

The English Parish Church Primary Schools Pack

Assemblies



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Schools Pack developed by Chris Hudson for the
Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture



Assembly: The Squint

Aims:

- To raise questions about including or excluding others
- To recall the golden Rule, and the Christian teaching that everyone is important to God.

You will need:

A picture of a church 'squint' or hagioscope to show. (See DVD-ROM Resources/Gallery)

Introduction:

Have you ever felt left out of something, maybe, a game? How did it feel? Have you ever left someone else out? Why? See what you think about that feeling in this story.

Development – Story:

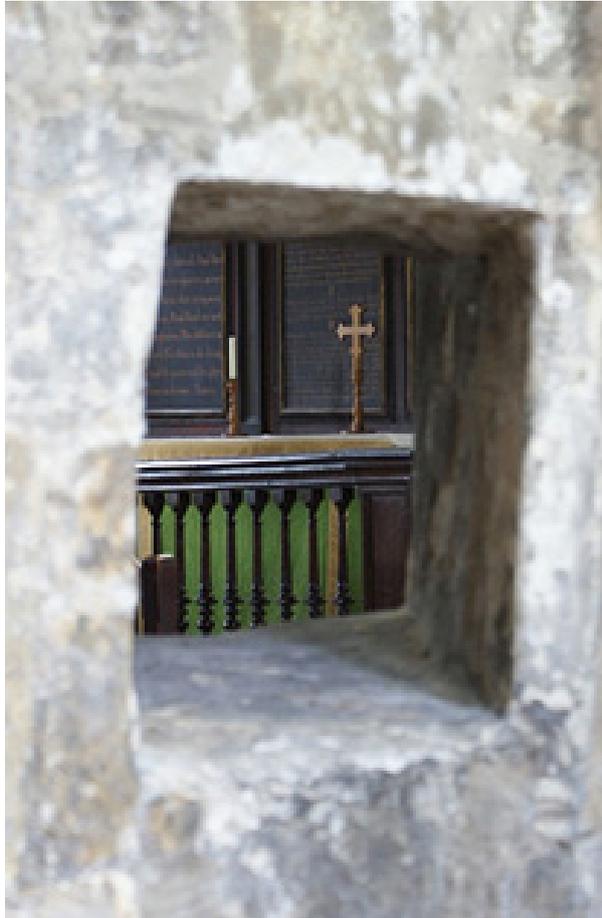
The class visit to the church was going well. The children had been full of excited questions, and the vicar was doing her best to answer them. The children had been sketching, jotting down questions, and puzzling their way around the old church building, which was almost a thousand years

old. There were many things with special names that the children had never heard before – and some objects that just seemed a complete mystery. Carlie was enjoying herself – it all made a welcome break from life at home, because Mum was having to keep visiting her own Mum who was very poorly in hospital. Things had been getting very disorganised at home, and Carlie was fed up with it. Why couldn't breakfast be on the table? Why did she have to get her own toast? She was fed up with Granny being sick. It wasn't fair.

And then, as she wandered around the church, Carlie saw it. It was like a letterbox in the wall at head height, up near the end where the Church had its special communion table. She opened the brass flap, and discovered a long rectangular hole. There was nothing inside – just a hole – leading through to the other side of the wall.

She asked the vicar to come over. 'What's this? Is it for letters?' Something in the vicar's face said No. 'I'm afraid not. It's to let someone outside see what's happening.'

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'Outside? Who?'

'It's a long story. I'll tell you all later. Wait until I give you the signal.' It all seemed rather mysterious.

The class were just sitting together at the end of their visit, when the vicar explained what happened in church when they had Holy Communion. She got out the special brass plate (called a paten) and a special cup (called a chalice) which were used to

carry the bread and the wine used in the service.

'It's remembering the last meal Jesus had with his friends before he died. During the service, I say a special prayer that says that we're sharing in the bread and wine as if we were there during that last meal. It's a special time for Christians – it says we're all part of one big family.' Then she looked hard at Carlie. *'But Carlie here has discovered something. What was it?'*

Everyone turned and looked.

'Carlie, could you describe what you found, please?'

Feeling nervous, Carlie described the hole in the wall for everybody. 'It's like a letterbox, but it's not for letters, is it?' she asked.

'No, sadly,' said the vicar. 'It's actually very old, from before the time when we had letters. It's called a Squint. It's from a time when everybody was scared of being sick – and in England at that time, there were people with a disease called leprosy. No-one knew how leprosy was passed on – so nobody wanted to touch lepers (that's people with leprosy) for fear of catching it. We now

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know you can't catch leprosy by touching, but they didn't know - which meant that lepers were banned from coming into church. But they were allowed to watch it all through that special window, called a squint. And if they were lucky, some of the bread would be passed out to them, but they weren't allowed in.'

'It wasn't much of a family, then, was it?' sighed Carlie, sadly.

The vicar shook her head. 'No, it wasn't. Jesus would touch people with leprosy, but some of his followers didn't. They were too scared. And before we all get too big-headed, there's plenty of diseases in the world now that make us all scared without knowing why. But that shouldn't stop us from caring for people who are poorly. '

After the visit, Carlie started thinking hard. The lepers' squint had filled her mind with questions. I wonder... what do you think they were?

Discuss this with your group. Draw out how Carlie is angry with her Granny for being sick, when she could be doing something more helpful... such as?

Conclusion:

It's very easy to push people out or just not care about them. It could be because they look different or seem different to us. Or they just get in our way. People who are poorly can feel left out very easily. But remember – we can all get poorly. Jesus said 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself – or, 'Treat other people in the way you 'd want to be treated.'

Prayer:

Father God, if I'm pushing someone away or leaving them out, then tap me on the shoulder and remind me what it feels like when it's happened to me. And show me the right thing to do. Amen.

Sing

Make me a channel of your peace (Junior Praise 161)

Bind us together Lord (Junior Praise 17)

When I needed a neighbour (Junior Praise 275)

Assembly: How do you say it?

Aims:

- To explain the use of symbols when expressing strong feelings
- To show how Christians sometimes use a candle as a symbol when praying.

You will need:

- A candle to light,
- Somewhere safe to place it where everyone can see it,
- A way of lighting it.

Introduction:

Have you ever had something really bad happen in your family? Sometimes, it can be very hard to come up with the right words to say and we end up saying nothing at all. Listen to this story, and see what you think

Development - story

The church was quiet. Daniel sat there, feeling the surface of the long smooth varnished bench, watching his Mum as she knelt next to him, her lips silently moving in prayer. He stared around at the bright banners, the stained glass

windows, the flowers, and the big table at the front.

'It's one place where I can really feel quiet inside', Mum had said. 'I can't do that at home, now.' Sometimes, church could be really noisy, with loud music and singing as people were thanking and praising God. But when she was feeling weak or sad, she preferred the silence.

Daniel didn't like silence. Silence made him uncomfortable. Thoughts came into his head that he didn't like – memories of bad times with his sister which he'd much rather forget. So he sat there and fidgeted. Mum turned and smiled.

'Sorry, I know you find this difficult. Do you ever try talking to God?'

'Sometimes' he answered, 'But I don't really know what to say.'

She nodded. 'Come over here'. She got to her feet and led Daniel towards a corner of the building. He followed, past bright banners festooned with winged angels. Near the font, on a table, was a metal tray filled with sand and candles. A few were lit. A notepad and a pen lay nearby. Behind, a noticeboard was covered with

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handwritten messages. 'Read some of these', she said.

Daniel did. One note asked people to pray for someone's mother who was very sick. Another asked Jesus to help someone make a difficult decision. A third just said, 'Please pray for me.' There were many more.

'Some people write notes', Mum said. 'Others light candles. It's a way of praying when you can't find the words. Would you like to light one for our family?'

Daniel nodded. He selected a candle, touched the wick to one that was already alight, and set it into the sand. As the flame flickered into life, he thought of his sister and all the problems they'd been having at home, and he shut his eyes. He didn't know if he was asking or just talking to God about it – but he was praying. In the silence, it felt as if a great load was coming off his shoulders. For the first time in a long time, he felt lighter. In a strange way, he felt... good.

Conclusion:

Sometimes, it's good to think about our feelings, even when that

hurts. I'm going to light a candle now. I wonder what you would want to say if we lit it for you. In the silence, you might want to say something happy, or sad. Or it might be a question. Or it might be today, just... nothing. That's all right. But I'm going to light the candle, and I want everyone to be really quiet, just for a moment, to think or speak your special thoughts, or to let other people say theirs quietly to themselves.

Prayer:

Here's a prayer that Christians use, which you may like to use yourself.

Father God, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sing:

This little light of mine (Junior Praise 258)

Father I place into your hands (Junior Praise 42)

*Afterwards, do remind pupils that playing with lighted flames and candles is dangerous, and that no child should use candles unless supervised by an adult.

Assembly: Whirls and Swirls

Aims:

- To explore the idea of creating something beautiful for God
- Using our talents

You will need:

- A display image of at least one page from the Lindisfarne Gospels without text on it. These can be found on the English Parish Church DVD-ROM and also at the British Library's online 'Sacred' exhibition.

Introduction:

Show the image. Ask the children to discuss with each other 5 things they notice about it, and then what they think it is. After a few minutes, ask for what they've noticed, encouraging them to listen to each other to avoid repetition. Then get answers for 'what is it?' Expect suggestions like 'a carpet' or 'a rug'.



Development:

Explain the following:

- The original is only as big as a sheet of A4 paper
- It was drawn and painted entirely by hand
- This one picture took two months to do
- It was made about 1300 years ago
- It's a decorated page out of a hand-made copy of the Gospels, the stories of Jesus from the Bible

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- As it was made on the holy Island of Lindisfarne in Northumberland, it's called 'The Lindisfarne Gospels'

Show another page (without text or obvious pictures), again asking pupils to discuss in pairs see what they can spot, **OR show a close-up of one area of the same page**. Depending on the image, expect to hear comments about... animals (dogs and geese with long necks) spirals, lines of symmetry, symbols of communion (chalices and bread), repeating patterns, the cross of Jesus...

Talk about the colours: point out the red pigment – it is called cochinite, and comes from a squashed bug found in places like Spain. The blue comes from a stone called lapis lazuli, which was mined in just one place in Afghanistan! Talk about how hard it must have been to get art materials like that to England 1300 years ago and how precious that made them.

Explain that this book was created to say thank you to God for the life of Saint Cuthbert, an important Christian in northern England – and the man who created it (Eadfrith) took about two months to complete each single page. There are 15 'carpet pages' like this one, and many more which mix text and patterns. (Show another page or two if you can.)

But what's the point? It was made because Eadfrith wanted to make the most beautiful thing he could for God, something wonderful to share with others when they came to his church. The pages are full of amazing swirling patterns and colours, all of them wrapped around the stories of Jesus to say – 'Look at this! Jesus is somebody really amazing! Listen to what he says!' And if you look closely at the patterns, they seem to move today. The words of Jesus still move people today as well. Jesus said – 'I have come so that people can live their life to the full!' (John 10.10.) And that's

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what the Lindisfarne Gospels say with their pages filled with colours, and light, and patterns: “Live life to the full”. Enjoy them!

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, that we live in an amazing world of colour, and light and pattern. Thank you for artists like Eadfrith. Help us to open our eyes, to see the beauty that’s all around us. Amen.

Sing:

*For the beauty of the earth
(Junior Praise 48)*

*God who made the earth
(Junior Praise 63)*

*All things bright and beautiful
(Junior Praise 6)*

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.

Editorial Team: Dee Dyas, Patrick Gibbs, Louise Hampson, Brian Rahn

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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.

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The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture
Berrick Saul Building
University of York
Heslington, York
YO10 5DD

Tel: 01904 328 095
Email: candc@york.ac.uk



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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