

The Christian Community in Scouting

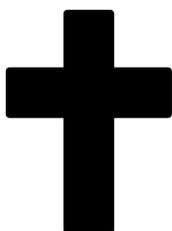


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Christianity is the largest religion in the United Kingdom and has played a major part in the development of the society in which Scouting takes place.

Christianity is the largest religion worldwide, with 2.1 billion members. It is a very diverse religion, and there are many different interpretations of what it means to be Christian. This has led to the formation of several major denominations and many smaller denominations being formed. These include Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and Orthodox. These denominations all believe in the same basic beliefs but they vary in other beliefs, in the way they worship, in their church structure and in other ways. This factsheet will explore some of the main elements of the Christian faith and try to show some of the diversity of the Christian faith but will be unable to cover everything.



Christianity

Christians believe in a Trinitarian God, that is one Supreme Being, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- God the Father being the presence of God who stayed in heaven,
- God the Son, Jesus Christ, who lived on earth for 33 years

- God the Holy Spirit the spiritual presence of God who remains on earth today.

They believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah or Saviour of the world, foretold in the books of the Old Testament. Jesus' followers wrote the books of the New Testament that give information on his life, teaching, and what it means to follow him. Christians therefore look to both the Old and New Testament for their theology and teaching.

Jesus Christ

Christians are called Christians because they are followers of Jesus Christ, the central figure of their faith. Christians believe Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, and the only person who has been both fully God and fully man. He was sent to earth to save mankind from death and sin.

Jesus was born of a woman, Mary, who conceived him through the Holy Spirit. For this reason, many Christian denominations hold Mary in very high regard.

Jesus' life and teaching are written in the Gospels of the New Testament, his example provides Christians with guidance on how they should live. For three years in the Roman province of Judea, Jesus had a ministry of healing, teaching and performing of miracles. During this time he formed around him a group of followers and within this wider group a smaller core of twelve disciples. His teachings can be summarised as to love of God and to love your neighbour.

Many of Jesus' teachings upset the Jewish authorities of the time and he was crucified. Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, was seen by witnesses, and then ascended to heaven. For Christians Jesus' death

was seen as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and forms a central part of their faith. They believe that his resurrection is a promise that they too will rise from the dead.

The twelve disciples were inspired by the Holy Spirit and started to spread Jesus' teachings. Jesus and his followers were Jewish, but Christianity soon began to develop as a separate religion.

The Holy Book – The Bible

Christians believe that the Bible is the direct revelation of God, written by men directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. It contains a record of God's actions in history, God's commands on how Christians should live their life, and the life of Jesus. The Bible consists of two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains the story of the people of Israel before the time of Jesus. The New Testament contains the story of Jesus and the development of the early church. Each Testament consists of a series of books that contain stories, songs, poetry, letters, history, and religious writing.

There have always been differences in the interpretation of the Bible by Christians. Some believe that the words of the Bible are true in the literal sense, whilst others consider the Bible to be essentially symbolic with profound spiritual insights.

Worship and Prayer

Christian worship involves praising God through music and speech, using readings from scripture, prayers, sermons and ceremonies (sometimes called sacraments).

Traditionally the main day of worship for Christians is Sunday: the first day of creation and the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. This is the day when Christians gather together for the main act of worship.

Worship will usually be at a designated church building, but can be at any venue. In the UK,

church buildings are often the oldest buildings in a community, but they can also be more modern.

There are differences in the style and emphasis of the main act of worship between different denominations:

- For some denominations the main act of worship will be a service of Holy Communion, which re-enacts the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples.
- At some churches the central act of worship will be bible readings and the interpretation of them. There are some denominations and congregations within the Christian church who have experimented in new ways of worshipping that use different venues to churches, along with high tech lighting and music.
- Other smaller acts of worship, social activities, and teaching times will be held during the week, either at the church building or in peoples homes.

The Sacraments

Most Christian denominations believe in sacraments. These can be described as the most holy or special things that the church can offer to believers. Not all churches have the same number of sacraments, and some give different value and importance to them. In all the sacraments the presence of the Holy Spirit and his working is of key importance. There are seven sacraments that are recognised to a different degree by many denominations.

• Baptism

Baptism is the most widely accepted means of entry into the Christian faith. This may happen as a baby or as an adult. The service is full of symbolism and contains the pouring out or immersion into water.

Key symbols within this service is darkness and light, unclean and clean, old life and new life. The parents of a baby who is to be baptised will choose Godparents who act as advisers for the baby as they grow up within the church. The

parents and Godparents speak for the baby at the service and commit the baby to the Christian church.

In some Christian denominations Baptism is considered to be such an important sacrament that it is only offered to adults who can express their faith for themselves.

- Holy Communion

Holy Communion is the service where bread and wine are consecrated and shared by the Congregation. This sacrament re-enacts the last meal, the Last Supper, that Jesus shared with his disciples. Some Christians see this is a simple re-enactment of the Last Supper, whereas for others the bread and wine symbolically represent the body and blood of Christ, and others believe that the bread and wine become the real body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The beliefs surrounding Holy Communion will vary between denominations and even within them. The Holy Communion itself can be referred to by several titles these include mass, Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy and the Lords supper

- Confirmation

This is a service in which a baptised child or adult confirms their faith in Christ. It is also a sign of full membership of the Christian community. Through confirmation, a Christian believes that they are receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Eastern churches, infants are confirmed after baptism, most Western denominations wait until participants are old enough to understand what they are undertaking. There are variations in the way the service is being carried out between denominations. Confirmation candidates attend classes to help them have a better understanding of how to live as a follower of Christ.

- Ordination

In some Christian denominations the leaders of the church are officially recognised and

commissioned either by ordination or a similar method, which is considered a sacrament. Performing this leadership role is often known as ministry, and seen as the continuation of the work of Jesus Christ. Ministry can take many different forms, both within and between denominations. There are also variations in who is able perform different types of ministry. In some denominations, only someone who has been ordained can usually administer the sacraments.

- Marriage

Christians believe that marriage is a gift from God, that shouldn't be taken lightly. They consider marriage to be a lifelong commitment, and important for the love of the couple themselves and the procreation and upbringing of children. Getting married in a church in front of God is very important, and some denominations see marriage as a sacrament. During the service of marriage the couple will make vows to each other with family, friends and God as their witnesses.

- Reconciliation

Christians believe that only God is perfect. As imperfect beings we often do things of which we are ashamed and that go against the teachings of Jesus. There are many forms of formal confession or saying sorry to God for these faults or sins. God's forgiveness comes through the absolution that normally comes from a Christian minister. This symbolises the forgiveness that comes from God.

- Healing

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ performed many miracles, including those of healing. Some Christians believe that this healing continues through the power of the Holy Spirit, and can be performed as a sacrament.

Holy Days and festivals

The two major celebrations for the Christian church are Christmas and Easter. Christmas is on the same day every year and Easter moves around. The actual date for Christmas and Easter can be different between different denominations of Christianity. Some other festivals are based on the date of Easter, so their dates will move around as well.

The Christian church year is divided into seasons. The year begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas with Advent. The major seasons are often indicated by the use of colour and the wording of services. Denominations will vary in their recognition of other seasonal times and celebrations. The church year is as follows:

- **Advent.** A time of preparation before Christmas. Seasonal colour of purple. Symbolism of darkness and light.
- **Christmas Day, Epiphany and Christmastide.** The celebration of the birth of Christ. Seasonal colour white.
- **Lent.** The 40 days leading up to Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday. It is a time of penitence and can include ritual fasting. Seasonal colour purple.
- **Easter, Eastertide, Pentecost (Whitsun)** The most important Christian festival, it is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. Seasonal colour white.

Christians may also celebrate Saints days. Saints are men and women whom the church believes to have led particularly holy lives and have shown a good example of Christian living. Several Saints days are associated with particular customs and celebrations. Some Christians may celebrate the name day of the saint that shares their name.

Some churches do not recognise special holidays, and may also discourage the celebration of Easter and Christmas.

Behaviour and Values

The behaviour and values of Christians are based on the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament and the teachings and behaviour of Jesus Christ. The teachings of Jesus are based on the love of God and for your fellow human beings.

The Christian church believes that all humans are faced with choices in life and one of the biggest is whether to follow the path of good or evil. The force of good in the world is God and the force of evil is traditionally referred to as the Devil.

Family and Community

Christianity differs from some of the other religions in the fact that not all members of a family may be Christians. Christians are encouraged to take their beliefs and live them out within their lives. Christian families may spend time together in prayer during the week and give thanks before each meal.

Christian Scouts

From the very early days, the Christian faith has warmly embraced the values and ethos of Scouting. Many of the first Scout Leaders in the United Kingdom were members of the clergy and respected members of the Christian church.

As there has been a long history of close links between Christianity and Scouting in the UK, many Scouts are Christian, and our practises and values are often closely linked.

Some Christian Scouts will be required to attend an act of Christian worship on a Sunday morning (or another day depending on their particular denomination). This may prevent them from taking part in Scout activities on that day. During camps, most Scout campsites will be able to offer a contact with local churches in the area. The campsite may also have a Christian minister as a site chaplain who may be available to offer worship on the campsite.

Some Christian young people will attend confirmation classes as part of becoming a full member of their church. This will happen at different ages depending upon the individual and their denomination. This might put extra pressure on their free time outside of school, or clash with their weekly Scout meetings, so Leaders may need to be understanding of their commitments, as well as supportive of this important time in a young Christian's life.

The majority of Christians are not restricted by diet, though some will abstain from alcohol.

Because of the variety of Christian beliefs, it is important not to make assumptions about what a Christian Scout believes, how they celebrate their faith, and how being a Christian will impact on them being a Scout. If you are unsure whether something is acceptable, ask the individual, and their parents if appropriate.

Further information

Further information on the Christian faith can be found at:

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/