

1 Peter 2:5

You yourselves like **living stones** are being built up as **a spiritual house**, to be **a holy priesthood**, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and **members of the household of God**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into **a holy temple** in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into **a dwelling place for God** by the Spirit

1 Timothy 3:15

[mentions] **the household of God**, which is the church of the living God

Ephesians 4:15-16

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom **the whole body**, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Romans 12:4-5

so in Christ we, though many, form **one body**, and each member belongs to all the others.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself **as a radiant church**, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

As you can see, the bible has different ways of describing 'church': from the above we can infer that it's to be full of spiritual life, holy and set apart for service, alive and growing in love, and increasingly beautiful before God.

1. Has anyone experience of church being done differently to PMC? Are there other forms of church you would like to experience? (Gospel church, house church, mega-church, monastic retreats like Iona, or where everything has meaning e.g. Orthodox...)
2. How have you experienced church being like a body? Like a household?
3. The bible tells us we belong to one another. What does that mean and how should it show at PMC?
4. There are many aspects to church life: worship & prayer, teaching, making disciples, loving our neighbours, building one another up, social action & justice, to name a few. How are these things done at PMC? Do you think we have them in balance?
5. Perhaps younger people in your group would like to know from the 'old faithful' what you've got from being part of church all these years? How has church changed since you started going? (And if you are brave enough: Do you ever regret giving up so much time/most of your Sundays?)
6. Younger people: tell the group if there are any aspects of church you would change. What do your friends make of you 'going to church'?
7. Because God gifts us individually to build up the church we are called to service. Share if/how you have been involved over the years. How might PMC improve how we encourage people to use their gifts?
8. Share with each other how some of the spaces in church are used and who are blessed by them. The main church space is possibly the least used. Can you think of any ways it might be used more?
9. We can't imagine what church will look like in the next 150 years, but what would you like it to look like in, say, 10 years' time?
10. What do you think our prayer for PMC should be?

Excerpts from an article by a mission organisation called 'Word Made Flesh':

The early church fathers had never developed an ecclesiology. It wasn't until after Constantine that the church began to articulate its theology of church, which wasn't fully worked out until the Reformation. Unfortunately, Christians have not taken up the charge to develop a fresh ecclesiology in light of historical changes and new contexts.

One cannot define "church" by looking at what the church is but must rather look at what the church is called to be. In the Bible we discover that the vision and hope of the church is in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the orientation, goal and life of the church. The kingdom of God is not contained by the church but presses it beyond its frontiers.

Synonymous with the "kingdom of God" in Scripture is the "New Creation." God says, "Behold, I make all things new". The mutual indwelling of the Trinity and his people in the New Creation fulfills Jesus' High Priestly prayer, "That they all may be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21).

While the New Creation is the reference point for the church, "two or three gathered in Jesus' name" is its starting point. The gathering in the name of Jesus represents not only a visible, concrete and local church, but also an icon of the Trinity.

Just as the church's being reflects the being of the Trinity, the church's action reflects the action of the Trinity. Because God is a missionary God, His people are a missionary people.

To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.

"The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." One cannot speak about the church and mission but only about the church in mission. There is a church because there is mission, not vice versa.

Jesus reveals Himself in the world through His body. Jesus is the Word, contextualized anew in each 'culture and setting' through His church. "It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, or a creed, a system of thought, or a rule of life, but a visible community."

The church goes out into the world through its members. The church is not confined by the walls it constructs.

The church is the community called to be the living interpretation of God's story, the hermeneutic of the gospel. Christians are called to make God known through loving one another.

Fast-forward to the summary: We are the Church

Gathered in the presence of Jesus, indwelt by the Spirit, directed toward the New Creation, we participate in the Triune fellowship of love and endure as a living icon of the Trinity in the world. Glorifying the Lord unto the margins of the earth and anticipating His future filling of all the earth with His glory, we are the messianic church in mission. Standing against divisions that break humanity apart, committing to live together in loving relationships, and imploring His unifying presence in us, we are the church in partnership (koinonia). In relationship among the poor and revolutionizing the world's value system, we are the church seeking to minister to Jesus in the "least of these." In the power of the Spirit and through the presence of Christ, we passionately desire to be the radiating people of God that burns to do justice, loves to do mercy and walks humbly with our God.

Closing prayer:

Thank you God for all you did through Jesus to make us your people.

Thank you that as your living stones, you build us together into your dwelling place.

Help us to understand better what it means to be church, to be the living interpretation of your story, a visible serving community revealing Jesus to the people we meet in our town and villages.

Build us up in love we pray.

Amen