

**The Church** (for use with Catechism questions 30-33, The Church & 58-63, The Anglican Church)

### **Acts 2:42-47**

v43, *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* The initial gatherings of the church described here and in Acts 4 sound amazing.

**What do you think the fellowship was like for them?**

It must have been a special time of encouragement and growth. Remember though the church was not static, it was about to face changing pressures from society that would force it to develop and spread in new and interesting ways.

Read the responses to questions 30 and 31 in the catechism. Here we get a description of the church from both the new testament and the creed. The word *catholic* means 'universal, or all people.'

**Is there anything in these descriptions that surprises you?**

**Is there anything that stands out to you?**

### **Acts 16**

The founding members of the congregation of believers in Philippi were a woman who sold expensive dyed cloth named Lydia, a slave girl who could predict the future through evil spirits before an encounter with God's Holy Spirit and a Roman jailer along with his family. What an interesting gathering!

### **A letter to the church in Philippi**

Do you think that Paul seems quite arrogant in places? His personal arrogance is torn from him... what develops is a faith that propels him throughout the Mediterranean, telling people about Jesus. Question 32 of the catechism asks what the mission of the church is. The answer given starts with: 'To proclaim the good news of God's kingdom...'

Paul is bold about his faith. **Do you feel bold about your faith?**

**What do you think might increase your boldness levels?**

In his letter, Paul mentions wanting to personally share in knowing 'Jesus Christ my Lord' Phil 3:8 (he usually refers to 'Christ our Lord', plural). This knowing means sharing in his sufferings, and death... and resurrection (v10-11). Christianity is typically advertised primarily referring to the truth of the resurrection, but not always on suffering leading to death. Paul encourages a joyful outlook amidst suffering because we can each be found, in Christ!

Paul changes from an attitude of 'righteousness is about me and what I do,' to it is about 'faith in Christ and what he has done for me.' Following Jesus seems to mean a costly road of letting go of our own preconceptions of who God is, instead receiving God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit instructs us, revealing who God truly is. The answer to question 33 suggests that all people involved in the church help with its mission. That means all of us need to know the Holy Spirit.

Following Jesus has never been easy. Following Jesus meant huge personal cost for so many first century Christians. In Acts chapter 8 we read of how persecution changed the early church who had previously enjoyed favour with society. **What do you think it was like to have been in favour with people, and then to find that you are soon being persecuted for the same thing that people had appreciated not that long before?**

Jonathan shared 3 images about the Mokihinui river as it approaches and enters the ocean.

1. The river wide and shallow on one side of the bridge,
2. the river that narrows and deepens to get past some bluffs,
3. the river that enters the vast and powerful ocean.

**What image do you most relate to when you think of our church?**

**Why?**

The catechism notes that the Anglican church is a world-wide movement. The nature of the Province of New Zealand is multi-racial, multicultural, with a special partnership between Maori and Pakeha based on the treaty of Waitangi. **Do you have any thoughts you want to share about the Anglican church of Aotearoa New Zealand?**

**Would you call yourself an Anglican?**

**If yes, why?**

**If not, what do you call yourself? why?**

The Anglican church attempts to embrace a broad spectrum of individual perspectives about specific topics, whilst holding to the core doctrines of the creeds and scripture. It does this with varying degrees of success.

**Do you see this approach as a strength, a weakness, or both? Why?**

In questions 61 through to 64, the catechism describes how the Anglican church relates to other Christians, other faiths, secular philosophies and scientific advances.

**Have you thought much about these questions before?**

**Testimony.**

**In concluding his sermon Jonathan (hopefully,) mentioned about the essential nature of sharing our stories with each other. Take a moment or two to consider and discuss the stories you have, of experiencing God's love and power in your life.**

While some of our stories are similar, others are different. Share your story. Develop your story. Let God change your story. The church is a body of many believers. If the different parts of the body do not share information, we will not learn to understand and appreciate our differences within the body. the church struggles and has stunted our growth when there is poor connection within the body. We are the church, God's Spirit in us grows the church. Let us share shamelessly the gifts God has given us.

**When have you last shared a lunch or personal story with someone else in church?**

**When have you recently shared a story about something God has done for you, or in you?**

As we do this, our fellowship with one another and God increases.

**What can you share today?**