

The church, a christian place of worship



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The word " church" can be interpreted in two different ways. The first of which simply means a group of people who are in fellowship, and the second obviously the building itself. However, the building and the group hold different meanings and differing importance with each individual Christian. For example, someone might consider that the church building itself might be their key for their love for God and worship whereas another might find that the building holds little relevance and thus to be in the company of fellow Christians is their priority.

In not one instance in the New Testament does the word " church" refer to a building but always as a company of worshipping people who have pledged their lives to Jesus.

In this sense, the group came first and the building second but often the building of a church was seen as a sacrifice for hard both hard labour and money were invested into it for the Glory of God.

In Britain the " Established" Church is the Church of England. This denomination came to being after Henry VIII fell out with the Pope regarding certain restraints of Catholicism regarding marriage and thus set out desecrating the monasteries for both financial gain and to spite the Catholic church.

The disciple Paul pointed out that God has appointed Jesus " head over everything for the church" (Eph. 1: 22) He was emphasising the fact that Jesus is the supreme head of the church and the vital life force that runs through it.

Section A

In a typical Church of England there are several distinguishing features that symbolise certain things that are special to the members of that particular church. Different objects in different churches signify different things for different people.

The Organ and Music in the Church

The whole point of a Christian service is to praise God and worship him. This can be done in several ways. However, many Christians find that the most effective way in which to praise the Lord is through music, not only can they share their feelings with other people by singing in groups but it is also rather enjoyable as well!

The organ is the most common instrument used in church but also more modern instruments such as guitars, drums and violins are also embraced by the congregation.

Due to the popularity of Christian " new-age" music, there has been a succession of musical albums released to be played at home etc.

The Bible

The Bible is obviously an integral part in any church service. Readings are usually taken from both the Old and the New Testament and are usually relevant to the time of year or teach a moral lesson for Jesus is the ultimate role model of all Christians.

Stained Glass Windows

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Church services have not always been as we know them. Hundreds of years ago, everything was in Latin which meant that the clergy had exclusive access to the Bible because the masses were generally illiterate. This meant that the majority of the public had very limited access to the Bible and its teachings which defies the Christian teaching of " spreading the word of Jesus".

The only way in which they could understand anything was through the stained glass windows. They were highly decorative and pleasing to the eye but more importantly, they were often like miniature cartoon strip extracts, often depicting an important event from the Bible such as the birth of Christ or the death of him on the cross.

The pulpit is a raised platform and is often highly decorative. It is usually where a priest or minister will stand when preaching his/her sermon. They have it on a raised platform because it represents the time when Jesus preached his sermon from the mountain.

Banners are another way of praising the Lord for they are decorative beautiful and often have words of praise and celebration on them. This is very important for Christians, as they must be able to express themselves in different ways.

Certain banners may only be used at a certain time of the year such as Christmas, Easter or the Harvest.

The Notice Board

The notice board is not an instantly striking thing to glance at unlike the Stained glass windows or the banners but is just as significant to a modern day church. Churches are very important to local communities and any events that happen in the surrounding area. Examples of what can be found on a notice board.

- * News on local events.
- * Church specific rotas (Stewards, flowers, books)
- * Charity news and events.
- * Dates and times of services
- * Contact Information

The Spire

When asked to picture a typical church in your head, you instantly picture a spire. That is the one of the main ideas of having a spire for if you see one, you can instantly tell that there is a church. The other meaning of the spire has a more spiritual significance. Like the bird on the lectern, it symbolizes closeness with God for it is pointing directly towards him.

Chesterfield Cathedral

Altar

The altar or nave as it is also known is the table at the front of the church. On it are the flagon and the chalice. The altar is used at times of Holy Communion. The whole table is meant to be a re-enactment of the last

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supper and so non-alcoholic wine is used to represent the blood of Christ and wafers or bread are used for the body of Christ.

Its original use in early times was for sacrificial purposes.

The Font

In order to become a member of the Church and Gods house, you must be either baptised as a child or be baptised as an adult. The font is used for infant baptisms where the child is blessed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist. The fonts are usually highly decorative made out of marble or stone and are usually placed near a door or an entrance so that the child's spirit is free to enter the congregation.

Crucifix or Cross

Known throughout the world as a sign of Christianity, the cross is a symbol of hope for it represents the time when Jesus rose again. In a Protestant church, the cross is plain and does not have Jesus upon it. This is because they want to show that he was resurrected and that he did not remain on the cross.

Pews and Kneelers

The pews in a church are the long seats on which the majority of the congregation sits. Each one is identical to any other in the same church to represent equality. The ends of the pews are can be very ornate which is a sign of creativity.

In the back of the pew in front, there is a section where you can put any hymn books or leaflets for easy access. On the floor are kneelers where, when praying, you may kneel.

The Role of A Priest or Minister within a Church

The ideal role for a priest/minister consists of love, sacrifice, caring and concern for all. The role of a priest or minister in a church is a very important one. If you think of it like the role of a shepherd, the sheep (the parishioners), have respect for you and will follow you. It is the shepherd's responsibility to care for the sheep; to accommodate their feelings, to be concerned about the spiritual needs of the flock and offer love to those in need.

" The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him or knows him" (John 14: 17)

This means that although the priest/minister is striving for the salvation of all, people are unresponsive and do not realise they are being saved thus they reject his/her efforts. In my opinion, secularisation is a main problem for this, for society is divided and people do not know their spiritual priorities and so cling to material possessions and popular beliefs rather than pursue spiritual well being and honesty with God

Within the community, the minister is a soothing presence as a part of his duty involves something called pastoral care, similar to a year head or tutor but on a wider scale. For instance, the minister will visit those that are sick in the parish, and will just pay general visits around the area. Also, the minister

is on church committees such as the maintenance committee or the overseas charity committee.

Church in the Community

As said in the section on the notice board, the church display activities that go on in the community, these range from:

- * Keep fit Classes

- * Yoga

- * Brownies/Guides

- * Cubs/Scouts

- * Committee meetings

- * Coffee Mornings

The church will often participate in local charity events because it is a sign of a good Christian to be caring and have concern for others.

In a small village, the church is the community. The church is always open to those in need. With the closure of village shops and post offices, churches become the only community building in rural areas and so must be kept in good condition. Local people will often help raise money for the church.

In more urbanised areas, the church can be utilised as a homeless shelter as one of the teachings of Christianity is " love thy neighbour" however poor or sick they are.

In Africa there is currently an HIV/AIDS epidemic and it is spreading fast. Perhaps the largest contributor for educating the people about AIDS is the church. No other organisation can join people together in hope better than the church. It unites communities and can get its message across to a more widespread range of people. The hope is to educate the new generation of children, millions of which are orphans due to their parents death of AIDS. The children are also a victim of AIDS, they are left on their own with no family living in poverty with no future, the church is steadily working towards changing this.

My local church is not only involved in the local community but also the global community. It supports a Charity called JMA (junior mission for all) and also Christian aid which helps good causes all over the world.