

Doctrinal Themes: The Church

Introduction

This segment is designed to help you reflect on the theme of the Church. It also provides insights into teaching the theme at different ages. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting on or journaling the first question. Watch the video *Theological Foundations: The Church* and note how the explanation sheds light on the topic for your own understanding. Then read the article “The Church” and answer the reflection questions.

First Question

What image best describes your concept of Church?

Video

Watch the *Theological Foundations: The Church*, and respond to these questions:

1. Describe what your life would be like without the Church.
2. Which image of Church parallels images in The Story of My Early Thanksgiving?
3. Which of the four images of Church in the video is the easiest for you to identify with?
4. Which of the four Marks of the Church would be easiest for you to explain to students?

Article: The Church

Read the following article and respond to the questions:

The Church is sacramental—a visible sign of Christ’s presence here on Earth. Although the Church is an earthly organization composed of holy but imperfect people, it is also the Body of Christ. These visible and invisible aspects of the Church are inseparable. The visible institution points to the invisible reality of Christ’s presence in the Church. Through the celebration of the Sacraments, the Church brings the individual believer and the community into contact with the divine life of the Holy Trinity.

From the time Jesus appeared in the Temple as a young man, those who heard his message knew that it was unique. Many saw him reach out to those who were poor, “outsiders,” or sinners. Jesus proclaimed the Good News of God the Father’s great love for them and they followed him. After Jesus’ Resurrection, his disciples could not contain themselves. They preached the Good News in neighboring towns and countries. Those who received the Good News formed themselves into communities of faith. As time passed, various images helped them understand the new relationship that Christians had with God the Father and his Son Jesus.

The mission of the Church is to proclaim God’s Kingdom of love, justice, and peace. This mission may sound simple, but it is not easy to accomplish. Today Jesus’ followers bring the Church’s mission to life in acts of compassion and forgiveness, and in works of justice and peace. All baptized Christians share in the mission of the Church. Their words and deeds proclaim the Good News. As a Church, we show people the face of God.

K-3

From Grades K–3, students can easily identify with being part of the Body of Christ through gesture and word. For example, forming a circle and saying or singing, “We are the Body of Christ,” or pointing to others and saying, “You are part of the Body of Christ”; “I am part of the Body of Christ.” For the most part, they will identify best with the parish as Church. Some of the younger students will not be able to abstract *Church* as people and *church* as the building. However, they will be able to understand that the members of the Church are God’s People.

Grades 4-6

This age group of students will identify easily with Church as a community. They also want to participate in the Church. It is important at this age to have students engaged in parish activities and to see individual parishioners living the life of mission. If you are teaching in a parochial school, guest speakers from the parish who witness to their service are good models at this age. If you are in a diocesan school, not affiliated with a particular parish, consider having someone come from a local parish. Also, think of ways to involve students in group activities that are part of the life of their own parish. This could be anything from taking care of the physical property, or having a display or booth at the parish festival, to assisting already existing social action projects. It is also at this time that young people can understand the structure and workings of the institutional Church.

Grades 7-8

In Grades 7–8, students should continue to be involved in parish activities and benefit from stories of active parishioners. This is also the time to begin Church history and discussion of current events in the Church. While the Marks of the Church may have already been introduced, students in this age group are able to grasp their meaning more fully.

Reflection Questions

- In your experience, what attracts students to want to be a part of the Church?
- What do you most want your students to know about the Church?