

What is the Traditional Anglican Church?

The Anglican Church is a branch of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church instituted by Jesus Christ. The word 'Anglican' refers to our spiritual heritage and roots in the Church of England.

Traders, merchants and soldiers seem to have brought the Christian Faith to Britain shortly after it became part of the Roman Empire in the middle of the First Century AD. Sixteen hundred years later, during what we call the Reformation, the Church of England emerged as a unique institution. It retained its 'Catholic' heritage enshrined in the Creeds, the decisions of the General Councils, its liturgy and sacraments, and in the threefold ministry of bishops, priest and deacons in Apostolic Succession. It 'reformed' itself by eliminating some nonessential accretions of the later medieval Church, by restoring much of the practice of the earliest Christians, and by insisting upon the authority of Holy Scripture as the rule and guide of faith.

Members of the Church of England came to America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In many of the original colonies, the Church of England was the established or official Church. After the Revolution, American Anglicans established an autonomous branch of the Church, which became known as the Episcopal Church. Recently, during the last thirty-five or so years, that body abandoned most of the tradition of historic Anglican Faith and Practice. It is this tradition that many former Episcopalians and other faithful Anglicans are seeking to preserve and proclaim.

Restoration in America

In 1968 a meeting of such faithful Episcopalians, clergy and lay, was held in Mobile Alabama. From that meeting emerged the 'American Episcopal Church'. Nine years later a Congress of Concerned Churchmen took place in St. Louis, Missouri. It was attended by United States and Canadian Anglicans committed to continuing our Church without the fatal deviations espoused by the Episcopal Church in recent times. A statement called 'The Affirmation of St. Louis' was agreed upon which affirms as unalterable the received Faith and Tradition of the Church; the essential core of Christian belief and practice. This includes the Holy Scripture, the Church's ancient and universal Creeds, the writings of the Fathers of the Early Church, the decisions of the General Councils held by the whole Church before any grave divisions took place, and the historic Apostolic Ministry of male bishops, priests and deacons descended in unbroken succession from the first Apostles. The statement called upon faithful Anglicans to "reorder such godly discipline as will strengthen us in continuation of our common life and witness."

As a result of this meeting, several groups of Anglican traditionalists in the United States and Canada began efforts to form a continuing, still-Anglican Church. While the work in Canada prospered, events in the U.S.A. were complicated by a lack of unity, and several "jurisdictions" emerged working separately from one another. In 1978, 1981, and 1991, bishops were consecrated through the Anglican Apostolic Succession to provide for the continuation of the Ministry as instituted by Christ.

Our Faith and Worship are set forth in the last orthodox and seemingly American edition of the historic Book of Common Prayer, that of 1928. This treasure of English language, scriptural spirituality and Catholic worship has shaped the lives of countless faithful Christians through the centuries and is the basis of our services of worship.

Catholic and Reformed

As we have seen, the Anglican Church affirms its 'Catholic' heritage. That term is used to affirm our fidelity to the whole Faith as revealed by Jesus Christ (without either additions or subtractions) as proclaimed by the Apostles, evangelists, saints, scholars and martyrs of the Early Church and taught in Holy Scripture. At the same time Anglicans give thanks for the witness of those pastors and teachers, who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries sought to "reform" the Church, some of whom gave their lives in witness to the authority of the Bible as the principle rule of Faith and Practice.

Anglicans do not regard the terms "Catholic" and "Reformed" (or "Evangelical") as contradictory claims, but rather as affirmations of the wholeness of the one Faith. The task of the Church in every generation is to transmit faithfully that which God has revealed. The test of that fidelity is the Gospel itself, the "Good News" revealed by God the Father, in His Son, through the Holy Spirit, primarily in the words of Holy Scripture, but also in the living witness of the Church called Tradition. While Anglicans treasure their "Catholic" identity, shared by the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches, they also demand that Catholicity be continually tested by the fidelity of 'particular' Churches to "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

What is this Faith we have sought to preserve?

Anglican faith is thoroughly grounded in Holy Scriptures. Anglicans believe "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the authentic record of God's revelation of himself, his saving activity, and moral demands - a revelation valid for all men and for all times" (The Affirmation of St. Louis). The 'Apocryphal Books,' found in some, but not all Bibles are used also in our worship, being read for instruction, but they are not used to establish doctrine.

We hold that the ancient creeds - the 'Apostles', 'Nicene', and 'Athanasian' - express the faith of the Church and are to be understood as they are written. The Anglican Church is a creedal church, not a confessional one. The creeds, which come from the earliest years of Christianity, summarize the "faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). By them we are taught that God is one God in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that God the Son became man, born of a virgin as our Lord Jesus Christ; that by our Lord's sinless life, death and resurrection He gained access for us to God the Father and opened the way for us to be children of God and to live with Him for all eternity.

On Christian morality, we believe that "every Christian is obligated to form his conscience by the divine Moral Law of the Mind of Christ as revealed in Holy Scriptures, and by the teachings and Tradition of the Church" (The Affirmation of St. Louis). Such teaching is especially seen in the Sermon on the Mount (St. Matthew 5,6,7) and in our Lord's Summary of the Law, which states that we must first love God with our heart, soul and mind, and also love our neighbors as ourselves, as well as in His teaching on the sanctity of all human life, and of marriage and the family.

What about our Worship?

Anglicans are expected to pray. When we pray in private, each of us prays in his own way (although guidance and instruction are available for those who wish to grow in the life of prayer). When we pray together in services of worship, our "common prayers" are 'liturgical,' that is, they are structured. Only in this way can we truly share our worship of God. Our liturgical worship involves the whole person, body, mind and spirit. We are active participants rather than just listeners. Worship to us is not "show business". It goes from us to God rather than from a preacher to us. We come to church to give God the praise and worship which, as His creatures, we owe Him; not to get something for ourselves.

The Holy Eucharist

The center of our worship is the Holy Eucharist. Other traditional names for this service are: the Holy Communion, the Mass, the Lord's Supper, and the Divine Liturgy. It is the service specifically commanded by Jesus in the New Testament. The Eucharist joins our offering of worship to Christ's offering of Himself upon the altar of the cross. As He promised (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 6; I Corinthians 11) Jesus is truly, spiritually present under the outward forms of the consecrated Bread and Wine, to infuse our lives with the spiritual strength of His life.

Receiving Holy Communion

By receiving Holy Communion, we give our Solemn Assent, our "Amen," to the entire Anglican Eucharistic Service. We express our belief that the Eucharist is a spiritual sacrifice which must be administered by a bishop or a priest whose ministry derives in succession from the Apostles themselves. We express also our faith in Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist. Because of the seriousness of these affirmations, this Church does not presume to invite those who in good faith cannot yet accept these beliefs to compromise their conscience by receiving Holy Communion at our Altar. It is for these reasons that we are not an "open Communion" Church. Those who do so believe, and who have been confirmed by a Bishop in Apostolic Succession, and who are spiritually prepared, are welcome to receive Holy Communion.

Preparation for Holy Communion generally takes the form of private prayers. In many Anglican parishes, those physically able to do so refrain from eating ordinary food prior to morning Communion, or for three hours prior to an evening Communion.

Morning and Evening Prayer

The Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer are prayer services derived in many ways from the Synagogue worship of the Old Testament. They consist of readings from the Psalms, other Bible readings, canticles (songs), and prayers. They are provided in the Book of Common Prayer in a manner which makes their discipline of prayer, psalmody, and Holy Scripture the daily spiritual diet of the Church, clergy and lay folk alike.

Customs

If you are new to Anglican worship you may find some of the customs in our services unfamiliar. You will also find some variation of customs from parish to parish. The priest in your local parish will be happy to explain to you the symbolism of our worship. One general rule of thumb for Anglicans is that we stand to praise God, sit for listening to instruction, and kneel humbly to pray.

Worship is the prime responsibility for all Christians. Anglicans believe that the life of Christian service is possible only through a full life of worship, through which we receive God's love and express our love to Him. Hence, we believe it is our obligation not only to worship God together every Lord's Day (Sunday) but also to have a daily life of prayer. A number of parishes are able to offer the Daily Offices and the Holy Communion during the week, as well as on Sunday.

Sacraments

The first Christians regarded the Church as the Sacrament, Jesus, Who is God, became truly human in the Incarnation, in the same manner as we are human, except that He was without sin. The Church is truly his Body. It is the outward and visible sign of God's presence with his people. Gradually, teachers identified certain outward and visible signs as "sacraments", that is as actions of the Church which gave the grace of God's presence and blessing. The Anglican Church believes that the Sacraments are "sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will toward us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth

not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in Him" (The Articles of Religion). Anglicans regard the two Gospel Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist as being "generally necessary to salvation". Five other sacramental rites, in their Biblical sense, are also termed sacraments.

Holy Baptism by means of water and in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19) conveys new birth (John 3:5; Romans 6:4) and forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; I Peter 3:21).

The Holy Communion also called the Lord's Supper, the Holy Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy and the Mass, was instituted by our Lord at the Last Supper when He said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (I Corinthians 11:24, Matthew 26:20-28; Mark 14:17-25; Luke 22:14-20). By this Sacrament He feeds His people with His Body and Blood (John 6:41-59)

Confirmation conveys the strengthening gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 19:1-7; Ephesians 1:13) for life as a mature Christian.

Penance conveys the forgiveness of sins (John 20:23; James 5:16) and the assurance of that forgiveness.

Holy Unction is the anointing with oil for healing (James 5:14; Mark 6:13) of body, mind, and soul.

Holy Matrimony is the union of one man and one woman for life before God. The relationship, St. Paul tells us (Ephesians 5:31-32), is like that between Christ and His Church.

Holy Orders denote the Apostolic Ministry of bishops, priest and deacons, instituted by Christ, and male in character (John 20:19-23; Matthew 16:18; Acts 6:1-6). Our Lord commissioned the Apostles and their successors, the bishops, to proclaim His work and salvation which He accomplished on Calvary. When Anglicans speak of Apostolic Succession, we mean an unbroken line of consecrations and commissions from our Lord to the present bishops, continuing the same teachings and ministry established by Jesus Christ Himself.

Baptism and Confirmation

Anglican parents who have a child to be Baptized should contact their priest. Some preparation is involved. Selection of Godparents is important. For Anglicans, this office is not just "honorary"; it creates a real spiritual responsibility towards the Godchild. Two Godparents of the same sex as the child, and one of the opposite sex, are required. Adult candidates for baptism and/or Confirmation undergo a period of instruction. Holy Confirmation is often administered at the same service as Holy Baptism in the case of adults. Adult candidates do not require Godparents but they may elect to have sponsors to "stand up" for them.

The Sacrament of Holy Confirmation, which completes and "seals" our Baptism, is administered by a bishop. By the imposition of the bishop's hand on our head, we come into sacramental unity with the Successors in Office to the Holy Apostles commissioned by Christ himself to govern His Church. A period of considerable instruction usually precedes the administration of this Sacrament.

Weddings

In the Anglican tradition, Holy Matrimony is generally administered only to couples who have both been baptized and at least one of whom is a practicing member of the traditional Anglican Church. Because sacramental Marriage is a life-long, solemn commitment, significant preparation and instruction is required. The clergy should be consulted before any other plans (including the date of the wedding) have been made.

Those coming to the Church to ask God's blessing upon their marriage will want to use the Church's prescribed rites and ceremonies. Neither the laity nor the clergy have the authority to change the Church's form of service or to substitute something in its place.

Funerals

Clergy of the Anglican Church will provide a Christian burial for any baptized Christian.

For practicing Anglicans, the funeral service provided by The Book of Common Prayer consists of the Burial Office, the Requiem Eucharist and the Committal at the grave. For other baptized Christians, the priest may suggest appropriate changes. At many Anglican funerals the casket, no matter how expensive or ornate, is covered with a cloth pall. Flower displays are not used in the Church. When we go to meet our Maker, we all do so on an equal footing.

When you need a Priest

If you are ill or shut in, If you are going to the hospital, or if you have a family emergency or need advice and counsel, contact one of the clergy at once. They are "on duty" twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Are there many opportunities for service?

Yes there are. Depending on the local parish, the chances for involvement will vary. All of our parishes need and welcome active lay men and women. It has been well said that the traditional Anglican movement has been built upon the efforts of its laity.

Within the parish there is the need for an altar guild, acolytes, church school teachers, lay readers, choir, vestry members and parish committees which help in carrying out the parish's mission. Also, a number of our parishes are in the process of obtaining their own property, building new structures or renovating existing ones for use in worship. A vast array of talent is needed to complete these tasks. Many parishes have begun study groups, prayer groups, and church school classes, offering further opportunity for involvement.

Beyond the parish you will find many Anglicans involved in community concerns or serving on committees of the diocese or province.

The laity are an integral part of the government of the traditional Anglican Church. The parish vestry (similar to a board of directors) is comprised of parish communicants and is charged

with the management of the temporal affairs of the parish. Synods - or meetings - of the diocese have active lay participation. Each parish sends lay representatives to the diocesan synod.

Anglicans take seriously our Lord's call to all Christians to serve Him. This means both a ministry within the Christian family and a ministry to the world to spread the Gospel and actively to show forth Jesus Christ in our lives.

How can I learn more?

Come and worship with us! Seek the nearest congregation of the traditional Anglican Church. They will be glad to welcome you and answer your questions.

Inquirers' Classes are conducted, usually by the clergy but sometimes by knowledgeable lay teachers, for persons interested in learning more about the traditional Anglican Church or interested in becoming a member of the Church. Parish members are encouraged to attend, both to "brush up" on their own knowledge of the faith and to show their interest in potential members.

Bible Study Groups exist in most parishes of the traditional Anglican Church. These are open to Anglicans and non-Anglicans alike who wish to deepen their understanding of God's word in the Holy Scriptures. Other study topics of interest to most Christians: Church History, Worship, the life of prayer, etc. are investigated from time to time, often as part of a study group during the Lenten Season. Interested inquirers of any faith are always welcome.