

CHRISTIANS IN BIRMINGHAM

Christianity in Birmingham is very diverse. Anglican, Roman Catholic, Free Church, Orthodox, Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches are all present in the city. Christians include migrants from across the world who bring their own traditions. There are 3 cathedrals, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox. Many Anglican and Free Churches are now led by women. Black Led Churches have seen significant growth in recent years.

Birmingham Churches Together acts as a co-ordinating body and encourages co-operation between different churches. Many churches work together at the local level and are engaged in projects for the benefit of the local community, such as care of pre-school children and the elderly. They work in partnership with people of other faiths, joining together to observe events such as Remembrance Day and Holocaust Memorial Day. There are many church schools in the city and Christians participate in social justice projects such as St Basils (helping young homeless people) and Restore (supporting refugees and asylum seekers).

Further information from Birmingham Churches Together, 0121 236 3966 www.birminghamchurches.org.uk

BCF

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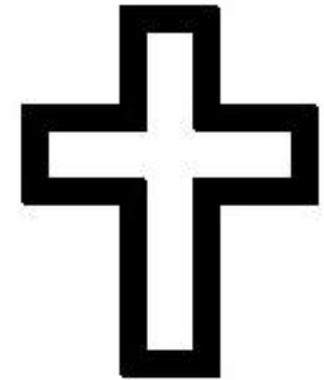
Originally founded in 1974, Birmingham Council of Faiths' objective is to promote knowledge and mutual understanding of the beliefs and practices of the city's many religious faiths.

Its belief is that through greater understanding of each other, a more harmonious and cohesive society can be created.

An additional strategy is to act as an interfaith hub, networking between the diverse faith organisations in the city and to serve as a focal point for information about their activities.

This brochure is one of ten covering the Council's affiliated faiths, which currently include Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Confucians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians.

Christians



one of
Birmingham's
faith
communities

CHRISTIAN BASICS

Christian faith is based on the life of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish man who was born in Bethlehem in Palestine/Israel about 2000 years ago. Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God, the majority taking that to mean that he was both human and divine. God is described as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is seen as the Creator and the Holy Spirit is the power of God experienced in people's lives. The Bible is the holy book which is the basis of Christian belief and practice.

Christians believe sin separates them from God and that, by his death on a cross and resurrection, Jesus enabled their relationship with God to be restored. This is the reason why the cross is the symbol commonly used to represent the religion. Christians see the love of God for humankind expressed in Jesus' giving of himself to others, and this gives them hope.

Despite attempts from Rome to unify the Christian church, Christianity in the UK has had many expressions including Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches as well as Roman Catholic. These grew up over the centuries in response to questions of authority and interpretation of scripture. More than two thirds of the UK population claim to be Christian.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Christians worship God in churches, particularly on Sundays. Some church services feature symbolic rituals, while others may emphasise preaching or praise of God, silence or prayer. Worship is usually led by a trained and ordained person, who is qualified to take weddings and funerals.

The personal spiritual life of a Christian is practised both at church and at home. It involves regular prayer, scripture reading and observing festivals. The main festivals are Christmas (the birth of Jesus), Easter (his death and resurrection) and Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit). Christmas falls in December, Easter usually in April and Pentecost in May. Many Christians are inspired by saints. Christians join the church by being baptised, either in infancy or adulthood, using water as a symbol of new life.

The heart of the Christian faith is expressed in the service of Holy Communion, also called the Mass or the Lord's Supper. Participants believe that they share symbolically in the sacrifice of Jesus and commit themselves to following his way of life. It involves receiving blessed bread and wine which symbolise the body and blood of Jesus.

SOCIAL PRACTICE

Christians believe that the commandments to 'Love God and to love your neighbour as yourself' (*Deuteronomy* 6. 5) are at the centre of their faith. This has inspired generations to set up educational and healing institutions across the world. They also believe that all people are made in the image of God (*Genesis* 1. 26) and should therefore be treated with equal respect. Christians try to follow the example of Jesus, who was compassionate to all, especially those who were treated by society as outcast or aliens.

Mission is a feature of Christianity. It has moved on from its former colonialist associations and is now often expressed through involvement in movements for social change as well as evangelism. Some Christians, for example, are involved in bringing peace and reconciliation in conflict situations, while others are engaged in relief work and long term development.

Some major issues such as attitudes towards women, homosexuality and the use of contraception, have the potential to divide the churches. Christians aim to apply the teaching of Jesus and the church to these modern dilemmas.