

# An Explanation and Guide to Anglicanism

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## I. Anglicans & Episcopalians: An Explanation

Many people are quite confused over the differences and similarities between Anglicans, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics. Here is a very short, succinct explanation!

### History

In order to really get this, you first have to know a bit about the history behind the church. In the sixth century the Catholic Church arrived in England through missionaries from Rome and Ireland. This church grew and spread and was an integral part of the wider Catholic communion. In the sixteenth century the church in England declared itself independent from Rome under Henry VIII and then in 1570 Pope Pius V excommunicated Queen Elizabeth I. The church *in* England then became "The Church of England" and later was referred to simply as the "Anglican Church" (from the word "Anglo").

Anglicans settled in many countries throughout the world and were among the first to settle in North America shortly after the Puritans arrived. However, when the Revolutionary War occurred in North America, the U.S. declared its independence from England and American Anglicans quickly changed their name to "Episcopalians" in order to avoid persecution and obvious ties to England. "Episcopal" simply means "to have bishops."

Today the Anglican Communion consists of churches on every continent. In order to be a member of the Anglican Communion, a Church must be in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury in Canterbury, England. There are currently many Anglicans in countries where the British established colonies and focused missionary efforts including Africa (particularly the Sudan and Nigeria), India, and China, but Anglicans can be found in every country today. Anglicanism is the third largest Christian religious body in the world.

### Anglicans and Roman Catholics

Many people are also confused by the similarities they see between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Obviously these similarities are due to their common roots and heritage (since they used to be the same church), but Anglicanism was heavily influenced by the Protestant Reformation and this accounts for some significant differences. An Anglican worship service or "mass" is almost identical to a Roman Catholic service except for a few minor differences. The most obvious difference is the fact that most Episcopalians ordain women to the Diaconate, Episcopate, and Priesthood, unlike the Roman Catholic Church. But many other differences exist between Roman Catholics and Anglicans as well. For example, all Anglicans allow their clergy to marry and celibacy is never mandated for clergy unless they are under Religious vows as a monk or nun. Many Episcopal Dioceses (not all) ordain homosexuals and bless homosexual unions. While Anglicans respect the Papacy, they are not under Papal authority. Anglicans allow for family planning among their members and encourage the use of contraceptives.

Divorce and remarriage is also allowed in the Episcopal Church with the counsel and consent of one's priest and Bishop.

## **Heritage and Tradition**

At the same time, Anglicans treasure their heritage and tradition and are very strong believers in maintaining those ancient traditions, particularly in the areas of worship, liturgy, sacraments, architecture, and patristic theology. If you really want to upset most Anglicans, tell them that the Eucharist is merely a symbol and not really the Body and Blood of Christ! Anglicans also insist on maintaining Apostolic Succession: the direct lineage of ordination that can be traced back to the apostles. In other words, when my Bishop laid hands on me to ordain me, he had the authority to do so because the Bishops who laid hands on him had hands laid on them who were in the direct line of Bishops going back to the apostles. Anglicans honor and respect their traditions and the writings and practices of the early church and seek to find ways to both maintain their heritage while moving forward to address current issues, thereby living out the middle way or "via media," which is an Anglican ideal.

## **Moving Forward**

The Episcopal Church USA has entered into full communion with the ELCA, the Lutheran Church in America and in so doing, we have reversed nearly 500 years of schism between the churches since the Reformation. Anglicans continue to work with other churches and denominations in many ecumenical efforts to bring unity to the world wide Church. Anglicans are also at the forefront of interfaith dialogue and seek to work together in unity with people of other religions rather than oppose them.

## **Our Beliefs**

To gain a sense of the fundamental beliefs of the Episcopal Church, check out our Book of Common Prayer and read our Catechism.

## **II. Why Liturgy?**

The Anglican (Episcopal) Church is accurately described as a "liturgical church" and our worship is entirely liturgical. Below is an explanation as to why we use and love liturgy.

### **1. Liturgy is Active and Participatory**

Liturgy literally means, "the work of the people." Worship in the early church was liturgical-it was not a passive experience but a participatory action and event in which the assembled people of God actively worshipped together. Liturgy requires the active participation of the whole assembly through corporate forms of prayer, song, response, and action. (See the section which explains specific participatory acts in the last section for details.)

### **2. Liturgy is Biblical**

When we look to the many models we have of worship in Scripture, we find some common themes. First, we see that God's people took seriously the **holiness** of God in their worship. Often in our western expressions of worship, we have lost a sense of God's holiness in our well-meaning attempts to make God more approachable. This is where we need to make a distinction: God is indeed approachable through Jesus Christ because Jesus has mediated salvation and forgiveness to us. ("Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him." Eph.3:12). However, God is still God and deserves to be approached with awe, reverence, and deep respect for God's Holiness and Other-ness in the context of worship. "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Hebrews 12:28-29 reminds us, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot

be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.”

Old Testament worship, as well as early Church worship, was liturgical. It included liturgical elements such as ritual and decorative, beautiful surroundings. In God’s commands to build the Temple, it was to be decorated ornately with golden cherubs, lamp stands, carvings, dishes for incense, fine linens of blue and purple, crimson yarns, looping blue curtains, sacred vestments, bells, anointing oils, perfumes, etc. (See Ex. 25-30). These passages shed light on how God deigns to be worshipped by God’s people; we can apply the spirit of such worship in our worship environments today.

This tradition of taking seriously the holiness of God continues in the New Testament. Notice that Jesus was raised in the context of the fullness of Jewish worship. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus participated fully in the liturgical celebrations and rites of the Temple and local Synagogues. Jesus never spoke against the form of worship itself, but he did speak out against the legalism and hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his day. Jesus upheld the idea that God’s house is to be a place of reverential prayer and worship; the only account we have of Jesus being greatly angered is when he encounters the money changers in the Temple. The people were not taking seriously the sanctity of God’s house and had turned it into a market place and “den of robbers.” This is a serious sin.

One of Paul’s major concerns regarding worship was that it be “done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Paul wanted everyone to participate fully in worship, his only concern was that order and decency be upheld, “for God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

The book of Revelation also offers us a vivid picture of worship as it takes place in heaven. In it we find the elders falling down on their faces before God, we see an ocean of people and creatures paying homage to God day and night without ceasing. We hear the refrain of angels singing, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Rev.4:8) before God who is seated on the throne. All focus and praise is on God and God alone. If we truly believe and understand that we are in the presence of the Lord of Lords, our worship ought to reflect that!

Of course, taking seriously God’s holiness does not negate the joy of worship. If anything, it should increase our sense of joy! Worship should be joyful because it is celebratory. We are in the presence of the Holy Victorious King and have the privilege of worshipping and glorifying God!

Liturgy in the church today is directly related to Jewish worship. Liturgy has the intent of taking seriously the holiness of God through its ordered structure and ancient refrains. That is one of the reasons why the early Church incorporated liturgical forms of worship. There is a time and place for everything, but worship is one of those times when we approach God in a spirit and form of true, deep reverence, acknowledging the Divine Holy presence among us.

*But doesn’t liturgy and ritual eventually become empty and meaningless?*

Possibly, but all forms of worship run this risk. This is more of an indicator of the state of one’s heart than the form of worship. In fact, most churches do have some kind of “ritual” in their worship even if they don’t call it that, i.e., it follows the same form week after week: sing songs, give announcements, pray, hear a sermon, and conclude with a song. Anything we do and any form of worship can become empty and meaningless when it is not done in the right spirit; it will become merely acting out a part rather than participating with our hearts, minds, and spirits. But if our worship is truly Spirit-filled and our hearts are open to God, then our worship will glorify God. The key to authentic worship is having a heart and attitude of praise and reverence that seeks to earnestly glorify God. Liturgy seeks to facilitate true worship.

There is no absolute “right” or “wrong” form of worship, in fact, it may be that certain forms are more assessable to some people than others. But worship that seeks to glorify God (and not merely to make the individual most comfortable or stimulated) will strive to create a worship environment that is utterly pleasing to God, whatever

form that may take. We take our cues from the Bible in the worship mandated by God in the Hebrew Scriptures and the clear picture we have of heavenly worship in the book of Revelation.

A pitfall in much modern worship is that the focus easily falls on the self/individual instead of on God. Not only is the corporate character of worship lost, but the goal and purpose of worship is lost. Many contemporary praise and worship songs focus more on one's feelings, hopes, desires, etc. than on God. While these concepts are important and necessary, they do not meet the goal of worship, which is ultimately to glorify God. Often the driving question behind modern worship is "What is most conducive for the people?" rather than "What is most glorifying to God?"

Another pitfall in modern worship is that it has the tendency to become pastor-centric and teaching-centric. The focus of the worship service becomes one person and their sermon. The service literally rises or falls on the individual and their sermon. But this is not the model of worship Scripture gives us. Rather, worship is joyful service we give to God because we owe God our abundant praise: it is entirely God-centered and God-focused. Teaching and learning have their own essential place in the life of the Christian, but worship is not the same as teaching. We need to return to authentic forms of worship to help us re-learn how to worship today.

### **3. Liturgy Connects Us to Christians Throughout the Ages**

Liturgy incorporates the form and content of the worship of the early, ancient church. It includes the Psalms, creeds, hymns, and verses used by the earliest Christians. The use of these components reminds us that we do not worship God in a historical vacuum, but are connected to God's people throughout time.

In the liturgy we recite the Kyrie "Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy" which has its origins in the Hebrew Hosannah, was used later by the ancient Greek Christians, and was standardized by the fourth century. The "Gloria in excelsis" was derived from the angelic hymn at our Saviour's birth and is an ancient Messianic song of the Jews. All of the major components of the liturgy, including the Eucharistic prayer, find their origins in Jewish, Biblical, or very early Christian worship.

### **4. Liturgy is Holistic Worship**

Liturgy invites participants to worship God holistically, with body, mind, and spirit. Often in our western society worship is reduced to the intellect. But God invites us to worship more fully. Our intellects may be engaged by a sermon or teaching, but our bodies usually are not and participants should not be mere spectators. In a liturgical worship environment, one's body and senses are fully engaged. Your body participates along with your mind and spirit through physical acts of kneeling, crossing oneself, rising, and coming forward to the altar. The senses are engaged through visual means in art, candles, and symbol, through the smell and smoke of incense, through the hearing and singing of music and bells, through taste and touch in Communion and the Sacraments. All of these invite us to lift up our hearts, minds, and bodies to God in praise, adoration, and worship.

A part of worshipping God holistically with our bodies includes our obedience to the mandate "offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to the Lord" (Romans 12:1). When we worship God holistically, we are reminded of this command.

### **5. Liturgy is Incarnational**

Our faith is an incarnational faith. (Incarnation is the embodiment of the spiritual in a material form.) Christianity is focused on a person: Jesus Christ who is God Incarnate. Unlike spiritualism or Gnosticism that deny the material as a good part of God's creation, Christianity affirms the inherent goodness of all creation, including the physical and material (Genesis 1:31 "God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good."). Christians also recognize that God comes to us, communicates with us, and works in our lives in incarnational ways. The Bible is full of examples of the incarnational ways God has of relating to God's people. Some examples include God's presence among the Israelites through a Cloud and the Tabernacle, God's use of Aaron's rod and Moses' staff to

perform miracles, God's way of speaking through people and the prophets, God communicating to us through the book of the Bible, and through Jesus Christ himself, the ultimate incarnation. Other ways God speaks to us incarnationally include: creation, art, music, the Sacraments, the Church, books, and other people. Christians affirm and understand that God uses such physical, material, and tangible means to communicate with us and touch us directly.

Liturgical communities take this incarnational theology and utilize it fully. God does not insist that we become perfectly spiritual in order to commune with God. No, God stoops down to us and takes on our earthly essence and life in order to speak to us and touch us. We are called to be open to God's touch and message and can expect to see it in the beauty of creation, the rhythm of worship, in water, bread, wine, in a beautiful picture or icon, in the radiance of a candle flame, in an image shining through a stained glass window, in elegant architecture, or in the gesture or touch of another person. We believe that liturgy itself mediates God's presence and message to us in powerful ways; we wait expectantly on God who graciously comes to us in these ordinary, earthly ways, just as God came to us as a tiny infant in a straw-filled manger.

### **III. The Sacraments: Baptism, Eucharist, and Other Rites**

In liturgical communities, celebrating the Sacraments are the primary acts of worship. Sacraments are outward, physical signs of inward, spiritual realities and graces. Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted two Sacraments: the Lord's Supper and Baptism. We uphold traditional views on both of these Sacraments.

#### **A. Baptism**

The account of Jesus' baptism given to us in the Scriptures is one of the most significant moments in the New Testament. We read when Jesus was baptized, "the heaven opened up, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, 'You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:22). Baptism is the rite of initiation into the Christian faith. In baptism, we die with Christ (Ro. 6:4), are cleansed from our sins (Acts 22:16), are clothed with Christ (Gal. 3:27), are brought into the life of the Trinity (Matt. 28:18), and receive the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism is of huge significance and import for all believers.

John the Baptist said that Jesus would come, "baptizing with the Holy Spirit." In Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water (baptism) and Spirit" (John 3:5). At Jesus' ascension into heaven his final command is "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."

Baptism is an essential act of obedience for every Christian. In baptism we receive innumerable graces through God's Holy Spirit. Baptism is also an important sign of God's pre-existent love and adoption for the one being baptized.

#### **B. The Holy Eucharist (Communion, the Mass, or the Lord's Supper)**

Eucharist comes from the Greek word, "eucharistia" which means "thanksgiving." The Eucharist is "The Great Thanksgiving" in which we meet God in the ordinary substances of bread and wine. On the night before Jesus died he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body broken for you." He then took the cup of wine and after giving thanks, gave it to them saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:26-28). Please notice Jesus' exact words. He did not say, "This 'symbolizes' or 'represents' my body and my blood," he said "This IS my body and blood." Jesus chose his words carefully at this significant moment and Anglicans tend to take him at his word.

It is not un-common for many Christians to re-arrange Jesus' words in order to de-mystify Communion and claim it is merely symbolic. We can affirm that Jesus' words baffle us to a degree; it is also appropriate and thoroughly Anglican to recognize Communion as a mystery that we cannot precisely define. But we can affirm that in some way, the elements of bread and wine really do become the body and blood of our Lord Jesus in the Eucharist. When we partake of the Eucharist, we share in the life of Jesus Christ and become partners with him in his life and death. (Please note that there are those who do not believe in the "real presence" of the bread and wine. Their belief does not disqualify them from receiving Communion even though it is not in keeping with the historical and current theological understanding of the church. This is because Episcopalians do not prohibit any baptized Christian from receiving Communion except in the case of a person "living a notoriously evil life" who refuses to repent, as stated in the Book of Common Prayer, p. 409. )

Listen again to Jesus' words in John 6: "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them...When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it'? In one sense, to eat and drink of Jesus' body and blood is to believe and abide in him. Yet this passage also foreshadows the Eucharistic Feast in which we come to the Lord's Table and, as his followers, eat and drink his body in blood. It was hard for folks to accept this then and it is hard for us today! When we partake of the bread and wine of Communion, we are actively demonstrating our faith and union with Jesus Christ. In turn, Jesus shares himself with us. We also receive grace and gain a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to come.

St. Paul had an extremely high view of the Eucharist and sees it as a literal sharing in Christ's body and blood. He writes to the Corinthians, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? (These are rhetorical questions and our answer ought to be a resounding, "Yes"! See 1 Cor. 10:16)

St. Paul believed that the Eucharistic elements had the power of life and death. We ought to heed his words and exercise caution. He writes, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat the bread and drink the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (1 Cor. 11:27-30). Clearly there is more going on in Communion in Paul's view than a mere symbolic act of remembrance.

Where did we get the idea that Communion is merely symbolic? This is a fairly new idea in the history of the Church. It was not until the 1500's that this idea crept in. The reason it became popular during the time of the Reformation was in reaction to the abuses taking place surrounding the Eucharist at that time. Many superstitious beliefs began to surface during the Middle Ages about Communion and lay people stopped receiving the bread and wine almost completely due to the idea that they were unworthy. However, to alter our beliefs about the Eucharist because of these abuses is a case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The proper response is to correct the abuses and educate ourselves and others as to the appropriate meaning of the Eucharist and continue to receive it in a worthy manner.

Liturgical communities like Anglicanism believe that the Eucharist is the climax of worship (not the sermon). The climax of worship is when we actively respond to Christ's call to once again share in his life and death as his followers and find amazing grace when we meet Jesus in the bread and wine at the Lord's Table. Halleluiah!

### **Other Sacramental Rites**

Other rites that have evolved in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit include:

- Holy Matrimony (the blessing of a marriage)
- Ordination (the setting apart of individuals for ministry)

- Reconciliation (confession of sin)
- Confirmation (an adult commitment to Christ following baptism)
- Unction of the sick (anointing and praying for sick)
- Extreme Unction (prayers and blessings just before death)

Of course, God is not limited to these rites alone, there are innumerable ways that God reaches out and touches us.

## **IV. Worship and Practice in Anglicanism**

### **1. The Altar**

The altar is the Christian's Feast Table and is a place of great joy. It represents Christ's presence among us and reminds us continually of the great sacrifice and offering that God in Jesus made to defeat sin and death upon the altar of God's love. We are invited to join with Jesus at the Table, even as we are called to make the sacrifice of offering back to God ourselves, our souls, our bodies, our thanksgiving, our worship, our praise, and our substance. All of these are gathered back up into, made acceptable by, and united with the sacrifice of Jesus in the Eucharist. The altar is also symbolic of the cross and the empty tomb, the greatest symbols of our faith.

### **2. The use of Anointing Oil**

The use of sacred oil goes back to Biblical mandates in the Old Testament in Exodus 30:22-38. "And you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be holy anointing oil...and you shall say to the Israelites, "This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations." It was also used to anoint and ordain Israel's kings (see 1 Sam. 10:1) which is why we use it in ordinations to this day.

Later James 5:14 calls us, "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord." We use oil in our rites and prayers for healing today, just as the Bible calls us to do. Liturgical communities visit the sick with Communion and anoint them with oil and prayers for healing. Anointing oil was also used in the early church at baptism as the sign of the seal of the Holy Spirit upon the new believer.

### **3. The Use of Bells in Worship**

Bells summon us and wake us up. They ring out joy and sometimes alarm. For centuries the Church has used bells to summon people to worship and to toll news regarding victory, death, and celebration. A Sanctus bell is sometimes rung at the point of consecration during the Eucharist to call our attention to and celebrate the miracle of Jesus Christ in the bread and wine. As Psalm 149 states, "Let them praise God's name...making melody with the tambourine and lyre."

### **4. The Act of Blessing People and Objects**

The act of blessing is simply a prayer dedicating someone or something to God. This act is powerful. Jesus tells us to "bless those who curse you" (Lk. 6:28) and the Scriptures are full of blessing pronouncements upon God's people by God's people. It is clear that Christians are obliged to pronounce blessings on other people.

We also bless objects at times. St. Paul refers to our act of blessing the communion cup in 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is not a sharing in the blood of Christ"? Objects used for worship and devotion are the main items that we bless including baptismal water, vestments, oil, and Communion elements: by blessing them we are asking God to set them aside for holy purposes. It is also an ancient Jewish and Christian practice to bless our food before a meal and to bless one's new home. Again, blessing is simply the act of prayer, dedicating someone or

something to God in order to set it apart; it is not magical or superstitious. The easiest way to “bless” something is to simply give God thanks for it!

## **5. The Use of Candles in Worship**

Jesus Christ is “the light of the world.” A candle lighting the darkness has a way of communicating this truth symbolically much more powerfully than a room filled with fluorescent light bulbs. And like all other aspects of liturgical worship, candles and lamps attended the worship of Israel. There is a natural beauty and power of candle light that communicates joy and illumination in a way no artificial light source can.

There are not many rules on candle requirements for worship in the Anglican/Episcopal Church, however, two for the altar (either on or near it) are always called for, one for the Epistle and one for the Gospel side. If the Reserved Sacrament is present (Communion), a candle (presence lamp) must be lit near it. (It’s often in red glass and burns continuously.) Also, the Paschal Candle (symbolizing the Resurrection and Christ’s presence) is required to be lit during the 50 days of the Easter season, at baptisms, and at funerals. In Advent, if a church uses an Advent Wreath, the wreath has 4 or 5 candles to represent each week of Advent. If there is more than one altar, there should be at least 2 candles for each altar but if one of the altars is a High altar, there are often 6-8 candles (from traditions when High Mass is or was celebrated).

## **6. The Use of Chant in Worship**

Chant is a simple form of sung speech. Chant goes back to the earliest Jewish worship. Originally chant was used in order to project one’s voice in a large space during worship. Without microphones, the Scriptures and prayers were chanted in order for the sound to carry more effectively. (Song carries better than speech.) This practice continued through Jesus’ day and even to this day in the Synagogues. This Jewish method of chant was naturally adopted by the early Church; many of whom were Jewish Christians. Later, chant became appreciated for its beauty and was further developed as simply another way to sing and praise God.

## **7. The Use of the Creeds in Worship**

The Creeds such as the Apostle’s Creed and Nicene Creed are some of the most ancient formulas of Christian belief and have guided the Church in expressing what she believes throughout the centuries. We recite the creeds in worship to declare publicly the essentials of our historic faith. When we recite it, we are, in a sense, in unified communion with the Church of the past 2,000 years.

## **8. The Use of the Crucifix in Worship**

Many people feel a bit unsettled at the sight of a crucifix: a cross with the crucified Christ upon it. Some feel that the cross should be empty since Jesus is no longer on the cross but has resurrected. They ask, “Isn’t the glory of the cross the fact that it is empty”? Well, yes and no. The cross has multiple meanings and significance for Christians. We are certainly called to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and the empty cross and tomb...this is God’s triumph over sin and death! At the same time, we ought to always be reminded of the great love our Lord has for us in his willingness to die and suffer so greatly for us. Christ being sacrificed on the cross is actually glorifying to God. Human eyes see only defeat, but God sees victory! Listen to St. Paul, “For the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” and “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 1:18 & 2:3). An absence of crucifixes neglects this significant truth of our faith. It is a lop- sided Christianity that celebrates the empty cross alone and never the sacrifice made upon it. In a balanced Christian view, the cross symbolizes BOTH the sacrifice of Jesus and the resurrection. It is appropriate for both symbols to have a place in Christian worship.

Additionally, in this day and age, almost anyone will wear a plain cross. It has become stylish and devoid of its' deeper meaning. A crucifix, however, remains more distinctive and continues to carry with it the power and symbolism at the center of our faith.

## 9. Female Clergy

Many Anglicans ordain women and they base that decision in Scripture itself. There are many examples of God using women to lead God's people in a wide variety of capacities. We read of Deborah, the Judge over Israel who also leads the people in the praise and worship of God in Judges Chapter 5. We also read about Miriam and her role as a prophet and worship leader in Israel in Exodus 15. In the New Testament we read about the woman Junia, whom St. Paul says is "of note among the apostles" in Romans 16:7 and whom the early Church fathers considered to be a female apostle. We also read of Phoebe the "Deacon," of whom St. Paul wrote, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well (Romans 16:1-2). Many other female prophets and female teachers are listed in the New Testament, clearly affirming the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit." Mary, the mother of Jesus herself, has a significant role in the history of the church as the one who was ultimately chosen to bear, birth, and facilitate the Incarnation to the world. There is certainly more than one way to bring the Good News to the world.

Notice also that in the Gospels Jesus gave women extremely pivotal roles in his ministry. The very first person to ever preach Jesus as the Messiah as the first Christian missionary was the woman at the well in John 4. And the first people commissioned to preach and testify to the Good News of the Resurrection were also women, Mary and the other women at the tomb. They in fact were sent to preach the news to the apostles themselves.

St. Paul wrote, 'there is neither male nor female, rich nor poor, slave or free, Jew nor Gentile, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28). For many Christians, this verse settles the debate. We would not discriminate against someone seeking ordination for being poor or of another race, so why would we discriminate against someone for being a woman? We are all one in Christ Jesus and the empowering action of the Holy Spirit is present in men and women equally according to the Bible.

Those who oppose women's ordination tend to cite 1 Timothy 2:12 where Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." The problem that many have pointed out about this verse is that not only do we have the cultural issues to contend with related to women's roles in Paul's time, and not only is it a letter written to a specific church dealing with particular issues of the time, but a closer look reveals that this text has nothing to say on the subject of ordination itself.

First, this verse is not a declaration or command that is being attributed to God, eg, Paul did not say "God does not permit a woman" he says that he, Paul didn't: "I do not permit a woman to do teach." If this was something that God wanted us to follow as a Divine injunction with universal application for all time, why not state that this is a command from God, not merely Paul's personal position? In many places in Paul's letters Paul states openly that he is simply giving his own personal opinion and that it is not a command from the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 7:12 & 7:25 for examples). Second, and perhaps more importantly, even the most fundamentalist Protestant and Roman Catholic churches overtly and blatantly disobey this verse if it is to be taken literally: they in fact do allow women to teach in a variety of capacities and they certainly don't expect women to be silent at all times...from singing to praying to witnessing in church. If it is such a foregone conclusion in Christendom that this verse was meant to have a literal and universal application, then why don't we see any churches following it as such? To put it another way, if we're not going to apply this literally, then we really do have to ask what deeper relevance it has to our current situation, and that opens us up to many possibilities. However, it is clear that one thing this verse is not addressing is the topic of ordination. Third, in 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 Paul gives instructions to women to cover their heads "when they pray and prophecy" in church...so we know that women were not completely silent in church. Clearly then, the statement in 1 Timothy was not a blanket command.

Given the problems we have in understanding and applying this verse and given the many examples of women being used by God in a multitude of ministerial and leadership capacities, many Christians have come to the conclusion that God can and will use women just as God has used men, to act as servant leaders in the Church in a variety of capacities, including ordination.

### **Titles for Female Priests**

One question I often receive is what title to use when addressing a female priest. There is not a clear cut answer to this question since individual women have individual preferences on this point. Some prefer no title at all, others prefer “Pastor” or “Reverend” and some prefer “Mother.” I personally see “Mother” as the most appropriate title for several reasons and it is the title I personally go by in my ministry. First, “Mother” has an historical precedent in the Church (as in the desert mothers/”ammās” and also the heads of women’s religious orders). I also like it because it puts female priests on an equal level with their male counterparts who tend to go by the title “Father.” Finally, it is appropriate because Christians are members of the family of God and the titles of “mother” and “father” help to remind us of that beautiful fact.

### **10. The Use of Holy Water**

First a joke:

Q: How do you make holy water?

A: You boil the hell out of it.

Water is a central and indispensable sign for Christians and reminds us continually of our baptism. Holy Water is water that has been blessed by a priest or Bishop and is used at the entrance of a church, in a baptismal font or pool, or used to sprinkle and bless people. We trace the use of blessed water to Psalm 51, “You shall purge me, O Lord, with hyssop, and I shall be clean.” A common chant during Eastertide is Vidi aquam - “I saw water” from Ezekiel 47 that reminds us that we must be cleansed before God’s presence. Again, there is no superstition here, rather, the humble physical element of water is seen as a sign of God’s healing, cleansing grace. “Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7).

### **11. The use of Images, Signs, and Symbols in Anglican Worship**

The concept of using images in worship finds its origins in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). The Temple contained numerous visual images, including the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. The Temple Solomon built for the Lord contained many carvings of trees, gourds, flowers, and angels (1 Kings 6). It is clear that God did not forbid images used in the Sanctuary to glorify God.

What about symbols? In reading the Bible we discover that God uses tangible signs and symbols throughout the Scriptures as a way of communicating to God’s people. Often God’s people are instructed to make use of such signs and symbols to help them understand or remember what God is teaching them.

The examples are nearly limitless. In the New Testament God uses powerful symbols such as:

- the star of Bethlehem to signify the birth of Christ
- the dove to signify the Holy Spirit’s presence at Jesus’ baptism (John 1:32)
- water to signify one’s commitment to Christ at baptism
- bread and wine to signify Jesus’ body and blood.
- the earliest church usage of the cross and empty tomb as signs and symbols of our faith
- the enduring marks in Jesus’ hands as symbolic of his crucifixion
- the symbol of a lamb to represent Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God

In addition, the Scriptures themselves paint vivid images for us of God in Divine glory. See Isaiah 6 where God is seated on the throne with God's robes overflowing the Temple, or Daniel 7:9ff where Daniel has a vision of the Ancient One with clothes white as snow and hair like pure wool on his throne of fiery flames, or in Revelation with its numerous images and symbols of God, Jesus Christ, and his Kingdom (too many to recount here).

In addition, signs and symbols are used by all of us today to communicate important truths of significance such as wedding rings, birthday cakes, birth stones, red roses, monograms, etc. It is natural way of communicating significant meaning.

### **The Greatest Sign: The Incarnation**

Another important point which must be mentioned is the significance of God taking human form in the person of Jesus Christ. This has powerful ramifications for our worship and the use of images. Now that God has been revealed in a tangible, physical, material way through Jesus Christ (the Word became flesh and dwelt among us), we can now image or imagine God in the form of Jesus Christ. Now that God has taken physical human form, God has given us an image of God in Jesus Christ: the God-Man. It is now possible to use symbolic pictures and images of Christ in his *humanity* to aid us in our devotion to God and cause us to continually recall and remember the work God has done in Jesus Christ. This is the main reason why early Christians began painting pictures of Jesus, demonstrating the different offices and attributes of Christ, in their places of worship. Soon these simple paintings became beautiful icons whose purpose was educational and devotional. Icons of Jesus and Biblical figures teach us about God and the Bible and cause us to lift our hearts in gratitude to our Creator. There is tremendous historical precedent for their use in worship and in individual devotion. The Seventh Ecumenical Council of the Church upheld the tradition of the use of images in the worship as consistent with the orthodox Christian faith in 787.

What is forbidden to us however, is to make images and symbols which become objects of worship in themselves. We are never to offer worship to anything created; worship is meant for God alone. Images and symbols are meant to aid us in our worship and understanding of God and to bring glory to God. They are merely guideposts which always point us back to the Creator. Symbols and images are good in and of themselves, especially when used to bring glory to God, but it is humans which corrupt them. One common solution to this human error is to disallow all images and symbols. This is the situation in some churches following the Reformation. But this is again a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The Bible is rich and full of many symbols and imagery; it is a gift of God to aid us. If God deigned to take on human flesh in all its particularity, we no longer need to fear particular symbols. Rather, we ought to make proper use of the gifts God has given us and educate ourselves and others as to their appropriate uses.

The Gnostic philosophers of Greece believed that only the spiritual was good, and all matter (or material things) were evil. We have inherited this dangerous Gnostic tendency in our western society that causes us to be overly suspicious of the material. In our Gnostic tendencies, we feel that the physical and material are more prone to corruption. We have too often thrown out the tangible, material forms of worship, as modeled in Scripture, in place of an immaterial form of worship. But God desires that we worship God both spiritually and physically as demonstrated in the Scriptural models of worship.

### **12. The Use of Incense in Worship**

The use of incense is a thoroughly Biblical concept. We see it commanded of the Jews (Ex. 25:29) and then used in worship in Israel from that point on. Notice the prophecy of Malachi 1:11, "From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name." God actually anticipates the use of incense by all people in God's name!

In the New Testament we see Zechariah offering incense in the sanctuary when the angel of the Lord appears to him (Luke 1:8-11). Later in Revelation we see the elders holding golden bowls of incense, "which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8).

Incense is the symbol of our prayers rising up to the Lord. It is also symbolic of spiritual cleansing and has been used in Christian worship since ancient times.

### **13. The use of Liturgical Seasons & Holy Days**

The liturgical calendar in the Old Testament included the setting apart of days and seasons of celebration, rest, and penance (see Leviticus 23-25). Some of these Holy Days and seasons include:

- Sabbath day of rest
- Passover
- Day of Atonement
- Festival of Unleavened Bread
- Festival of Booths
- Year of Jubilee.

Early Jewish Christians carried on this practice with Christian celebrations and commemorations beginning with Good Friday and Easter. The earliest mentions of Christian days of celebration are Acts 20:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:8 where the celebration of Pentecost is mentioned.

As time passed, Christians began adding other days and seasons to their calendar. Early on, Holy Week was introduced starting with Palm Sunday and continuing through the week leading up to Easter. Eventually there was an Easter season. The time before Holy Week became a season of penitence (seeking God's forgiveness) called Lent which began on Ash Wednesday. On this day penitents would present themselves at the door of the Church to demonstrate their repentance from sin and would receive the cross of ashes on their foreheads as symbols of their repentance. Advent, which marks the beginning of the Christian calendar, became the time of preparation before Christmas. The Epiphany (Visitation of the Wise Men), the Ascension and many other days celebrating the life of our Lord were also added, including days to honor the apostles and other Biblical figures.

Eventually there became "Saint's Days" which were days set aside to remember and honor the great heroes of the faith in the local towns and communities. We do a similar thing in the USA today on President's Days and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It is beneficial to recall and look back at the example of our Christian mothers and fathers. Holy Days give us the opportunity to stop and intentionally recall what God has done and what God may be calling us to do. The act of remembrance (anamnesis) is one God calls all people to do: "Remember the wonderful works God has done, his miracles, and the judgments he utters...Remember his covenant forever" (1 Chronicles 16:12 & 15).

Also associated with the seasonal calendar are specific colors.

- Red is symbolic of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the blood and passion of the martyrs. It is used at Pentecost, ordinations, Holy Week, and on feast days commemorating Christian martyrs.
- White is symbolic of Christ and his purity and resurrection. It is used on Holy Days and seasons commemorating the life of Jesus such as Easter and Epiphany, but also at funerals to remind us of resurrection because death is not the final word.
- Violet and blue are symbolic of a more somber preparation and penance. They are used during the seasons of Lent and Advent. (Blue is also the color associated with Mary. )
- Green is the color used during "ordinary time," or any time there are not special days, seasons, or occasions.
- Black is used on All Soul's Day when we remember all the faithful departed, and can also be used on Good Friday to commemorate Jesus' death.

## **14. The Use of Liturgical Vestments in Worship**

The first example we have of God mandating that liturgical officiants wear sacred garments for worship is in Exodus. Later we see the saints and elders clothed in robes of white in Revelation as they worship God. (There is simply something that happens interiorly to us when we put on special clothing: it has an effect on our attitude and behavior.) Besides these Biblical models, the continued use of liturgical vestments in worship connects us historically to the Christians of ages past. We wear such garments because this has been the practice of the Church for most of her existence. In wearing liturgical clothing, we are reminded that we do not stand and worship alone in a modern-day vacuum, but are connected to all God's people throughout time. Each item of liturgical clothing is symbolic. For example, the stoles, collars, and cords represent the yoke of the slave: a slave to Jesus Christ. White albs were worn by early Christians at baptism as a sign of purity. These albs continue to remind us of our baptism as children of God.

## **15. Membership: Confirmation & Reception**

Most Episcopal parishes will consider a person an informal member of their parish once one starts attending regularly, contributing, participating, etc. However, to formally become an Anglican or Episcopalian, one must be received and/or confirmed. Which option is chosen depends on whether a person was already confirmed and who confirmed them. If one was confirmed by a Bishop in apostolic succession (meaning a Bishop who traces the lineage of their consecration back to the apostles), they are considered already confirmed and will simply be "received" formally into the Anglican Communion by the Bishop. Otherwise a person will need to be confirmed by an Anglican/Episcopal Bishop by the laying on of hands in the formal rite of confirmation. In Acts 8 we read about the apostles praying and then laying their hands on new adult converts following baptism, as a distinct and separate act from baptism. This is the basic foundation for the rite of confirmation. If a person has already been baptized, they don't have to be re-baptized because Anglicans recognize all baptisms as valid and one baptism is sufficient (as long as it was in the name of the Trinity). Ordinarily to be confirmed or received as an adult from another denomination, the process is fairly simple and straightforward and your priest can tell you what instruction is needed and whether you will need a sponsor. After receiving sufficient instruction, you are ready to be confirmed the next time the Bishop visits the parish (usually once a year) or at another convenient time for the Bishop. Most churches begin confirming youth at age 12 or 13, close to the "age of accountability" in the Jewish tradition. Confirmation is simply one more means of grace that God provides for us and serves as a formal way to "confirm" our Christian faith and take up membership in the church.

## **16. Ordination: What is Ordination?**

Ordination is very simply, the setting aside or consecrating of a person who the community believes has been called to minister in a particular role. The ordination itself generally occurs in the context of a celebrative worship service.

Scripture provides for at least three offices of ministry: the diakoneo (translated "deacon" or "servant"), presbyteros (translated "elder" or "priest" in Latin), and episkopos (translated "bishop").

St. Paul describes these roles in 1 Timothy:

3:1 : "The saying is sure; whoever aspires to the office of episkopos (bishop) desires a noble task."

3:13: "For those who serve well as diakoneo (deacons) gain a good standing for themselves and in great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

5:17: "Let the presbyteros (elders/priests) who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."

Of "presbyteros" St. Peter writes, "So I exhort the presbyteros among you, as a fellow presbyteros and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3).

While the Latin translation of "presbyteros" is "priest," it should be noted that every Christian is a "priest" because all Christians share in Christ's priesthood, the priesthood of all believers, and mediate God's grace and redemption to the world. Some "priests" are simply called to a particular function and office in the Church and set aside explicitly for that task. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

In the Anglican tradition, deacons, priests, and bishops are ordained to particular roles, but ministry is still considered to be a vocation of all the baptized. Ordination is also considered a sacrament because it is believed that God empowers the person, through the Holy Spirit, to fulfill their particular ministry and calling. Ordination is always conferred by the laying on of hands by one or more Bishops as an outward sign of the inward reality of God's call. In a priestly ordination, all the priests of the Diocese lay hands upon the ordinand following the example of Scripture: "Neglect not the gift that is in you, which was given you with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14, see also Acts 8:18). Because of the sacramental nature of ordination, it is believed that once someone is ordained they are forever ordained...it is not something that can be "withdrawn."

Priestly ordination in the Anglican tradition can be confusing because ordinands called to the priesthood are ordained twice: first to the "Transitional Diaconate" and then to the Priesthood. Transitional Deacons receive further training and experience as clergy members and are given particular roles of service to fulfill ministerially and liturgically. Once a Transitional Deacon is made a Priest they are able to celebrate Communion and provide blessings and absolutions as well as perform all other Sacramental rites. This is simply one type of service and "role" in the church among many.

## **17. The Passing of the Peace**

St. Paul always greeted and closed with the words, "The peace of God be with you" in his pastoral letters. This is an appropriate way to greet fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and so we say, "The peace of the Lord be with you" and respond, "And also with you." We then pass this greeting of peace to one another. At the passing of the peace we should earnestly desire God's peace upon each person we greet. The passing of the peace is also a sign of obedience to Jesus' words that we make peace with one another before offering our gifts at the altar (Matt. 5:23-24).

## **18. Processions in Worship**

Processions are an ancient liturgical practice adopted from the secular royal processions. In a Christian procession, we laud Jesus Christ as the King, and the cross, lifted high, always leads the way. Earlier processions would have included everyone, but out of practicality they are generally trimmed down to include the ministers, acolytes, and choir today. On special occasions, the entire assembly will process together or even around the street as a public witness. Processions are not necessary for worship, but they do help us gain a focus and aid us in our preparation to worship and our preparation to go back out into the world rejoicing in the Good News.

## **19. The Saints**

There is some diversity of thought and practice in regard to the saints within the Anglican tradition. However, most Anglicans would agree that we don't and should not "pray" to the saints (prayer is offered to God alone, indeed God alone *can* be the recipient of prayer). And it goes without saying that the worship of the saints is idolatry and absolutely not allowed. However, this does not mean that we cannot commune with the saints; in fact, we can always ask them for their prayers and intercessions. If there are people who have died who have shown

themselves to be very godly and holy, we can feel just as comfortable asking them for their intercessions and prayers as we would asking a godly person who is still living for their prayers. As the author of Hebrews writes in chapter 12:1, "we are surrounded by so a great a cloud of witnesses." These witnesses are the "communion of saints" that we affirm in the Apostle's Creed, and this is the spiritual communion of the living and the dead.

Anglicans do not formally "canonize" saints the way the Roman Catholic Church does, however we do observe all the major saint's days exactly as was practiced prior to the Reformation. In the Episcopal Church we also have our own "Lesser Feasts and Fasts" calendar. Individuals on that calendar include many people of faith you would not find in a strictly traditional saints calendar. It includes individuals like Martin Luther King Jr., Evelyn Underhill, John Wesley, and the martyrs of Uganda; because their witness is something we want to remember and honor in order to encourage us in our own journeys of faith. This, after all, is what all Christians seek to become. In that sense, our calendar reflects the idea that all believers are indeed "saints," we simply see it as helpful to commemorate some outstanding believers to serve as examples to us all.

## **20. Making the Sign of the Cross**

This is a very ancient practice going back to the earliest Christians. Hippolytus speaks of making the sign of the cross as a regular habit of faithful Christians around 220. It was developed as a reminder and symbol of the power of the cross of Jesus Christ from top (forehead) to center (chest) to left (shoulder) to right (shoulder) to center (chest) again. It is used as a form of blessing and is sometimes used at the mention of death or the deceased to remind us that death is not the final word and that it has been triumphed over by the cross and the resurrection.

Some traditional points where we cross ourselves in the service:

- At the opening words "Blessed be God" (because a blessing is being pronounced)
- A mini-crossing with the thumb at the announcement of the Gospel (on our forehead, lips, and heart goes along with the prayer: "Christ be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart")
- At the mention of the resurrection during the Creed
- When praying for those who have died at the Prayers of the People
- At the Absolution following Confession
- During the Eucharist when we ask God to sanctify us in one form or another (another form of blessing) Some also cross themselves at the Sanctus when we say or sing "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"
- After receiving Communion (you've just been blessed big time!)
- At the Blessing at the end of the service
- At any mention of the resurrection
- When sprinkled with holy water (like a blessing)
- Any other time a clergy person makes the sign of the cross over you.

Making the sign of the cross is merely an optional outward symbol and reminder of the reality of the power of the cross in faith, and is not an act of superstition. Another way to think of it is as a prayer of the hands.

## **21. The Acts of Sitting, Kneeling, Bowing, and Standing**

While in the presence of God, acts of humble reverence are natural. Neither kneeling or bowing are compulsory acts, but they are outward signs of our reverence for God and aid our hearts in reverence. While we are already continually in the presence of God, there are certain times and places when acts of reverence are especially appropriate. Kneeling and bowing represent submission, respect, humility, reverence and obedience. All of these are proper responses to the God of the Universe.

Biblically there is much precedent for such physical acts of worship to God. Moses and the Israelites regularly "bowed down and worshipped" God (Ex. 4:31, 12:27, 34:8 ), so did King David, Daniel (three times a day to pray), and many of the prophets. People bowed and knelt down in the presence of Jesus including the wise men (Mt. 2:11), the leper of Lk. 5:12, the Syrophenician woman, the father of the epileptic boy (Mt. 17:14), the mother of

the sons of Zebedee (Mt. 20:20), Simon Peter (Lk 5:8), Mary the sister of Lazarus (Jn. 11:32), and Thomas-following Jesus' resurrection.

St. Paul says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father" and "After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him" (1 Cor. 14:25).

The Scriptures also exhort us to "Come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our God our Maker" (Psalm 95:6) and "At the name of Jesus every knee should bend on heaven and on earth" (Phil. 2:10). The heavenly worship in Revelation includes all creatures bowing down before God.

Kneeling and bowing are particularly appropriate during confession and seasons of penitence. Many Anglicans bow or kneel in the direction of the altar, signifying the obedience and submission to God whose presence is signified in the altar. Genuflecting (bending down on the right knee) is also appropriate whenever the Sacrament of the Eucharist is present as a sign of reverence. Some people also bow their heads slightly at the name of Jesus or the Trinitarian formula.

We also stand at certain points in the liturgy in order to show our respect and to help us focus. Whenever we sing, pray, or hear the Gospel read for instance, we stand. We also sit to pray and listen at specific times. These contrasting movements help us stay active, aware, focused, and fully participating in worship.

## **22. The Use of Water in Communion Wine**

Water in the wine symbolizes several things and dates back to the earliest church, although the practice is not universal (the Greek Orthodox do it but not all Roman Catholics do for instance). It represents the water that flowed from Jesus' side on the cross with both blood and water...much as the church itself was formed and flowed from Jesus' action. The water also symbolizes our baptism and our becoming one with Jesus in his death/resurrection in Communion. There is some disagreement among the early church Fathers about this practice however, so one must admit some level of mystery about its' origins.

## **23. The Use of Written Prayers and Collects in Worship**

It is often feared that the use of written prayers and responses will infringe on the liberty of the Holy Spirit. However, a balance between written and extemporaneous prayers in worship is helpful for a number of reasons. Written prayers teach us how to pray and what to say in the presence of Almighty God. Sometimes we find ourselves like St. Peter at the Mount of the Transfiguration and do not know what to say in the presence of Divine Majesty. Recall that Jesus and the apostles used pre-cast forms of prayer. Most of the written prayers we use are very ancient or based on Scriptural words and phrases. They provide us with helpful tools, but should not replace spontaneous prayer altogether. Written prayers also increase the participation of the community in prayer because people can pray in unison. A "collect" is another word for prayer and is simply a "collecting" of our thoughts in prayer.