

What do we believe about ... **Holy Spirit?**

dependence **Holy Spirit** *friendship*
Whit-Sunday *soul* *gospel love* *companionship*
risen life *relationships* *image glory God*
spiritual **human believe nature** *ascended*
divine presence *image of God* *spirituality* *Jesus* *reflect*



What do we believe about **Holy Spirit?**

The Spirit is personal

The English word 'spirit' can refer to the mood or atmosphere among a group of people. While a valid use of the word, this is not what Christians mean when we talk about the Holy Spirit. With the whole Christian Church, the United Reformed Church use capital letters and a definite 'the' when we talk about 'the Holy Spirit'.

The Holy Spirit carries the presence of God into this world and in this world. God is not just a creator who wound up the world and left it to tick. Nor is God just the one who came in Jesus, stayed with us for a few years, then moved on, back to heaven. But God is also a living presence, right up to date, active in the world today.

The Spirit brings the creative power and energy of God into our world. The Spirit breathes the life and goodness of Jesus among us. We can relate to the Spirit, in friendship and dependence and companionship.

'Pentecost means 'fifty' – just fifty days on from Easter.'

Christians celebrate the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Whit Sunday as

it often used to be called. Pentecost means 'fifty' – just fifty days on from Easter. Acts 2 tells of the Pentecost that followed



the first Good Friday and Easter. Jesus had died, risen and ascended. He was gone. Then a wind blew, a fire burned, voices spoke, and lives were filled with a new energy from heaven. The friends of Jesus realised that they were not a people deserted. They were accompanied, empowered and enabled. The life of Jesus had come among them, in the Spirit of Jesus.

Telling it this way might suggest that the Spirit was completely unknown in Old Testament times. That is not the case. But there are some differences between Old Testament and New. The New Testament tells of the Spirit as a constant presence rather than occasional; as available to all the friends of Jesus, not just to a few leaders and prophets; specifically as 'holy' (the term 'Holy Spirit' is not common in the Old Testament); and as the Spirit of Jesus.

The Spirit is holy

To call the Spirit ‘Holy’ is to speak of the life of God. God is holy – distinct, perfect, not dependent on us, yet shaping our world with goodness. The Spirit carries that holiness into our life today and helps us to respond to God and to share in God’s nature.

So the Spirit calls us to faith, reminding us of the reality of Jesus and of the truths he brought us (John 14:26). The Spirit bears

witness in our hearts and prompts us to reach out in Jesus’ name as children of the God whom Jesus called Father (Romans 8:15-17).

‘The Spirit calls us to a lifestyle that mirrors and embodies the values of Jesus’

The Spirit is the invisible power in Christian worship,

kindling within us a desire to praise God and acting as conduit and interpreter of our prayers. The Spirit makes our sacraments deep moments of connection with the life of heaven.

The Spirit knits Christians together in fellowship, calling us to be one body in Christ, and giving us a bond of love with one another that reaches beyond the limits and boundaries of language, culture, tradition and background.

The Spirit calls us to a lifestyle that mirrors and embodies the values of Jesus. ‘Sanctification’ is an old name for this – the process of becoming holy in practice. Goodness is not a quality we can attain by pulling upwards on our own moral and ethical shoelaces. It needs to be a gift from God. Surely we have to respond to the Spirit. But when forces of temptation, habit or



custom try to pull us off the path of Jesus, we are not in the struggle on our own. The inner strength of God’s Spirit works for us, with us and within us.

And the Spirit gives the church energy to make Jesus known. There are many words for this – mission, outreach, witness. The church was never meant to be an ingrown community. The Spirit gives us the confidence and credibility to look outward, to declare by word and action that Jesus is alive, and to represent his truth and goodness by what we say and do. Again, we are not in this on our own. We are agents of the Spirit.

‘mission, outreach, witness. The church was never meant to be an ingrown community’

The Spirit is alive

Finally, it is worth noting that different people in the United Reformed Church would tell parts of this story in different ways. Some would stress the Spirit's role in creation (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30) and speak of the Spirit working all over the world, not merely among Christians. Others would underline



the Spirit's relationship to Jesus, and expect to encounter the work of the Spirit specifically in places where Jesus is named and known. Of one thing, however, we can be sure: God's Spirit regularly has surprises in store for us. Let us be ready to respond to these with faith, hope and joy, for Jesus' sake.



This is one in a series of booklets about the United Reformed Church. The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/believe



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