



via media: An Anglican Way of Being Christian

Theology Statement

We live in a world of hunger. While we hunger for food to sustain our bodies, we also hunger for spiritual food to sustain our souls. This spiritual hunger is a hunger for community, and it was planted in us by God. In this sense, religious faith is not a way to find pre-packaged answers to life's many difficult questions. Religious faith is a way to respond to our deep hunger for communion: for relationship with each other and with God.

Christian faith rests on the belief that God loves us, longs to see us thrive, and wants to be in relationship with us. This is an energizing and deeply hopeful vision for human life, which we discover and learn about best in community.

In **via media** you are invited into Christian community in a particular way. As Episcopalians, we understand religious faith as a matter of ongoing conversation among diverse communities past and present—those with whom we might agree and those with whom we might disagree. Through this conversation we believe God is calling each of us into community—with each other, with the whole of creation and with God.

The Episcopal Church belongs to the worldwide communion of Anglican Christians. The Anglican Communion has its roots in the Church of England's break with the Pope in Rome. Anglicanism derives its unique approach to Christian faith from the Elizabethan Settlement in 16th century England, where deep divisions between Catholics and Protestants threatened to tear English society apart. Only a compromise incorporating diverse Christian practices would enable that society to survive. Since then, Anglicans have continued to work out the implications of this wide-reaching embrace in an approach that became known as the *via media*, a middle way that values multiple perspectives.

In the Episcopal Church today, we continue this heritage by relying on the dynamic interaction of Scripture (sacred texts), Traditions (centuries of prayer and reflection by a multiplicity of voices), and Reason (the combined use of our learning and our experiences of God and the world) to discern the truth and make decisions about what God is saying to us. Each of these sources is informed by the other two in a balanced approach to Christian faith, a process often pictured as a three-legged stool.

We also invoke the image of the three-legged stool to find authority in the Episcopal Church. Rather than a top-down hierarchy alone, or dependence upon the pronouncements of pope or local pastor, or relying only on Scripture, Episcopalians find authority through the consideration of Scripture, Traditions and Reason by clergy and laity alike sharing in conversation. The process for discerning Truth in the Anglican tradition is shared by the laity and the clergy.

One of the ways Episcopalians experience a profound invitation to this ongoing conversation is in our participation in the Holy Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion. At the Eucharistic table we hear and reenact the story of Jesus' self-giving love. In experiencing that love again and again by bringing our selves to the table, we find our lives shaped, and our community formed, into the body of Christ in the world.

The story, in other words, is not yet finished. And you are invited to participate in the unfolding of its next chapter.

Take-Home Materials for Session One

The work of the Gospel calls us to go out into the world, to take the learning, prayer, and spirit of the community to the people of God who are not gathered in our community. As you reflect on your experience this week, here are some resources to focus your meditation, prayer, and study. You may have time to do all of these things during your week. You may only have time for some of the suggestions. Whatever you do, please keep the members of your small group in your thoughts as you carry out your work this week.

Outline of the Faith (Book of Common Prayer, pg. 854)

The Church

Q. What is the mission of the Church?

A. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?

A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

Prayer for the Week (Book of Common Prayer, pg. 816, adapted)

For the Church

Gracious God, we pray for your holy catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son our Savior. Amen.

Scripture for the Week

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." **Matthew 28:16-20**, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Journaling

Journaling is a good way for adults to pay attention to their faith lives. You are encouraged to journal so that you can consider the questions that develop during our time together. Like with other prayer disciplines, it often helps to pick a time to write in your journal each day, setting it aside in some way. The question to think about as you write this week appears below.

Reflection for the Week

You heard in today's video that is is said: "Doubt is not the opposite of faith; fear is."
What do you doubt? What do you fear? What fears or doubts do you bring with you to this program?

Church History: Of Things Anglican and Episcopalian

“The study of history is a way of backing up a few hundred years into the past in order to get a head start on the future.”

– Frederica Harris-Thomsett, *We Are Theologians*

(online source: www.justus.anglican.org/resources/timeline)

Our Anglican Roots

- 44 – Roman conquest of Britain ... Christianity arrives about this time
- 64 – Persecution of the Church under Nero
- 209 – Alban, the first English martyr (dies for offering shelter to a Christian missionary)
- 312 – Constantine ends persecution: Christianity becomes official religion of Rome
- 325 – Council of Nicea
- 407 – Last date-certain of any of official Roman presence in Britain
- 432 – Patrick (an Englishman from a clerical family) evangelizes Ireland
- 500 – First Celtic monastery founded in Tintagel
- 530 – David, bishop in Wales, popularizes Christianity there
- 562 – Columba, an Irishman, popularizes Christianity in Scotland
- 597 – Pope Gregory decides to send a Christian Mission to Britain. Augustine is sent.
- 663 – Synod of Whitby: The English Church comes under Roman authority
- 1066 – Norman Conquest
- 1525 – Henry VIII seeks for an annulment of his 1st marriage to Catherine of Aragon
- 1536 – Henry VIII ensures the permanent popularity of the English Reformation by abolishing the monasteries and sharing the loot with almost everybody.
- 1547 – Henry dies. Succeeded by young son, Edward VI
- 1549 – First Book of Common Prayer
- 1553 – Edward dies. Succeeded by Mary ... who attempts to return England to Rome
- 1558 – Mary dies. Succeeded by Elizabeth I

“Elizabeth’s solution to the strife between Protestantism and Catholicism would eventually be called the Elizabethan Settlement - a “middle way” (*via media*). Under her rule, a new edition of the Book of Common Prayer was created which continued with the tradition of being as vague as possible for the purpose of allowing as many different interpretations as possible. This motive of achieving maximum inclusiveness has remained an important aspect of the Anglican church down through today.”
(http://atheism.about.com/library/glossary/western/bldef_elizabethansettlement.htm)

The American Church

1776 – Declaration of Independence

1784 – Samuel Seabury is consecrated first American bishop by Scottish bishops

1789 – First General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church; First American Prayer Book

From the Preface: *It is a most invaluable part of that blessed “liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” that in his worship different forms and usages may without offense be allowed, provided the substance of the Faith be kept entire; and that, in every Church, what cannot be clearly determined to belong to Doctrine must be deferred to Discipline; and therefore, by common consent and authority, may be altered, abridged, enlarged, amended or otherwise disposed of, as may seem most convenient for the edification of the people, “according to the various exigency of times and occasions.”*

1861-1865 – Civil War. Many feel the Episcopal Church will break in schism, but the Episcopal Church emerges from the war to be a voice of real Reconstruction

1892 – Prayer Book revision

1928 – Another Prayer Book revision

1960’s and 1970’s – Church is proactive in movements opposing segregation and opposing the Viet Nam war

1970 – Ordination of women as deacons approved

1973 – Approval of ordination of women to the priesthood falls a few votes short of passage

1974 – Eleven women are “irregularly ordained” priests in Philadelphia

1975 – Four more women ordained priest in Washington

1976 – The General Convention of the Episcopal Church approves the ordination of women to all three orders of ordained ministry: deacon, priest and bishop; Declares that gay and lesbian people are entitled to “full and equal claim” on the pastoral care and concern of the Church

1979 – New Prayer Book is introduced

1982 – New Hymnal is adopted

1989 – Barbara Harris consecrated bishop suffragan of Massachusetts

2003 – Gene Robinson elected bishop coadjutor of New Hampshire; General Convention recognizes “local option” for blessing same-gender unions