen the young people's understanding of the reality that the Church is a 'work in progress'. God continues his saving work in and through his Church. The Church is the 'seed of the Kingdom'; the Kingdom of God is the final stage of the divine plan of Salvation.

Supplementary Activities for 'Think It Through'

Worksheet 6: 'The Church—A Pilgrim People' (page 101 of this resource) engages the young people in further reflection on the image of Church as a pilgrim people. The exercises are based on excerpts from the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* (Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) and Blessed Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (Rich in Mercy). The full text of the encyclical is available on the Vatican website.

Worksheet 7: 'Where Do I Fit In?' (page 103 of this resource) gives the young people an opportunity to absorb the significance for their own lives of the images of Church that they have studied and explored. We encourage them to examine the

possibilities for their future involvement in the mission of the Church.

JUDGE AND ACT

Learning Outcomes

That the young people would:

- understand the concept of responding to the signs of the times, as promulgated by Blessed Pope John XXIII;
- learn from the example of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman;
- understand the role of the laity in the Church.

Faith-formation Outcome

That the young people would also:

- develop a greater appreciation of the role of young people in the Church.

Overview

In section five, 'Judge and Act', we give the young people the opportunity to reflect on the various topics discussed throughout the chapter, culminating in the personal challenge of assessing their own relationship to and role in the Church. We present two examples that stress the significance of the laity: Blessed Pope John XXIII's emphasis on discerning the signs of the times and responding appropriately, and the Christian witness of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman.

Supplementary Activities for 'Judge and Act'

Class Debate

Have the class share ideas on one of the following motions:

- The work of the Church is for adults.
- To say that the Church is the 'People of God' and the 'Body of Christ' is to say one and the same thing.
- The Church cannot really be Church without the laity.

Worksheet 8: 'Catholic Lay Movements' (page 104 of this resource) involves the young people in researching Catholic lay organizations. Through this activity and the enhanced awareness the young people will gain of lay involvement in communities, we aim to encourage the young people's own participation in the life of the Church.

Media Link

Consider guiding the young people toward a closer study of the youth section of the Focolare Movement. The website is www.teens4unity.org.

Additional Prayer Suggestions

Guided Meditation: Psalm 23

(See 'Student Activity Tool Kit', page 299 of this resource, for further helpful suggestions in relation to conducting guided meditations.)

Allow some quiet time for reflection and invite each young person to write down a short prayer for the Church, which will be used during this meditation.

Leader

We cherish the Church as our way of approaching God and God's way of approaching us—as the community of his own people. We remember that God is our Shepherd; Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Let us pray Psalm 23 together.

One or several readers may read the psalm.

Reader(s)

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters,
he restores my soul. (Pause)

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake. (Pause)

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me. (Pause)

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows. (Pause)

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long. (Pause)

Leader

Let us pray for the Church.

Now invite the young people to share their prayers, if they choose. End each prayer with 'Let us pray to the Lord', to which all respond 'Lord hear our prayer'.

Conclude with the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross.

Scripture Reflection

(See instructions for the use of doodling in prayer in the 'Student Activity Tool Kit', page 299 of this resource.)

Use the following Scripture verse to engage the young people in prayer:

If the part of the
dough offered as
first fruits is holy,
then the whole
batch is holy; and
if the root is holy,
then the branches
also are holy.

ROMANS 11:16

JOURNAL EXERCISE

Write a short reflection on the insights you have gained about Church and your role in the life of the Church through your reflections on the Scripture passages.

NAME: _____

The Community of Faith in the Bible

This worksheet will give you the opportunity to consider different biblical images for Church and to use the insights gained from reflecting on them to deepen your own understanding of Church.

READ, REFLECT AND RESPOND

Look up and read the Scripture passages listed in the left column of the chart, each of which contains an image or images that help us deepen our understanding of Church. Reflect on each passage carefully before answering the questions in the other two columns.

Scripture passage	What does this passage teach about Church?	How do you respond to the image of Church presented in this passage?
Deuteronomy 7:6		
1 Corinthians 12:12–26		

Scripture passage	What does this passage teach about Church?	How do you respond to the image of Church presented in this passage?
Exodus 19:3–6		
Ephesians 4:1–16		
2 Corinthians 6:16–18, 7:1		

JOURNAL EXERCISE

Write a short reflection on the insights you have gained about Church and your role in the life of the Church through your reflection on the Scripture passages.

NAME: _____

Why Do You Need the Church?

This worksheet will guide you to reflect more deeply on and articulate what the Church means to you.

THINK, PAIR AND SHARE

- ⊙ Think about your immediate response to these questions:
 - How do you feel part of, or not part of, the Church?
 - Why do you want to belong to the Church?
 - Do you struggle with what it means to be a member of the Church? If so, how?
- ⊙ Pair up with a partner and discuss these questions.
- ⊙ Share with the class any insights you have gained from your discussion.

OBSERVE AND RESPOND

- ⊙ Have a look at the images in this activity. Do they speak to you of Church in any way?
- ⊙ Discuss your insights with a partner and then with the class.



JOURNAL EXERCISE

Read the chart below. Fill in as many responses as you can. Add additional responses as time goes on. Consider placing it somewhere safe so that you can look back over it throughout your study of this course.

The Church needs me because	I need the Church because
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.

NAME: _____

The Mystery of the Church

The activities in this worksheet invite you to delve more deeply into the divine-human mystery that is the Church. First explore the term 'mystery' and then look at the wisdom offered in the Second Vatican Council document *Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* on Church as mystery.

BRAINSTORM ACTIVITY

- ⊗ Work in pairs and brainstorm all the words, phrases and connotations that are conjured by the term 'mystery'.
- ⊗ Compare your results with those of the other groups.
- ⊗ As a class, compile a list of five positive and five negative associations with the term 'mystery'.

Positive associations with 'mystery'	Negative associations with 'mystery'
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

NAME: _____

Review of Chapter 4

- I. Matching. Write the letter of the term or phrase from column 2 on the line next to its best match in column 1. There are two more items in column 2 than you will need.

COLUMN 1	COLUMN 2
_____ 1. Image of the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, whose members were 'living stones'	A. Psalm 23
_____ 2. Image of the Church as a pilgrim people	B. Book of Exodus
_____ 3. Image of God's relationship with his people as reflected in the intimate love of a married couple	C. The prophet Hosea
_____ 4. Challenged the Church to understand more deeply the role of the laity	D. Blessed Pope John XXIII
_____ 5. Image for God as the shepherd of his flock	E. <i>consensus fidelium</i>
_____ 6. Image of the Church as the Body of Christ	F. John 15:1-5
_____ 7. Image of the members of the Church as brothers and sisters in the Lord	G. Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman
_____ 8. 'Final age'	H. Acts of the Apostles
_____ 9. Image of Church as the vine and branches	I. 1 Peter 2:5
_____ 10. Convoled the Second Vatican Council	J. Romans 12:4-8
	K. <i>eschaton</i>
	L. Blessed Pope John Paul II

II. Multiple Choice. Write the letter for the correct answer in the blank spaces.

1. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, Jewish believers in Christ _____.
 - A. were delighted
 - B. planned to rebuild it
 - C. lost all faith in him
 - D. began to see the Church as the new Temple of God
 - E. went into hiding in case people blamed them
2. The Sacraments through which the Church initiates new members into the People of God are _____.
 - A. Baptism and Confirmation
 - B. Penance and Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick
 - C. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist
 - D. Holy Orders and Marriage
 - E. Baptism and Eucharist
3. St. Paul used the image of _____ for Jesus.
 - A. the bridegroom of the Church
 - B. a farmer
 - C. a guest at a wedding
 - D. father of all
 - E. the groomsman of the Church
4. The Church is always and forever the sign and instrument of _____.
 - A. the people
 - B. angels
 - C. the clergy
 - D. the government
 - E. the coming of the Kingdom

5. Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman believed that the role of the Magisterium was ____.
- to work in isolation
 - to listen to the voice of the whole Church
 - to listen to the voice of non-believers
 - to do whatever the Pope wants
 - to avoid conflict at all costs

III. Write a brief answer for 1 or 2.

- Name the three ways or 'states of life' in which the baptized serve the Church and give an example of each.
- Choose one image of the Church from Sacred Scripture and discuss it.

IV. How would you respond? A friend says, 'I believe in God, but my relationship is with him, not with others. I don't need to go through the Church or belong to a parish. I can be a Christian on my own.'
