

WHY JOIN THE CHURCH?

Too often we still tend to think of the Church as an institution, a bureaucracy, buildings, authority figures, laws and regulations – all the sorts of things which are large, impersonal and removed from us. I may think of joining the Church as I would join a political party or a club or an association I believe in.

But basically the Church is people. People who feel called by Jesus. People who realise their special worth as children of God. People who unite to worship, serve and minister to one another. It is people who seek strength for their weakness and involve themselves in working for the Kingdom of God.

It is in working for the Kingdom that the Church becomes visible. We are called to offer the world a vision that is God's vision. To live a life of love and peace and selflessness that offers an alternative to the hate and war and greed that surrounds. It is then that we will be seen as the People of God.

The Church is striving to live up to this ideal. To care for the sick, to speak out against injustice, to feed the hungry and the poor. Much has been done. There is much more to do.

As a Church, we must always be hopeful. We will be victorious, not because we are good, but because of the goodness of God **who is with us**. The Spirit of God is alive and working in the Church. As members of the Church, we must allow the Spirit to work within us.

Inside this leaflet there are various models of the Church. Which of these ways of talking about the Church would you prefer?

When people spoke of the Church, what did you think of?



**YOU ARE
THE CHURCH**

MODELS OF THE CHURCH

A priest, Fr. Avery Dulles, says that there are at least five ways of describing the Church. They are familiar images that we try to model the Church on. So we can call them models for the Church.

1. Herald

Some people see the Church as a sort of herald. Jesus came to bring the Good News. What we have been given can be described as a message; that God loves us, that we are truly his children. The message is that we have been saved by this love in Jesus Christ. He died for us, but not just for us; he died for all mankind. The call of the Church is to proclaim the Good News to all mankind by what we say and do. This is a good way of describing the Church, so long as we don't regard hearing and proclaiming the Good News as enough for salvation. It must be more than "just mere talk".



2. Servant



Others see the Church as a servant. These people are usually very enthusiastic about establishing the Kingdom. They want to transform society into the loving, caring, sharing community that Christ spoke of. In other words, they see the Church as called to serve those in need, especially the poor, the sick etc. Again, this is a good way of talking about the Church because it shows that we are not too "other worldly". But social change must not become our sole aim in life. We can so easily get caught up in the things of this world and forget about God.

3. Sacrament or Sign

By his very existence, Jesus was a sign of God's love and presence. The Church comes together in worship and prayer and is a sign to the world of God's presence. The Church also offers hope for the future, a hope of salvation for all. The only danger here is that we could become so wrapped up in ourselves that we might forget everyone else.

4. Community

This is a very popular model nowadays. The Church as a group of people united to one another and to God, united by love. But community cannot be sought, it must happen. You find some people who like this model, running from community to community looking for religious experiences, lively liturgy and warm relationships. We are called to form community not seek ones that appeal.



5. Institution

Some people feel more comfortable with seeing the Church as institution, a community with a structure; people given different authority and functions. This view is necessary to give order and stability to a Church with millions of members. The danger is with rigidity, conformity; a danger that the leaders are seen as the Church. They make all the decisions and the rest merely follow like sheep. This would be misleading because you are the Church as much as the priests, Bishop and Pope.

We all have our own view of the Church. A balanced vision would include all five models, to some extent and maybe even some more ideas of your own.