

IN IT TOGETHER

Church as a community of believers

Part 1: What is Church?

Select an activity (or more than one) from the options below that best suits your group and context.

Activity 1: Church in pictures

You will need photographs or pictures of different churches, paper, pens and pencils. Ideally the photos should be a mixture of the outside and inside of church buildings, as well as worship and other activities that take place in church buildings.

Show the young people the photographs of the churches. Give them one minute to look at the photographs and then remove the photographs from sight. Invite the group to draw what they can remember. Next, ask everyone to share their drawings with the whole group. What aspects did they focus on and why? Draw out the fact that people often regard the church as being a building. Whilst the buildings are of importance, the church is actually about the Christian believers who gather there.

Activity 2: Church on film

Show a few clips from YouTube that depict church in different ways (for example, *Songs of Praise*, Hillsong worship, *Sister Act*: 'Oh Maria' clip, *Mr Bean Goes to Church* clip, etc.)

After watching, discuss whether they think the clips are an accurate and fair representation of what church is? If so, why? If not, why not?

Activity 3: Perceptions of Church

Take a large piece of paper; draw a line down the middle to divide it in half and then draw the outline of two churches, one in each half. (You could use one piece of paper and drawing for the whole group to focus on, or alternatively each young person could draw their own).

Around the drawing of the first church, ask the young people to write words that might describe what the general public think church is (particularly people who never go to church). Inside the other church drawing, write words that church-goers might use to describe church. Then discuss with the group what they think is correct, incorrect and what might be missing.

Activity 4: The persecuted Church

In some countries around the world, Christians have not been allowed to meet together as 'church'. Often the church leaders are imprisoned and Bibles are taken away.

Imagine that the British Government has just decided to make Christianity illegal from midnight today. Ask the group how they would feel about this. Would they be angry? Sad? Not bothered? Why? Do they think they would still want to meet as a group? Why do people in countries where Christianity is illegal continue to meet when the risk could be death? What aspects of being church can still take place when you can't meet? What did you miss about church when you were in lockdown as part of the coronavirus pandemic?

Part 2: Understanding Church as community

This section will draw out that the Church is a community of Christian believers. Each person has a role to play, everyone supports the other members of the community – no one is more important than another, but without working together and playing their part the work of the Church will not be done.

Select an activity (or more than one) from the options below that best suits your group and context.

Activity 1: Home-made orchestra

Encourage the children/young people to create musical instruments from some everyday rubbish that either has been gathered beforehand, or that they have lying around at home, such as margarine tubs, elastic bands, cardboard tubes, old saucepans, tin foil, pens that click – anything that would make different noises.

Alternatively, instead of creating instruments, invite the group to produce a musical accompaniment by using body percussion, for example stamping feet, patting legs, clapping, clicking, or an array of sounds that could come from the mouth!

Allow them time to practice playing their instrument or making their noise. After the count of three they all make their noise or play their instrument for one minute. (It might produce a terrible sound – that's ok!) Then ask the group to start with one person playing and then everyone gradually joins in, one at a time, listening to the sounds and the rhythm and trying to complement that rhythm. Hopefully by the end there may be a better sound than there had been first time round.

Follow up with a discussion:

- Were all the sounds different?
- Did everybody play at the same volume?
- What does it mean to play in harmony?
- Would it have mattered if everyone had chosen the same instrument or sound?
- The Church could be described as being like an orchestra. How could an orchestra and a church community be similar? What could a church learn from an orchestra to help them flourish?

Activity 2: Rapping the Bible

Rap music has often been used as a form of storytelling. Together, read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 from the Message version of the Bible. Then invite the group to retell the passage by creating their own rap, drawing out in their rap a message about what it means to be the church together.

Activity 3: Bridge-building

You will need newspaper, sticky tape, plain paper and pens.

Arrange the group into small teams. Each team is to build a bridge. Before starting the task, each person is to be given one of the roles listed below. (Explain that they must not share this with any of the others in their team and they must only carry out this role).

Role descriptions

Designer:	You are to design a bridge that can stand alone, without support, made out of tubes of newspaper.
Sticky tape monitor:	You are in charge of the sticky tape and must keep hold of it at all times. You can only provide tape in lengths of 5cm, and only to the bridge builder and newspaper monitor.
Newspaper monitor:	You are in charge of rolling the sheets of newspaper into long tubes. You may use a small piece of sticky tape to stop them unravelling.
Bridge builder:	You are to build a bridge according to the design provided by the designer. You are not allowed to adapt it. You can only use the tubes of newspaper provided by the newspaper monitor, and you must get your sticky tape from the sticky tape monitor.

After the activity, ask the following questions.

- Did you like the role you were assigned?
- How important did you feel your role was? Very or not very? Why?
- If you could have chosen a role, which one would it have been?

Read the following passage together from Ephesians 4:16:

“Christ holds [the body] together and makes all its parts work perfectly, as it grows and becomes strong because of love.” (Contemporary English Version)

Ask what connections they can make between this passage and the activity they have just undertaken.

Draw out in the discussion that the local church is often described as being the bridge between God and community. Each Christian believer has a role to play in helping the church be that bridge into the local community; all of us are important.

Part 3: Our responsibilities

In the New Testament the Greek word 'ecclesia' has generally been translated in two ways. The first is by the term 'assembly', and the second is by the word 'church'. Church is about assembling together; community is at the heart of the church.

Select an activity (or more than one) from the options below that best suit your group and context.

Activity 1: Letters to the church

Paul was one of the early leaders of the Church after the time of Jesus. He wrote a letter to the church in Corinth to give people encouragement and advice about how to be a good church community.

Invite the children/young people to write letters to their church to give encouragement and advice on how they can be a good church community. (Ask the group if they would like to share the letters with the church and, if so, think of an appropriate way to do this.)

Activity 2: What we think of church

Copy each of the following sentences onto separate pieces of paper. Write the sentence at the top of the page.

- I think meeting with other Christians is important because...
- I think people need to help in church because...
- The worst thing about church is...
- The best thing about church is...
- Our church is important to our community because...
- The word that describes how I feel about church is...

Spread these pieces of paper around the room and invite the children/young people to walk around and add their response to the pieces of paper (leaving enough room

for others to write their response). Alternatively, each person has their own piece of paper which they write all their responses on.

When everyone has had chance to write their responses, share them and discuss with the group. What do they notice?

Activity 3: Church MOT

Every year cars that are over three years old have to undergo an MOT where they are checked by mechanics to ensure they are road worthy and safe. Imagine that you were doing a similar process for your church to check that your church is a healthy community. Print out the following questions, enabling the children/young people to have time to reflect upon them and then take some time to discuss their thoughts.

- Do you think that your church works well as a community of Christian believers? If so, why? If not, what needs to change?
- Does your church welcome new members? Do I welcome new people?
- Do you feel a part of the different communities within your church?
- Does your church set a good example to people who live nearby but who do not go to your church? Do you set a good example to others?
- Your local church is one part of the Worldwide Church. Does your church connect with other churches in the world, the global Christian community?
- Would you let your church pass its MOT?
- What can I do to help the church become an even healthier community?

Activity 4: Giving and receiving

Give each person two sheets of paper. On the first write 'What I can give to my Christian community...' On the second write 'What I'd like to receive from my Christian community...' Invite everyone to write their ideas on the sheets of paper and then discuss the responses and circle the three that the group considers to be the most important.

Personal reflection and challenge

Reflect on the role that you play in your church, or in your children's/youth group. What other role could you play that would make a difference to that community? When you have thought of something, have a go at it and see what happens.

Material adapted from *Participate!* (The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2012). Used with permission.