

# Anglicanism

Who we are and what we do.

## Anglicanism:

“Christians first, Anglicans second” is an expression we’ve used to describe how we think about our affiliation. We are first, passionate to be followers of Christ; second, we find great value being a part of a movement that is historical, global and biblical. Are we trying to convert people to Anglicanism? No! We’re working to bring people to know the life we can have in Jesus Christ as well as seeking to benefit from the history, liturgy, seasons and more that comprise the Anglican story. This is no different, for example, than Baptists who find meaning in their history of American revivalism and Presbyterians who find meaning in the story of Calvinism.

## A (not-so-short) History :

(taken from “Our Anglican Heritage”  
by Bishop John Howe):

No, the Church of England did not begin in the sixteenth century. It was not founded by Henry VIII. It was not simply a matter of his wanting a divorce so he could marry Anne Boleyn. But these are some of the widely held misconceptions, even among Anglicans themselves. The Church of England has a rich biblical and theological heritage. Its reformation was as much a protest against Roman Catholic heresy as were the Lutheran and Calvinist movements on the continent. In this case, however, the break with Rome mixed politics with religion.

By the fourteenth century, Roman Catholicism had evolved into something very different from the “faith once delivered to the saints.” The Bible had been interpreted and reinterpreted by various church councils and finally forced into categories of Aristotelian philosophy by Thomas Aquinas. Salvation was no longer a matter of simply trusting God’s graciousness, but increasingly, it was seen as something we earn. In the popular



**The River is an Ancient/Future church blending the ancient traditions of the past, with cultural relevance.**

mind, forgiveness could be bought and sold through a system of indulgences. The communion meal had become an elaborate sacrifice, offered on an altar by a priest in whose hands the bread and wine were to be literally transformed into Christ’s body and blood. The pope claimed political as well as religious supremacy and financed his wars through taxation of the faithful. The Mass was in Latin and was only understood by most of the clergy, not at all by the ordinary Christian.

One of the clearest voices calling for reform was that of John Wycliffe, an Englishman. In open defiance of Rome, Wycliffe (1320’s - 1384) translated the major portion of the Bible into English and called for the church to return to the Scriptures. The principle of *sola Scriptura* (“the Scriptures only”), which became the battle cry of the Reformation, was trumpeted in England a century and a half before Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Wittenburg church.

At least three other factors paved the way for the break with Rome. First, there was the impact of the Renaissance and its critical undermining of papal authority. It was clearly proven that many of the most important apostolic (and later documents) on which the pope’s authority was based were outright forgeries from as late as the ninth century. If the basis for claiming dominion was false, what status could the claim itself have?

Secondly, the power of the printing press made possible the wholesale distribution of tracts and pamphlets as well as the Scriptures in the language of the common man. This was Luther’s greatest tool. His books were distributed throughout Europe, and by the early 1520’s, the Lutheran movement was well established in Cambridge. Groups of young theologians and clergy gathered at the White Horse Tavern to discuss Luther’s works. By the time Henry VIII declared his independence from Rome, approximately 50 percent of the English bishops were of Lutheran persuasion.

Thirdly, there was a rising tide of nationalism, a desire on the part of both church and state to limit the interference of any foreign power—including the pope—in the internal affairs of the realm. The conviction that England should be English lay at the root of Henry's political support. In 1534, on authority of Parliament and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Act of Succession declared the marriage of Henry and Anne Boleyn null and void. Leaving spiritual functions such as administering the sacraments to the clergy, he had in effect, replaced the pope with the king. The church remained Catholic ("catholic" meaning a part of the larger, global church), but the break with Rome was complete.

Henry was no noble king. His purposes were far from godly. Some of the bishops and theologians who helped him compromised at several points. Yet, there can be no doubt that in the midst of all the power politics, all the intrigue and rationalization and all the compromise and outright sin on both sides, God was returning the Church of England to its biblical foundations.



Case in point, even under Henry's basically Catholic rule, two major changes were introduced with far-reaching consequences. First, the Bible was again translated into English and copies were introduced into all the churches in England. People crowded into them all day long, simply to hear the Scriptures read.

Secondly, the genius of Archbishop Cranmer began to shine in the area of worship. Convinced that prayer should be in the language of the people, he began to fashion what has come to be known as *The Book of Common Prayer*. Cranmer bequeathed to the English-speaking world a form of worship so majestic as to be without rival. The fact that the majority of the book's prayers are still relevant and in wide use today, speaks to the timelessness and relevance of Cranmer's spiritual writings. Cranmer gave worship back to the people, and he did so magnificently. Eventually, he fashioned a lectionary (a daily and weekly schedule of Bible readings), and in a stroke he made the Church of England the greatest Bible-reading church in the world. Nowhere else is the Bible read so regularly, so comprehensively, and at such length as in the public worship of the Anglican communion.

Other reforms were made: the Roman Mass was transformed into a Communion meal once again. Wine, previously reserved for the clergy, was distributed along with the bread to all communicants. The bread itself was real bread instead of a special wafer. The altar was replaced by the Holy Table. By law it had to be made of wood and moved away from the wall into the middle of the congregation. Adoration of the communion elements (and anything that hinted of it) was prohibited.

The prayer of transubstantiation, that the bread and wine become Christ's body and blood, was eliminated. The words of distribution were reduced to simply "Take and eat this" or "Drink this in remembrance." Ritual gestures were forbidden as were prayers for the dead and reference to purgatory. Priest's vestments were reduced to cassock and surplice (a black robe with a simple white garment over top). Clergy were freely permitted to marry.

In the midst of all these specifics, the central point of difference between the Church of England and the Church of Rome emerged. In 1545, the pope convened the Council of Trent. It declared what had long been practiced: that regarding authority, Roman Catholicism gives equal authority to the Scriptures and the traditions of the church. In the sharpest contrast, Anglicanism chose to stand upon the ultimate authority of Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*).

## What we do in worship?

Anglicanism holds to two sacraments ("sacred instruments"), as consistent with many other major denominations. These are (1) baptism as a sign of entrance into a relationship with a covenant God, and His covenant community, and (2) the Lord's supper, (also called "Eucharist" (thanksgiving) or "Communion"), a sign of participation with Christ in the covenant meal.

First in regards to baptism: Do we baptize adults? Absolutely! We prefer full immersion. Not many people have a problem with this because it is so clearly commanded in Scripture. Do we baptize kids? Yes. Why? Like many other groups that baptize children (called "paedobaptism") – such as Presbyterians, Catholics, Orthodox to name a few – we baptize children because we believe that Scripture supports it and also does not oppose it. There is an excellent article in Bishop Howe's book ("Our Anglican Heritage") about this.



Suffice it to say that we believe in a covenant God who began the idea of children's entrance into the covenant community with the rite of circumcision (in the Old Testament). This act had nothing to do with the child's faith, it had to do with the faith of the child's natural family (nuclear and extended) as well as spiritual faith community. It was a sign of their belief in the faithfulness of God.

In the same way, our belief is not different for children than for adults. When we baptize adults, are we putting our faith in the adult's ability to be faithful? No. None of us have the ability to be faithful to the covenant, that's why we need the Gospel. We're putting our faith in a God who brings broken and sinful people into the covenant family in order to show His power, faithfulness and forgiveness when we fail.

# The Work of the People

*Who participates in worshipping God when we gather on Sundays?*

## Ordered Worship:

We believe that ordered worship sets us free. C.S. Lewis compared this to learning to dance. At first, we are thinking about the steps, conscious of each movement. At this state we are not yet really dancing, and can't dance well with others. But as we learn the steps, we begin to be free to dance, because we know the steps by heart and can enjoy the movement and the moment. The pattern we have learned for dancing helps us to coordinate with others dancing with us, and move in one motion. Ordered worship is not created to stifle the Holy Spirit or to limit us, instead it frees us to join together as one voice in praise. It gives us that pattern by which we can together "dance" in God's presence.

Does that mean we are not spontaneous? No! We are open to the Holy Spirit in worship. We pray spontaneously, we allow God to speak through us in preaching spontaneously, and at times we change up the service when it seems the Holy Spirit is leading us in that way. What is the value of repetition then? The value of some amount of repetition is that we can lose ourselves in the drama and dance of worship and enter in the presence of God and the passion of Christ's death and resurrection.

What is liturgy? Liturgy is literally "the work of the people". Worship is participation, not just observation; an offering rather than a performance! Every church has a liturgy, it just so happens that ours involves more group participation than most churches: call and response Psalms, prayers we say together like The Lord's Prayer, and movement (like kneeling for communion) that symbolizes our humility before God.

## Ancient Worship Patterns:

We follow *The Book of Common Prayer* (a book written to guide Anglicans in common worship) in a catholic and reformational worship tradition. By 'catholic', we mean the faith and order of the early Church and the faithful throughout church history. By 'reformational', we mean the foundation of Scripture and lively faith renewed at the Reformation, during the evangelical revivals, and the renewal movements. The pattern of Word and Sacrament has been present in



Christian worship from the earliest days of the church. Although there are many distinctively Anglican customs, the shape of the liturgy is a historic, Christian pattern. The creed used on some Sundays is either the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds from the early church. A creed is a common confession and acknowledgment of our personal faith, the faith of our local church, and a faith consistent with all the faithful today and in times past. By saying creeds, we are stating that we are the same church, with the same faith, that has existed since Christ himself founded it.

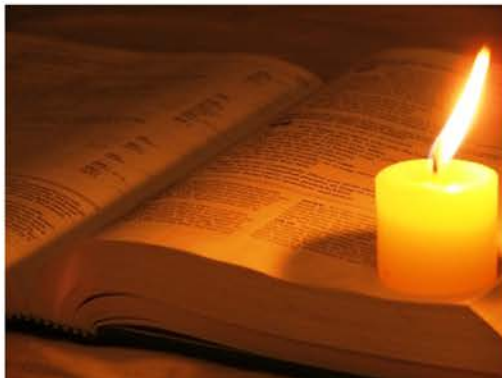
## The Offering:

The giving of resources to our local parish is both a partnering together in mission and a sacramental act representing God's ownership of all things. We believe that giving the tithe (10% of income) is a historical Christian discipline, based on the biblical practice of Israel. While not a requirement, it is a pattern that we invite all believers to joyfully practice as an act of devotion and a visible sign of partnership in mission.

## The Great Thanksgiving:

The great thanksgiving is the name for the cluster of prayers that surround the Lord's Supper. These prayers are based on the ancient pattern of prayer from the earliest days of the church. The celebrant leads, and the whole congregation joins in prayer.

First, there is the *Sursum Corda*, or the lifting up of our hearts. This is an ancient Christian responsive prayer that is used in many Christian churches today. This is followed by a brief remembrance of the history of our salvation in and through Christ. Next is the *Sanctus* (Latin for "Holy, Holy, Holy") that the book of Revelation tells us the saints and angels sing to God around his throne. We believe that our voices are joined with that heavenly choir as we stand with them in praise to God. The words of institution are the words Jesus gave us, and St Paul recorded, "this is my body...this is my blood." This is the central prayer of the Lord's Supper, indicating that we obey his command as we take bread, break it, give thanks and give it in his name.



## Receiving Communion:

We believe that during the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit makes Christ himself present to us in the bread and wine - by faith. John Calvin, the Reformer, called this the "Real Presence", describing the way in which God uses communion as a mystery (see 1 Cor 10:16 for example). All baptized believers are welcome to receive at the Lord's Table because baptism is the initiation rite that Jesus commanded us to do (Matthew 28:18-19). Thus, it is most appropriate in fulfillment of Scripture, to be baptized before receiving communion. Anglicans practice an open table, meaning that any person from a Trinitarian church is able to receive communion at The River.

## The Dismissal:

The end of the service is the beginning. The dismissal does not end with an "Amen" because our worship continues through the week. It sends us out to love and serve the Lord, and those in the world, with "Alleluia!" (which means "Praise the Lord"). Worship has no end- we continue to worship as we go where we are called to go in the name of the Christ we love, who first loved us.

## Statement of faith:

We believe and confess Jesus Christ to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no one comes to the Father but by Him. Therefore, The River identifies the following seven elements as characteristic of the Anglican Way:

1. We confess the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God, containing all things necessary for salvation, the final authority and unchangeable standard for Christian faith and life.
2. We confess Baptism and the Supper of the Lord to be Sacraments ordained by Christ in the Gospel, and thus to be ministered with unfailing use of His words of institution and of the elements ordained by Him.
3. We confess the godly historic Episcopate as an inherent part of the apostolic faith and practice, and therefore as integral to the fullness and unity of the Body of Christ.
4. We confess as proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture the historic faith of the undivided church as declared in the three Catholic Creeds: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian.
5. Concerning the seven Councils of the undivided Church, we affirm the teaching of the first four Councils and the Christological clarifications of the fifth, sixth and seventh Councils, in so far as they are agreeable to the Holy Scriptures.
6. We receive *The Book of Common Prayer* as set forth by the Church of England in 1662, together with the Ordinal attached to the same, as a standard for Anglican doctrine and discipline, and, with the Books which preceded it, as the standard for the Anglican tradition of worship.
7. We receive the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of 1571, taken in their literal and grammatical sense, as expressing the Anglican response to certain doctrinal issues controverted at that time, and as expressing the fundamental principles of authentic Anglican belief.

## What is our affiliation?

We are a part of PearUSA, which is a missionary district of the diocese of Rwanda, Africa. We have many other churches here in the US in several other states from both coasts. The River was planted out of our sister churches in Roanoke, which are Church of the Holy Spirit and Orchard Hills Church.

As Anglicans, we are committed to being in a strong network of churches (our network consists of over 15 churches that span from Roanoke to Harrisonburg to the Triangle area in NC to the Triad in Greensboro, NC).

PearUSA is an exciting movement that is very much centered in the commitment to plant healthy churches that in turn plant healthy churches. We feel privileged to be connected and submitted to African leaders who love Jesus Christ and are faithful servants on the other side of the world!

For more information, including the full story, check out [www.PearUSA.org](http://www.PearUSA.org).