

My ideal Church



I'm often asked to describe my ideal Church. There are several qualities I would like to find in a Church that is a healthy Christian community:

I would begin my response by saying I want a Church that is truly a supportive community of friends: men and women striving to live in the spirit of Christ. Not a doctrinaire, authoritarian institution.

Some institutional structures of course are necessary but they should be understood as provisional. They, along with institutional leaders, should be regularly critiqued and changed.

Institutional structures are tools – a means – constructed to help and support Christian communities. The innate danger in all institutions is that, if left unchecked, they cease being service-oriented structures and become hard-nosed self-serving institutions demanding unquestioned loyalty. A kind of institutional idolatry.

A healthy Church affirms the dignity and equality of all men and women, regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. It does this not just in official rhetoric and documents but in personal and institutional behavior. We need male and female ordained ministers. LGBTQ people should be welcomed in Church ministries and employment. For too long Church leaders have patronized, insulted, or simply removed people who do not fit their mold. It still happens.

An honest and humble Church must realize that it does not possess all the truth and has to collaborate with a variety of people in pursuit of the truth. It has to acknowledge as well that all Church doctrines are time- and culture-bound. They are provisional and changeable. Some doctrines may have been meaningful in the past but just don't work today. Others evolved more from religious fantasy and folklore. Gabriel Moran mentioned the great assumption about the Assumption.

A healthy Church asks questions and welcomes the questioner. Asking questions brings greater self-knowledge, a more realistic life understanding. It is an essential element in personal conscience formation.

All the great advances in human knowledge have come from people who dared to ask questions. Isaac Newton asked: "Why does an apple fall from a tree?" and "Why does the moon not fall into the Earth?" Charles Darwin asked: "Why do the Galápagos Islands have so many species not found elsewhere?" Albert Einstein asked: "What would the universe look like if I rode through it on a beam of light?" By asking these kinds of basic questions they were able to start the processes that lead to historic breakthroughs in human and scientific understanding. And of course, Jesus of Nazareth asks in the synoptic gospels "Who do people say that I am?" In John 7, 19 he asks "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

I want a Church that stresses and practices tolerance and freedom of inquiry: a Church that realizes that all doctrines, even infallible papal pronouncements, evolve. All "official teachers" must also be humble learners. A healthy Christian community rejects intimidation and realizes that conflicts must be resolved through patient and humble dialogue. It may not be easy but it has to happen.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/my-ideal-church/15805>