The English Parish Church
Primary Schools Pack
RE Lesson A: What is the Church?
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims, Objectives and Teaching points</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Activity 1: What do we know?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Activity 2: What can we see?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Activity 3: What’s Communion all about?</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Activity 4: What’s going on?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Activity 5: Finding out from others</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acknowledgements and Further Info                                        | 17   |

Schools Pack developed by Chris Hudson for the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture
Lesson A: What is the ‘Church’?

Aims:
To connect the building and congregation ‘down the road’ with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and his disciples.
To show that the church building often provides the hub for a range of activities all through the week for Christians and others.

Objectives:
Each pupil will have the opportunity to reflect on what it might mean to be part of a local Christian community.

Resources:
DVD-ROM images of local church life, large pieces of paper, felt tips, worksheets, badges or labels. If you can access them, a real chalice and paten for handling and display will be very useful.

Key teaching points for the lesson:
A church is a community of Christian believers, but it is also the name for the building they use for meeting to worship.
There are many types of church community and church building, but they all aim to live their lives according to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

EXPLORER ▶ Churches to the present day ▶ Daily life and worship ▶ The Christian community

EXPLORER ▶ Churches to the present day ▶ Daily life and worship ▶ Sacraments

Information for teachers:
Read these articles on the DVD-ROM:
Display the word **Church**? Ask the pupils what they think it means.

**Class Activity 1: What do we know?**

Set them (in pairs) the task of answering ‘What is the Church’ in a short sentence.

- ‘Mind-map’ their ideas as they feed them back to you.
- Note down the names of any children who have first-hand experiences of being in a church - these will be your ‘Experts’.

**Explain** that churches have existed in this country for at least 1500 years, and that they’re an important part of our shared history. Everybody should know something about them.

**Sort the class into two groups:**

- ‘Experts’ - those who have been in a church at some time.
- ‘Enquirers’ - those who haven’t.

1. Ask the ‘Enquirers’ in pairs, to come up with a list of some ‘open’ questions (What? When? etc., questions that can’t be answered with a simple Yes, or No) about what might happen in a church.

2. Ask your ‘Experts’ to list on large bits of paper all the most interesting things they remember seeing, hearing and doing when they were in a church. Suggest they group them under headings such as ‘Services’, ‘Church Music’, Church Celebrations, Hospitality, Church buildings, Adults and Children.

3. **Come together afterwards and have a question and answer session.** (Choose one child from each group to interview and respond.)

   If your class are all Enquirers, or Experts, then extend the relevant task further.
Lesson A: What is the ‘Church’?

Class Activity 2 - What can we see?

Display the pictures on the following two pages in as large a format as possible:

Tell the class that both pictures are of people doing activities inside a church. Set pupils the task of studying these pictures with a partner for a few minutes and then ask them to:

a) List as many differences and similarities as you can about the pictures.

b) Say what they think is going on in each picture.

- Write down the feedback, drawing out interesting points. What visual clues have they picked up on and what links with the earlier discussion? – see the sample worksheet for more details on clues to spot.

- Explain that both of the pictures are of a ‘service’ taking place – the photograph is a modern church service in Birmingham, the second is a painting of people singing hymns at a Christmas Day service from 200 years ago. You can research more about what the church of the early nineteenth century was like in Section 5 of the DVD.

There are different types of services and lots of different activities that take place in the life of a local church. Ask: Do you know of any more? Note down any pupil contributions.

Find them:
► Gallery
► Churches to the present day
► Page 2 of 4

► Gallery
► The Church in England (c.1689 - c.1945)
► Page 5 of 6
Class Activity 3: What’s Communion all about?

*Explain* that Christians see each other as members of a worldwide family brought together by Jesus. That includes coming together to remember an important meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. It was a traditional Jewish Passover celebration, but Jesus changed its meaning that evening.

From the Christian Bible, read this short passage: Mark 14.22-25:

That meal is now called ‘The Last Supper’, and Christians remember it every time they take part in ‘Holy Communion’ – it’s like being there at the meal with Jesus. A type of bread and wine is shared by everybody, to remember what Jesus said and did at that meal.

Mark 14:22-25
Good News Translation (GNT)

The Lord’s Supper

22 While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. Take it, he said, this is my body.

23 Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it.

24 Jesus said, This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God’s covenant.

25 I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God.
Lesson A: What is the ‘Church’?

Show images from the DVD-ROM associated with Communion

Explain that if you go into a church, you’ll often see a raised table at the far end where people go to receive a piece of the bread and a sip of the wine. Some Christians have even believed that during the service, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood and Jesus – it’s that important. This is why the plate (paten) and cup (chalice) used to hold the bread and wine are sometimes very special.

Show images from the DVD-ROM of communion silverware eg:

Set pupils the task of studying Communion pictures such as these, and using the worksheet ‘What’s Communion all about?’ to rank their most important observations. Afterwards, discuss: Why do you think taking communion with others is now one of the most important parts of being a Christian?
What’s Communion all about?

TEACHER’S COPY

What things do you notice happening here?

Try to think of a few, then list them in the diamond.

Put the one you think is most important at the top.

Answers might include:
- Two people are standing in front of three people kneeling
- Boy in center being handed a silver cup (Why? What is in it?)
- The officiants are both smiling
What’s Communion all about?

Name______________

What are the most important things you see happening here?

Try to think of a few, then list them in the diamond.

Put the one you think is most important at the top.
Lesson A: What is the ‘Church’?

Class Activity 4: What’s going on?

Give out copies of the worksheets (see below).

Pupils should work singly or in pairs, discussing and noting down their observations. The four worksheet pictures are (in order of appearance):

1) A boy being confirmed as a Christian and church member. He is accepting for himself, the baptismal vow made on his behalf by his parents when he was baptized as a baby. The ceremony of confirmation is carried out by a bishop (in the gold robe). The woman standing behind the boy is his godmother, an adult who promises at the child’s baptism ceremony to take part in their upbringing, often including their religious education.

2) A gospel choir leading worship in a church.

3) A small child taking part in a pre-school activity learning about Christian symbols. The models arranged on the cross have been made by children to illustrate the various symbols and items used in Christian worship. Crucifixes (crosses), chalices and patens (communion plates) can be seen. The lit candle symbolizes a prayer said by a Christian.

4) A Mystery play performed outdoors, re-enacting the Easter story. Mystery plays are Medieval plays which were used to bring the stories of the Bible to life for illiterate people. The one depicted here presents the Passion of Christ, the story of Easter and Jesus’ crucifixion. It is being put on on an open, outdoor stage so that all can watch, much as it would have been in Medieval times, when it would have been performed either in church or outside.

Pupils’ written responses to the pictures could be noted and displayed next to larger copies of the pictures, perhaps on post-it notes.
What’s Going On? Worksheet 1

Study these pictures, listing:
a) What you notice in each picture
b) What you think is happening

This picture shows a gospel choir leading worship at an open-air service outside a church.

Pupils might notice:
- The robes worn by the choir, which look like those worn by a priest or minister
- They are facing an audience (the other members of the church)
- A man is standing in front of them, facing them (the conductor)

This picture shows a boy being confirmed as a Christian and church member. He is accepting for himself the baptismal vow made on his behalf when he was baptized as a baby.

Pupils might notice:
- The different clothing worn by the bishop (kneeling) and church staff.
- The boy is kneeling and is dressed formally
- The bishop is touching the boy's head (why?)
- The woman standing behind the boy (not his mother, but his godmother, a person who promises to help with his upbringing)
What's Going On? Worksheet 2

Study these pictures, listing:
  a) 5 significant things in each picture
  b) What you think is happening

This photo shows a small child taking part in a preschool activity learning about Christian symbols. The symbols arranged on the crucifix were modeled from clay by the girl and other children to illustrate the various symbols used in Christian worship.

Pupils might notice:
- The large cross lying on the ground
- The various models including crucifixes, chalices (cups), patens (plates). Some of the models may be misidentified, eg the yellow ‘flower’ in the foreground which is probably a model of a communion plate complete with communion wafers.
- The lit candle on the cross.

This photo shows an Easter Mystery Play being performed outside. Mystery Plays are Medieval plays which were used to bring Bible stories to life for the common people.

Pupils might notice:
- The location outside
- The large building (cathedral)
- The crucifixes with people hanging on them
- The brightly coloured costumes

The English Parish Church Primary Schools Pack
What’s Going On? Worksheet 1

Study these pictures, listing:
a) What things you notice in each picture
b) What you think is happening

What we notice

What’s happening?

What we notice

What’s happening?

What we notice

What’s happening?

What we notice

What’s happening?
What’s Going On? Worksheet 2

Study these pictures, listing:
   a) What things you notice in each picture
   b) What you think is happening

What we notice

What’s happening?

What we notice

What’s happening?
Lesson A: What is the ‘Church’?

Class Activity 5: Finding out from others

Set a challenging research task involving interviews with visiting members of a local church. Your pupils will need to be provided with a pre-arranged list of names and addresses of appropriate people to ask, who have been pre-warned (talk to a local minister). The interviews could then be conducted as part of a lesson – and afterwards, the interviewers could write reports. (Note: Letter-writing, interviews and report-writing are great activities for Literacy lessons.)

As preparation, pupils should study a section of text from the service for Holy Communion, eg:

http://www.churchofengland.org/media/41130/mvcommunion154-335.pdf

List 3 ‘open’ questions you could have for somebody taking part in that service. (Why do you want to know? What answers do you think they might give?)

Using the following prompts, pupils should then draft and write a polite letter inviting the local church member to come to your school to answer their questions, giving good reasons.

Dear... This is to invite you... This is because... In particular, we want to know... because...
Looking forward to meeting you...
Yours Sincerely...

Plenary – Discussion questions

Why do people like to get together to do things? (Why not just stay at home and do everything on the internet and phone?)

Why do you think taking communion with others is now one of the most important parts of being a Christian?

In most communion services, Christians drink from the same cup when taking communion. Why? What message do you think that is saying?
Acknowledgments and further information

The English Parish Church Primary Schools Pack has been created for the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at the University of York by Chris Hudson (Barnabas for Children team member, Bible Reading Fellowship). Chris is an experienced primary teacher, subject leader and educational author.

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The creation of this free downloadable resource has been made possible by a grant from the University of York.

Grateful thanks for trialling and feedback to the following RE advisors and teaching staff:
Jo Fageant, Sue Glover, Andrew Price, Rachel Manley, Eleanor Zuercher, Sara Bennett, Elizabeth Broadbent, Victoria Allman.

The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture:

The Centre was founded in 1999 to support teaching and research through books and international conferences, and the provision of cultural tools to help students engage with literature, history, art, architecture and music significantly influenced by Christian thought and spirituality.

The Centre has produced a range of resources, including two CD-ROMS (Images of Salvation: the Story of the Bible through Medieval Art’ and ‘Pilgrims and Pilgrimage: journey, spirituality and daily life through the centuries’) as well as ‘The English Parish Church through the Centuries: daily life & spirituality, art & architecture, literature & music’. Grant funding means that these resources can be made available at very affordable prices. The books and interactive resources created by Christianity and Culture are now used worldwide in universities and schools and by a general audience.

Christianity and Culture also works with important historic churches to bring recent research to life through interpretation schemes which will help people of all ages and backgrounds understand and enjoy these remarkable buildings and the stories which they hold.

We welcome your feedback on this Schools Pack and would like to create a forum where teaching approaches, experiences and projects can be shared online.
Barnabas for Children exists to support teaching and learning about Christianity, Spirituality and the Bible in primary schools, and to support children's work both in the Church and the home.

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