

Excerpt from The Parish Leader's Handbook, Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

Understanding the Worldwide Anglican Church

To help you understand some of the structures and tasks of Anglicanism and the worldwide Anglican Communion, the information here has been taken in part from the website of the Anglican Communion found at www.anglicancommunion.org. This is where you will find the most current leaders, priorities, and activities of our worldwide church.

The Anglican Communion is a global family of 85 million siblings united around the love of Jesus Christ. From Canterbury to Calcutta, and Manhattan to Nairobi, the Anglican Communion is one of the world's largest and most diverse Christian communities. Eighty-five million people in over 165 countries call themselves Anglicans. Among them, Anglicans speak more than 2,000 languages. It is a global family with over 500 cultures and ways of looking at the world. It is spread across 41 autonomous churches, who are all in communion with the See of Canterbury. This global family is united by and around the love of Jesus Christ. It's held together by a shared heritage, by ways of worshipping and by the relationships – the “bonds of affection” – between its members worldwide. “The Anglican Communion is one of the greatest miracles of the Church. It is a bewildering, extraordinary, miraculous, diverse, remarkable range of cultures, languages, attitudes, and people. Some live in wealth, others in immense poverty.”
(former Archbishop Justin Welby)

Although vast and international, there is no central authority in the Anglican Communion. All of the provinces are autonomous and free to make their own decisions in their own ways, guided by recommendations from the Instruments of Communion which include the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council. All of these are explained later in this chapter.

The word “Anglican” originates from the Medieval Latin phrase *ecclesia anglicana*, which dates from at least 1246. It means the English Church. Over the past two centuries the tradition of that church has been adopted around the world.

The Church of England initially separated from the Bishop of Rome in the 16th century during the reign of King Henry VIII. But it has always considered itself as a reformed continuation of the *Ecclesia Anglicana*.

Anglican worship outside Britain began in 1578 in Canada. The Anglican Communion traces much of its growth to the older mission organisations of the Church of England such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS). These organizations sent missionaries overseas, often to countries colonised by the British, and during the 18th and 19th centuries, bishops from the British Isles led many of the dioceses and national churches in locations

including India, Canada, the West Indies, and New Zealand.

In 1783, following the American War of Independence, the parishes of Connecticut elected Samuel Seabury as their bishop. Because the Church of England could no longer ordain bishops in the United States, he turned to the Scottish Episcopal Church – a move seen by some as the beginnings of an Anglican Communion with autonomous member churches.

Local bishops eventually became Metropolitans — senior bishops within specified geographic areas — and in 1867, 76 Anglican bishops attended the first Lambeth Conference (following an invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Longley).

Over the years, national churches gained independence from the Church of England and the Anglican Communion gradually became a global family of national and regional churches.

As well as a common ancestry, Anglicans and Episcopalians around the world share many aspects of their traditions and ways of worship. But there is diversity too — often even within a diocese.

Anglicans and Episcopalians have always worked and worshipped together across national borders to support each other's lives and ministry. Communion members from different provinces bring a range of insight, experience and wisdom to joint endeavours at the national and international level. *Ecumenical* is that which promotes or relates to unity among the world's Christian churches, such as in ecumenical dialogues or ecumenical shared ministries. It advises on the organisation and structures of the Communion and seeks to develop common action. common policies with respect to the world mission of the church, including with regards to ecumenical matters.