

*Webs of relationships formed by love,
common prayer*

The Episcopal Church traces its roots to the Church of England, and we are not the only Christian community in the world to do so. There are more than 70 million people in 163 countries who call themselves Anglican because they belong to congregations with roots similar to ours.

Those roots were put down by missionaries and by settlers who journeyed to new lands and brought with them The Book of Common Prayer and Anglican clergy. The churches which grew up from those seeds resembled each other in basic ways, yet also reflected their individual cultures. Your experience of worshipping with Anglicans in Alaska, for instance, may well be very different than if you were worshipping with Anglicans in South Africa or Italy but all Anglicans use a version of The Book of Common Prayer.



The Episcopal Church welcomes you
The 75th General Convention, Columbus

Even the way Anglicans govern their churches differs throughout the world. For instance, in some churches, bishops are appointed by the government or by archbishops. In other Anglican churches, clergy and lay people elect their bishops. Few member churches gather both its clergy and lay people as the Episcopal Church does to vote on the direction of the church's mission.

Our common history and common prayer make us members of what we call the Anglican Communion. At the center of the Communion is the leader of the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The current archbishop, the 104th man in that position, is the Most Reverend Rowan Williams. He is the spiritual head of the Communion, but has no direct authority over any Anglican church outside of England.



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Each member church is connected or “in communion,” as Anglicans say, with the Archbishop of Canterbury and, through him, to every other church. The member churches of the Anglican Communion are joined together by choice in love, and have no authority over one another.

This arrangement may seem complicated, and it has led to some tension. For at least the last 30 years, the leaders of some of the 38 member churches of the Communion have said they are “out of communion” with the Episcopal Church because of our decisions, first, about ordaining women and then, more recently, consecrating an openly gay man as the bishop of New Hampshire and the blessing of same-gender relationships.

Yet, the Anglican Communion has been called a mystery which we are always trying to understand. Many say living in this sometimes-imperfect web of relationships is a gift from God. Indeed, we are called by God to be an example of how a group of very different people might be held together by our love of God, our belief that Jesus invited everyone to the table and our desire to spread that love in this world that is often divided and broken.

“ O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery . . . ”

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 280

Read more about it:

- The Anglican Communion website
<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/index.cfm>
- “An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church,” Don S. Armentrout, Robert Boak Slocum, editors, Church Publishing Inc., © 2000, www.episcopalchurch.org/19625_19610_ENG_HTML.htm?menupage=19609

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