

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FAITH OF OUR CHURCH

The Episcopal Church in the United States is a true part of the one Church of Jesus Christ, which he established by his death and resurrection, empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and through which God works for the redemption of all creation. Members of the Episcopal Church, like all Christians everywhere, follow Jesus Christ, confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share in his eternal priesthood.

The Episcopal Church is a daughter of the Church of England and, together with churches in other nations around the world which share that heritage, is a part of what is called the Anglican Communion. Each national Church within this fellowship is independent of the others in matters of local governance and discipline, but all share a common heritage, a common understanding of Christian tradition and worship, the same creeds, sacraments, and ministry. They look to the Archbishop of Canterbury as the spiritual head and symbol of unity for the entire Communion. Although the Archbishop has no governing authority beyond his own Church of England, his moral and spiritual authority is taken very seriously throughout the worldwide Communion.

Members of the Episcopal Church are generally called “Episcopalians.” Members of any Anglican Church, including Episcopalians, can be called “Anglicans”.

Anglican Christians accept the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as “containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith. The apocryphal books of the Old Testament – which appear in the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, but not in the Hebrew Bible – are used and read in our churches, but are not used, as Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians do, to establish any doctrine.

The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, ancient summaries of the Christian faith coming to us from the time of the undivided Catholic Church, are received as sufficient statements of the Christian faith. The Apostles’ Creed, used in the Church’s daily worship, is especially associated with the profession of faith made by candidates for Holy Baptism. The Nicene Creed, recited during the Eucharist on feast days, proclaims the Trinitarian faith of Christians throughout the world and throughout the ages.

The sacraments ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are considered essential to Christian life and worship within our tradition. Holy Baptism can be administered at any age, and the sharing of the sacramental Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Communion takes place within the service of the Holy Eucharist, the Church’s chief act of worship on Sundays and Holy Days. Other sacramental rites are recognized and used in our Church, but are not considered necessary for all persons in the same way that Baptism and the Eucharist are.

The Episcopal Church considers all baptized persons to be ministers, with the duty and privilege of witnessing to Jesus Christ and to serving others in his name. Some Christians are called to the ordained ministries of bishops, priests, and deacons, to serve the Church by teaching, governing, celebrating the sacraments, providing pastoral care, and in servant ministry to the world. This threefold ministry preserves and continues the apostolic ministry empowered by Christ himself, and transmitted in unbroken succession from the time of the Apostles. It is the same ministry shared by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and certain other bodies within Christ’s universal Church.

The Anglican Communion believes that all truth comes from God, and that new knowledge, if true, can only help our understanding of God, no matter whence it comes. We do not see conflict between “science” and “religion”. In the interpretation of Scripture, we believe that the eternal spiritual truths it presents are not compromised by confessing that sometimes its statements regarding such things as sickness or the nature of the universe were limited by the understanding of its human authors. We believe that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the proper interpreter of Scripture, and that this process continues from generation to generation.

Our Church believes passionately that a living Christian faith must show itself in reaching out to others, particularly to those in any way disadvantaged or oppressed, sick, or in need. This is not an option for Christians, either individually or corporately. Therefore our Church has always been involved, locally and nationally, in issues which concern people's welfare. The civil rights movement has been such an issue in living memory. Local helping ministries engaged in by parishes, often in interdenominational cooperation, are numerous. All of us, as individuals, are urged and encouraged to share in some way in this kind of ministry.

The Anglican Communion possesses a deep and rich tradition of Christian spirituality, once again freely using resources from any part of the Christian Church, and inviting its members to grow in holiness within this tradition according to their individual spiritual personalities. One can find as deep and rigorous a Christian discipline among us as one can anywhere, but not a "one size fits all" mentality. Among us, discipline is not imposed, but offered, and each person, on his or her spiritual journey, often in consultation with another Christian acting as spiritual director, "lives into" whatever rule of life he or she may embrace.

Finally, Anglicans seek to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness". The liturgical worship using the Book of Common Prayer is enriched by architecture, art, music, and whatever things of beauty each local congregation may be able to supply. Beautiful and inspiring worship informs and empowers our service in the world, and that service, laid before the altar, in turn deepens our worship. In all things we seek to glorify God, and to serve Jesus Christ by serving his people in the world.

CHURCH HISTORY

An Introduction

Adult inquirers are likely to be familiar with the proposition that the Anglican way is a “via media” or middle way between Catholic and Protestant and to be aware that the Episcopal Church is a part of the Anglican Communion and stems from the Church of England. In two sessions devoted to church history, it is the aim of this curriculum to build on these understandings and to deepen them. Session One is on the English heritage and Session Two on the American Church. In both sessions, the emphasis is on what is distinctive about Anglicanism, not on what is held in common with all other Christians. The central lesson of both sessions is that the Anglican *via media* is not merely a compromise, but a distinctive approach to living the Christian life. Throughout these sessions, the recurring themes are those of balancing competing claims and living in the tension between opposites: English and Catholic, Protestant and Catholic, community and individual.

Anglican theology comes in many flavors: Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical, Liberal, and Broad Church are some of the terms that have been applied to these different perspectives. These different perspectives are all contained within Anglicanism but are mediated by and through common prayer. The first thematic principle for these classes is that for Anglicans prayer shapes belief: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. And Anglican prayer is common prayer. The Church for Anglicans is not held together by a common confessional statement or by the theology of a particular leader but by community in worship according to a *Book of Common Prayer* “in a language understood of the people.”

The second thematic principle to be seen throughout the history of the Church in England and America is its distinctive emphasis on incarnational theology, centered in the Christian belief that “the words was made flesh and dwelt among us.” This is expressed in the importance of the Sacraments in worship, but also in the Anglican view of nature as revelatory of God and in a positive understanding of the engagement of the Church in this world. Anglicans are not separatists seeking a community of the pure or the saved, but committed participants in the political and social struggles of a messy world that God loves and works to redeem. We are so because we see the world in sacramental terms.

Thirdly, Anglicans value history and historical continuity. Our theology emphasizes continuity with the teachings of the apostles, and our polity stresses the value of the historic episcopate as a symbol of that link down through the centuries. Anglicans do not regard the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation as the beginning of their Church, but see the Church of today as extending in a direct line back to Christ and His Apostles.

CHURCH HISTORY: PART I ENGLISH HERITAGE

OUTLINE

Themes: Living with the Tension: English and Catholic, Community and Individual

I. Basis: The distinctively Anglican emphases on the following:

- A. Common Prayer:** Prayer shapes believing, “make no windows into men’s souls,” the Church is not held together by any confession other than the ancient creeds, worship is centered on a Book of Common Prayer.
- B. Incarnational Theology:** emphasis on the sacraments and the Church as the Body of Christ in the world rather than as a group of the elect.
- C. Apostolic Faith:** God in three persons, Jesus Christ as redeemer of the world, apostolic succession of bishops, the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments, the dominical sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, use of the ancient creeds.
- D. Moderation:** The *via media*, authority of Scripture, reason, and tradition. Scripture read as a whole and not in pieces as proof-text.

II. The *Ecclesia Anglicana* Before the Reformation

General theme: English Christianity existed as a distinctive synthesis of Celtic and Roman patterns with important additions of Benedictine spirituality. The Church in England was a distinct *Ecclesia Anglicana* long before the Reformation.

- A. Celtic roots of Christianity in the British Isles
- B. Augustine of Canterbury and the Council of Whitby
- C. Benedictine spirituality and monasticism
- D. *Ecclesia Anglicana* before Henry VIII

III. The English Reformation

General themes: The English Reformation was largely a political matter, and distinct from the Continental Reformation—neither Lutheran nor Calvinist though affected by both. Elizabeth I was more important to the Anglican *via media* than Henry VIII. Challenged from both Roman Catholic and Puritan sides, the Church of England was held together not by a common confession, but by a common English Bible and Prayer Book, a common national pattern of worship and spirituality.

- A. Henry VIII and the break with Rome
- B. Thomas Cranmer and *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1549
- C. From Catholic to Protestant and back again: Henry to Edward to Mary
- D. Elizabeth I and the Anglican Settlement, 1558-1603
- E. The English Bible from Wyclif to King James
- F. Richard Hooker: Scripture, Tradition, & Reason: the *via media*
- G. The 17th century: Puritan challenge and the English Civil War

CHURCH HISTORY: PART I

THE ENGLISH HERITAGE

I. Gathering

Hymn

- God is working his purpose out, *The Hymnal 1982* #534
- Singing songs of expectation, *The Hymnal 1982* #527

Collect for the Day

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your sson Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Invite the participants to share something of their own family history and what they know of the religious affiliations of their ancestors on both paternal and maternal sides. How did their family background relate to their own interest in Anglicanism?

II. Illumination

1. English Christianity existed as a distinctive branch of the trunk of the apostolic Church from the earliest times of the Christian era. It synthesized Celtic practices and Roman practices into a distinct *Ecclesia Anglicana* long before the Reformation.

2. The first British Christians were Romans, but with the withdrawal of the Romans from England in the Fifth century, Christianity survived in the Celtic areas of the west of England, Ireland, and Scotland. In the centuries during which Celtic Christianity was separated from Roman, the Celts developed a distinctive form of monasticism and church polity and a spirituality centered on creation and the cross.

3. In 597, when Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine of Canterbury to evangelize the English, there was a centuries-old Celtic church flourishing in Ireland and Scotland. In 664 at the Council of Whitby, the King of Northumberland accepted the Roman date for Easter rather than the Celtic, and the two branches began to grow together in Great Britain. During the next centuries, monasteries adopted a characteristic Benedictine spirituality.

4. From the Norman conquest of 1066 to Henry II's controversies with his Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket a century later, to John's confrontation with Archbishop Stephen Langton that led to the Magna Carta, to Henry VIII's displeasure with his Chancellor Thomas More, the relationship of Crown to Church was never easy, but the distinctively English character of the Church was never in question.

5. The Sixteenth-Century Reformation in England was different in character from the Continental Reformation—neither Lutheran nor Calvinist, though affected by both. In England, the Reformation was a political event, expressive of an emerging English national feeling. The Parliament in 1534 passed the Act of Supremacy making the King the Head of the Church in England as the culmination of a series of laws rejecting various claims to entitlement of the Bishop of Rome.

6. Henry VIII did not favor Continental Protestant ideas, and did not start the Church of England; he considered himself an English Catholic. His Archbishop Thomas Cranmer was affected by Lutheran ideas, but during Henry's reign (1509-47) was able to persuade the King only to authorize the writing of the Great Litany in English and the placement of an English Bible in churches. The mass remained in Latin and priests remained celibate.

7. Lutheran and Calvinist ideas did have their day during the brief reign of Edward VI, Henry's son, and it was during this period the first English *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) was issued, making worship uniform throughout the realm. The Protestant direction of the Edwardian reform was halted with the accession in 1553 of Mary, who returned England to the Latin mass and allegiance to the Pope.

8. When Mary died and Elizabeth I inherited in 1558, the distinctively Anglican *via media* or middle way was an expression of her policy. Elizabeth maintained the continuity of apostolic succession through the consecration of her Archbishop Matthew Parker. A national English Church outside the authority of Rome or Geneva survived. The Anglican Settlement of Elizabeth is more important in shaping modern Anglicanism than anything done by Henry VIII.

9. One important religious and cultural monument of the Reformation that does owe a good deal to Continental Protestant influences was the translation into English of the Bible. From John Wyclif and William Tyndale to the various translators of the Reformation era, and finally to the Authorized Version or King James Bible of 1611, the English Bible emerged as a literary masterpiece and cherished national treasure of the English Church.

10. In the 1580's Richard Hooker offered the classical defense of the Anglican middle way in his work *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, holding that the English Church, continuous with the apostolic Church, was both Catholic and reformed and rejecting the claims both of Rome and of the increasingly influential Puritans. Hooker offered the English a way of understanding Church authority as based on Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.

11. Under the early Stuart kings James I and Charles I, Puritanism grew and increasingly challenged royal authority in ecclesiastical as well as legislative and financial affairs. The influence of Calvinism led the Puritans to understand the Church as a gathering of the elect and to reject episcopacy. These challenges culminated between 1642 and 1649 in a civil war between the Puritan-led Parliament and the forces of Charles I. For a time in the 1650s, the Puritans under Oliver Cromwell abolished the episcopate as well as the monarchy, substituting a Presbyterian form of government for the Church and a Commonwealth for the king. However with the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660, the historic episcopate and the Anglican settlement were restored as well.

12. Through these troubled times, the English Church moved back and forth in response to the political changes, but its continuity was never broken and the Elizabethan *via media* endured. Stemming from its multivalent past, a national Church of England held together faithful believers with many convictions ranging from Anglo-Catholic ("High Church") to Evangelical ("Low Church"), but an English national Church continued to govern itself through bishops and worship together according to the *Book of Common Prayer*.

CHURCH HISTORY: PART I ENGLISH HERITAGE

III. Engagement

1. What was distinctive about English Christianity before the Reformation?
2. How was the English Reformation different from that of the Continent in the sixteenth century?
3. Explore the shifting relationship between the Church of England and the institution of monarchy in the Reformation period and after.
4. How was the Church of England able to contain within itself such varied perspectives and pieties?

IV. Reflection

Preface to the First *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP 1979, pages 866-7)

Articles of Religion (BCP 1979, pages 867-76)

V. Looking forward

The Church in America grows out of the English colonial experience, undergoes a catastrophe during the American Revolution, and revives to become an important part of American religious life. But the American Church must adapt to the conditions of a republic, a moving frontier, and the emergence of a democratic society.

CHURCH HISTORY: PART II

THE AMERICAN CHURCH

OUTLINE

Themes: Living with the Tension: Anglican Heritage and American Democracy, a Church both Catholic and Protestant.

I. The Church in Colonial & Revolutionary America

General themes: The Church of England was established in some colonies, and Puritan churches in others. In the colonial era, there were no American bishops, and the Church appeared to many colonists to be a political tool of the monarchy. The American Revolution disestablished the Church and almost eliminated its clergy in many areas.

- A. Anglican Establishment in some Southern Colonies
- B. Puritanism in the New England colonies
- C. An Episcopal Church without Bishops for 270 years
- D. The Effects of the American Revolution on the Church

II. The Church Adapts to American Conditions

General themes: Maintaining apostolic succession, American Anglicans established an American episcopate at the conclusion of the Revolution and created for the first time an Anglican polity appropriate to a republic, with a bicameral General Convention, elected bishops and lay leaders. The Church lost much ground to other churches in the generation after the Revolution by maintaining an approach to parish life more appropriate to a settled stable society than a nation of pioneers and immigrants; however, a new generation of leaders after 1820 began to plant churches and move westward. Only briefly divided by the Civil War, Episcopalians were instrumental thereafter in turning the attention of Christians to the problems of a new industrial society. Different flavors of Episcopalian liturgy stressed the Catholic or Protestant heritage, but the Church remained bonded by its common worship.

- A. The Transmission of the Episcopate to America
- B. The Creation of the Protestant Episcopal Church: the Role of the Laity
- C. The Domestic Mission: westward movement and missionary bishops
- D. The Episcopal Church and the Civil War
- E. High Church and Low Church
- F. The Church and industrialism: the Social Gospel

III. The Church and the World

General themes: The Episcopal Church engaged in worldwide mission work in Latin America, China, the Philippines, and Africa. It took the lead in the promotion of the modern ecumenical movement and was important in the development of the Anglican Communion.

- A. Mission to African-Americans, Native Americans
- B. Foreign Missions
- C. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and the Ecumenical Movement
- D. The Development of the Anglican Communion

IV. The Recent Past and Present Issues

General themes: In the turbulence of the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for women's equality, the Episcopal Church was an important, if often controversial, player. Women were ordained to all three orders of the clergy by 1989. The liturgical movement recovered many features of the worship of the ancient church and integrated them with the new sensibilities and contemporary language in *The Book of Common Prayer* 1979. At present, the Church is struggling with issues of sexuality and sexual orientation, which are typically expressed in controversies over ordination and liturgy.

- A. The Church and the Civil Rights Movement
- B. The full inclusion of women and women's ordination
- C. The liturgical movement and *The Book of Common Prayer* 1979
- D. Issues of sexuality dividing the Church today.

CHURCH HISTORY: PART II THE AMERICAN CHURCH

I. Gathering

Hymn

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Introduction

Remind participants of the basic themes of the Anglican way as it had emerged by the 17th century: a national church, common prayer, apostolic faith, incarnational theology, and the via media. How will these inheritances from the English experience be challenged by and adapted to the conditions of a democratizing American society in a federal, republican polity?

The Church of England was never established in all the English colonies, and no bishop was ever consecrated for the colonial Church. The colonial Church experienced the separation from England as a disaster, losing its privileged position in some colonies and many of its clergy everywhere. In the years immediately after the American Revolution, the Church in America had to re-think what it meant to be an Anglican without being English, an Anglican in an American republic. It was slow to adapt to the conditions of a growing and democratizing nation moving westwards. It did not learn how to grapple with these new realities quickly, but a new generation of American bishops after the 1820's was able to establish a secure place for the Episcopal Church in the United States.

II. Illumination

1. The Church of England came to the English colonies in North America with the first settlers at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Since the New England colonies were the creation of Puritans dissatisfied with the established Church at home, they were never Anglican, but the southern colonies gave a privileged position to the established Church of England.

2. During the two and a half centuries from 1607 to 1776, the English never consecrated a bishop for America, and even in the southern colonies there were many Anglicans who were not eager to see them appointed, since they were regarded as unwelcome extensions of royal authority. Laymen on vestries acquired much greater control over their clergy and parish affairs than in England.

3. The American Revolution was at first a disaster for the Church. Identified as it was with the mother country, having a clergy dependent upon episcopal oversight from London, worshipping according to a form that required prayers for the King at every service, it was the target of laws disestablishing it where it had been established and limiting it where it was not. Many clergy fled to England or Canada and left their congregations without pastors and without the sacraments.

4. At the end of the war, with British recognition of American independence, it was not clear how a Church of England could continue to exist in an American Republic. Samuel Seabury of Connecticut went to England to seek consecration as a bishop, but the English bishops were not legally able to lay hands upon anyone who could not pledge loyalty to the King of England. The answer was to turn to the Episcopal Church in Scotland, whose bishops consecrated Seabury in 1787.

5. Now that the historic episcopate had been brought to the United States, however, it was still not clear how the American Church would govern itself. William White of Philadelphia, soon consecrated a bishop himself, led the effort to design an American church suited to the new republic, and in 1789 the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. was created, with a governing structure based on the model of the Federal Constitution, combining lay and clerical leadership, with a Presiding Bishop and a General Convention made up of a House of Bishops and a House of Delegates.

6. The infant American Church existed in the doldrums as the new century opened. Its parish-level organization was suited for a stable society, but Americans were on the move. Protestant denominations with their circuit-riding preachers laid the foundations for large Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches while the Episcopal Church remained small. Only with a new generation of leaders such as Bishops William Henry Hobart and Jackson Kemper did the domestic mission of the Church find proper expression.

7. Briefly divided by the Civil War, the Episcopal Church found it easier to reunite afterwards than many other denominations, because its unity came through common worship and prayer and the episcopacy. Even as Protestantism continued to give rise to new religious groups in America, the Episcopal Church remained largely intact. There were, however, multiple influences acting on the Episcopal Church from the Oxford movement to Liberal theology, the Broad Church movement, and the Social Gospel. The Catholic revival notably enriched the liturgy and led to a Gothic revival in church buildings. High Church and Low Church parties differed in their emphases but remained within the same Episcopal Church structure.

8. As America industrialized and large numbers of immigrants arrived from central and eastern European lands, and as slavery disappeared, to be replaced by racial segregation, the religious makeup of the nation changed quickly. At the same time, industrialism and racism presented new problems and opportunities for the American Church. Episcopalians were prominent in the Social Gospel movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and they struggled with the question of race relations and mission to African-Americans and Native Americans. In the late 19th century, American Episcopalians also began to play a significant role in foreign mission work in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Philippines, and China.

9. Having pioneered in the development of a non-English Anglicanism, American Episcopalians also played a role in the evolution of the Anglican Communion as other former colonies of Great Britain acquired self-government and looked to the American Church as a model of how to retain an Anglican identity outside a colonial relationship with England. Similarly, from the 1850s on, Episcopalians led in the emerging Ecumenical Movement, offering the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 as a basis for church union.

10. In the twentieth century, the Church avoided the internal schisms that Protestant denominations often faced in the battle over a literal understanding of scripture and the issue of evolution. In the first half of the century, the Church was generally conservative, and its membership was largely middle and upper-class, but it promoted the social gospel and the ecumenical movement.

11. After World War II the Church experienced tremendous growth, reaching 3.4 million members by 1960. The controversies since that time have included the turbulence over racial and gender equality:

the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the issue of Prayer Book revision. Typically for Anglicans, many of these issues have found expression as questions of liturgy and ordination. The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* attempted both to modernize the language of the 1928 *BCP* and to return to many ancient practices of the Church. At present the Episcopal Church is struggling with issues of sexuality and sexual orientation which continue to find expression in typically Anglican form as questions of liturgy and ordination.

CHURCH HISTORY: PART II THE AMERICAN CHURCH

III. Engagement

1. How did the independence of the American republic create a crisis for Anglicanism?
2. How did American Anglicans solve the problem of creating a non-English form of Anglicanism?
3. Why was the Episcopal Church relatively slow in moving westward with the country?
4. How did Episcopalians avoid the permanent divisions that affected Protestant churches over issues of slavery, Civil War, and fundamentalism?
5. Why has the Episcopal Church been a leader in foreign missions and the ecumenical movement?
6. How has the Episcopal Church dealt with questions such as social justice, civil rights, and women's equality?

IV. Reflection

1. Preface to the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), pages 9-11
2. Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (BCP 1979, pages 876-7)