Here are six metaphors that the New Testament uses to describe the Church. The layout of each identifying metaphor will be as such:

1) The biblical texts that reference the metaphor.
2) The Greek word used, and the definition of it.
3) Application points for the local church taken from the biblical texts.

The metaphors:

1) A Family/Members of a Household
2) A Building/Structure
3) A Holy Temple
4) A Field
5) A Bride
6) A Body

**Family/Members of Household**

**Galatians 6:9-10**

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

**Ephesians 2:18-20, 22**

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone…In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

**1 Peter 4:16-17**

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

**1 Peter 2:4-5**
As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Members of the household: Greek word: “οἰκείος”

- “Belonging to the house;’ persons who are related by kinship or circumstances and form a closely knit group, with focus on association in common cause or belief.”

As “members of the household of God”:

**Galatians 6:**
- We pursue relationship with each other.
- We encourage one another.
- We take special attention to “doing good” to one another.

**Ephesians 2:**
- We treat each other as a family, not as strangers.
- We work hard to destroy anonymity within the local church.
- We commit to one another as “members” of the household of God.
- We remember and live in light of our foundation on God’s word.
- We read, memorize, preach, and teach God’s word day by day.
- We submit to Jesus as the cornerstone of our foundation.
- We look to Jesus and submit to Jesus as the head of our household of faith.
- We take seriously our responsibility to be a dwelling place for God within our city.
- We do these things as we are created into a context where the Spirit dwells and the gospel advances.

**1 Peter 4**
- We build one another up in the midst of suffering.
- We develop a biblical understanding of suffering and we work hard to persevere with one another as we suffer.
- We hold each other accountable.
- We bear each other’s burden, and speak truth to one another.

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- We build each other up, knowing that together we are being built by Jesus as a “spiritual house.”
- We take discipleship (following Jesus) seriously.
- We actively work our faith in community, knowing that Jesus saves us and calls us together as his house.
- We surrender to the work of the Spirit, knowing that it is God who works in us to sanctify and unity us.

**A Building/Structure**

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

**1 Corinthians 3:9-10**

For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

**Structure/Building: Greek word: oikodome’**

- “A building formed as the result of a construction process.”

**As “God’s Building”:**

**Ephesians 2**

- We are held together in Jesus, the cornerstone of our foundation as a structure built by God through His Spirit.
- We are joined together by Jesus, making him the source of our unity.
- Our foundation is God’s word, so we must preach it, speak it to one another, and frame our lives by it.
- We are under construction, so we must not get used to the décor.

**1 Corinthians 3**

- We are built by God through people He calls and empowers to lead within the local church.
- We must give energy, prayer, thought, and careful attention to the construction process.
- The “skill” we have in building is totally dependent on and derived from the grace of God.
• Any “cult of personality” is idolatry, for the builder of the church is God.
• We must take great care in how we are building the church, and how we are building up one another.
• Our church culture must be gospel-centered, Jesus-focused, Holy Spirit-empowered, and fully devoted to God’s grace and word.

**Holy Temple**

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Ephesians 2:20-22

…built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 6:16

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Holy Temple: Greek words: naos agios

Agios: “Holy”
• “Consecrated, dedicated to the service of God, set apart.”

Naon: “Temple”
• “A place or structure specifically associated with or set apart for a deity, who is frequently perceived to be using it as a dwelling.”

As a “Holy Temple”:

1 Corinthians 3
• We must be aware that God has placed us in our city to be a dwelling place for His Spirit.
• The living God is present in our world through us.
• We must live lives of holiness marked by continual confession of sin to one another and repentance of sin.

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2 Ibid.
● We are accountable to God for how we form our church culture.

_Ephesians 2_

● We are “growing into a holy temple,” so we keep in mind that we are on a journey and in process together.
● We don’t allow the ideal of the “perfect church” to be formed as an idol in our lives.
● We critically think through processes, strategies, culture, etc. within the church, but we stay focused on Jesus and we build one another up in the process.
● We recognize that this all happens “in the Lord.” Jesus is the source and target of our identity as a holy temple.
● We practice discipline within our church in order to restore those who sin.

_2 Corinthians 6_

● We destroy all idols that contradict the reality that we are the temple of the living God.
● We don’t fall into the trap that anything about the physical facilities we meet in as a church are in some way “holy” or the true “temple.”
● We make sure our practical vocabulary reflects our biblical theology.
● For example, we avoid the trap of thinking the church building is the “house of God,” that the biggest room on campus is “the sanctuary,” or that the room we pray in is “a house of prayer for all the nations.”
● We take seriously our role in our city as a place (a people) where God dwells by his Spirit.
● We stay connected to our culture, while exemplifying Christ-exalting, God-empowered holy lives.

_God’s Field_

1 Corinthians 3:9

For we are God's fellow workers. _You are God's field_, God's building.

**Field: Greek word: georgeon**

● “An area of land used for cultivation.”

As “God’s field”:

● God is growing things within us.
● There is plowing, planting, watering, and pruning necessary.
Things constantly change within us.

Without proper and regular cultivation (plowing, planting, watering, pruning) we become useless.

The church is a place of agriculture, not archeology.

**Agriculture vs. Archeology**

Metaphor: Church as "God's Field"

**Agriculture defined:** The art, science, and occupation associated with cultivating land and raising crops.

**Archeology defined:** The study of prehistoric peoples and their cultures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Agriculture:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Archeology:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The place: A field</td>
<td>The place: A dig site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You live in the present and plan for the future.</td>
<td>You live in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything is focused on the harvest (Luke 10:2).</td>
<td>Everything is focused on what happened before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the harvest, you work hard to re-plant for future harvests.</td>
<td>After discovery, you think about what life may have been like when what you discovered was alive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your faith is tested, you are dependent on God to bring rain and give increase.</td>
<td>Your faith is not tested, not much is at stake, because you’re not producing something new or alive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ground is constantly pulverized, so that new life can be brought forth.</td>
<td>You don’t pulverize the ground so that it can produce life (through planting), you stabilize the ground so that nothing from the past is disturbed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is forward motion and constant change.</td>
<td>You are looking to memorialize days gone by.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is hard work, but it is all focused</td>
<td>It is hard work, but it is focused on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
toward producing life and life-giving sustenance. | discovery and preservation of the past.

**Bride of Christ**

**Ephesians 5:23-32**

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

**2 Corinthians 11:1-4**

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

**Revelation 19:7-9**

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure“- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

**Bride: Greek word: gune’**: “wife.”

**As the “Bride of Christ”**: 

**Ephesians 5**

- We take seriously the biblical definition and description of marriage. We don’t just take it seriously for “others,” but we take it seriously in our own lives and community first.
- We recognize that marriage has been created by God to serve as a parable of permanence, reflecting to ourselves, our families, and our world the redeeming love and faithfulness of Jesus.
● We take seriously biblical gender roles, realizing that God has created men and women equal, but also with complementary differences.

● We teach men to serve as the head of their homes, exemplifying the self-sacrificing love of Christ toward their wives and children.

● We teach woman to respond in love and submission to the Christ-centered context their husbands set in their homes.

● We are sanctified (made holy) by Christ through His word.

● We are in process, Christ is forming us to present us without spot, wrinkle, or blemish.

● We are cherished and nourished by Christ.

2 Corinthians 11

● We realize that as the betrothed of Christ, we will be tempted by the idols in our culture.

● We emphasize the true, biblical, and pure gospel of Jesus.

● We work hard to hold one another accountable to the word, and our leadership works hard to guard true and right doctrine.

● We submit to Christ through His word.

● We are dedicated to Christ, but false teaching and thinking will try to steal our allegiance.

● We must stay committed to accountability in and through the word of Christ.

● We must have pure, biblically sound leadership who serve as guardians and protectors of God’s word within our community.

Revelation 19

● When Christ has completed the process we are in, our unity with Him will be realized.

● Our journey today, this week, this month, this year, this decade, etc. is a process of transformation affected by Christ, through His word, as we head toward that day.

● Our words and deeds matter; and we strive for holiness.

● We do not think we are justified through holiness (we are justified through Christ alone); rather we are sanctified (set apart) by Christ for holiness.

Body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks,
slaves or free- and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Ephesians 4:11-16

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Colossians 1:18

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Colossians 2:18-19

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Romans 12:4-5

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Body: Greek word: *soma*

- “A unified group of people, of the Christian community or church”

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3 Ibid.
As the Body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12

- We are unified or we are dead.
- Unity is as important as life itself.
- We, by nature, will be marked by unity and diversity.
- We will have different passions, functions, identifications, roles, and responsibilities, but we can only accomplish them if we are unified.
- Our unity must be maintained through corporate and individual humility.\(^4\)
- God composes us, so we must respect his design within us (individually and corporately).
- We must share in honor, suffering, and joy together.

Ephesians 4

- God has given us leaders as a gift to equip and build us up.
- Our health is dependent on equipping and hard work by all members.
- We will be susceptible to the diseases of immaturity, lack of focus, and heresy.
- We must work hard to maintain unity while building antibodies to attack these diseases.
- We must demand accountability in words and actions.
- We are built from the Head (Christ) and into the Head (Christ).
- Our unity is dependent on healthy (equipped and working) joints.
- When we are healthy and unified, we will naturally reproduce, build antibodies, and thrive.

Colossians 1,2

- Jesus Christ is our Head.
- He was raised from death, making a way for us all to be raised from death and sin.
- Christ has the first place, and holds the highest rank in the group (preeminent).
- There will be those within our ranks who insist on religion over Christ.
- We must resist them and demand that Christ remain supreme.

Romans 12

- We will have diversity.

\(^4\) No one can look down on others (1 Cor. 12), and no one can spend time focusing their full attention on themselves (“Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body!”).
● We must thrive in unity in the midst of diversity.
● We are members of each other, so disunity will kill us (individually and corporately).

**SUMMARY: The Church Defined**

"The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the biblical sacraments of baptism and Communion, and are unified by the Spirit, are disciplined for holiness, and scatter to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries to the world for God's glory and their joy."\(^5\)

-Andrew Murch is the Lead Pastor of LifePoint Church in Vancouver, WA

\(^5\) Vintage Church, p. 38.