

# What do we believe about ... **The Church?**

*fellowship* **bible** *one* *community*  
**The Church**  
*Christians* *catholic* *living*  
*holiness* *diversity* *divinity* *councils* *humanity* *human* *together* *nurture* *believe* *apostolic* *love* *Jesus*  
*committee* *relationship* *creator* *reflective*



# What do we believe about The Church?

## Experiencing Church

The United Reformed Church is part of God's one Church which, at all times – past, present and future – and in all places worships God through God's son, Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before people think about the Church they experience it. Initially, people experience the Church as it is revealed in a particular form of worship, pattern of fellowship, engagement in mission, and witness to the gospel. Worship can be reflective and meditative, it can be traditional with hymns and a sermon, or it can be informal and led by music bands. Churches govern themselves differently, some placing more importance on the participation of all members in any decision-making. Others have particular councils or committees to do this while still others place more importance on the authority of specific people who hold particular offices.



Whatever form of governance they have, churches engage in ministry and mission which involves proclaiming the good news about Jesus in word and in deed. This might involve evangelistic



activity as well as charitable acts such as raising money for special causes or providing services for the community such as a food bank. These, and the countless other experiences that are possible, demonstrate part of the rich diversity of the Church. In one sense, this is *the Church*.

## Church beyond experience

While everyone experiences Church and understands it first through a local gathering of Christians, the fact that the Church existed prior to our own experience of it tells us that there is more to be said. Understanding the Church is not simply a matter of considering our personal experience at a particular place and time, but trying to make sense of how and why the Church first came into existence as well as how it has developed over the centuries.

Here we discover that the Church is brought into being and sustained by God. From the fourth century, the Church has been known according to four 'marks': the Church is 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'. The Church's unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are not defined in terms of human morality,

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belief and activity because they depend on God's redeeming, saving, liberating action in history. The Church, then, is not the product of human activity, but the creation of God, brought

into being and sustained by God coming to us in human form in Jesus Christ, and inspiring our response through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Church is **one**, then, because it is one in Christ who is its head. The United Reformed Church is committed to demonstrating this by seeking unity across denominations and to work with and share with other denominations as widely as is possible. The Church's **holiness** derives from God's goodness. The Church is **catholic** (universal) because it includes all of Christ's followers throughout the world, past, present and future. The Church is **apostolic** because God continues graciously to entrust to it the task of proclaiming to the world the same good news as was committed to the first apostles. As the Church is engaged in Christ's mission, so it shares in the witness and calling of Jesus' first disciples.



## The Church made visible

The one Church of Jesus Christ can only be known in a particular place and time. The United Reformed Church belongs to a tradition which believes the Church to be made visible where the Word of God is preached and heard, the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution and there is godly living among the Church's members. This means that the Church is visible when it worships God and reflects God's grace as the community characterised by love for God, for each other and for the world.

‘community characterised by love for God, for each other and for the world’



The United Reformed Church has a ‘conciliar’ structure, which means that decisions are made corporately by baptised church members meeting in council. Decisions are made locally, at the Church Meeting. Ministers of Word and Sacraments serve the local church along with elected and ordained elders, who are also trustees. In the wider church there are thirteen Synods which meet twice a year and General Assembly which meets annually.

‘follow Christ’s ministry of bringing forgiveness, healing and wholeness to the world.’

But there is no single way to be the Church and we do not experience the Church in its fullness. The visible form which it currently takes can never be the only one in which the Church

can be made manifest. Instead, the Church is forever able to be renewed and to change its form when, under the Word of God, the Holy Spirit prompts it to do so. The United Reformed Church recognises that, because it is made up of human beings, it needs continually to reform itself to be more faithful in its calling to follow Christ’s ministry of bringing forgiveness, healing and wholeness to the world.



**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](http://www.urc.org.uk/believe)**



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