

The Church

Community: The Living Church

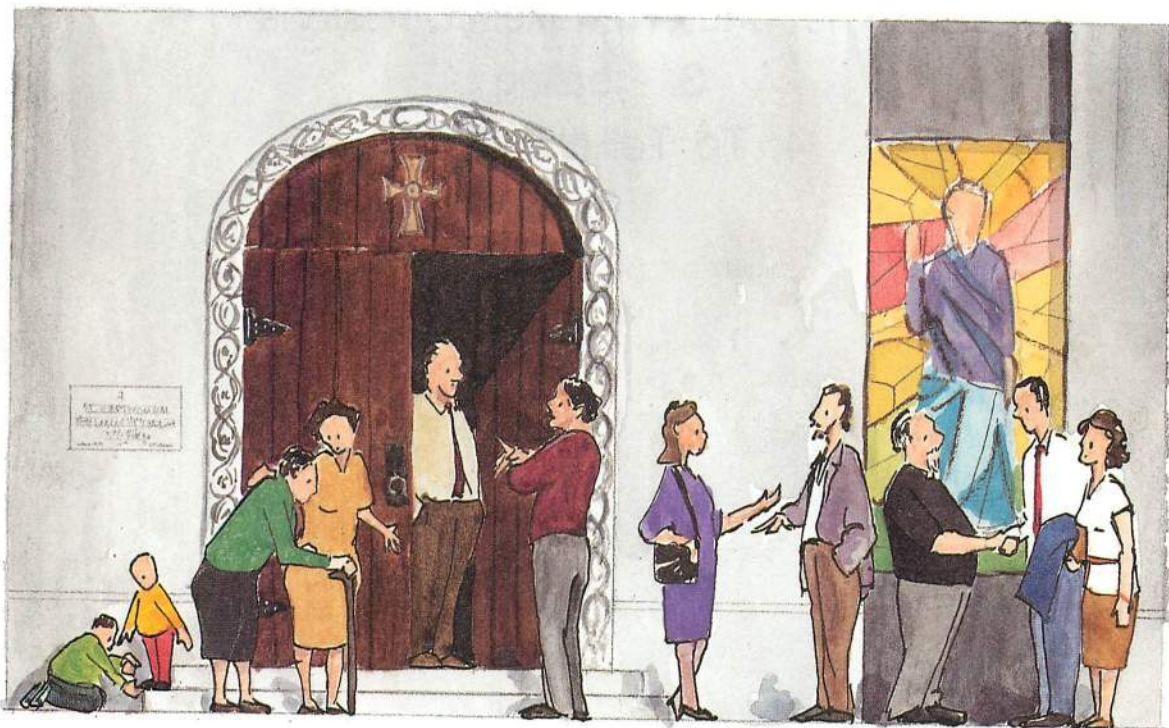
Have you ever tried to imagine what it was like to be a Christian during the first generation after Jesus' death? Have you ever thought of sitting down to a meal with Peter, James, and the other apostles, and after the meal listening to them recall the words of Jesus Christ in vivid detail?

The last part of the second chapter of Acts simply describes the early Christian community. It says that "they were faithful to the teachings of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread, and prayer . . . They also lived together and shared everything in common; they sold their goods and posses-

sions and shared the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed . . . They shared their food gladly and generously and were looked up to by everyone . . ."

But it was not enough to be faithful to a remembered message. Jesus told his followers that faithfulness to one another was faithfulness to him. So they prized their own faithfulness to the brotherhood, to all men and women who shared their convictions and belief that Jesus was the Lord. A shared life of prayer, good deeds and acts of charity, all reflected the early Christian community of believers.

Their community was a special one, different



from others that existed because the main purpose of their gathering was to keep alive the message of salvation given to us by Jesus the Lord; from the very beginning the church was a community of others, a people dedicated to the spiritual and material needs of all, always keeping alive their "oneness," the faith which

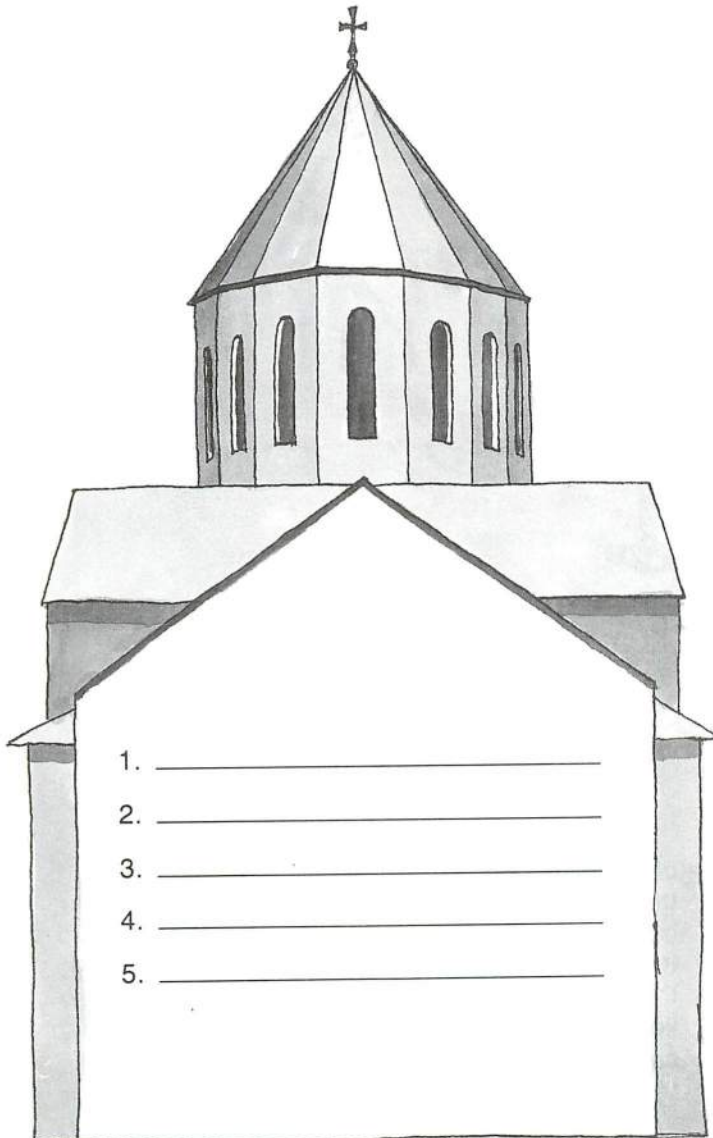
kept them together.

The purpose of the church is the same today as it was then. It is to share the message of Jesus with the world, both by its preaching and inner life, to express a common faith taught by Christ, preached by the apostles, and lived by the saints.

What Is the Church?

From the brief description of the early Christian community which you just read, list five one-word descriptions of your understanding of the Church.

The Church is:



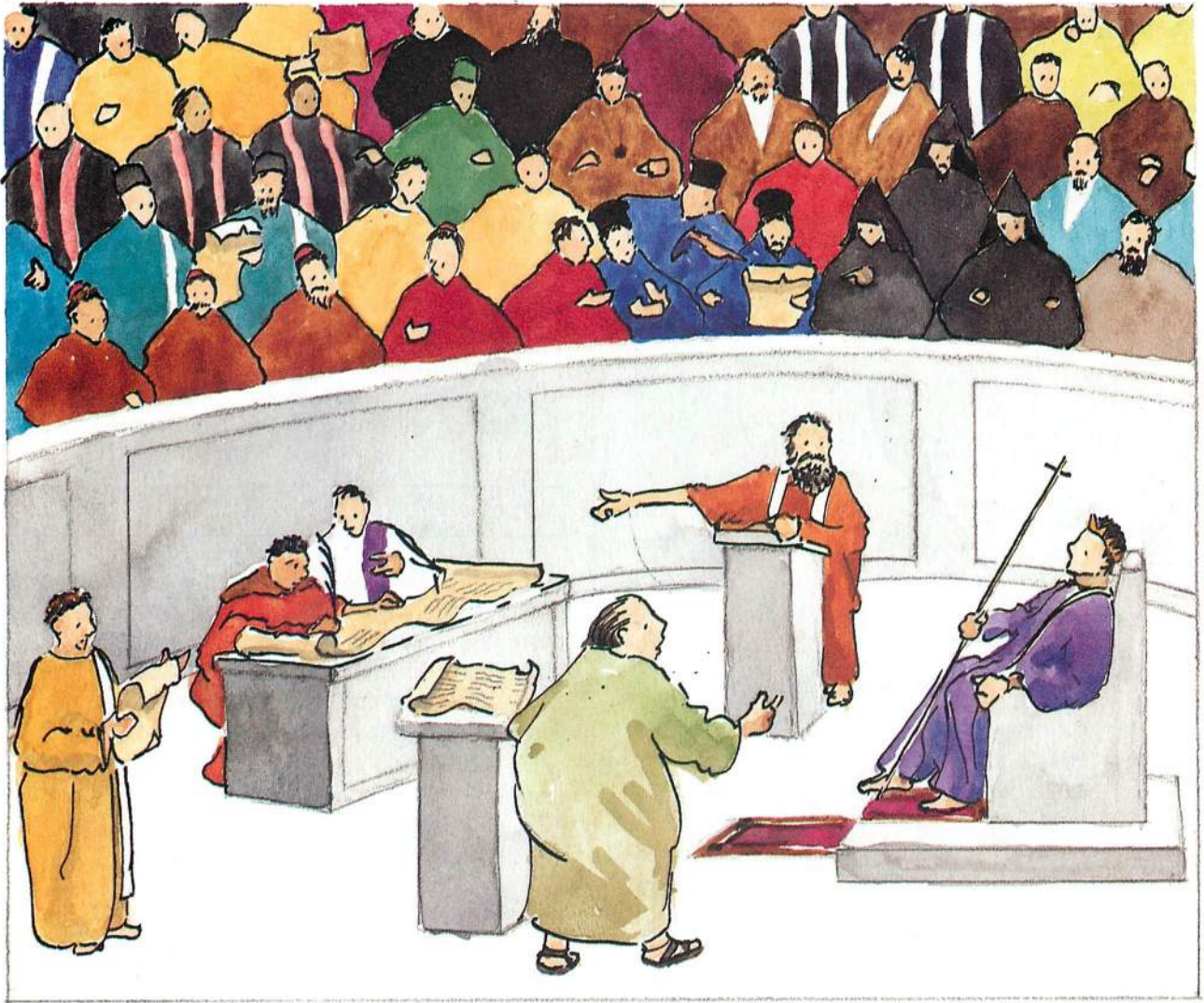
- Now share your descriptions with each other.
 - Do the same with the following scriptural references: Matthew 26:26; Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 12:12-28.
 - Now list five one-word descriptions of the Church as found in the Scriptures.
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The people who lived when the Church was newly born were courageous and expressed their faith not only by the way they lived, but also in the formal proclamation of their faith in a statement which we still use in the church today. This is called the Nicene Creed.

The Community Becomes Divided

During the time the early Christians were thinking of how to express their ideas of the "new faith," there was a young deacon who did not hold the same understanding and opposed the faith of the community. His name was Arius and he lived in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. This city was a great center of Christian learning where, daily, converts were brought into the growing household of Christ.

Arius questioned how the Church was to understand who Jesus Christ was. He believed that since Christ was called the "Son of God," he was created and not actually God himself. His opinion disturbed the leaders of the Christian community and its members who believed that Christ was the human appearance of God. The Church believed that God who is "pure



spirit" became man and took on our "fleshy body," uniting the two together in the person of Jesus Christ. But Arius said no, and looked for a "logical" answer to a question which was beyond the limits of human explanation. Christ, the mystery of God become man, was the answer, but Arius found it difficult to accept.

Many members of the Christian community

believed as Arius did and created a division in the Church. Because Arius' interpretation caused this problem, a special meeting of all the bishops of the church was held to defend the faith and set down in words what was believed. The Armenian Church also was represented at this meeting which was to become the first ecumenical council.

Today the Armenian Church Still Proclaims the True Faith

Despite the efforts of Arius, the Armenian and other Christian peoples still hold the faith as expressed by the early Christian community, that Christ was God with us! We say, "We Believe" or "HAVADAMK," and share in the universal faith. We teach that our church is ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC, but what do we mean?

The Armenian Church is ONE — meaning united with other Orthodox Churches in matters of faith.

The Armenian Church is HOLY — meaning that

the ministry of its leaders is inspired by the HOLY SPIRIT.

The Armenian Church is CATHOLIC — meaning universal, in that we do not consider our church separated in any sense from the churches of other peoples.

The Armenian Church is APOSTOLIC — meaning that it was founded by the apostles Saint Thaddeus and Saint Bartholomew, and that as APOSTOLIC it must also be a missionary church reaching out to everyone who seeks Christ.

Coming to Terms

One	Mi	Church	Yegeghetsi
Holy	Soorp	Faith	Havadk
We Believe	Havadamk	Apostolic	Arakelagan
Catholic	Untanragan	Confession of Faith	Tavanank
Body	Marmin		

