

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING TODAY

We are Evangelical Anglican Christians and some of our beliefs are set out below. These guidelines come from the Affirming Catholicism movement which is within the Anglican Church. Catholicism refers to the world-wide church and NOT the Roman Catholic Church to which we would reach out in love and fellowship.

DISCIPLINED LIVES OF REGULAR PRAYER, STUDY AND WORSHIP

The Christian faith is not a hobby, a Sunday pastime for people who 'like that kind of thing'. It concerns the whole of our life and our eternal destiny. The purpose of our Christian commitment and Church life is to change us into the people God wants us to become - for ever.

Christianity challenges us to build the whole of our lives with Christ at the centre, and it offers us the spiritual wisdom and resources of centuries to help us grow up spiritually. It encourages us to make a rule of life - to commit ourselves to a pattern of worship each Sunday, and a pattern of daily prayer and regular Bible reading. By sharing in the Eucharist and, if we can, in the daily offices of morning and evening prayer, we can unite ourselves with a continuous worldwide cycle of worship across the seasons, feasts and fasts of the liturgical year. In the writings of the Church fathers, the saints, and of more recent spiritual authors, we are given a treasury of guidance to help us in our personal journey of prayer and meditation. Anglican Catholic tradition encourages us to find a 'soul friend' for spiritual direction and support, and offers sacramental confession as a chance to open ourselves to God and overhaul our spiritual lives regularly. It provides retreats and refreshment in our monastic communities, which are powerhouses of prayer and spirituality. It supplies renewal and inspiration, as well as fun and fellowship, in pilgrimages to shrines and holy places.

With its long inheritance of profound theological thought, Anglican Catholicism also challenges us to turn our minds as well as our hearts to Christ. The widespread ignorance of basic Christianity in our society calls urgently for a renewed commitment to an intelligent evangelism and systematic teaching. Within the Church we need continuing instruction, so that faith is matched by an adult understanding. We need good, popular teaching to close the gap between the theology taught in our colleges and the doctrine preached in the pulpit. In face of the various kinds of fundamentalism on offer today, we have to insist that God speaks to us through reason as well as through tradition and scripture. Whatever our intellectual capacity, and whatever our place in life, we are all called to integrate our reason and our belief, and to be able to give an account of that belief to those around us.

It is therefore a primary aim of Affirming Catholicism to educate people in the faith at every level.

Practical Questions

Real Anglican renewal begins with us, as praying individuals. So take stock of yourself: Are you moving on spiritually, or stagnating? In your spiritual life does the word Catholic mean merely that you like a certain style of worship? Or are you seriously engaged with all that Anglican Catholic tradition offers, to help you grow in God?

Do you need more discipline and structure in your prayer life? Do you need a retreat, a time for serious consideration? Do you have a spiritual director or soul friend? Do you use sacramental confession? Do you read the Bible regularly, with an intelligent guide to help (such as the Bible Reading Fellowship's Guidelines)?

Do you read books to enrich your faith and understanding? Do you attend parish Bible studies and courses? Or does your deanery or diocese offer lay training courses that you might follow? Have you done your bit towards making your own Church a place where everyone, from infants to the oldest, is helped to learn and grow to their fullest capacity?

COMMITMENT TO THE SOCIAL AND MORAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD

Catholic means universal, for everybody. By definition, Catholic Christianity cannot be privatised. God made us social beings to care for each other. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God himself is a kind of community - three persons existing in perfect union - and we are made in his image. We can only develop into the people he wants us to be through our relationships with him and with one other.

The doctrines of the Creation and Incarnation also stress God's involvement in the whole of life, material as well as spiritual. Our calling as Anglican Catholic Christians is the sanctification not only of ourselves but of the created world we live in. Salvation does not remove us from the world and promise only 'pie in the sky when we die'. We must start building the Kingdom here and now, and resist the attempt to make morality a purely personal and individual concern. Christian morality is as much a social, political and environmental matter as a personal one.

Some of the most famous pioneers of Anglo-Catholicism in the Church of England were priests who worked in slums which no other Christian influence touched, and who combined their personal ministry and evangelism with political action for justice. It is some time since Anglican Catholics were noted for their social concern or defence of the underprivileged. Yet in our own time there is hardly less division and injustice in our society and our world, and hardly fewer 'no go' areas for the Church. In addition there are many new and pressing concerns about discrimination, violence and social disintegration, economic oppression, genetics and medical ethics, and global threats to the environment.

Affirming Catholicism underlines the urgent social implications of our faith which have been neglected in the ecclesiastical navel-gazing of recent years. We want a strong and active Anglican Catholic witness to social justice, to the equal worth and dignity of all people, and to good stewardship of God's creation.

Practical Questions

How do you think Jesus would react to the society we live in? Where do you see injustice in the society around you: locally, nationally, internationally? And what are you doing about it as part of your Christian witness?

Are you a member of any political party or pressure group? Are you actively involved in charity work? Have you personally, or has your Church, ever lobbied your MP or others in power on behalf of a cause you believe in? If not, why not?

Does your Church have cooperative links with the local authority and social services? Would your Church be perceived as a community which cares for others in general, or only for its own members? In which issues of justice and social concern would you like to see your Church more active and involved?

MODELS OF LOVE AND COMMUNITY FOR ALL SEEKING TO FOLLOW THE GOSPEL

By definition, Catholicism is inclusive - for everybody; but particular versions of Catholicism have not always proved to be so in practice. Affirming Catholics are committed to inclusive models of Christian life and to work against injustices and prejudices - some of which the Church itself has helped to generate down the ages.

The most powerful way of proclaiming the Gospel will always be by behaviour, not by slogans or definitions, and our vocation is to reflect in our personal lives and in our movement the God who is himself inclusive, because he welcomes us first - then loves us into what he would have us be.

Our respect for tradition and discipline - and our awareness of the reality of human sinfulness - are therefore matched by tolerance and welcome at the pastoral level. At the heart of Catholicism is the conscience of the individual, as expressed in the Anglican tradition by Queen Elizabeth I's disinclination to 'open windows on men's souls'. Nevertheless, Anglican Catholic teaching has always emphasized that the primacy of conscience is not an indulgence, since the individual has an urgent responsibility to inform the conscience by prayerful reflection on experience, scripture and tradition- weighing each in the light of the others. In our own day the Church faces a number of acute moral dilemmas, not least on issues surrounding gender, sexuality and the family, which remain unresolved. While rooted and grounded in the tradition of the Church, we intend to remain open in heart and mind, and claim the freedom - a genuine liberalism - to relate that tradition to the present, and in doing so to play our part in the evolution of that tradition itself.

In the end, as Pope John XXIII wrote, 'God's mercy is our only merit'. Yet to outsiders the Church often seems more like a Sanhedrin of the self-righteous than a community of grace, and Anglicanism in particular has often lapsed into establishment moralism. Affirming Catholicism exists to remind the Church that 'the acid test of a truly Catholic Christianity is that it seeks not to make good people better, but bad people holy' (Michael Marshall, former Bishop of Woolwich, now Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of London).

Practical Questions

What kind of people are you most prejudiced against? What are you doing about it? Is your Church genuinely open and accessible to all kinds of people? Would some folk feel excluded, or find it very hard to fit in and be comfortable?

How would the worship and the teaching strike a newcomer? Can you imagine what it would be like for different kinds of people to walk into your Church for the first time? What about people of a different class or colour from the majority? People with disabilities? People with babies or young children? What about older children, teenagers, old people? A same-sex couple? Single parents?

How does your Church deal with people who approach the Church for the first time, seeking a baptism or a wedding, or at a time of their bereavement? What is your attitude, and the

attitude of your Church, to people of other Christian denominations, and to people of different faiths? Do you think you have anything to learn from them? Have you ever visited their places of worship or found out about their beliefs? Have you ever tried to explain yours to them? Have you any idea what you may have in common?

A LIVING ANGLICAN CATHOLIC TRADITION TO CARRY THE GIFTS OF THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

Anglican Catholic tradition is not an unchanging body of teachings and attitudes which we are supposed to adopt wholesale. That would simply be an alternative form of fundamentalism. As Newman remarked, speaking of tradition itself, 'to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often'. At the same time, we would be foolish and faithless to change at random, or simply to follow the spirit of the age.

Anglican Catholic tradition is like an organic growth, which remains rooted and fed by the inheritance of the past, but also evolves and adapts to new knowledge and experience, testing the compatibility of the new in the light of the old. The great majority of Affirming Catholics, for example, welcome the ordination of women because we see it, not as a radical denial of tradition, but as a legitimate development within it, which so far from undermining the Church's traditional understanding of priestly ministry, actually deepens and enriches it. In the same way many would affirm the grace of God in faithful same-sex relationships, and believe that this understanding represents a proper extension of, not a threat to, the Christian theology of marriage.

Similarly we want to encourage developments in Anglican liturgy which combine intelligibility and accessibility with the depth and mystery which have been its traditional hallmarks. We want to explore the new ways of teaching the faith which are offered by modern information and media technologies. We want to promote real bible study, which takes on board the insights of biblical scholarship and seeks to close the gap between academic theology and parish teaching. We want an open debate on sexuality and the family, to examine critically Catholicism's 'traditional' and often hypocritical stance on these matters and confront them squarely. We want to explore new possibilities of unity with other denominations, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, and to be more daring to tear down ancient barriers.

In recent years an instinctive and seemingly fearful opposition to any new development became the hallmark of Anglo-Catholicism. We believe that in all these contemporary issues, as in those of the past and in those yet to come, a genuinely Catholic approach will avoid both a congealed traditionalism which opposes all change, and a rootless liberalism which embraces any change uncritically.

Practical Questions

It is important to be clear about what it means to be a Catholic in the Anglican Communion. What are the elements and approaches which seem to you most important about being Catholic? How would you explain the difference between Roman and Anglican Catholicism? How would you answer Anglican Catholics who say 'You cannot be a Catholic and believe in the ordination of women as priests and bishops?'

In every generation Catholic teaching has had to adapt and adjust to new knowledge and experience: where do you see this happening today? Would you describe yourself or your Church as 'conservative' or 'liberal' by instinct?

What would you like to see change in Church teaching and practice? What kind of developments would you resist? Is there provision in your parish or deanery for teaching and discussion about contemporary theology and ethics?

LITURGY TO INSPIRE HOLINESS AND RELATE THE GREATNESS OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE TODAY

People are hungry for a sense of God. At its best Anglican Catholic liturgy instils an awareness both of God's transcendent greatness and of his intimate closeness to us in the sacraments. It can lift us beyond the barriers of space and time and death, and make us experience the truth that we are worshipping 'with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven'.

Yet it must be admitted that in many churches the liturgy fails to inspire and nourish as it should. In many of the 'highest' Anglo-Catholic churches, worship can feel like camp or antiquarian self-indulgence, and that kind of thing no longer exercises the power to engage more than a handful of cognoscenti. On the other hand, in churches which have uncritically adopted liturgical reform, worship - though often strong on the social dimension - seems to have lost any sense of awe and reverence. In yet other churches towards the middle of the Anglican spectrum, odd elements of ancient or modern Catholic practice seem to have been preserved in a piecemeal way, with little grasp of their original meaning or purpose.

Affirming Catholicism seeks to promote intelligent and effective liturgy, and to increase awareness of those liturgical and musical possibilities that can transform parish worship. For that purpose, liturgical days and workshops (in conjunction sometimes with Praxis and other concerned groups) are very much part of our programme. Anglican Catholic liturgy needs to rediscover and renew its traditional alliance with the best contemporary art in every medium, for the benefit and enrichment of both. At the same time we need to learn from, without being seduced by, experiments in popular worship undertaken in other traditions. All in all, we hope to be at the centre of a liturgical renewal in Anglicanism which preserves, and in some cases rescues, the best of the past, but which also will find new ways of worship to express God's grace and greatness in the future.

Practical Questions

Does the liturgy of your Church work for you? Does it convey a sense of God's presence? How much of traditional Catholic ceremonial do you have? Is it understood and effectively used? Are the clergy and their lay helpers properly trained to perform the ceremonial effectively so that it is neither a shambles nor too stiff and self-conscious? Does the manner of the ritual intrude on the concentration and spiritual attentiveness of the congregation?

Do you have a creche and a sensible Church policy about the attendance of children, so that teaching and prayer are not always destroyed by noise? Is there a strategy for welcoming new people? Is there a chance for the congregation to meet socially after the service?

Is there an air of excitement and expectation about the sermon, or is it a bore to be got through? Are the intercessions properly prepared, and tied in with the theme of the readings and sermon, so that a clear thread runs through the whole service? Is the music appropriate to the congregation and the style of service, and is it as good as it can be? Do you need to explore different musical styles?

If your Church has the accoutrements of Catholic worship, are people taught to understand them in order that the ritual does not become empty custom? If yours is a more middle-of-

the-road Church, would it benefit from greater use of the symbols and visual aids of Catholic worship, properly taught and sensitively introduced? Is there regular provision for a more meditative or informal kind of worship as well as the Sunday Eucharist? What about seminars on the liturgy, or Eucharists with running commentary (for children or adults), or attendance at a Praxis day? Could the clergy and readers do with the help and training offered by the College of Preachers?

Action to take: Engage as much as you can with the life of your parish. Join Affirming Catholicism and get others to join. Help your local diocesan Affirming Catholicism group to be active and effective. See whether your local parish would like to be more closely and corporately involved with Affirming Catholicism.

Many Anglican dioceses have a local Affirming Catholicism diocesan convenor who will have details of the activities and meetings of your local group.