



St Anne's Church Wandsworth

BEING ANGLICANS

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

'Anglican' comes from the Latin for 'English'. The Anglican Communion is based historically on the spread of the Church of England around the world – but mostly the bits which at some time were part of the Commonwealth. The Anglican Communion is technically not a single church but a 'family' of sister churches called Provinces.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is the senior bishop in the Church of England. He is also the figurehead, as it were, of the whole Anglican Communion, but carries no authority over other Provinces.

Each province is divided into dioceses. Each diocese is headed by a bishop (often with assistant bishops). The clergy in the diocese are technically the bishop's deputies. Dioceses are divided into parishes which, in England and Wales, are geographical areas. Every corner of this country is in one parish or another and every person is entitled to pastoral care from their local parish and clergy.

The parish of St Anne's Wandsworth is in the Diocese of Southwark (most of South London and Surrey)

(Bishop Christopher Chessun is the diocesan bishop. This part of the diocese is in the Kingston Episcopal Area under Bishop Richard Cheetham)

The Diocese of Southwark is part of the Church of England which is part of the Anglican Communion (Archbishop Justin Welby is the Archbishop of Canterbury)

The Church of England is a Province in the Anglican Communion

The **Lambeth Conference** is a ten-yearly meeting to which all the bishops of the Anglican Communion are invited. (It outgrew Lambeth Palace long ago and now meets in Canterbury.) The Conference enables bishops from around the world to meet and discuss all sorts of matters together. It does not pass rules or make binding judgements, but its discussions are treated with great respect by all the Provinces.

ANGLICANISM AMONG OTHER DENOMINATIONS: WHAT MAKES US ANGLICAN?

The Church of England separated from the Roman Catholic Church during the Reformation when Western European Christianity split over a series of disputes. (The Lutheran Church in Germany, the Reformed or Presbyterian Church and the Baptists also date from this time.)

Some basic labels help us see our place among other denominations:

All mainstream Christian churches worship God as the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They regard Jesus Christ as the full revelation of God: fully divine and fully human. They have the same Bible (though groups differ over how to treat an Appendix to the Old Testament called the Apocrypha). They acknowledge the ancient Creeds, especially the 'Nicene Creed' as authoritative summaries of Christian teaching and acknowledge also the Councils that produced them.

The **Eastern Orthodox Churches** (of Greece, Russia and Eastern Europe) hold all this and are proud of their ancient traditions. In many ways they are theologically close to the Church of England though culturally there is a vast difference between East and West.

The **Roman Catholic Church** belongs culturally to Western Europe. Theologically their distinctive feature is the authority given to the Pope (the Bishop of Rome) above all other bishops and over Councils.

The **Churches of the Reformation** opposed the Roman Catholic Church on the position of the Pope, and set the Bible as the supreme authority over the Church. (Easy to say, but who then interprets the Bible? Many splits have since come over interpretations of scripture.) Also most of the Reformation Churches rejected the traditional ministry of bishops, priests and deacons and adopted various structures, preferring ministers with titles such as elders and superintendents. The worship was radically revised.

The **Church of England**, though one of the Churches of the Reformation, retained the traditional bishops, priests and deacons. It revised its worship but less radically than other churches. More than most Reformation churches it stressed the continuity with the Church of the Middle Ages and before. It rejected the Pope and was reserved about the authority of general councils. It

evolved a particular approach to authority, speaking of “scripture, tradition and reason”. Scripture is the supreme source of our understanding of God and Christ. The Christian tradition is the way by which it has come down to us and been interpreted. Our own reason then plays a part as we grapple with scripture and the tradition in our generation. This can be a demanding but positive thing: “devotion to truth for truth’s sake”. And it is not about each person making up their own mind for themselves: this is the Church as a community sharing together and trying to understand the mind of God. But the Anglican respect for reason makes the Church slow to condemn or to define too closely: what is God calling us to in the future? Big decisions can be made but only after much debate and reflection. About fifteen years ago women were first ordained as priests. Will they now be ordained as bishops? And what is the proper Christian response to homosexual behaviour? These matters are being discussed today, but it is important that they do not divide the Church. The point is to learn about these things together, not to fall apart over them.

The Declaration of Assent is sworn by all clergy when they are ordained or take up any post in the Church, affirming their allegiance to the Anglican tradition.

Preface

The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration you are about to make, will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care?

Declaration of Assent

I, A B, do so affirm, and accordingly declare my belief in the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use only the forms of service which are authorized or allowed by Canon.

VARIETY IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND: ST ANNE'S AND OTHER C of E CHURCHES

The early years of the Church of England saw yo-yo swings in teaching and worship from Henry VIII to Edward VI to Mary to Elizabeth I. It happened again in the seventeenth century under Charles I, Oliver Cromwell and Charles II. As a result there has never been uniformity, but the Church has always included people of all sorts of different views and practices.

Besides the creeds, Anglican teaching is still classically defined by the documents of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Book of Common Prayer (1662) and the Thirty Nine Articles. But we have all moved a long way since those times and had to respond to many new insights and challenges. Movements which have had an enormous effect even today are the Evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century, the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century (leading people to emphasise the Catholic nature of the Church and its continuity with earlier ages) and the rise of modern scholarship in science, history and the reading of the Bible.

Also clergy enjoy considerable independence and, for good or ill, the bishops can do little to make them toe any line! On the down side this can lead to division and chaos, but it also frees clergy and congregations for their own life of worship and service and encourages individuality.

Today almost every Church of England church can seem very different from its neighbours. Some, like St Anne's, have traditional hymns, much ceremony, robed clergy and choir and a form of service which is fairly stable from week to week. Others might have few or none of those things! The variety can be bewildering, and make it difficult when moving from one area to another.

But each church ministers to its local area and conducts baptisms, weddings and funerals for its parishioners as well as providing Sunday services and pastoral care. Churches, especially those in villages, are held in deep affection by locals as so many important events are celebrated there.

The main thing is that each church and congregation should be a place where God is known, served and worshipped. And that's something the Church of England is pretty good at.