

# BECOMING A CHURCH

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Whenever we read the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church we encounter vocabulary and concepts that require us to think, and think carefully, about meaning. Such is the case when we encounter the term “church.” Even in common speech, “church” has multiple meanings, ranging from a “building for public worship” to “a specific Christian denomination.”

Primarily, the Heavenly Doctrines use “church” to mean something more internal than a building or religious organization, something that resides in the spirit of a person or group of individuals, as in the following definition:

*Everyone who leads a good life, in charity and faith, is a Church, and is a kingdom of the Lord. He is for that reason also called a temple, and a house of God too. Those who are Churches individually, no matter how remote from one another they may be, constitute one Church collectively. Arcana Coelestia 6637*

This kind of church can thus be spread throughout the globe and still be considered a church through the internal bonds and connections of the spirit.

People who are members of this church can also be in various stages of spiritual development. If they have access to the Lord’s Word and teachings from it, they have the tools to fully become an image and likeness of God, a most complete church. If these tools are not available, but people sincerely and faithfully live the spiritual principles of their religion, a church can still be formed within them. And, in the Lord’s mercy and love, good people of every *bona fide* religion will come to know and accept the Lord as their God in the next life.

When a person becomes a church, he has found a dwelling place, a home inside his heart and mind where the Lord can dwell. We could call this secret home a little part of heaven on earth. For it brings heavenly peace and deep delight to us when our thoughts, feelings and deeds arise from this source. Think of this home being like the Tabernacle built by the Children of Israel as a portable place of worship while they wandered in the wilderness.

The innermost chamber of the tabernacle was called the Holy of Holies. The ark containing the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai rested there. These ten immutable spiritual laws contained in the Decalogue are at the core of every church on earth and every individual who aspires to become a church. When fixed as principles that guide our lives, they become a living conscience within us.

Two other rooms completed the Tabernacle, and they represent different aspects of the life of religion that each of us strives for. In fact every least detail mentioned about the Tabernacle relates to different parts of the human mind and also to parts of the angelic heavens.

The Tabernacle, and later the Temple, served the Children of Israel as a house of worship. And it behooves us to also set aside a time and special place to worship the Lord. Church buildings and church organizations serve that use most admirably. But for these externals to be truly effective, we too must become a church, a dwelling place for the Lord in mind, body and spirit. Then these words from the Book of Revelation will ring true:

*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God (21:3).*