

## Attending to God: Growing into Christ

We have been called by Jesus to follow him, and so we have dropped what we are doing, picked up our rucksacks (some heavier than others) and changed our direction in life, but it does not end there. Following Jesus is more than walking in his footsteps or his shadow, further than being called to be 'more like Christ'. It means growing into Christ.

How do we meet the challenge of truly growing into Christ? A focus for this is the Eucharist, where in a special way we are united with Christ. He comes into us and we move into him and become one. So spiritual growth can continue. St. Paul uses two analogies in his first letter to the Corinthians to help us understand what this means. In chapter 12 he describes us as the body of Christ with many parts; and in chapter 13 he illustrates growth from childhood to adulthood.

We cannot grow into Christ alone; we need unity with others and with God. Just as the body has many parts, we each have gifts to offer and we cannot discover and use these independently without support from others. But equally we must also have time alone with God to learn how Jesus wants us to use them.

We can be childish about our faith. We can get obsessed with things that really do not matter, such as what others might think of us, or who is right on a particular issue. We can put our own dignity and pride first, deciding what we want to achieve rather than what God is asking of us. We need to move from individual to unity, ignorance to understanding, impetuosity to wisdom, and from child to adult. So it is as we grow into the full stature of Christ.

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## What people REALLY think of the church!

A 2004 survey, entitled "Let the People Speak" by the Ecumenical Research Committee, asking the main things that encourage people to attend church, or put them off regular attendance, attracted 14,000 replies. These are not necessarily representative of all the church.

- Nearly three-quarters, 73%, said they wanted churches to explain why it was sensible to believe in God and what the main facts of Christianity were.
- Others desired to learn of God's character and its implications for their personal lives. If the only message taught is that "God loves you no matter what you do" then the need to attend church or to seek forgiveness withers, they said.
- Many wanted high quality church services deploring "ministers going through the motions". The importance of having relevant sermons was emphasised.
- Some respondents wanted churches to teach the return of Christ, to challenge society's immorality, to stress the need for repentance, and explain Biblical prophecy. This meant taking the Bible and its teachings seriously.
- Four-fifths, 80%, of respondents believed that greater attention to pastoral care would help retain church attendance.