

# Community/ The Church

**Rani:** Leana! It's so good to see you again! We've all missed you.

**Leana:** Home at last! I'm so glad to be back where I belong.

It's funny, but as soon as the bus came around the corner near the river I felt I was home.

Suddenly everything looked so familiar and I felt a smile creeping onto my face.

**Rani:** Well, come on! Let me help carry your bags. I can't wait to see your mother's face.

**Tammy:** But the walk through the village to Leana's parents' house took a long time. First one old friend, then another came to greet Leana and welcome her back. And Leana kept looking around and noticing the familiar things that she loved. There was Soto's store, with Soto's old blue car outside, and there was Joseph leaning against the wall of the store, just like he always did.

**Leana:** Yes, this is where I belong. This is my community.

**Tammy:** Hello my friend, this is Women of Hope and today we're going to be talking about the communities that we live in. I'm Tammy, and Carol's with me, as usual.

**Carol:** Hello. It's great to be with you again.

**Tammy:** Did you notice how pleased Leana was to be back in her own community?

**Carol:** Yes. She said that she was back where she belongs. Isn't it nice to feel you belong?

**Tammy:** Mmm, I know what you mean, Carol. It's wonderful to be with the people we know and love. We feel very secure...that's if we're accepted and treated well by that community.

That makes me think: What *does* make a good community? Is it a good community just because people live near each other?

**Carol:** My friend, what about the community where you live? Is it a good community? Or are there some things about it that aren't so good? What do you think makes a community a good one?

**Tammy:** I think that in a good community people care for each other. And in a community that's not so good they don't, at least some of them don't. It's a bad community if people try to exploit each other, or gossip in a mean way. Gossip can be a terrible problem in small communities!

**Carol:** I agree, Tammy, but no group of people can be perfect. Most communities have some good things about them and some bad things. So let's try and think what it is that makes a really good community.

**Tammy:** In a really good community people try to help each other. If someone needs help they offer to help... Perhaps if a child in the family is very sick, someone will offer to look after the other children. Or, if someone has run out of cooking oil a neighbour might give them some.

**Carol:** Everyone in the community needs to feel that they have something to contribute -

everyone, both women and men. We all like to feel that we're useful. Even children like to contribute to their community as they get older.

**Tammy:** Most people like to have a say in what happens in their communities. It's good when the leaders let ordinary people give their opinions...and they listen to their ideas. Even if you're not a leader you might be able to make some good suggestions for ways to improve things in your community. For example, you might all work together to make the place safer, or fix the paths. Or you might build something that you could all use, like a sports ground or a well. In a good community, everyone feels they own it and they work together to look after the things they share.

**Carol:** But part of living in a community is not always expecting to get your own way. Sometimes we need to let go of something that we think is important so that other

As we've been talking about good community living I've thought of another thing, Tammy. When someone has to move to a new community...maybe because of their job, or because they get married...or for some other reason...it can sometimes be quite difficult.

**Tammy:** Yes, I know what you mean. I had to move to a completely new area and it wasn't easy. I didn't know anyone. I didn't know my way around and I didn't really know anyone.

**Carol:** Friend, perhaps you've had to move to a new place. Did you find it difficult? Maybe there's someone new in your community who's finding it difficult to fit in. You can be a friend to that person and help them to settle in.

**Tammy:** Yes, if even one person makes you feel welcome that really helps. They can show you around the place and help you find where things are. They can introduce you to some of their friends and invite you to join in things. I found that just having someone to talk to was important, because I left my friends behind when I moved.

**Carol:** Try to imagine how lonely the new person in your community might be. How you can get to know them and make them feel welcome? You might visit them and take them some food, or invite them to your place for a drink or a meal. Different communities have different ways of welcoming people, but there's always a way that you can do it.

**Tammy:** What if the new person is quite different to you, perhaps from a different race or religion? Do you think that would make it harder to be their friend?

**Carol:** Yes, it probably would be a bit harder, but it's still really important. They really need people to welcome them and help them settle in, and be their friends.

**Tammy:** There are some other people who really need to feel that they belong...and that they're useful. I'm thinking of people with disabilities. I wonder if there are people in your community who are blind, or deaf...or have problems walking...or people who need a lot of help with most things?

Sometimes, sadly, people with disabilities can be left out and feel lonely. People don't make friends with them and help them join in with community activities. They often miss out on the things that other people enjoy.

**Carol:** How could you help these people feel accepted and just as much a part of the community as everyone else? Every person is equally important, whether they have a disability or not.

**Tammy:** Is there someone in your community who needs some extra help to fit in? Good communities take extra trouble to include people with disabilities in their activities. And it's important to listen to them and allow them to contribute to the community too.

**Carol:** You might be thinking, "I can't make much of a difference in my community". But, you can, even in small ways. You can help make your community a friendly place, a welcoming place and a pleasant place to live – for everyone.

**Tammy:** We've been talking about communities, and you know, there is another special community, and that's the church. What is a church? What picture comes to your mind when you hear that word...church?

**Carol:** Often people think that a church is a building. Are there church buildings where you live? Can you tell from the architecture that they are churches?

But the church is not really a building. A church is the people. The church of Jesus Christ is made up of believers from all around the world: people who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

**Tammy:** These people might go to a building, called a church, but "the church" really *is* made up of the followers of Jesus who attend the "church" building. There are many people around the world who belong to Jesus who can't meet with others for worship because it is forbidden. But they belong to "the church" too.

**Carol:** So you don't have to meet in a church building to be part of the church of Jesus Christ.

**Tammy:** You know, a person who goes to a church building or attends a church might not be a true believer. There are some people who are Christians in name only and are not *really* part of the church of Jesus Christ.

So why do Christians – people who are followers of Jesus Christ – gather together? They worship God together, and learn more about him by studying the Bible. They pray for one another. Christians are not perfect people and they sin and make mistakes, so sometimes they need to ask God, and other people, to forgive them.

The Bible tells us that it's important for Christians to gather together, if at all possible. Because when they do this, they encourage one another in the faith and are blessed.

**Carol:** People who follow Jesus don't all meet in the same way. There are lots of different traditions and ways of meeting, but they're all meant to help us to worship God through Jesus.

**Tammy:** Yes, and churches have some special customs, don't they? Baptism is one of them...where a person shows in public that they have become a follower of Jesus. Nearly every church will remember the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, by breaking and eating some bread and drinking some juice or wine. The bread and the wine remind us that Jesus' body was broken for us and his blood was shed when he died on the cross. Sometimes this is called a 'communion service'. We've talked about community - well, this is a similar word. Communion means sharing together something that is very important to you. In the communion service we draw close to God, but we also draw close to each other, and it shows that we are united in our faith.

**Carol:** Do you think there is any culture or place where people are really treated equally?

**Tammy:** I don't think so. Everywhere in the world, some people look down on others of a different race...or colour...or religion. There may be different classes or castes, and often women don't have the same value as men. Have *you* found that?

**Carol:** The Bible clearly tells us what God thinks about this. Paul, one of the early church leaders, wrote to the new church at Galatia and he said this (Galatians 3:26-28 GNB):

'...through faith... all of you are God's children in union with Jesus Christ. You were baptised into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself. So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Jesus Christ.' This shows that for Christians there should not be any racial discrimination or classes. We're all equal in God's sight.

**Tammy:** Let me tell you a true story that makes this very clear. It happened not long after Jesus went back to heaven, and at that time all Jesus' followers were Jewish. Jewish people went to the synagogues or meeting halls to worship God and learn about him. They did not allow Gentiles, that is, people who were not Jews, to enter the synagogue or mix with them, as they believed that Gentiles were unclean. But it was God's plan that people of other races – people like us – should also be free to worship him and belong to his family. So let's hear about how Jesus' followers came to accept Gentiles, This story is from God's word the Bible (Acts 10 and 11).

Cornelius was a Roman soldier and officer, stationed in Israel. He was very spiritual and he worshipped the one God who made heaven and earth. He also helped Jewish poor people. He prayed to God and wanted to learn more about him. One day Cornelius received a vision: an angel told him to send to the town of Joppa for a man named Simon Peter, who was staying at the house of Simon, a leather tanner who lived near the sea.

This man Peter was a close follower of Jesus and a leader of the believers. He was visiting Joppa

- yes, at the house of Simon the tanner.

Peter also received a message from God. He went up to the rooftop to pray. While he was waiting for the midday meal to be prepared, he saw a vision of heaven opening, and saw something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all sorts of animals, reptiles and wild birds. Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, kill one of the animals and eat it.' But Peter protested, 'I've never eaten anything that was unclean according to the Jewish law.' The voice said, 'Don't call anything 'unclean' that God has made clean.' This happened three times, and then the sheet was taken back to heaven. While Peter was wondering what the vision meant, the men sent by Cornelius arrived.

God's Holy Spirit told Peter, 'Listen! Three men are looking for you. Go with them because I have sent them.'

The men told him they had come from Cornelius, who was a righteous and God-fearing man. When Peter heard their message, he realised God was directing him. So the next day he and some Jewish friends went with the men to the home of Cornelius. This was a hard thing for Peter to do, because Cornelius was a Gentile; but God had prepared Peter's heart.

Cornelius was expecting him and had called together his relatives and close friends to listen to what Peter had to say. When Peter went inside and saw the large gathering he told them, "You know that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

Then Cornelius told him about his vision, and said, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

Peter told them about Jesus, his life and sacrificial death, and that everyone who believed in Jesus would have their sins forgiven through his name. While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon the people listening... Peter and his friends were amazed as they heard these Gentiles praising God and speaking in other languages. This was a sign that they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit of God.

Then Peter told them that they should be baptised in water, in the name of the Lord Jesus. Cornelius was baptized straight away, and he asked Peter to stay with him for a number of days. Peter learned a big lesson from this experience. He said, 'I understand now that God treats everyone on the same basis... no matter what race they belong to.'

After this Peter went back to the church in Jerusalem. At first they criticised Peter for mixing with the unclean Gentiles and eating with them. He told them the whole story, and of how the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles who believed. When they heard this, they praised God saying,

“God has also given to the Gentiles the opportunity to repent and live!”

So these people formed the first church, made up of Jews and Gentiles. And when the followers of Jesus were severely persecuted, they travelled to many parts of the world. They shared the good news about Jesus because they knew that God wanted people of every nation to be part of his church.

**Tammy:** The Bible tells us that it’s important for Christians to gather together, if at all possible. When they do this, they encourage one another in the faith and are blessed.

**Carol:** The church is important to Jesus. The Bible talks about it as the ‘bride’ of Christ; that’s how much he loves us. He loved his church so much that he gave his life for it – that is, so that people who believe in him will be saved. I wonder, are you part of the church? If you have put your trust in Jesus, you are, whether you can meet with others or not. Even if you have to keep your faith a secret, you are still part of the church ...this wonderful group of people, living all over the world, that Jesus loves so much.

**Tammy:** Sadly, Christians sometimes forget that we are all one in Jesus Christ. Sometimes we don’t welcome people who are different to us, or who understand things a bit differently. Let’s remember that in the church we must not look down on anyone else. We must love each other, because we all belong to our Lord Jesus and we are all precious to him.

**Carol:** There is a special bond that exists within the community of believers; the church. I and my family have lived in several places around the world, and we have travelled much. Every time we have visited a local church or met another believer in Christ, we have instantly felt that bond of community; of family.

Think about your own community. And, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, about the place you call church; and the family of believers that you know. Maybe you can think of some way you can make your community a better place? What could you do this week?

**Tammy:** And as you think about all of this – if you are not sure of your place in God’s community, He is always waiting to welcome you into his community, his family, the church of Jesus Christ.

If you have any questions about how you can become a part of the family or church of Jesus Christ, please contact us in care of this station or at Women of Hope. The email address is [TWRWomenofHope@twr.org](mailto:TWRWomenofHope@twr.org). That’s [TWRWomenofHope@twr.org](mailto:TWRWomenofHope@twr.org). We would love to welcome you into God’s family. If you missed a program or would like to hear one again visit our website [TWRWomenofHope.org](http://TWRWomenofHope.org) or visit our Facebook page. We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week working to make your community a better place for everyone. Good-bye and God bless.

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