

The English Parish Church Primary Schools Pack

RE Lesson E: What can a church building tell us?



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



RE Lessons and Worksheets

Lesson E: What can a church building tell us?

Aims:

To explore how elements in a parish church can represent changes and developments in the values of Christian communities at different times in history.

- A very large cardboard box, card, craft materials (see below).

Preparation! This lesson requires you to have ready-made a model 'church interior' (Blue-Peter fashion) that your pupils can then customise. This will provide you afterwards with a highly-interactive classroom display that could be part of some school display (in a local church?).

Objectives:

Each child will have the opportunity to think about the meaning and function of church buildings by participating in the design and construction of a model one.

You will need a very large cardboard box cut horizontally through the middle to show the inside of a rectangular church building, with 'windows' and 'doors' cut out.

Resources provided:

- 3D Animation from the Resources Gallery on the English Parish Church DVD-ROM.

- The box should be big enough to show a basic rectangular church layout when looking down, to comfortably sit around 30-50 'people', assuming they are each about 10 cm tall.

Additional resources required:

- A precious personal item that means something special to you (a photo or symbol?), that you would feel comfortable explaining to your class.

- The 'walls' shouldn't be higher than 30 cm.
- Experiment by making a chair and a human figure first using the worksheet examples that should be copied on to card and cut out.
- Before the lesson, the interior 'walls' should be already 'decorated' with white paper

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ready for other things to be stuck on them.

- Plastic film decorated with 'permanent' felt tips for images might be used for the 'stained glass windows'.
- The outside walls of the building might also be decorated with appropriate 'cladding' (sugar paper?) prior to the lesson.
- If your class has done work on electrical circuits, then you could add lighting using LEDs, batteries, switches and wiring.
- The 'floor' should be coloured card or thick sugar paper, not too dark. (A roof isn't necessary – but then if you're getting keen...)

Due to the Craft element of this session, you will need to adjust your timetable to use some of the week's allocation for Art, to enable the RE element to do its work. Each pupil in your class should be able to explain the function of the thing they have made – what purpose does it serve in a church service of worship? Worksheet 1 provides plenary prompts for thinking about this, and could serve as a draft for a label accompanying the final display. This will also help you to assess the pupil's current level of understanding.

Information for teachers

Read this article-

EXPLORE ▶ 1945 Onwards ▶ Art and Architecture ▶ Re-ordering Churches ▶ Case Studies

Key teaching points for the lesson:

- Many local communities have a special place for celebrating the most precious things in life. Often, that place is the local parish church.
- Through history, Christian communities have celebrated what's 'precious' in different ways. We can still find many clues for that in the building and grounds of a parish church.
- For Christians, the most precious thing of all is the life, teaching and saving work of Jesus Christ.

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Lesson Introduction

Show a personal item that has value for you, and explain its continuing resonance in your life. Explain that everybody has precious things like this because they carry memories that 'say' something special.

Explain that a local parish church will have items like that which say something very special for Christians and others. In fact, the whole building will be 'precious' in all sorts of ways. But you have to look closely to see how that works. It's like reading a secret language.

Show the DVD animation from the Resources Gallery on the English Parish Church DVD-ROM, which lasts for 5 minutes.

Pause it at the end of the 'Anglo-Saxon' period:

- Point out how the special table or 'altar' is the centre piece. Something special happens here. What could it be?
 - See if any child mentions 'communion', remembering a previous lesson.
- This is where the bread and wine are 'consecrated' (made a symbol of the body

and blood of Jesus). Notice how this area changes, but is still the centrepiece of the church.

- See if any child spots how the table is moved further back as the centuries progress, and then nearly blocked off by a 'rood screen'.
- Notice also how other altar tables appear (in the chantry chapel and the Lady Chapel) in the main body of the church. So, the main table remembering where Jesus shared a meal with his friends has been moved away from the people, and others moved in!
- Point out that in many modern churches, the table's now been brought forward again back to where the people are. Ask why you think that might be.



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This all shows how Christians have changed in the way they think about communion. Is it meant to be something you watch from a distance, or something you take part in, close up? Is God someone you want to keep at a distance, or is God someone you want to be close to? The building changes as the answers change.

Class Activity: Creating a model church

Set the task: working together:

- Create the interior of a model church that the class thinks Christians today would want to use today for worshipping God together.
 - Decide on a name for the church (Saint.... The name of one of the children in your class whose birthday it is?)
 - Create a list of elements that they think 'ought' to be there, such as:
 - o a worship area – this might include a table for the bread and wine (often adorned with a cross, candles and an altar-cloth);
 - o a lectern (angled reading table) from which someone
- can 'lead' or 'teach';
 - o some way of creating music, and some way of showing the words to be sung (now days, instead of using books, many churches use projectors and laptops to put song-words and other content up on a screen where everyone can see it).



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local people attached to the walls, pillars, arches.... You decide!

With older children, you might wish to have a discussion about architectural styles of different time-periods, and create it using them – BUT emphasise that the church is meant to be in use NOW and will therefore have been adapted in some ways for modern use.

Once your building is made:

- Agree where the main 'table', 'chairs and people' would be (allowing for an aisle down the middle) and mark them on the 'floor' with pencil, so children know where to place and stick them, once they've been made.
- **Set each child the task** of creating a chair and a simple human figure to sit on it (or stand in front of) using the cut-out figures on the worksheet (copied on to card, cut out, decorated and stuck), and then one other item for the 'church' to use on the Sunday.
- Around the walls there may

be other things – a notice board, posters and displays to show what's going on.

- Mark out where the chairs ought to be and as the figures and chairs are produced, they should be placed and stuck – possibly using Blue-tak, to allow some adjustment or a little PVA glue. The pupils then go on to creating more artefacts as time allows.



NB: 3D elements should all be made simply – except for tables (see the template on the worksheet) - anything 'freestanding' should be drawn on flat card with a folded 'stand', decorated then cut out. A chair could be given wheels to make it a wheelchair.

Ideas for differentiation

It is important that the 'craft' side of this lesson doesn't get bogged down in tiny details,

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such as making the chairs and people. Some children are better at this type of activity than others, so pair them up with those who struggle. SEN children might benefit from just being given the pre-drawn characters which can be simply decorated then cut out. More Able children should be encouraged to get on to designing and making the 'other items' as quickly as possible, after helping another child.

Reflection

When everybody has had a chance to create something else for the church apart from the chair and person, allow 10 minutes for each child to write their own reflection on what's been produced, using the prompts from worksheet 1. Explain that these thoughts will be used to make labels to explain the model church for other people who will be looking at it and reading it. When the reflection time is over, discuss pupil responses.

In a follow-up session (we suggest Literacy), 'work up' the written reflections (which you will have checked and marked for spellings, understanding and clarity of thought) as labels for the model

which could be free-standing, or mounted on the outside walls of the model. Or perhaps they could be compiled to make a guidebook with a fictitious history of the building thrown in!



Plenary

Discuss what's been created.

Has it turned out the way we hoped? What else could be added if we had the time?

What has this activity taught you about the way Christians use their church building on a Sunday?

What further questions do you have about churches and the people who use them?

Worksheet 1 – Designing our own church!

The church's name _____

The person I made was ___ years old.

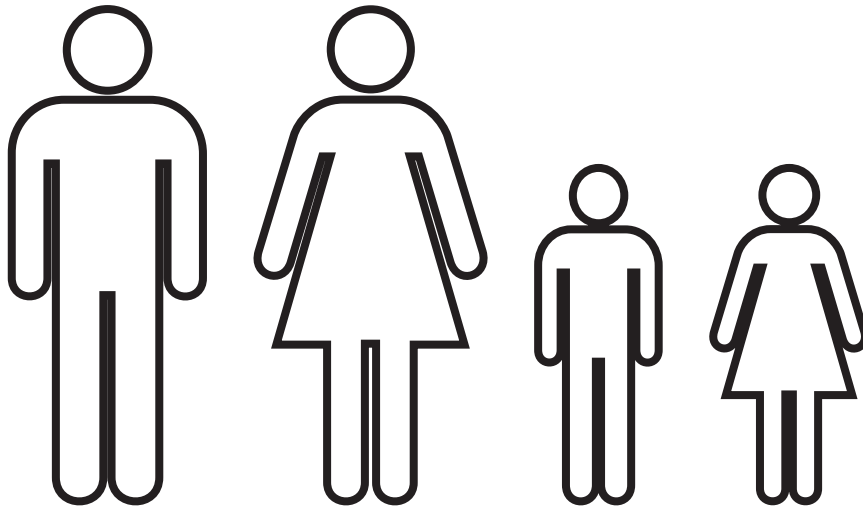
The feature I designed and made was a
_____.

What is it meant to do? Write about its importance for the people who meet and worship there.

Answer as many of the following questions as you can – but giving good detailed reasons for your opinions. ('.... because...')

- 1) What else would you have designed and made for our church if you had the time? Why? Draw it, explaining how it works.
- 2) What has this activity taught you about the way Christians use their church building on a Sunday?
- 3) What have you learned from these lessons about Christians, and about being a member of a Christian church today?
- 4) For Christians, which do you think are the most important activities that take place in church?
- 5) What further questions do you have about churches and the people who use them?

Worksheet 2 – Sample cutouts for a model church



Chairs

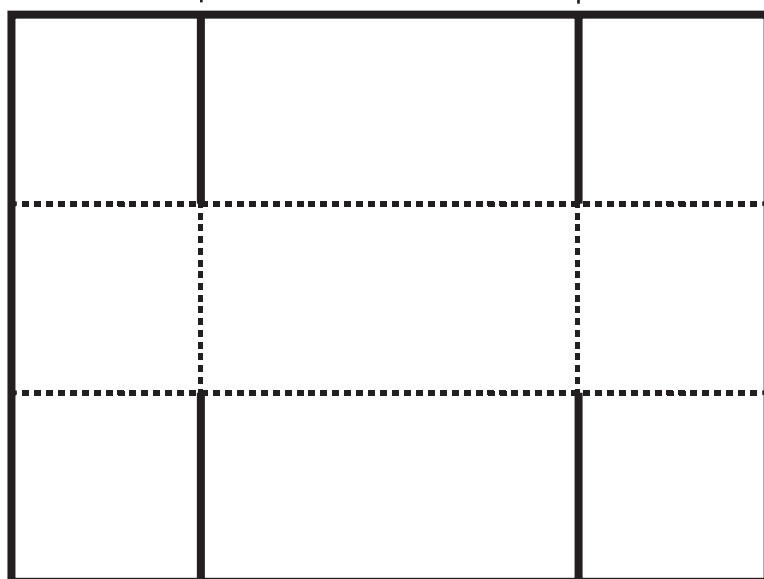
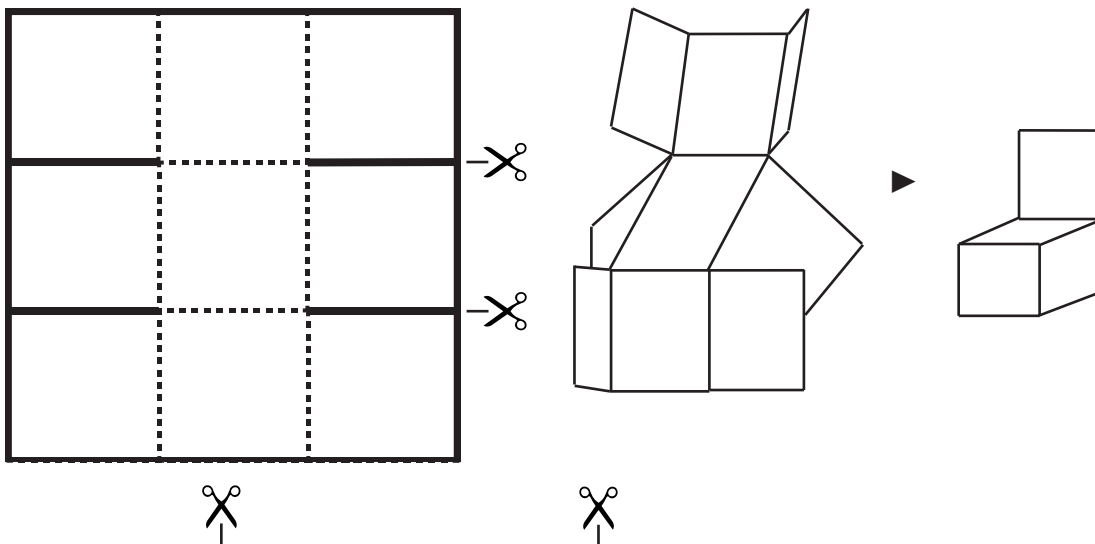


Table / Altar

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 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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