



Introduction to the series

Many schools are increasingly interested in exploring Christianity as a world faith in their religious education and collective worship. In [Where in the World?](#) (BRF, 2018), we sketched out some of the many ways Christians around the world express and live out their faith. The study of church buildings provides another useful window into understanding this multicultural and international phenomenon followed by roughly one-third of people on the planet.

Church buildings reflect a country's history, its human geography and the beliefs and traditions of that branch of the Christian world that uses them. Across the world, many churches of a similar tradition ('denomination') will show international similarities in design and usage, while others reflect their local cultures and communities. Each has a story to tell that reflects something of the Jesus story that has affected billions of people through the centuries.

Each of the churches in this series supplements others that can be found in [Churches from around the World](#) (BRF, 2019).

As with the collection of [crosses from around the world](#), the overall aim remains the same:

- to enable children and adults to see churches through the eyes of other cultures and traditions;
- to prompt discussion and debate on why they continue to be significant places for so many communities;
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived out their faith together using buildings like this.

Preparation

You will need images of the Nykirken 'Children's Cathedral' from Bergen, Norway, from a range of sources including [here](#), as well as pictures from international Messy Churches.

Note: you could choose to make the extension Bible story (see below) your lesson introduction.

Lesson introduction: Jesus blesses little children

Share this story:

Some people brought their children to Jesus so that he could bless them by placing his hands on them. But his disciples told the people to stop bothering him. When Jesus saw this, he became angry and said, 'Let the children come to me! Don't try to stop them. People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God. I promise you that you cannot get into God's kingdom, unless you accept it the way a child does.' Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them.



Mark 10:13-16

For discussion:

List some possible reasons why some parents might be wanting to bring their children to Jesus, and also why Jesus' disciples might be wanting to keep children and their families away from Jesus.

After discussion, ask 'Are children more trusting than adults? Why? What could a child have to teach an adult about trusting God?'

Key question:

What might Christians think this story has to say about how churches welcome children?

Development: child friendly?

What does the word 'church' mean for you? (*Discuss, then feed back ideas.*)

The word can mean two very different things. For many, it's the building where Christians gather for worship. But it's also 'a group of Christians who worship together'. In fact, Christians say they are actually all part of one big church, made up of billions of people around the world.

If a church says it welcomes children, then what do you think a child-friendly church would be like? What would you expect to see happening? (*Discuss, then get feedback, listing and displaying possible features. Does any of the class have any personal experiences of a 'child-friendly church' they want to share?*)

Around the world, Christians will have different answers to those questions

Children's cathedral, Bergen, Norway

[Nykirken \(photo 1\)](#) [Nykirken \(photo 2\)](#) [Nykirken \(photo 3\)](#)

In Bergen, Norway, there is a children's cathedral called Nykirken (New Church).

It's quite an old building. For christenings, they lower an angel down from the ceiling to hold the water in a bowl during the ceremony! Local children were invited to decorate the building inside.

Do you think that could make it a good church for children? Why? Why not?

St Aidan's church, Morpeth, UK

[St Aidan's \(photo\)](#)

This church in the north of England runs holiday clubs for 20-30 children over a few mornings each



week, during the school holidays and half-term holidays. A team of volunteers uses drama, songs, dancing and Bible stories to explore what being a Christian might mean.

Do you think that could make it a good church for children? Why? Why not?

Salvation Army church, Maassluis, the Netherlands

[Salvation Army, Maassluis](#)

This Salvation Army Church is in the Netherlands. In this picture, they were holding a Messy Church for 45 people, including eight children, on the theme of *justice*, using the Bible story of Jesus meeting Zacchaeus. Messy Church is a monthly all-age gathering that includes arts and crafts, worship time and a hot meal to draw people together.

Do you think that could make it a good church for children? Why? Why not?

Discuss

Which of these examples is the most child-friendly church for you, and why? In pairs, decide which could be the three most important features of a church that valued children and their families. Then sort the three example churches in order, placing the 'best' one first, in your own opinion, and explain your choice. Try not to be swayed by details in the photos; use what's described to help make your judgments.

Extension tasks for further development

1. 1 Bible story of Jesus and the children

Using stick figures, quickly draw the scene to show the parents, disciples and Jesus. In two speech bubbles, show what the parents and disciples might be saying. In a thought cloud, show what a child who is there might be thinking, when they hear what Jesus says.

1. 2 Children and church

Do you think people have to be adults to be part of a church, or can it be for children too?
(*Discuss; feed back answers.*)

Christians have different answers for this. Some say that to be a full part of the church, someone has to be adult enough to decide to be part of it. That's why some churches (e.g. Baptists) only baptise young people and adults into membership, but not children. Others say that children can be part of it if their parents or carers promise to raise them in that faith, so their children are baptised (or 'christened') at a very young age. (*Ask the class if any of them have been baptised or christened?*)

Children who are baptised as infants can declare membership for themselves when they are older, at



confirmation or first communion.

Research local experiences of christenings, baptisms, confirmation or first communion. You could also show [this video](#) of a first communion produced by a Spanish-American Catholic Church in the Philippines, and together list all the observed features of the service that do and don't make it (in your opinion) a child-friendly church.

Plenary

Sum up different ideas from the class about what a child-friendly church might be.

Background information for teachers

A church's 'theology' of children and childhood will affect how well or not they make the effort to include them in the life of the church community. For many Christians, putting Jesus' words about children into practice raises practical questions about whether the spiritual needs of a local church community can be best met by running activities for different age groups, or by encouraging everyone to learn and worship together. The [Messy Church](#) approach is one significant answer to this question that began in the UK, and has since been adopted by many churches around the world.

This lesson could be the useful starting point for a Q&A session with local Christian clergy (or leaders of other local faith communities) about what provision their places of worship make for children.