

Unit Two

What Do We Believe? What Do I Believe?

Lesson 9

Once Again: We're in This Together

heart to Heart

1 Corinthians 12: 12-31

"We are one body, one body in Christ."

We believe also in only one catholic and apostolic holy Church;

Havdamk yev ee mee meeayn untanragan yev arakelagan soorp Yegeghetsee.

Հաւատամք եւ ի մի միայն ընդհանրական եւ առաքելական սուրբ Եկեղեցի:



Discuss

Write next to each phrase taken from the creed, what this actually means.

1. Can you explain verses 12 and 13 in your own words?
2. Why do you think St. Paul gives such a long illustration with so many examples of the parts of the body? (verses 14-26)
3. What kinds of skills does St. Paul mention in verses 27-31?

To see what St. Paul means in the second half of verse 31, translated in the NIV as "and now I will show you the most excellent way" let's read together the world-famous...

1 Corinthians 13

Defining Terms

This creed statement stresses four vital characteristics of the church. Let's make sure we understand what these mean, because these features mark all of us as church members!

The Church is one Church. This word stresses the unity of the community on two levels. First, we are one within our own Armenian Church family. We become united with the rest of the church through baptism, the sacraments, worship and Holy Communion. The Kiss of Peace is a perfect example of the unity and love we feel in Christ.

On another level, it is about the unity of the *entire* church throughout the world. That is why the ecumenical movement is so important. It was never God's intention for the church to be fractured into so many "families," some of them in dispute. So we continue to build bridges and repair misunderstandings through such important organizations as the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches, the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. The Armenian Church is active in all of these.



Scenic Overlook

The Armenian word "yegeghezti" comes from the Greek "ecclesia" which means "assembly" or "gathering." This further emphasizes that the church is first and foremost the gathering of the people of God for a purpose and is not just a building.



The Church is holy. The word holy means that we share in the holiness of God. When Jesus died on the cross and rose again, he gave us all the opportunity to become holy through baptism and life in the church. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the church as it "grows into a temple sacred to the Lord. (Ephesians 2:21-22). Finally, we ourselves become the bearers of holiness when we express the fruits of the Holy Spirit through our changed behavior. (Galatians 5:22)

The Church is catholic. This word has nothing to do with the specific Roman Catholic Church. It simply means "universal." And that means that the church is for everyone – it cannot limit itself to one place or time or people. So while the Armenian Church – as other national churches - developed in one part of the world and its language and traditions reflect the experiences of a particular people, it carries Jesus' message to all people. It needs to reach out to *all* people to bring them to Christ.



The Church is apostolic. The community of believers who together form the Body of Christ on earth began with Jesus' apostles. They were sent by Jesus himself to "be witnesses to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) It is reassuring to know that the Armenian Church has continued to grow in a straight line (more or less!) from the two apostles who brought the Good News to Armenia, Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew. That is why the Armenian Orthodox Church is also referred to as the Armenian *Apostolic* Church.

Our ordained leaders, starting with the first Catholicos, St. Gregory the Enlightener, continue this direct succession. It is said that the holy oil used in ordinations and made in Etchmiadzin contains some of the holy muron from centuries ago!

What is The Church?

What do you think of when you heard the word church? For many, a building comes to mind – for Armenian Christians, the image of our own parish church or perhaps the image of Etchmiadzin.

But "the church" was actually never primarily meant to describe the place where Christians gathered, but rather the *people* themselves. The root of the word "church" comes from the Greek "ecclesia" which means "assembly" or "gathering" of those baptized into Christ (more on baptism in Lesson 11). And those people were defined by Jesus himself.

Remember

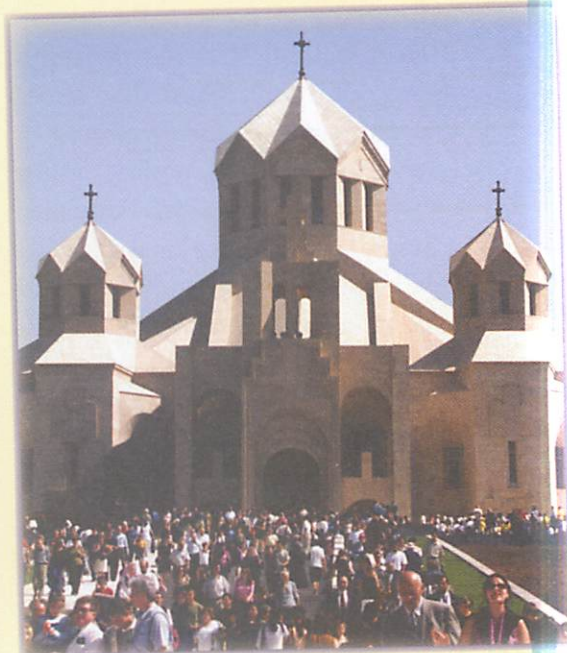
It is in the Church - the Body of Christ on earth - that we most fully realize our faith, growing closer to God and to one another and being empowered to identify our spiritual gifts.

Paul described the believers as members of one body. Who is the Head? Interestingly, this image stresses the importance of being and growing together into Christ. For the Armenian Church, it is impossible to know the Lord fully outside of this Body, the Church. And there is no time when we are more united than at the Divine Liturgy. There, every individual – with different personal stories, different joys and sorrows, different backgrounds – becomes completely united into the one Body and we pray and sing with one voice.

Of course, the story of the people of God began long before Jesus. It begins in Genesis 1 – from the beginning of time. It took a particular shape with a particular people when God called the first Patriarch, Abraham, to leave his homeland and begin a new community. That is why the Hebrew Bible – the Old Testament – is as much a part of our Scriptures as the New Testament.

The Christian Church – the gathering of the people who believed in Jesus – could be said to have started at Pentecost. Do you remember what happened on that day to the believers who were gathered in Jerusalem? After that amazing day, when the Holy Spirit breathed “life” into the Body of Christ, the apostles went out to teach and people were baptized in the thousands days after day.

Even though the Church is filled with the Holy Spirit, it cannot be perfect. Why not? Because imperfect human beings make up the church. And as much as God might guide and prompt us, we are always free to choose our path. You’ve already seen how the early church struggled with disputing factions and competing authorities. Until perfection is restored to the world at the end of time, it will always be a challenge for the church to act harmoniously as one body.



Acts 2:42-47

Read these verses which contain the oldest description of a Christian church community. List all the things people were doing:

Look at John 15: 5. How does Jesus describe the connection between him and those who believe in him?

