

With Whom Do You Gather?

748 Vatican II met from 1962 to 1965 in Rome and produced, among others, a stunning Constitution on the Church called, in Latin, *Lumen Gentium*. “Christ is the light of the nations,” it says in its opening lines, “and consequently, this holy synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit ardently desires to bring to humanity that light of Christ which is resplendent on the face of the Church....”

The Council here points to a favorite image of the early theologians of the Church:

The Church is like the moon:
all its light is reflected from the sun.

In other words, when you see the Church, you see only the body of Christ, working under the power of the Spirit. And if you see anything else, then we humans in the Church are failing to live up to our high calling to bring Christ to the world.

The Name of the Church

751 People have assembled for religious purposes for as long as anyone can remember. There is also buried in our understanding of Church a sense of being called or summoned, perhaps of being “called together.”

- 753 The Constitution on the Church,
mentioned above,
uses rich imagery to help us understand
who we are as Church.
- 754 The Church is, for example,
a sheepfold or even the flock,
with Christ as our shepherd.
- 755 It is a field farmed well and tilled carefully,
a choice vineyard tended by Christ,
who is the true vine.
- 756 It is the building of God,
the household of God,
with Christ as the cornerstone.
It is a temple built of living stones
which are we—the People of God.
- 757 It is our mother.
It is the new Jerusalem.
These many images each point
to a different dimension
of the Church, which is, in truth,
a great mystery,
a sacrament of Christ to the world.

The Mystery of the Church

- 758–59 God had called together a people
long before Jesus of Nazareth was born.
This family of God gradually took shape,
increased its own self-identity,
and learned to follow its vocation.
- 760 We know that God is the Trinity,
the Father or Mother of us all,
Jesus, the teacher and friend of all,
and the Spirit of love for us all.
This is God: one and inseparable,
always acting, and as one.

The Church is also inseparable from the Trinity
because it is the community called
the People of God
or, we might say,
the People of Love.

Remember, the Trinity isn't located up in the skies
but is very near to us.

We dwell within the Trinity's love,
and the Triune God dwells within us.

761-62 When Abraham heard the divine call
in his own heart
and responded with Sarah,
the Church was unfolding.

763 When Christ, who is the Son of God,
began announcing the reign of God,
it was again a call to gather as Church.

The Church is a sign of the kingdom of God
already present among us
but not yet fully achieved.

The Body of Christ

764 For us Christians,
being part of the Church
is being part of the body of Christ,
with Christ as head
and ourselves as members.

We see ourselves as a sign to the world,
a sacrament to the world
that shows forth Christ,
that is, love revealed.

We are, in a word, the family of Christ,
the household of love.

765 The Church has a specific structure
to help it achieve its mission.



766 But the Church is born entirely from Christ,
so even its structure is one of service.
767 And this structure,
along with all the members of the Church
and all aspects of Church life,
is given the Spirit of love
and flows from that Spirit as well.
That is the real meaning of what happened
on Pentecost.

768 The Sacred Source of Wisdom and Love
flowed out into the community
and awakened within its members
the gifts needed for ministry.
These gifts continue to flow today.

769-70 Because we experience
the mysterious presence of God,
we sense that the Church
is powerfully endowed
as both a human institution
and a spiritual community.
It is oriented at once toward action in the world
and contemplation of the divine mysteries.
It is at once the mystical Body of Christ
and a society of humans.
The Constitution on the Church from Vatican II
explains this for us in article 8.



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Church that we
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Our Union with God

772 It is in the Church that we humans
experience communion with God
in genuine, concrete moments.
In the Church, we are all united in Christ,
and it is a communion that never ends.
The entire structure of the Church is organized



to help us all live in this love,
that is, as holy men and women.

774-75 The Constitution on the Church
enlightens our understanding of all this.
“the Church, in Christ, is a sacrament,”
the document says in article 1,
“a sign and instrument, that is,
of communion with God
and the unity of the entire human race.”

This is the first purpose of the Church:
to be a sacrament of Christ
which also unites us with each other
in the Spirit of love.

776 And this communion, of course, is made possible
by Christ, the firstborn Son of God.
In the Church, we experience once again
that Trinitarian love,
which is what can save us from non-love,
that is, from sin.

GROUP OR PERSONAL PROCESS

*Which image of Church described here speaks most clearly to you?
Is there another image that you also like?*

What role does the Church play in your journey of faith?

*Who are we describing specifically when we speak of the People of God?
Who is not included in this People?*

Describe the mission of the Church as we have just learned about it.