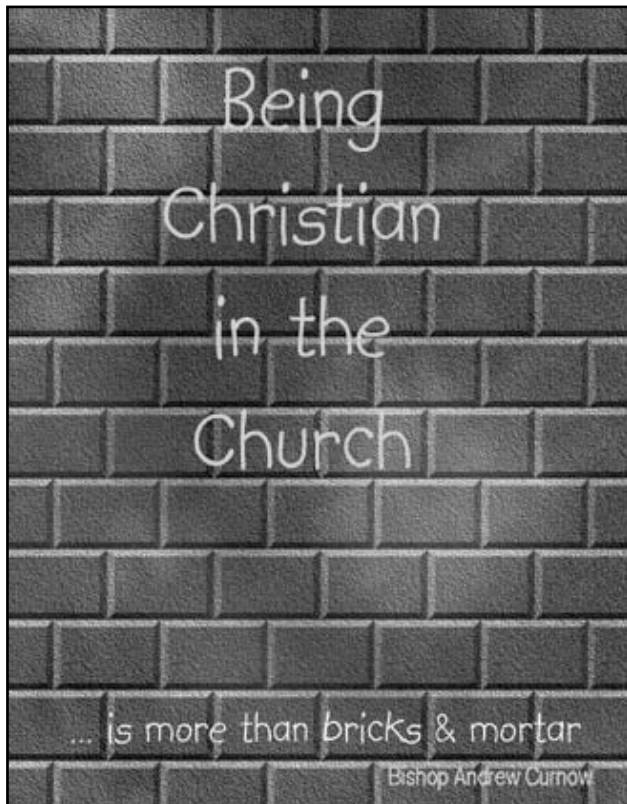


Being Christian in the Church



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Home Group Contract

For the next five weeks, we agree to the following commitment as a group.

- [] **ATTENDANCE:** To give priority to group meetings.
- [] **PARTICIPATION:** To make every effort to participate fully within the group.
- [] **CONFIDENTIALITY:** To keep confidential everything that is shared.
- [] **ACCOUNTABILITY:** To accept the challenge to reach the goals we have set ourselves.
- [] **ACCESSIBILITY:** To give one another the right to call at any time for spiritual help in time of need - even in the middle of the night.
- [] **EVANGELISM:** To make an effort to each encourage one person to join this group.

SPECIFICS

We will meet on(Day of week)
We will meet at(Home/Place)
The meeting will begin at..... and close at
We agree to all have left by to not over stay our welcome.

GROUND RULES

- [] Refreshments
- [] Baby Sitting
- [] Newcomers.....
- [] Absence.....

I WILL TRY WITH GOD'S HELP TO BE A REGULAR, FAITHFUL, CARING MEMBER OF THIS GROUP.

NAMES OF GROUP MEMBERS	PHONE
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

REMEMBER:

NEW PEOPLE CAN JOIN THE GROUP AT ANY TIME.

A group that cares

One of the special ways group members value each other is when special events are recognised.

One way to show the members of the group you care for them is to take a little time at the first meeting to note each other's special days.

This could take the form of an icebreaker and if this was the case then you could include some fun things. Eg: Your first kiss, graduation, first car, first date etc.

More general would be birthdays (You don't need the year although the inquisitive will try) and wedding anniversary.

If any of these events happen during the time the group meets, why not have a special cake to commemorate this?

It is also a good idea for someone to be appointed as the 'pastoral co-ordinator' to see that these events are not forgotten. It is this care that makes a small group, like the one you are in, special and valued.

Group member's name	Special events and dates

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES

“Being Christian in the Church”

Introduction

As I write this series of studies, the Church in Australia is going through a difficult and demanding time owing to the way the churches have handled or mishandled cases of sex abuse. The same is happening in other countries in the world. Recent revelations in several dioceses in the Anglican Church of Australia about the way sexual abuse matters were handled have brought a storm of criticism from the media, the community and political leaders. It has led the Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, The Most Rev'd Peter Carnley, to declare that:



"the standing and integrity of the Church in this nation has been set back fifty years."

While many parishes, congregations and members of churches may feel not directly involved, all feel in some ways affected and know that the Church's image in the community has been tarnished. Many people feel let down by the leadership of the Church and angry about the way their own commitment has been compromised. In this context, it is all the more important that those of us who are committed to the church, its mission and ministry have some clear understanding of what we believe the Church to be.

This study is the final in a trilogy of studies. The first, Being a Christian in the 21st Century was followed by Being a Christian in the Secular World, and now, Being a Christian in the Church. In this study we explore our understanding of the Church. The title may sound provocative, and it is, because I believe we are at a point in history where the Church needs some critical rethinking and re-establishing of its role.

Australia by law is a secular nation. This is not to say we are a non-religious society, but certainly a society where denominationalism and religion have no formal role. We have never been like the Church of England, which is an established Church, and where there are clear linkages between Church and State. Our religious history is unlike that of the USA, where Church life has always enjoyed a high level of support. This has meant that the churches in Australia have had to work very hard, not only to develop their own mission and ministry, but to have an influence on our culture and society.

At the present time most churches in Australia are experiencing decline. There are exceptions, but the overall drift is towards a declining church membership and an increasing marginalisation of the Church in Australian society. The Archbishop of Sydney, the Most Rev'd Peter Jensen has summed up the situation by saying:

"This is a major intellectual and spiritual crisis for the churches, since if we continue thus the faith itself will disappear. Then we will have no contribution to make to the Australian society that is our own." Melb Age 17.05.02

The situation may seem somewhat bleak. The Archbishop of Sydney uses the word crisis, and this means all of us in the churches must address the situation. I hope this study booklet provides some encouragement and affirmation. We also need to remember that we are God's Church and constantly seek the way God will lead us. In our present circumstances it is all too easy to become obsessed by the church as an institution. In one way it obviously is but in another way we need to look beyond the physical organisation.

The five studies in this book are:

- The Body of Christ
- Worship
- Healthy Churches
- Partnership
- The Future Church

Scripture or Bible Readings

For the Bible readings you might like to use a contemporary version of the Bible. I would recommend either of the following:

- The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
- The Message: a translation of the New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs by Eugene H Peterson.

Have someone in your Study Group read the passage aloud during each study. If you have a copy of the Peterson translation, read it and another version to hear the differences..

*"For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many, are one body,
So it is with Christ
Now you are the body of Christ and individually
members of it"* (1 Cor 12 V 12 & 27)

The Church's origins go back to a period not long after the earthly time of Christ. In the nearly two thousand years that have passed, the Church has gone through many evolutions and one major Reformation. The Church today in its various denominational expressions believes it is the Body of Christ, but we also know it is the product of history and a human organisation. At all times, the Church must critically examine itself and ask if it is genuinely responding to the call of Christ to be his body. Is the Church being faithful to its calling?

American theologian, Avery Dulles, believes there is a need for a dramatic re-examination of structure, dogma, position, and indeed everything pertaining to the life of the Church and her members. In his book, **Models of the Church**, he has sifted out five major models through which the Church's character can be understood. These are Institution, Mystical, Communion, Sacrament, Herald and Servant.

Let us examine each model briefly:

Institution:

Three terms characterise this model: Clericalism, Juridicism and Triumphalism. Clericalism means emphasising the hierarchical nature of this model and sees all power descending through the bishops and clergy to the faithful. Juridicism indicates that the life of the Church in terms of governance follows a pattern of jurisdiction similar to that of the secular state, with a complex set of laws and legislation in place commonly called canon law. Triumphalism refers to the Church's relationship with the world where it sees itself as a holy force marshalled against the powers of evil. The institutional Church's approach to mission is to save souls from a sinful world by bringing them into the Institution, which has all the answers for faith and life.

Mystical Communion

The basis for this model is the Church as community and it is exemplified by the two biblical images of Body of Christ and People of God. The Church in this model is not in the first instance an institution or visibly organised structure, but it is rather a community of people brought together by the bonds of relationships, prayer, worship and belief. The Church is seen as a network of friendly fellowships where people are fellow travellers on a spiritual journey. There is emphasis on the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and each community striving to build a better and more Christlike community. There is a strong commitment to the healing of and enrichment of relationships bound by a common commitment to Christ and the gospel.

Sacrament

In this model the Church is seen as a sacrament for Christ. She makes him present. The Church is to carry out the work of Christ, and to confirm that his presence is far more real than that which is normally possible for any human institution. The Church has both an outer and an inner aspect. Outwardly the Church may appear institutional and structural, but inwardly it contains the expressions of faith, hope and love through which the grace of Christ is mediated. The ritual and worship of the Church must convey grace so that lives of church members are transformed in hope, in joy, in selfless love, peace and many other Christian virtues. The Church is the place where reconciliation to God and to one another takes place and this occurs most fully in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Herald

This model is radically focused upon Jesus Christ, and on the Bible as the primary witness to him. It sees the task of the Church as fundamentally being one of proclamation. The Church is a herald, in that its task is to "pass the message on". The form of the Church in this model is characteristically the local congregation and it is not dependent for its authority on being part of a worldwide structure. The Word of God, faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, and evangelism are the primary platforms for churches in this tradition.

Servant

With this model, the Church must be the Body of Christ, the suffering servant, and hence the servant Church. The Church announces the Kingdom of God not only in word, but also in action, in her ministry of reconciliation, of justice, healing and service. The servant Church's mission is not just to gain new recruits, but rather to be of help to people wherever and whoever they are. The special calling of the Church is to keep alive the hope and aspiration of people for the Kingdom of God and its values. The Church is furthermore called to discern the signs of the times and to offer guidance and prophetic justice and mutuality and is an advocate for God's Kingdom on Earth.

After having read these five models, your reaction might be to add to them, pick various parts from the models to describe your own church or feel the need to examine them more closely. All models have limitations, but they can act as a catalyst to our own thinking and reflection. Today, those of us in the Church must take responsibility for its life, conscious that we do so under God. It is vitally important that in our local churches and congregations and at the denominational level we critically evaluate what sort of Church we are called and seek to be.

The models outlined have emerged from the Church's evolution over nearly two thousand years, and give us a basis on which to look at our churches, their ministry, mission, and relation to the world and community in which they exist. Today and for the future, the Church needs a fresh understanding of mission, a new vitality, and a renewed confidence in itself as the Body of Christ.

Sharing with others

Focus: Models of the Church

**HEY
EVERYONE!**

Welcome and introductions

As this may be the first time you have come together as a group, each of you is encouraged to introduce yourself to the group. Tell something about who you are or alternatively, say why you have decided to join this study group.

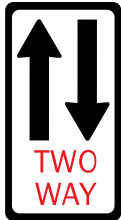


Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Christ, whose insistent call disturbs our settled lives: give us discernment to hear your word, grace to relinquish our tasks, and courage to follow empty-handed wherever you may lead, so that the voice of your gospel may reach to the ends of the earth. Amen.

Getting started (15 minutes)

- Spend time looking at this Study Guide and discuss pages 2 & 3. Then each using your own study book, fill the pages out together. These study sessions are designed to be enjoyable and challenging.
- Share with the group how you feel about the church at this time.
- If you have any comments on the introduction to this study on pages 6 & 7, share them with the group and discuss.



Read the Scripture passage (5 minutes)

Ephesians 4 : 1 – 6 (7-16)

In this reading the writer of Ephesians emphasises:



- The Church must measure up to the standard God has set it.
- Unity is central to the life of the Church no matter how diverse its various expressions may be.
- Christ is the head of the Church.



Open up your potential

Questions for reflection (40 minutes)

1. In which direction do you see the church or congregation to which you belong at the present time heading?
2. Which of the models outlined best describes the church or congregation to which you belong?
3. If you could pick a model that you would like your church or congregation to emulate, which one would it be?
4. In what ways could you personally help your church or congregation to reflect on its mission and ministry?
5. Why do you think the Church is experiencing difficulties at this time?
6. How would you describe the leadership of your denomination using the five models?

Consider this ...

It was Archbishop William Temple who formulated the idea that the church is the only society in the world which exists for the sake of those who are not members of it. The classical expression of this perception of the church was the phrase :

"the church for others".

Its architect was Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a German pastor and theologian who opposed Hitler) who wrote the following sentences from a Nazi prison in 1944: "The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and sewing."

David Bosch.



Discussion highlights

Appoint a scribe to jot down (after the discussion), two things that you would like to be included in a report either to the parish or to a joint meeting of a number of study groups that may be meeting in your congregation/parish.

Alternatively, you may like to do this individually and share your points by meeting for a sixth session.

Closing prayer (5 minutes)



The Group may like to use this prayer or members may add their own prayers.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
Who said to your apostles,
Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you:
Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your church
And grant us the peace and unity of your Kingdom,
Where you live and reign, now and forever.
Amen.*



Hospitality

Relax and enjoy each others company over a cuppa!



1. For supper, ask group members to volunteer to:
 - Bring a selection of herbal teas to share. This maybe a new experience but see it as a symbol of the church trying new things
 - Bring a cake or slice to share with the group.
2. Read the preparation material for Study 2 on pages 12 & 13.
3. Think about your experience of worship. What is it that really works for you?



Web Version of 'Going Further'

<http://www.grassroots.com.au/Studybooks/Test2.htm>

Material includes:

1. Additional background on each of the 5 week studies.
2. Stories and illustrations
3. Pewsheet or Newsletter material
4. A going further section for those wishing to go a little deeper regarding the weekly themes.

There is no cost for this additional material provided that you have purchased at least 10 copies of this book. The password would have been supplied to you with your order.

If you have mislaid this, please Email for a new password giving details of your order and the address it was sent to.

For the parish or individuals seeking additional background or to dig a little deeper into this study series, this weekly resource is now available to you.