

A centre for the community

The role of the church in a local community is to act as an interface between God and the local people. It serves the people in their rites of passage and community groups and events; it serves the worshipping community through services and festivals; it is the focus of national events such as Remembrance Sunday and millennium celebrations.

There is also a private focus of work in the parish, as individual church members – not only the clergy – take services out to parishioners who need care. This may be communion for the sick, visits to the bereaved, or shopping for the elderly. There is also the running of non-religious groups, like toddler groups or workshops for disabled adults.

KS1

The house of the Gospel

In the Middle Ages our parish churches were a riot of colour with walls covered in paintings and windows glowing with stained glass. These pictures were not mere decoration; they were designed to be the “poor man’s Bible”, so that in an age when few could read, they could instead “read” the stories of the Scriptures and the doctrines of the Church in the art and artefacts. The Reformation swept away “images” and replaced the visual word with the written. The language of Christian symbolism has also become more difficult to interpret for a generation which is no longer able to spot the once well known visual clues. This topic sends the church detectives to look for the clues that are left, and to see how much of the story of Jesus they can “recover”.

KS2

WHAT?

What are the different uses of a church building? How does the church building proclaim the message of Jesus? What are the common features of worship services? What is actually going on when people worship?

A worship centre

Worship of God may be the activity of one person alone, but most Christians think it important to join with others to worship. This can be called “corporate worship” (as opposed to school collective worship) because Christians, united in their beliefs, join together as the body (“corpus”) of Christ. The word “service” is also used because worship is seen as a way of serving God. Worship styles can differ significantly between denominations, as can the understanding of who is able to lead worship and whether they need to be set aside (ordained) to do so. Some churches have a strong attachment to ritual and liturgy, others are less formal and may experiment with a greater variety of patterns. What is actually going on when people worship?

KS2

The church and the senses

In most religions worship is designed to appeal to all five senses, so why is it that when we visit a church we so often concentrate on what can be seen, without bringing our other senses into play? In a very real sense ritual is also theatre, just think of how the visual worship focus shifts as a service progresses, and how ritual actions such as baptism convey meaning.

When visiting a church, incorporate into your programme some opportunities to exercise the senses – listen to the building, and inhale the smell of sanctity! It will help pupils to begin to comprehend what is special about this place for Christians.