

GCSE Religious Studies (from 2016)

## Christian Aid: theology and ethics

Lesson ideas from RE Today

Lesson title:

# What is 'church'?



We believe in life  
before death

**RE Today**  
Services

**This lesson presents different interpretations of the word 'church', exploring whether it relates more to buildings or to people. It considers the worldwide church, and Christian Aid's place within that.**

### Flexibilities:

The learning ideas in this lesson can be used as they are written, but are flexible. You might like to try:

- simplifying the work on the purposes of church by inviting a local vicar to answer this question.
- setting an extended writing task for high achievers, in which they consider this proposition: 'Christian Aid is a non-religious church for the 21st century'.
- consider the critique that Christian Aid could balance its political and humanitarian work more accurately
- to take their studies further, high achieving students might interview local Christians who are involved with Christian Aid about their beliefs, values and motivations, reporting back to the class

- investigating liberation theologies from Latin America where new models of 'being the church' were developed in the late 20th century by applying the Bible's anti-poverty messages to politics
- drawing attention to Christian beliefs and teachings about community, church and equality in both the Bible and contemporary churches. Do Christian communities in the UK need to change to reflect a more compassionate or connected idea of being the church in a world where 13,000 children die each day from preventable diseases? For example, should all churches sell 10% of their 'assets' (silverware, for example) to feed the starving?

### Good learning: what's working well here?

- It is based in the GCSE syllabus's aims to describe what the church is, and is for.
- It links dynamic global examples of Christian practice to students' own thinking.
- It challenges students to think for themselves about controversies and big questions.

### Text and Beliefs

This work enables students to study some biblical texts about justice and peace, and consider what they mean and how they can be interpreted.

Texts used here include:

- Matthew 25: the end of the age
- 1 Corinthians 13: the importance of love above all
- Acts 2:42: four functions of the early church
- 1 Peter 2:9-10: the people of God in the world.

### Impact

Students examine the ways these Biblical and spiritual ideas make a difference in the practice of Christian Aid, linking to the wider UK Christian community.

The concepts of ecumenism, reconciliation, fellowship and solidarity are considered.

### Connections

Students are challenged to consider what impact this work might have on their own opinions and behaviour: would the world be a better place if we all followed these teachings? In what ways?

They are encouraged to think through their own spiritual and moral ideas about solidarity and human unity: many say 'we are all one human race' – what should people who believe this do about it?

### Learning outcomes:

#### Emerging

- give two meanings of 'church' in Christianity, eg, a building and a community
- explain the meaning of reconciliation.

#### Expected

- outline some purposes of the Christian church
- outline how Christian Aid's practical and spiritual support encourages reconciliation
- explain Christian efforts to allow reconciliation
- offer a view as to how far Christian Aid fulfils the purposes of a global church.

#### Exceeding

- offer reasoned support for a view as to how far Christian Aid's work can be seen as an expanded, global ecumenism.

## Teaching notes

### 1: What is a church for?

a) Display images of modern church designs, such as the Church of Seed in China or Jubilee Church in Rome. Gather reactions: should church design retain a traditional feel, or evolve to suit new generations? Show Gaudi's Sagrada Familia cathedral in Barcelona which is still groundbreaking today, and must have been even more so when construction started in 1882. Gather reactions. Have any students visited this, or other, remarkable cathedrals? Show images of medieval Norman cathedrals in Britain such as Rochester, Ely or Wells. Do students think these are more traditional cathedrals? In fact, these were also groundbreaking at the time and radically different from the older Anglo-Saxon churches. Finally, ask the group to brainstorm responses to the prompt: 'A church is...'

b) Look at the ideas from your brainstorm: how much are they about people and how much about buildings? How much is about worship or connection with God, and how much about charitable, community or educational activities? Give out the information sheet on page 7, detailing the history and purpose of the church. Ask pairs to separate this information into four categories: community, God, building, and action.

c) Ask groups to create a large pie-chart entitled: What is church for? Their pie chart may contain ideas under all the categories discussed: community (friendship, care for members of the church of all ages, needs and varieties); building (local landmark, historic treasure, space for the community); God (worship and evangelism); and action (caring for local people in need, for the wider world, for the Earth). Groups create pie charts allocating the proportion of time, energy and resources that, in their view, should be spent on each of these elements. Inside each slice, they should explain what the category involves and why they have made their allocation of importance. After this exercise, you can ask whether all these things need to (or can) be separate.

### 2: The worldwide church: Working for reconciliation

a) Get students to view the information and stories from Angola, Colombia and Sierra Leone online at [christianaid.ie/maps/](http://christianaid.ie/maps/). Display a world map with these countries marked. Let the class decide which country to hear about first. Ask students to read

the information from each country. As they listen, ask the class to jot down the ways Christian Aid brings people together after conflict. Overall, what is needed for communities to recover and flourish after conflict? Create a list as a class.

b) Offer an example of conflict between churches, such as the persecution of Protestants during the reign of Mary I. Do students know the differences between the Catholic and Protestant churches, which led to such persecution? Display a list of Christian denominations in the UK, such as the list of the member churches of Churches Together on Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Churches\\_Together\\_in\\_England](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Churches_Together_in_England). How many of these churches have the class heard of? Were they aware there are so many Christian denominations? Each one of these churches represents a different way of being Christian.

c) Churches can also play a role in reconciliation between nations. Display an image of Coventry Cathedral's 'Charred Cross', and gather reactions. The medieval cathedral in Coventry was destroyed by German bombs during the Second World War. It now stands ruined, and a new cathedral was built next to it, opening in 1962. The cross was constructed from burned wood and the altar from rubble from the destroyed cathedral. What do the class think this might symbolise? Show an image of Coventry's Cross of Nails, also created from the ruins. The provost of the cathedral pledged forgiveness and rebuilding after the destruction, rather than revenge and hatred. After the war, Crosses of Nails were given to many German churches whose buildings had been destroyed by Allied bombs, and the Community of the Cross of Nails was formed, dedicated to reconciliation.

Extension: find out more about the Community of the Cross of Nails at <http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/wpsite/our-reconciliation-ministry/>

d) Define 'reconciliation' as a list of points. Display an image of the sculpture 'Reconciliation' by Josefina de Vasconcellos. Versions of this sculpture stand in Coventry Cathedral, Hiroshima, Stormont Castle in Belfast, the site of the Reichstag in Berlin and at a Berlin Wall site in Berlin. Challenge the class to find out what these places have in common.

e) Read about how Christian Aid have supported Nyanut, a young woman in South Sudan, as her community recovers from a civil war: <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/whatwedo/eyewitness/africa/south-sudan-new-hope-for-a-new-nation.aspx>.

Discuss how far Christian Aid have offered Nyanut's community practical support and how far spiritual support. Where does Nyanut seem to derive her support from? Is spiritual support as important as practical help?

f) Add Nyanut to the world map (your map might not even have the world's newest country, South Sudan, whose creation in 2011 was the outcome of the civil war). Add what she needed to the reconciliation definition you created under point d.

g) Ask students to think silently of a time when a relationship they valued was under stress, threatening to break. Give them time to think about what they needed to mend that relationship. Possibly it is not yet mended. Look at the list of factors that support reconciliation. Could any of these methods help students in their own conflicts and stresses?

### 3: The worldwide church: Pilgrimage and ecumenism

a) Show pictures of the Islamic Hajj to Mecca: can students identify it? Have any of the students, or their friends or relatives, made the Hajj? Ask if the class know of any places to which Christians make pilgrimages. Examples might include Iona and Walsingham in the UK; Lourdes, Jerusalem, Rome, Bethlehem and others worldwide. Brainstorm reasons why people make religious pilgrimages.

b) Ask if a 'pilgrimage' has to be a journey to a place associated with one's own religion. Could a Muslim make a pilgrimage to Lourdes, or a Christian make a pilgrimage to hear the Dalai Lama, for example? Why or why not?

c) Display an image of planet Earth. Ask the class what Christians believe about the Earth (for example, was it created by God, are humans in a position of stewardship over it, is it good, fruitful, creative?) Display the Bible passages on page 9. What do these passages tell students about church teaching in relation to the whole planet? Is it for everyone, or just Christians? (A: everyone). Define 'ecumenism', from 'oikumene' in Greek, which means 'the whole inhabited earth'. Teach that this is a reference to the Matthew passage 'the whole world' (Matthew 24:14).

d) Read about the three places on page 10, Taizé, Corrymeela and Iona. These are Christian places that are ecumenical, meaning they represent all Christians. Many Christians and non-Christians visit these places. Return to the discussion about pilgrimage: do visitors have to be Christian to make a pilgrimage to ecumenical places such as these?

e) After reading, ask the class if they think these sites actually go beyond Christianity to all people? What makes them appropriate for all people, and what makes them specifically Christian? Go back over the text and highlight in two different colours aspects of these sites which are for everyone, and aspects which are specifically for Christians.

f) Watch this five-minute video about Christian Aid's work to support Bangladeshi communities affected by flooding: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T37XD79rOTU>. How can Morsheda receive the help she needs to protect her family? Christian Aid suggest a church hold a Big Brekkie to raise around £250 to be able to offer someone like Morsheda a lifeline. Discuss if this is an excellent example of ecumenism, even though most Bangladeshis are Muslim (Bangladesh: 170m people, 90% Muslim, 1m Christians). Can ecumenism be redefined to encompass all people?

### 4: To what extent is Christian Aid 'doing church work'?

a) Talk about a time when someone helped you. Talk about what they did and how they treated you. Ask any students to share experiences of being helped. How far does the class appreciate kindness and sympathy, or how far do they appreciate the practical actions, items or money they receive? Would they prefer someone be rude and unfriendly but helps them all the same, or loving and sympathetic but not able to help them?

b) Ask one half of the class to read 1 Corinthians 13, a famous passage from Paul about the need for love to guide all actions, and the other half to read Matthew 25:31-46, another famous passage where Jesus explains that he expects his followers to take action on behalf of the vulnerable. Return to your initial discussion about emotional commitment versus practical support. Ask each half to present the main gist of their passage and summarise the teaching into a slogan, as if for a badge. Give out badges for them to make and wear when they present. As a class, decide whether the idea in Paul or Matthew is the most important factor in being a good person. Are they at odds?

c) Share the information you have found on Christian Aid and ask groups to make a second pie-chart, entitled 'what is Christian Aid for?', showing what they think should be the most important aspects of Christian Aid's work. Suggest they use the same categories of community, building, God and action.

d) Ask the same groups to summarise one of the case studies from the Information Sheet: Christian Aid as church on pages 8 and 9, and ask them to present back to the class. Finish by showing them Theodor's story, which is online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HmU-OIL5h4>, and discuss how volunteering for Christian Aid in the UK is linked to doing Christian Aid project work overseas. How can both be seen as forms of church?

e) 'Christian Aid is a global church'. Discuss. Use the table on page 11 to complete an exam-style question in groups, drawing on the Bible passages and the Christian Aid case studies explored in this lesson. Bible passages affirm the importance of love (1 Corinthians 13), the importance of action (Matthew 25), and the passages on page 9 extend the relevance of Christian teaching to the whole planet. Students should add these passages as explanations to their view, as well as Christian Aid case studies, and offer their own justified conclusion.

## Supporting the Christianity paper

This page summarises the ways in which this lesson contributes to meeting the requirements of the GCSE Christianity papers.

### In the specifications

#### AQA

- The role of the church in the local and worldwide community
- The role of the church in the local community, including food banks and street pastors
- The place of mission, evangelism and church growth
- The importance of the worldwide Church including:
  - working for reconciliation
  - how Christian churches respond to persecution
  - the work of one of the following: Catholic Agency For Overseas Development (CAFOD), Christian Aid, Tearfund.

#### Edexcel

The role and importance of the church in the worldwide community: how and why it works for reconciliation and the problems faced by the persecuted church; divergent Christian responses to teachings about charity, including 1 Corinthians 13 and Matthew 25:31–46; the work of Christian Aid, what it does and why.

#### Eduqas

Practices: worldwide church

- The importance of mission, evangelism and church growth
- The work of Tearfund: Christian beliefs in action
- Persecution of Christians past and present

Working for reconciliation: the World Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Movement  
Grace and the Spirit: Acts 2:1-6. The role of Holy Spirit in Evangelical worship.

#### OCR

Practices: The role of the church in the wider world

- The meaning of the term ecumenical
- The meaning of the word church (spiritual and temporal) and of churches as individual communities
- The purpose of the World Council of Churches, including reconciliation through ecumenism
- The work of ecumenical communities, for example: Taizé, Iona, Corrymeela and the Churches Together movement
- The way in which the church is being persecuted in the 21st century
- Supporting the persecuted church
- The purpose of one of the following agencies: Christian Aid, Tearfund, CAFOD
- Different interpretations and emphases given to sources of wisdom and authority.

### Glossary

**Reconciliation** means restoring a friendly relationship after disagreement or conflict.

**Ecumenism** is the principle of promoting unity among the world's Christian churches.

**Pilgrimage** means a journey of moral or spiritual significance.

The **Hajj** is a journey that Muslims make to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. It is a journey that every Muslim is expected to undertake once in their lifetime, provided that they are healthy enough to travel and can afford the trip.

**Solidarity** means mutual support. To 'stand in solidarity' with someone means to agree with their principles or to support their actions or struggle.

**Gender Based Violence** means violence against women.

**Indigenous** means originating from a particular place. For example, the indigenous people of North America are North American Indians.

**Pastoral ministry** refers to the duties of a church leader to her or his congregation.

**Disseminate** means to spread something, usually information.

## Information Sheet: Church – what's that?

### Origins:

- The earliest Jewish (Hebrew) synagogue and dates from the 3rd century BCE and is in Egypt, from more than 2,300 years ago.
- A 'synagogue' is a meeting place. The word is derived from the Greek word 'synagoge', meaning assembly. In Hebrew it is called Beit Knesset: 'house of assembly'. Some Jews also refer to synagogue as 'shul', meaning 'school' in German, as within a synagogue there is usually a study hall, or Beit Midrash, 'house of study'.
- In ancient Judaism the focus of worship was the Temple in Jerusalem. The synagogue was for prayer, gathering and learning in local towns and villages. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, synagogues did not take on the worship role of the Temple.
- The earliest Christians got together in houses (Acts 17:5, Acts 20:20, 1 Corinthians 16:19) or synagogues (Acts 2:46, Acts 19:8). Is 'church' an idea that Christians took from the Jewish faith?
- The earliest identified Christian church is a house church in Syria dated between 233 and 256 CE.
- The meaning of 'church' in the New Testament is a group of people drawn together because of their commitment to follow Jesus, rather than a building or institution.
- The early church groups met to pray, learn, discuss their faith, practice mutual support and remember Jesus' sacrifice through communion (bread and wine) (Acts 2:42).

### In the UK today:

- Thousands of churches run food banks in the UK for those who cannot afford food.
- Christian Aid, the charity founded in the late 1940s by more than 40 British denominations, unites churches to fight global poverty, campaign against injustice and make sure marginalised people worldwide can have a safe place to call home.
- Many churches train 'street pastors', who are available in urban areas at night between 10pm and 4am to talk to and support those out enjoying themselves. They give away free flip flops to people who have broken their high heels and help anyone who is drunk to find a taxi!
- Many churches run support sessions for their communities, ranging from addiction support to help for jobseekers and debt counselling for people who are struggling to pay back money they owe.
- Some churches convert part of their buildings into homeless shelters.
- Church activities for diverse groups are popular, such as 'Messy Church' services for young children, small groups or 'cell' groups at the houses of congregation members, or marriage courses for engaged couples.
- In urban areas, church congregations are sharing older church buildings with other denominations or are opening in non-traditional places, such as industrial estates.
- The Alpha Course and Christianity Explored are two popular evening courses, which introduce non-Christians and new Christians to the faith through discussion of big life questions.
- People enter the church through baptism, whether they have been born into a Christian family or not.
- The church is seen as God's people in the world (1 Peter 2: 9-10), with a responsibility to worship God and take the message of Jesus to all non-Christians.

## Information sheet: Christian Aid as church

### Reverend Elineide Ferreira Oliveira, Brazil

Reverend Elineide runs Noeli dos Santos, a safe house for women who have survived or who are at risk of Gender Based Violence. This is vital in Brazilian society, which is traditionally male-dominated, with high rates of violence against women. Elineide is motivated by her sister Elione's story: Elione was abused and hospitalised by her husband, and her life was at risk. Up to 10 women and their children can stay at the safe house, and the staff also rescue women in urgent need.

The safe house was set up by the Anglican church, one of Christian Aid's partners, and Elineide is motivated by her faith. However, she says she forgets she is a reverend once she is in the house 'to guarantee there is enough space for dialogue and so the house is not labelled as something by Anglicans and for Anglicans – our priesthood is most expressed when we are open to everyone.'

Elineide recognises that Gender Based Violence is a problem throughout Brazilian society. 'We recognize it is present even in church communities because we are not perfect and the dialogue we want to engage in is for everyone, not just a group, coming from the premise that we were all, men and women, from all faiths or no faith, born to be happy.'



'...what we want to engage in is for everyone, not just one group, coming from the premise that we were all – men and women, from all faiths or no faith – born to be happy.'

Reverend Elineide Ferreira Oliveira

### Reverend Samuel Naikumi, Kenya

Reverend Samuel leads the Anglican Development Service in Narok County, one of Christian Aid's partners and part of the Anglican church in Kenya. Whether helping mothers to get the medical care they need to deliver babies safely, preventing HIV and malaria transmission or empowering women to earn their own money, Reverend Samuel and his staff are transforming lives. They are also campaigning for an end to female genital cutting, speaking out against traditional norms.

For him, all the development work he does is powered by his Christian faith. His organisation's mission is to 'sustain and bring life, in the places where life happens', inspired by Jesus' words in John 10:10. Reverend Samuel believes that development work is more important than bringing people to faith: 'Church and community are inseparable, and social action needs to come before pastoral ministry. When I'm doing social action, I'm still preaching the Good News. But what you plant can be used 20 years later to support pastoral ministry.'

**Father Alberto Franco, Colombia**

Father Alberto is a Catholic missionary priest working with victims of armed conflict in Colombia. He is a leading member of Christian Aid partner, the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace, and works to defend marginalised communities of Afro-Colombian, indigenous and farming people.

His organisation sets up and protects safe zones for communities who have been forced to leave their homes due to fighting, often because companies or corrupt government groups want their land. He's received death threats for his work to protect the vulnerable, but he still continues.

When asked what motivated him still, he says:

'Firstly because we are talking about people like us, people who are poor and marginalised who decided to risk their lives for dignity and justice. When I look towards the word of God, my faith asks me to follow justice, solidarity, to provide support, to be with them. By not acting I would be betraying these ideas. And another reason is that there is the universal family of solidarity, in many parts of the world there are people who are doing the same.'



**'When I look towards the word of God, my faith asks me to follow justice, solidarity, to provide support, to be with them.'**

Father Alberto Franco

**Bible passages: Is church teaching for the whole planet or just Christians?**

'And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.' (Matthew 24:14)

'Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' (Ephesians 4:3)

'Then Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20)

## Places of Christian pilgrimage

**Iona Community**

**Location:** Isle of Iona, Inner Hebrides, Scotland

**Founded in:** 1938

**Main aim:** a Christian community connecting work with church teaching.

Members of many Christian denominations come to live and work in the Iona community, but many more live around the world, upholding its ideals. The key focus is communal living, including communal work, meditation and worship. The community runs a publishing house to disseminate its principles for life.

**Corrymeela**

**Location:** Ballycastle, County Antrim, Northern Ireland

**Founded in:** 1965

**Main aim:** a Christian community devoted to reconciliation.

Corrymeela is a Christian community in Northern Ireland, founded by a pacifist priest horrified by the brutality he witnessed in the Second World War. Corrymeela offers a place for all people, Christian or otherwise, to discuss their differences, talk and listen. The centre mostly supports groups in Ireland and Northern Ireland to resolve conflict but is open to all groups experiencing conflict.

Video on their website:  
[corrymeela.org/about](http://corrymeela.org/about)

**Taizé Community**

**Location:** near the village of Taizé in Burgundy, France

**Founded in:** 1940

**Main aim:** a house of prayer.

Taizé is a French monastic community, made up of around 100 brothers, encompassing both Catholic and Protestant monks from around the world. The monastery welcomes around 100,000 pilgrims every year, most of them young people. The monastery has a particular focus on the young. Pilgrims can make use of a space to talk and ask questions. They can experience a simple life which allows time for prayer and reflection, as well as communal work and the practice of kindness. Worship draws on Christian traditions from around the world.

**'Christian Aid is a global church.' Discuss.**

**Christian Aid's work: examples focused on community, building, God and/or action:**

**Argument that supports the statement that 'Christian Aid is a global church':**

**Argument that rejects this statement:**

**Based on biblical passages:**

**My conclusion:**