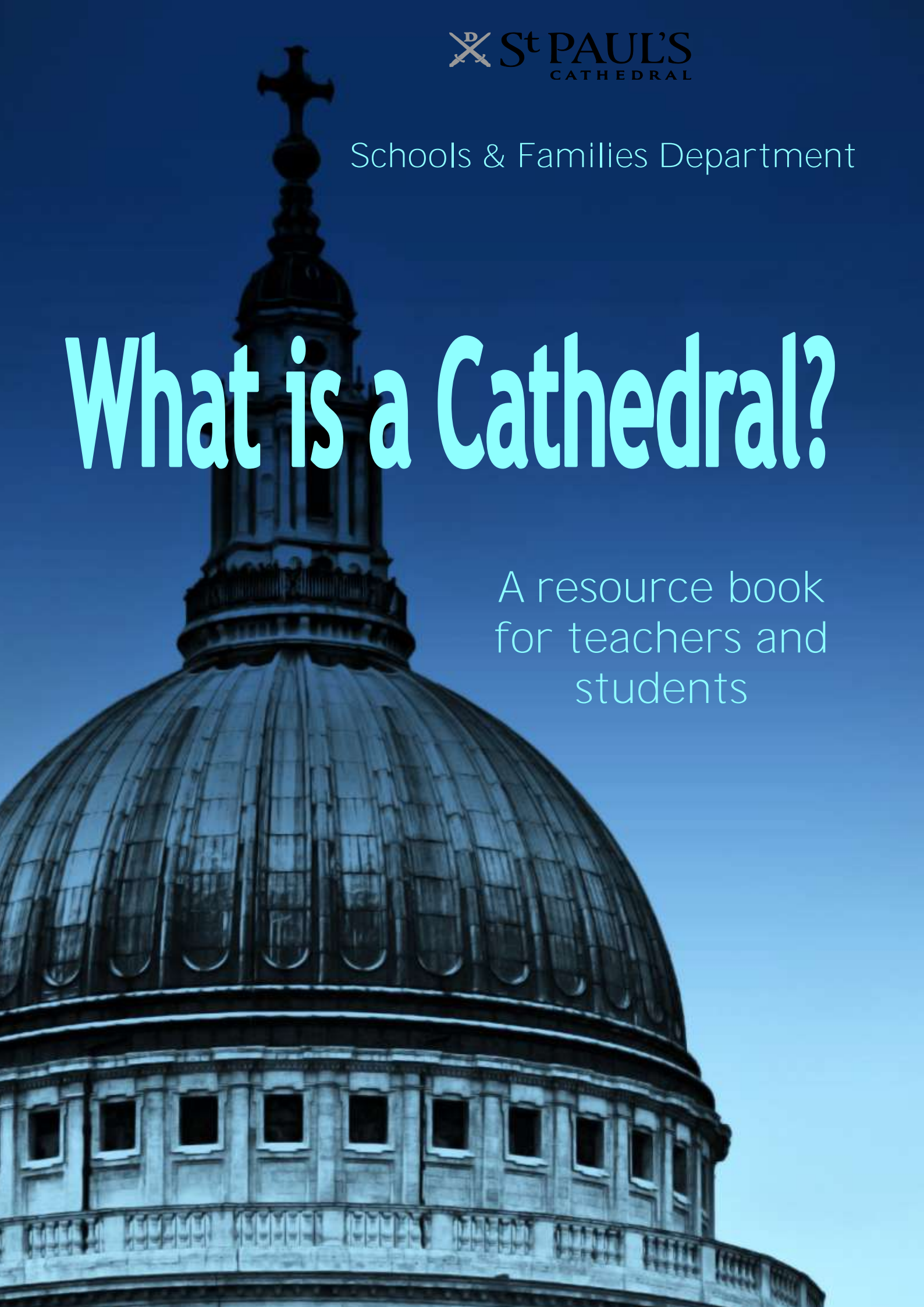


Schools & Families Department

# What is a Cathedral?

A resource book  
for teachers and  
students





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# Introduction

## ***We hope you will enjoy exploring St Paul's!***

St. Paul's Cathedral is not only the Cathedral church of the London diocese, but it can also be called the Nation's Cathedral. Dominating the London skyline for hundreds of years, **St. Paul's has been the scene of many important events.** From its earliest days as the home of the Shrine of St. Erkenwald, people have been attracted to the site on Ludgate Hill to worship God, and to see the spectacle of the building itself. Destroyed by the Great Fire of London in **1666, St. Paul's was rebuilt according to the radical plans of Sir Christopher Wren,** and stands today as a symbol of faith and an object of beauty in the City of London.

This booklet aims to cover both the history and symbolism of the various parts of the Cathedral, as well as some of the objects which can be seen during an act of worship. It attempts to explain how these features relate to the **Christian faith as practised in St. Paul's, but could also be used to explain key features common to all Cathedrals and many churches.**

**St. Paul's is a Cathedral of the Church of England, part of the worldwide Anglican Communion.** It is the Cathedral of the London Diocese, and is the seat of the Bishop of London. About two million people visit the Cathedral every year, both as tourists and worshippers.

With grateful thanks to Laura Arends who produced this booklet.

Janet Marshall  
Head of Schools & Families Department

# What is a Cathedral?

A Cathedral is the main church in a diocese, and contains a *cathedra*, or **bishop's chair**.

Every person in the country lives in a parish. Parishes usually have several thousand parishioners, people who **live in the parish even if they don't** go to the church. They are under the care of the parish priest, or

Parishes are grouped together under the care of a bishop. It is **the bishop's task to oversee the** running of all these parishes, and this large area is called a diocese. There are 43 Anglican dioceses in England.

**St. Paul's Cathedral is the main church** of the Anglican London Diocese and was completed in the 1710. In the Quire you can see special chair or *cathedra* of The **Bishop of London.** **Having a bishop's** chair is what makes a Cathedral more than just a large church.

There has been a Cathedral on the **site of St. Paul's in London since** 604 AD. That means that God has been worshipped on the site, **EVERY DAY** for over fourteen hundred years!

Each diocese has a large church called a *cathedral*. This is where people from all over the diocese can come and worship together, usually on special occasions. Many Cathedrals in Britain are very old, dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and are built on even older foundations.

The person in charge of a Cathedral is called the Dean. He or she is a priest, and is assisted by Canons, some priests and some lay (not ordained) people, who make up the Chapter. Since Cathedrals are also tourist attractions today, they employ a vast range of staff, from IT to **Customer Services.** **St. Paul's employs about 150 people,** making it a medium sized business as well as a place of worship.

# The Uses of a Cathedral

A Cathedral is the main church of a diocese., used by Christians from all over the area.

Cathedrals also hold services such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals of **important people.** **St. Paul's Cathedral** was chosen as the site for the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill in 1965, and in 1981 the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer was also conducted **at St. Paul's.**

Some organisations such as schools and charities may hold special services in Cathedrals.

On Remembrance Sunday, important people join with old soldiers to remember people who died in wars.

Many Cathedrals also hold concerts and lectures. **St. Paul's** hosts **Handel's *Messiah*** each year in December, and regularly invites famous speakers to give lectures on a wide range of topics.

All Cathedrals are places to worship God. They hold several services **every day.** **St. Paul's** has four services on weekdays: Mattins at 7.30am, Eucharist at 8am, Eucharist at 12.30pm, and Evensong at 5pm. Anyone can come to these services.

Cathedrals will also celebrate **special days, such as Saints' Days.** During the week before Easter, there will be special services to mark the events as they are told in the Bible.



Cathedrals may hold other, important services when a large building is needed.

A Cathedral is place of worship, but has many other roles. Since most Cathedrals are also beautiful places to visit, tourism is also now very important, too.

# Parts of a Cathedral: Altar

The Jewish Temple used to stand in Jerusalem. The altar was used to sacrifice animals to God as part of their worship. Many of the first Christians were Jews.

The idea of the altar came from Judaism. When the first Christians built churches, they put in altars. They broke bread on them as a reminder of the death of Jesus, as a sacrifice for all people.

The altar is a table used when Christians share bread and wine in the Communion.

Quaker Christians place emphasis on quiet prayer. Their altar is a simple table, in the centre of the room.

Altars reflect the beliefs of groups of Christians. For example, Roman Catholics see communion, or Mass, as the central act of worship. The Altar in a Catholic church is highly decorated. It also contains relics of saints. Protestant Christians tend to have a simple wooden table, often with a Bible on top, to reflect their belief in the importance of Scripture.

Puritans believed that everything should be very plain and simple so that you could concentrate on praying. They destroyed decorations such as statues and wall paintings.

Most Cathedrals in Britain were built before the Reformation, so their altars tend to be quite ornate. However, many were attacked by Puritans during the 17th Century and much of the decoration was destroyed.

The Victorians replaced the **simple wooden altar at St. Paul's**, in 1888, with a large, ornate one, topped with a marble screen. In 1940, this altar was damaged by a bomb and the present altar was completed in 1958. It is based on a design by Sir Christopher Wren.

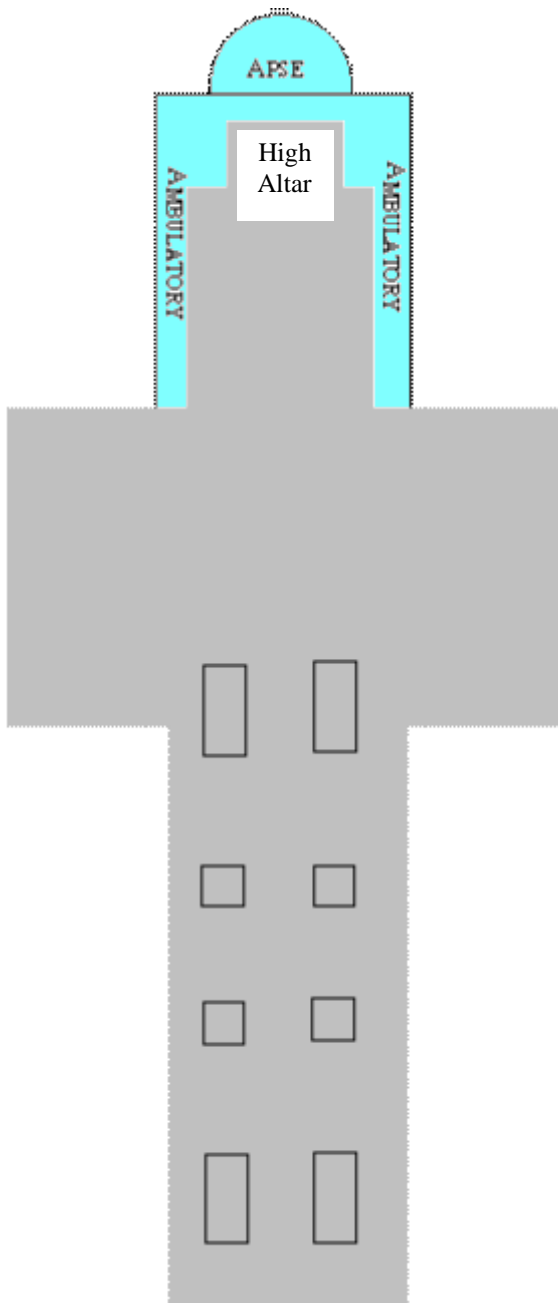


# Parts of a Cathedral: Apse and Ambulatory

The Apse is the semi-circular chapel behind the High Altar.

The Ambulatory is the area which links the North and South Aisles.

Cathedrals have always been places of pilgrimage, with a shrine to a saint. An ambulatory made it possible for pilgrims to move all around the shrine, without entering the Sanctuary, where only Priests could go.



**At St. Paul's, the Ambulatory runs behind the Quire stalls. It is made up of two side aisles: the Dean's Aisle (to the south) and the Minor Canon's Aisle (to the north), joined by the Apse chapel behind the High Altar.**

Behind the High Altar is a semi-circular area called the apse. This is a found in the earliest of church buildings. In many Cathedrals, this area is a chapel, often dedicated to **Jesus' mother, Mary, and known as the Lady Chapel.**

**The chapel in the apse of St. Paul's was built after World War 2, and is known as the American Memorial Chapel. It remembers all the North American soldiers, based in Britain, who died during the Second World War.**



# Parts of a Cathedral: Crypt

Crypts were used to bury the dead. People were either buried under the ground, or placed in vaults with family members.

**A 'martyr' is someone** who has been killed for their faith.

Early Christians dug under their churches and put the bodies of martyrs there. Crypts became important resting places for the relics of saints.

The word, **'crypt' comes** from a word meaning **'hidden place'**.

**'Relics' are physical** reminders of saints. They are often bits of bone, clothing, or personal objects

Later, churches were built with crypts in which important people could be buried.

## The Chapel of St. Faith in St. Paul's Crypt



The Duke of Wellington's tomb in the Crypt of St. Paul's

was first created in the Medieval Cathedral after a rebuilding programme required the demolition of the Parish Church of St. Faith. It was rebuilt by Christopher Wren. Today, it is used as a venue for the weddings and baptisms of members of the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

**St. Paul's Crypt has the tombs of** Nelson and Wellington, not martyrs, but great men from the past. Today, **the Crypt of St. Paul's houses many** essential elements: the Works Department, music practice areas, the Education Centre, Treasury, Toilets, Café and Restaurant, and Conference facilities.

The floor was originally plain earth. Coffins were buried with a stone slab, or ledger, on top. A proper floor was laid by the Victorians, who added memorials to the crypt, making it a place to visit as much as the building above. The Victorians also heated the Cathedral by burning charcoal in the crypt beneath vents in the Cathedral floor.

# Parts of a Cathedral: The Nave

The nave of a Cathedral is the main area in which people sit during worship.

The word *nave* comes from Latin *navis* and means 'ship'. This may refer to the early Christian idea that the Church was the 'ship of St. Peter'.

Most churches and cathedrals are built in a cross-shape. This reminds Christians that Jesus died on a cross. The nave is lined by columns or piers and strictly speaking refers only to the central aisle.

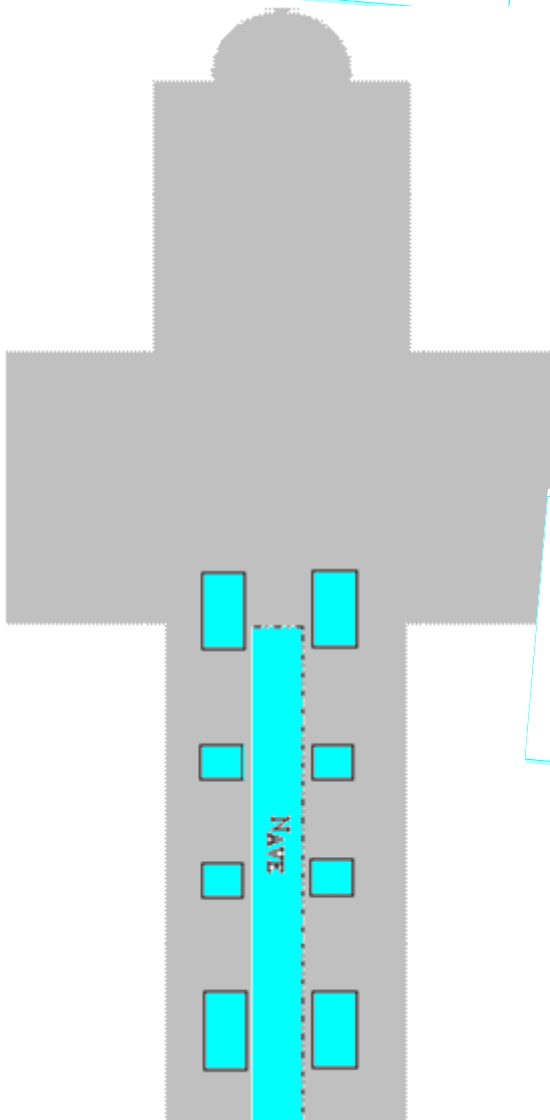
The image of the ship being held firmly by God despite the winds and waves, also explains the use of the ship as a symbol for the church which still sometimes suffers persecution in some parts

The nave was where the ordinary people sat. The main focus of worship was at the High Altar. This was hidden from the nave by the rood screen so only the choir and priests could see.

The nave was long so that the choir and clergy could process up it as part of their entrance and exit.

**St. Paul's Cathedral** nave was designed to hold thousands of people. Originally, there would not have been seats, so it

could have held even more than today. Today, there are seats for 859 people in the nave itself, although more can be seated elsewhere in the Cathedral.



# Parts of a Cathedral: The Quire and Sanctuary

The Quire is where the choir and clergy sit during services.

The Sanctuary is the area around the High Altar.

In many older Cathedrals and churches, the Quire was separated from the rest of the Cathedral by a decorated rood screen.

**At St. Paul's, this screen was topped by the organ. The Cathedral's architect, Sir**

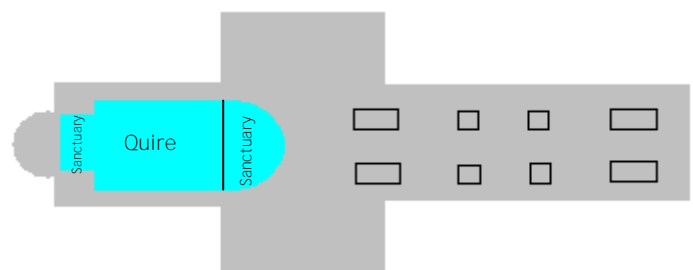
Christopher Wren disliked this as it spoilt the view down the full length of the building. In 1871, it was removed and the organ split in two. It can now be seen on either side of the West end of the Quire.

**If you look at the Quire of St. Paul's you will** see that the back row on each side is divided up into stalls, and the name of the member of the clergy who sits there is written in gold lettering in Latin. The front rows are used by the choir.

A cathedral gets its name from the *cathedra*, the **bishop's chair**, which is found in the Quire. You will see this is the biggest chair.

The Sanctuary is the area around the altar which is generally not entered, except by priests when presiding over the Eucharist. It is considered a holy (separate) area surrounding **the altar. At St. Paul's, the Dome altar is surrounded by a** wooden dais which is considered a Sanctuary, and so access to the Quire is from the Ambulatory.

**The Choir of St. Paul's Cathedral is** made up of men and boys. They practise for two hours a day and lead the service of Evensong each evening at 5pm.



# Parts of a Cathedral: Side Chapels

Cathedrals usually have a number of side chapels with altars. They are usually set slightly apart from the main areas and are often dedicated to specific saints.

There are different kinds of Side Chapels.

Lady Chapels remember the **Virgin Mary, Jesus' mother**. Many cathedrals have beautiful Lady Chapels near the High Altar.

**Saint's Chapels** remember particular saints. They were usually created using money from a rich person who particularly liked the saint for some reason. They will often have a statue or painting of the saint.

**St. Paul's doesn't have a Lady Chapel**, but there is a statue of **'Mother & Child'** by the famous sculptor, Henry Moore. It is in **the Minor Canon's Aisle, to the left of the High Altar**.

**At St. Paul's, there are two saint's chapels: St. Dunstan's and Sts. Michael and George.** There is also a chapel in the crypt, dedicated to St. Faith, which is set aside for the use of people with an OBE.

Military Chapels remember soldiers, sailors or airmen. They have flags from the forces they serve. In **St. Paul's you can see the Middlesex Regiment's Chapel in the North transept**.

Some Christians believe that Purgatory is a place where you go after death to be purified of your sins before you can go to heaven. Some Christians believe that saying prayers for a **person's soul will help them to get to heaven more quickly**.

Before the Reformation, Chantry chapels were built by the rich as a place where priests would pray for their souls when they died. There are no chantry chapels in **St. Paul's, as it was built later**.

# Parts of a Cathedral: The Transepts

The Transepts, North and South, join the nave and the quire. Linking the transepts is an area known as *the Crossing*.

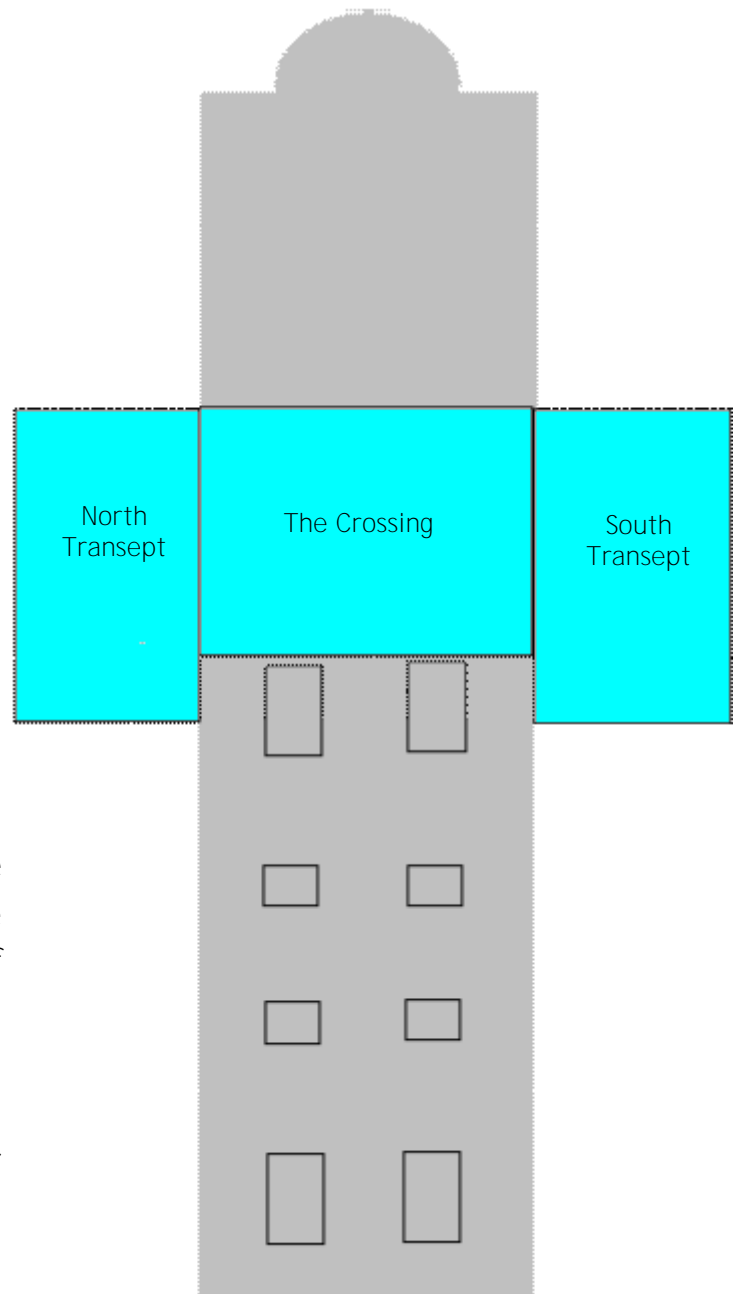
Many churches and Cathedrals are built in a cross shape to remind Christians that Jesus died on the Cross. The North and South Transepts are the 'arms' of the cross.

People can sit in the Transepts, and there is usually an altar in the Crossing. This is used when the Quire and High Altar are considered too far away from the people sitting in the Nave.

Side chapels are found in the transepts of cathedrals. **St. Paul's has only one side chapel in the transepts.**

The Middlesex Chapel in the North Transept is for private prayer. A famous painting of Jesus, *The Light of the World*, by Holman Hunt is there.

It is also often used for exhibitions



**St. Paul's calls The Crossing the 'Dome Area' as it is directly beneath the Dome.**

# Objects in a Cathedral: The Cathedra

A Cathedra is the **Bishop's throne**, found in a Cathedral.

The Cathedra is the official seat of a bishop, and is what distinguishes a Cathedral from a church, and gives it its name.

When there is an important service, the Bishop will come to the Cathedral and sit in the cathedra. In the past, bishops would also preach from the cathedra, but these days, most bishops move to the pulpit to give their sermon.

A bishop is the overseer of a large number of clergy who work within his area, called a diocese. A **Cathedral is the bishop's church** and the main church within the diocese. It is big enough to fit in lots of people for large services.



**The Cathedra in St. Paul's is found on the North side of the Quire.** It is beautifully carved with cherubs, flowers and plants, the work of Grinling Gibbons, a very famous carver. It was completed in 1697, for Bishop Compton, and Bishop Richard Chartres, the current Bishop of London, sits there.

The diocese of London is split up into five areas. Four of these areas have their own bishop, who helps the Bishop of London with his duties. These bishops have seats at St. **Paul's. If you look carefully in the Quire you** will see the names of the areas written in gold in the appropriate place. These are not, strictly speaking, *cathedra*.

# Objects in a Cathedral: Chalice and Paten

The Chalice is the cup and the Paten is the plate used at Holy Communion.

The chalice that Jesus drank from is called the Holy Grail. No one knows what happened to it, but there are many stories of people searching for it.

Holy Communion reminds Christians **of Jesus' death. Before he was killed,** Jesus had a meal, the Last Supper, with his disciples. During that meal, he took bread and wine and gave them to his disciples saying that the wine was his blood and the bread was his body. Christians remember this by sharing bread and wine with each other during some of their services.

Chalices can be made from pottery or wood, but the ones at **St. Paul's are gold and silver. Some even have precious stones** decorating them. This is because people wanted to show how important their faith was to them. Using the best materials demonstrates this.



The bread used during communion can be from an ordinary loaf. The bread at **St. Paul's is thin wafers. On the** surface is a picture of Jesus on the cross. This helps Christians remember that he died for them. We never know exactly how many people will come for communion so having wafers is more practical than having a loaf of bread.

The Paten is a small round plate. During communion the priest puts the bread on the paten. Most patens are quite simple.

# Objects in a Cathedral: The Font

The font is a container for holy water used when a person is baptised as a Christian.

Baptism is a sacrament, and is the sign of becoming a Christian. In the Church of England, many parents choose to have their babies baptised. Water is placed in the font and blessed.

**A sacrament is 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual blessing'. This means it is a ceremony which brings you closer to God.**



The priest wets his finger and draws a **cross on the baby's forehead**. Then he **pours water over the baby's head three times** saying,

I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Baptism is also called Christening, and is the time when a baby is given his or her *Christian* (first) name.

The water has two meanings. Firstly, it is a sign that a baptised person is spiritually clean. Secondly, it shows that a Christian has died with Christ, and come back to life with Him.

The font is usually placed near the door, as a symbol of entry to the Christian faith. The font at St. Paul's is made from Italian marble.





# Objects in a Cathedral: Lectern

The lectern is a special desk from which the Bible is read during services.

Christians call the Bible **“The Word of God”** It contains teachings and **accounts of God’s dealings** with people.



Short passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament are read aloud during a service. A talk or sermon is usually given which explains some of the themes contained in the readings.

The Bibles in churches are often very large and heavy. To make it easier to read it is placed on a reading desk, or lectern. Many lecterns are shaped like eagles. The Bible is placed on the outstretched wings of the eagle.

There idea is that the words of God are carried all over the world by the wings of the eagle and everyone can hear them. Also, an eagle is a traditional symbol of the Gospel of John, one of the books of the New Testament. **The Lectern at St. Paul’s Cathedral is a very large eagle.**

The Bible is actually a collection of 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. They cover a whole range of different kinds of literature from poetry to history, and from letters to prophecy. It is mostly written in Hebrew and Greek, but has been translated into nearly all the languages of the world.

The Bible was written over thousands of years, and by many different people. It is divided into two sections. The Old Testament, tells the history of the Jewish people. The New Testament contains the life of Jesus and the history of the early Christians.

Some Christians think that the Bible is a bit unclear and that you need to interpret it in order to understand how its teachings can be put into practice in the modern world. Other Christians think it is perfectly clear and you must take what it says literally, no matter how difficult it might sound.

# Objects in a Cathedral: The Pulpit

A pulpit is a stand, raised above the level of the people. A priest will preach a sermon from there.

To help them learn about their faith, Christians have a sermon, or talk, as part of their worship. Sermons can help Christians understand the Bible, and can give them ideas about how to behave, or think.

With the reading of the Bible, the sermon is a central part of a Protestant service. A sermon can be a few short comments, or last 1-1½ hours, depending on the type of church and the skill of the speaker.

Pulpits are often richly decorated with scenes from the bible. Protestants place a lot of emphasis on preaching, so the pulpits in their churches are easy to find.

**The first pulpit at St. Paul's was a simple wooden one.** Later, two other pulpits were designed and used. The pulpit you can see today was designed and made in the 20th century. It was presented to commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the completion of the Cathedral. You can see it is carved with cherubs blowing trumpets and holding flowers.

**The pulpit at St. Paul's has a roof or canopy.** Before the days of microphones, the preacher had to speak very loudly in order to be heard. The canopy reflected his voice back into the nave and stopped it getting lost up in the high dome.



One of the Cherubs on the pulpit at **St. Paul's**

# Objects in a Cathedral: Vestments

Vestments are the special clothes worn by members of the clergy. They have symbolic meanings.

If you visit a Cathedral, you may see some people dressed in rather unusual clothes. Members of the clergy, and some staff wear special clothing, or vestments for services.

**Mitre**—Worn by a bishop, this hat is made of two triangles, which are meant to look like flames. Flames are a symbol of the Holy Spirit who gives

**A dog collar** is meant to look like the iron band worn by slaves, by which they were chained together. A priest will wear it to show that he is the servant of God.

**Cope**—Worn by any member of the clergy for formal processions. This is a semi-circular cloak, embroidered and coloured to match the liturgical season.

**Alb**- this is a long white tunic, with a hood, which is worn when Holy Communion is celebrated. It is worn with a white rope, or cincture, round the waist.

**Stole**—this started out as a simple cloth, used by priests to wipe the chalice and paten at communion. It is now part of the vestments worn for services.

The buttons stand for the Thirty-nine Articles of faith stated by the Church of England.

Underneath the alb is a cassock—this is a long, tunic worn by priests and virgins as part of their everyday dress. It is black and it has thirty nine buttons. A bishop wears a purple cassock.



# Glossary

## A

Alb—White robe worn for celebrating the Eucharist. Symbolises purity

Altar—Table at the front of the church used to celebrate the Holy Communion.

Ambulatory—Historically, the area used by pilgrims to move around a shrine. Now refers to a passage that runs around and behind the High Altar.

Apse—Semi-circular area, often a chapel, at the East end of a church.

## B

Baptism—Sacrament (symbolic ceremony) marking entry into the Christian faith.

Bible—Christian holy book. Refers to a collection on 66 separate books gathered **together over many centuries. Often referred to as ‘The Word of God’.**

Bishop—Priest with authority over the people of a diocese.

## C

Canon—Priest who is part of the leadership team of a Cathedral.

Cassock—Full-length black robe usually worn by a priest or verger. Bishops wear a purple cassock.

Cathedra—**Bishop’s chair.**

Cathedral—Main church of a diocese.

Chantry Chapel—Historically, a chapel established to pray for the souls of the dead.

Chalice—Cup used to distribute wine at communion.

Chapel—**Small ‘church within a church’.**

Christening—See Baptism.

Church of England—The denomination of Christianity which was formed in 1534 when Henry VIII made himself Supreme Head of the Church in England.

Communion—Holy Communion. A sacrament (symbolic ceremony) in which bread **and wine are blessed and shared a reminder of Jesus’ body and blood sacrificed on the cross.**

Cope—Long, semi-circular robe worn by priests when processing.

Crossing—**Area which links the North and South transepts, and forms the ‘arms’ of the cross of a cruciform (cross-shaped) church.**

Crosier—**Bishop’s staff, shaped like a crook as a symbol that he is a shepherd to his people.**

Crypt—Area beneath the church traditionally used for burials.

## D

Dean—Priest in charge of a Cathedral.

Denomination—Branch of Christianity e.g. Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant etc.

Dog collar—White band worn around the neck by a priest.

Diocese—Area of the country under the authority of a bishop.

## E

Eucharist— **‘Thanksgiving’**. Generally refers to a service which includes the celebration of Holy Communion.

Evensong—Service in the late afternoon.

## F

Font—Large container of holy water used to baptise babies. Usually found by the entrance to a church as a symbol that baptism is the entry to the Christian faith.

## G

Gospel— **‘Good news’**. One of four books which tell of the life and teaching of Jesus. Part of the Bible.

## H

Holy—Special, or set apart for a particular spiritual purpose.

## L

Lady Chapel—Chapel dedicated to Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Lectern—Desk, often in the shape of an eagle, from which the Bible is read during a service.

Ledger—Stone set in the church or crypt floor recording the details of who is buried beneath.

## M

Martyr—Someone who is killed for their faith.

Mary—The name of several female followers of Jesus, most notably his mother.

Mass—Service containing the celebration of Holy Communion. Term is more usually used by Roman Catholics

Mattins—**Morning service. Can be ‘said’ or ‘sung’ by the choir.**

Mitre—Hat worn by a bishop

Minor Canon—**One of a group of priests (three at St. Paul’s) who are responsible for organising all the services**

## N

Nave—The long part of the Cathedral where most people sit.

## O

Order of the British Empire—Order of Chivalry created to reward people who have done great service to any nation where the Queen is Head of State.

Organ—Wind instrument play by a keyboard commonly found in churches for leading the singing during worship.

## P

Parish—Local area allocated to the care of a particular church.

Parishioners— Anyone who lives within the parish.

Paten—Small plate used to carry the bread at Holy Communion.

Plate—Name sometimes used to refer to the gold and silver items used at Holy Communion.

Pilgrimage—A significant journey made for a religious reason.

Pulpit—Small raised platform used by the priest when preaching.

Purgatory—A place of purification after death, between Hell and Heaven. Not all Christians believe in the existence of Purgatory.

## Q

Quire—Area at the East End of the Cathedral where the choir sit to lead worship.

## R

Relic—a physical memento of a dead saint, perhaps a bone or fragment of clothing.

Reformation—Movement to reform the Catholic Church which began in 1517, although its roots can be found much earlier.

Rood Screen—Screen separating the Nave from the Quire in many churches and Cathedrals. Rood comes from an old word for *cross* and screens were often **decorated with images of Jesus' crucifixion.**

## S

Sacrament—**'The outward and visible sign of an inward, spiritual blessing.'** One of a number of ceremonies which bring God's particular blessing. They include Holy Communion and Baptism.

Saint—A Christian whose life and/or death was so remarkable that they are honoured as particularly holy people. Many have a particular day of the year on **which a service is held to remember them e.g. St. Luke's Day is October 18th.**

Sanctuary—area around the altar which is reserved as a holy space.

Sermon—Talk given during a service.

Shrine—Place of pilgrimage which has a particular connection to a saint. Most British Cathedrals had shrines before the Reformation.

Stole—Long cloth worn around the neck by a priest.

## T

Temple—The Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was first built by King Solomon, approximately 3000 years ago, and rebuilt five hundred years later. Jesus worshipped in the Temple, but it was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD.

Transept—**The 'arms' of a cruciform church, referred to as North and South respectively.**

Testament—**'Promise'. Refers to the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.**

Thirty-nine Articles—Statements of belief which define the Church of England.

## V

Virgiers— Team of people responsible for ensuring the services run smoothly.