

Resource: What is the Anglican church?

The Anglican church is a network of over 80 million Christians around the world. It's name comes from its origin- England (the land of the 'Angles'). Some trace its theological roots to the first century AD, to what tradition tells us was a visit by the Apostle John himself (one of Jesus' closest followers). The Anglican church separated from Roman Catholicism and became a distinctly protestant denomination during the time of the protestant reformation (mid-16th century), and spread through missionary efforts around the world. Today, the vast majority of Anglicans live and worship in the global south, and most are not 'Anglo's at all! The Gospel has made a new people, and a new family, that is as diverse as it is numerous.

The Anglican church today exists as a federation of local networks (each called a 'diocese') that are overseen by Bishops. These are then grouped into larger, regional networks (each called a 'province'), that are overseen by Archbishops. These Bishops and Archbishops form a voluntary communion of Christian leaders that support one another with resources, accountability, and partnership in mission. This is called the "Anglican Communion." There is no single ruling leader in the Anglican Communion- any official decision is made by an international counsel of Archbishops.

The Anglican church looks very different in different places around the United States and around the world, which can make generalizations difficult. However, in general, two distinctions set Anglicanism apart from other branches of Christianity:

1. Protestant Theology. The Anglican Church has for centuries anchored its thought and practice in the protestant vein of Christian Theology. This means that Anglicans, by and large, hold to the teachings of the reformers- that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, authoritatively revealed in Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. The reformers understood these five principles to be derived from Scripture and to have been held by the church for a millennia before getting 'jumbled' in the Roman Catholic teaching of the middle ages. Nevertheless, as scholarship broadens our understanding of the church's understanding of salvation through the ages, and as ecumenical conversations have brought about much shared understanding of the same, these reformational tenants are often interpreted more generously than their original authors would have understood them, and many in the Anglican communion find great affinity with other Christian traditions around the world. Nevertheless, these reformational principles form the backbone of the traditional Anglican theological formularies: the 39 Articles. See the 39 Articles in full length on our resource page.
2. Ancient Practice. In the 16th century the Anglican church maintained many of the patterns of worship and devotional life of the Roman Church even as it sought theological distinction from it. The Anglican Reformers (Thomas Cranmer chief amongst them) recognized that, while only scripture is finally authoritative in matters of doctrine, it is not intended to be the sole guide of the church's practice. In fact, the Spirit is given to the church to guide and gift its body, and thus the history of the church has immense, God-given wisdom- wisdom not to be treated lightly. Thus the Anglican church kept

many of the visual distinctives of Roman practice- such as ancient liturgical (scripted/dramatized) worship services, the ruling office of a Bishop, and the church calendar (to name a few). Our worship services, centered around word and often sacrament, (or teaching and often table) are set forth in regularly updated “Books of Common Prayer;” ours can be found here. [link, BCP].

Much more can be said about these two distinctives, and more information about our theological distinctives as a church can be found on our Resource page (or will be, as we continue to flesh it out. Don’t hesitate to contact us with questions in the meantime!)

In the Statesboro Anglican Mission in particular, several other values of Anglicanism are particularly attractive to us.

1. Christ- Centeredness. Not just in it’s protestant theological underpinnings, but in its ancient practices, Anglicanism seeks to make Jesus central to our lives, our hopes, and our futures.
2. Rootedness. We are not making this up as we go, and we believe that gives us remarkable freedom. In an age of constant novelty, planned obsolescence and exploding news feeds, an ancient, well-trodden way gives us tremendous stability and joyful confidence to continue walking forward together. Our faith is not built on our experience, but on the word of God carried by people of God through the centuries.
3. Diversity. Being part of a global communion allows for our theology to be worked out together with people in various places and cultures. This minimizes the likelihood that our cultural blindspots hinder our work together, and enriches our study of scripture and our worship in particular.
4. Rich, Full-bodied Worship. Our worship, like our life, should involve all of who we are. Thus our worship includes sights and sounds and tastes and touches and motion. We sing and we stand and we kneel and we pray together. We think, and we confess, and we rejoice, and we give thanks. Our worship services are deliberately structured to be a spiritual workout, to bring all of ourselves to God in the many ways that his grace invites and commands us to respond.

Further Resources:

39 Articles

Jerusalem Declaration

Book of Common Prayer, 2019

Justo Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity Pt. 2. (for a more Protestant reading)

Moorman, A History of the Church in England (for a more Roman reading)