Anglican Communion Q&A

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Q: What is the Anglican Communion?

This is the name given to the collection of 38 self-governing national or regional Member Churches around the world that share several things in common including doctrine, ways of worshipping, mission and a focus of unity in the Archbishop of Canterbury. There are also six (soon-to-be five) churches or dioceses known as *Extra Provincials* that also have a formal relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Click here for the full list of Member Churches and Extra Provincials.

Q: How many Anglicans are there around the world?

It is very difficult to be precise. Currently the best estimate is around 85 million. This is based on Member Churches' own attendance figures*, figures provided to the World Council of Churches and figures published in the Atlas of Global Christianity. Anglicans are known as Episcopalians in some parts of the world.

**These figures are measured differently Church by Church. They can be people in the pews every Sunday morning, or on one particular Sunday in the year, or those who call themselves Anglican on the census form, etc.*

Q: Where are most Anglicans located?

Anglicans can be found in more than 165 countries worldwide. More than half are on the continent of Africa. The countries with the highest numbers of Anglicans (or Episcopalians) currently are England, Nigeria and Uganda.

Q: Doesn't Anglicanism start with King Henry VIII?

Anglican Churches' strong links with the See of Canterbury and Canterbury Cathedral demonstrate that Anglican Christian history goes back much further than the Church's separation from the Bishop of Rome during the reign of King Henry VIII. Anglicans in Ireland also trace their history back to St Patrick. The Latin term 'Ecclesia Anglicana' was used from the earliest days to describe the English Church: it appears in the 1215 Magna Carta. Learn more about the history of the Anglican Communion here

Q: Who is in charge of the Anglican Communion?

Neither the Archbishop of Canterbury nor the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion can tell Member Churches what they must do. The Archbishop is the *spiritual* head and focus of unity of the Anglican Communion. The Secretary General manages the London-based Secretariat that serves the Instruments of Communion and has a relational and ambassadorial role in the Anglican Communion and with other Christian Churches. While Member Church share much in common, and will agree on doctrine and ways of working together, each is self-governing.

Q: What are the decision-making bodies in the Anglican Communion?

As mentioned above, each Member Church is self-governing and ultimately makes its own decisions. The General Synods of the Provincial Churches are, for example, the final arbitrators of doctrine for that Church. Nevertheless, the Instruments of Communion (Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Archbishop of Canterbury in his role as the Anglican Communion's spiritual head) pass resolutions or statements that are recommendations to the Member Churches and need to be ratified by them to be effective.

Q: Are all Anglican Churches part of the Anglican Communion?

There are a small number of Anglican churches around the world who are not part of the Anglican Communion. To be part of it, a church must have a formal relation with the See of Canterbury and be recognised by the ACC as a church of the Anglican Communion. It is possible for a church to be completely Anglican in heritage and origin, and for it not to be in the Anglican Communion.

Q: Do all Member Churches of the Anglican Communion ordain women as bishops?

The decision to ordain women is for each of the 38 Provinces. As of January 2015, eight Member Churches/Extra Provincials ordain women as priests or deacons but not as bishops, three ordain women only as deacons, five do not ordain women at all. The rest will ordain women as priests, as deacons and as bishops.

Q: What is the Anglican Communion Covenant?

The Covenant was proposed as a way formalising the relationship between the 38 Provinces to ensure greater coherence. Several Provinces have adopted it in some form and others are considering it. It is likely to be discussed at the next Anglican Consultative Council in 2016 in Lusaka, Zambia.

Q: Do Anglicans get on with other Christian traditions/denominations?

Anglicans work and worship with a variety of other Christian traditions at all levels.

There are formal dialogues with other global churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and confessions such as the Lutheran World Federation. These often take the form of theological consultations which have resulted in wide ranging theological agreements. You can learn about the dialogues, with other Christian traditions such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and Methodist Church, at the global level by visiting here

In addition Provinces are in dialogue and often full communion with local expressions of other traditions, e.g. Anglicans and Lutherans in Canada, or Filipino Episcopalians and the Independent Filipino church (IFI). Practically this means priests and churches are shared between the two.

There are a small number of churches in full Communion with the Anglican Communion – The Old Catholic Church was the first example of this. Learn more about such relationships here and here

Q: What is the Anglican Communion's position on marriage and ordination of LGBT people?

The bishops at the 1998 Lambeth Conference stated their belief that marriage was between a man and a woman and that they could not recommend the blessing of same sex unions or the ordination of people in such unions. They also called for a process of 'listening to the experience of homosexual persons.' Some of the Member Churches are re-examining the advice as a result of their listening, while others are firm in a commitment to maintain the position adopted in 1998.