

What is the biblical meaning of church?

The word translated "church" in the English Bible is *ekklesia*. This word is the Greek words *kaleo* (to call), with the prefix *ek* (out). Thus, the word means "the called out ones." However, the English word "church" does not come from *ekklesia* but from the word *kuriakon*, which means "dedicated to the Lord."

The Household of faith

Churches come in different sizes, shapes, and situations. They also look and feel very different. Across the world, the Church meets in grand cathedrals, under trees, in tin shacks and in ordinary homes. Down the years the church has developed a dizzyingly wide variety of styles, expressions, some explained by differences of cultural context, some by theological differences of conviction, some by personal preference. Some of these divisions are the result of actual splits or schisms in the past, some are held within the bounds of one particular denomination. Whatever else it is, Christianity is not monochrome.

Christianity is lived and exercised in particular contexts, in specific social and historical circumstances and that each of us needs a tradition within the tradition, a place with a broader Christian family in which we feel at home.

Each Christian acknowledges, owns and values their own tradition for what it is but, in conversation with other traditions, both appreciates the strengths and weaknesses of their own tradition and what can be learned from others. So, it is perfectly fine to be an Evangelical, a Charismatic, a Catholic, a Calvinist, a Pentecostal a Baptist, and so on. What does not work is to believe that my own tradition is somehow final and there is nothing to learn from Christian who inhabit other parts of the Christian faith.

'Receptive ecumenism' is not so much to find agreed forms of wording and overcome difference by establishing common statements of faith, but for each particular tradition to recognize what it can learn from others and what it can teach others as well. It has therefore been described as a corporate exercise in theological humility, which requires a secure confidence in one's own tradition yet a willingness to gain from the insights of others even when there is genuine

disagreement., towards a goal that all will one day share, but which no single tradition has the monopoly on describing. It is quite possible to believe one's own tradition to be more faithful and true to the heart of

Christian faith than others, while also recognizing that it still lacks the perfection of the age to come and adopting humility that enables it to learn from the insights of others.

What does "church" mean to you?

- 1) a building (but not just a building, but a *sacred* building consecrated for worship and prayer and offices e.g. baptisms, weddings, funeral, ordination etc) a community of people.
- 2) The community of Christians meeting together is the 'Body of Christ' - it is a 'family' with people offering different gifts and talents.

What then is the Church for?

A place to *belong*?

To belong is to bring relevance e, to find a focus in time of need, to offer celebration, and shelter. It offers identity and cohesion. It is meant to be a moral compass for society; values and morals - a conscience. It is meant to be hospitable, offering reconciliation and love. It is a mediator. It is missionary. The Church of England 5 Marks of Mission:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.

To respond to human need by loving service

To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The marks were adopted by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1996 and many dioceses and other denominations used them as the basis of action plans and creative mission ideas.

The Church of England is the National Church it is the 'chaplain to the people'. A parish feels it has some ownership of the vicar.

A place to *believe*?

The Church is a place of *sanctuary*; somewhere to go to for spiritual comfort, personally and corporately. It has language and ritual of varying and diverse kinds which evoke and allow people to experience God's presence.