

# WELCOME TO THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

*The following is excerpted from Patricia Bays' book about the Anglican Church called 'Meet the Family'.*

Welcome to the Anglican Church! Perhaps you are a visitor or a new member and want to know something more about the customs and traditions of this church. Perhaps you have been an Anglican for a long time, but are curious about what the Anglican Church stands for and are looking for a refresher course.

"Because we were going to a Protestant school, my mother was refused communion at the local Roman Catholic church."

If you are coming into the Anglican Church from another tradition, you may find some of our customs unfamiliar, perhaps confusing. I can sympathize to some extent with your experience.

Let me tell you something of my own story of discovering the Anglican Church. I was born the oldest child of a Scottish Presbyterian mother and an Irish Roman Catholic father, and was baptised and raised in the Roman Catholic Church. We were an observant family, attending Mass every Sunday, reciting the family Rosary, saying grace at meals, fasting on Fridays, attending church schools. Religious customs were part of everyday life.

Our Presbyterian grandmother lived with us. She demanded very strict standards of behaviour from us. From her we learned Bible stories and hymns. She also imparted, somehow, the idea of God as a strict parent -- a view that I have had to struggle to overcome in my adult life.

My sister and I attended a United Church girls' school, a school deeply influenced by the Christian tradition, with daily worship, fine liturgical music and excellent required classes in Christian knowledge. In its daily chapel services, I encountered the worship traditions of The United Church of Canada and its predecessors, the

Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches.

Because we were going to a Protestant school, my mother was refused communion at the local Roman Catholic church. So when I was a teenager, my mother decided to attend the Anglican Church as a kind of middle road, and my sister and I accompanied her. I was immediately drawn to the Anglican Church by its worship - the orderly pattern of common prayer, the richness of its music & symbolism. I have remained and Anglican, have studied and taught theology, and been involved with the life of the Anglican Church at many levels -- parish, diocesan, national and international. My life as a member of this church has brought me a great diversity and richness of experience. I love the Anglican Church and am committed to living and working within this family. Here are some of the things that I celebrate about the life of the Anglican Church.

I love the **worship**, with its ordered patterns of prayer, the same from week to week and yet varied according to the seasons. I love the rhythm and music of the language of worship, and the colour and dramatic action of the services. Anglican worship, quite deliberately, I think, involves all our senses. Our churches are (usually) visually tasteful, colourful, attractive. Wood stone, fabric, appeal to touch as well as sight; flowers or incense connect with the sense of smell; the Eucharist, celebrated week by week, stimulates the sense of taste. Anglican worship is much more than a performance to be observed or listened to.

I appreciate also a certain "matter-of-factness" about Anglican worship. We join in **common** prayer. "Common" does not mean "ordinary" in this context. It means that we all say the same words together when we pray. Anglicans use set texts, printed in our books of Common Prayer.

"I love the rhythm and music of the language of worship."

You will not find the priest extemporizing in prayer. Our worship does not depend on the personality of the priest or the quest for novelty or the stirring up of an emotional reaction. We worship God in accustomed patterns, the same week by week. This provides an order and stability to worship, though we do have variations according to the seasons of the year.

The **sacraments**, particularly the Eucharist, are an important part of being an Anglican. For us, the Eucharist is daily bread, food for our journey. It is to be celebrated frequently, on all occasions, in sorrow and in joy.

I find helpful the importance of **reason common sense** in Anglican theology. God gave us minds and expects us to use them. The Anglican Church places a great deal of importance on theological exploration, and I appreciate this freedom to question and explore.

Sometimes this exploration brings controversy. In the 1960s Bishop John Robinson's book *Honest to God* explored the Christian teaching about the nature of God in terms that secular society could understand. In the 1990s Bishop John Spong has written for contemporary men and women a number of provocative books exploring the Bible and the Christian approach to human sexuality. Both authors have generated a good deal of debate, in church circles and in the wider world. I value membership in a church which allows and, in fact, encourages such exploration, and is not threatened by the debate.

I also love the encouragement of **the life of the imagination**. Anglicans find God through art and music and fiction and poetry as well as through the Bible and

theological texts. The great Anglican writers who shape and are shaped by our distinctive way of doing theology include such people as George Herbert, C.S. Lewis, William Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot,

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Madeleine L'Engle, Dorothy Sayers, and P.D. James. A current interest of mine is using literature in religious education, to encourage the use of the imagination in exploring Christian faith.

I like the Anglican emphasis on the **doctrines of Creation and the Incarnation**. We affirm that the world and human beings are good because they are God's creation. In Jesus Christ, God became human and shared in our everyday existence. God must value human nature very highly if God is willing, in Jesus Christ, to "take our nature upon him" as our prayers say. and if God also raises that same human nature to new life after Jesus endured suffering and death. We must work to bring all of humanity to its full potential as God intended, and I rejoice that we do this by loving God and by being involved in our society to work for change.

"a young boy tended a flock of small goats and edged nearer to the open windows to hear what was going on."

I like the **diversity** which Anglicanism offers. Within our communion we have a variety of styles of worship, of theological emphases. Yet we keep also a strong sense of family, of connections, of links in

worship and structure. Through my involvement with international committees of the Anglican Church, I have had the privilege of worshipping in Anglican churches in many parts of the world. In a Nigerian village I was escorted into the church by a group of Women's Guild members, singing and clapping and dancing up the aisle. The service was in the Yoruba language but the pattern of the liturgy was the same as at home. In Malaysia, in a small frame church on a palm oil plantation, we sat on benches for the Eucharist. The music was supplied by a guitarist and two small boys who played a lively beat on the drums. Outside a young boy tended a flock of small goats and edged nearer to the open windows to hear what was going on.

Everywhere I have travelled there has been a warm welcome for a fellow Anglican, and I have felt at home as the familiar words and actions of the service unfold. It will be an enriching experience for you if

you can visit these other "family members" when you go to different places.

I invite you to join with me in exploring what the Anglican Church is like and getting to know your fellow Anglicans or Anglican neighbours.

**Patricia Bays, 1996**

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE

Welcome to The Regional Ministry of St Francis  
The Anglican Church of Canada  
A Short History of the Anglican Communion

*You will find these Brochures at the back of the church*



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DEANERY OF ST FRANCIS  
ST FRANCIS REGIONAL MINISTRY

**THE RIGHT REVEREND BRUCE MYERS OGS**  
BISHOP OF QUEBEC

**THE VEN. DR EDWARD SIMONTON OGS**  
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