

## The Purpose of the Church

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by Jim Howard

**T**he supermarket is for food. The filling station is for gasoline. The dentist's office is for tooth repair. The freeway is for travel. The library is for reading. The post office is for mail, and the quick stop is for convenience shopping. The pharmacy is for medicine. The school is for learning. The television is for viewing and the radio for listening. The football stadium is for football and the baseball diamond is for baseball. The garden is for fruits and vegetables. The job is for a livelihood and the home for living.

**But what is the church for?** Though you might think that an easy question, down through the centuries its answer has proved elusive. Should it be the official religious organ of national government? Should it spend all of its funds, time and energy in massive welfare projects intended to do away with the widespread social ills of the day? Should it become an adjunct to the community college, dispensing information on every conceivable subject? Should it be concerned with raising the cultural level of the community or serve as a convenient neighborhood recreation center? Should it be a tool of political propaganda?

While there are pressures today for the church to become involved in all these spheres of activity, its function is actually much more definable. The church should be the twenty-first-century incarnation of Jesus who came *"to seek and to save the lost"* (**Luke 19:10**). The church which gets out of the salvation business has no more right to call itself **"the church"** than the supermarket has the right to call itself by that designation when it stops selling food. Twenty centuries later the church is still called to be the embodiment of Jesus Christ and to define its ministry as He did His. That's what the church is for.

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