

“I believe in Christianity as I  
believe that the sun has risen.  
Not only because I see it, but  
because i see everything by it”

CS Lewis

**Affirming Catholicism**  
Inspiration and hope in the Anglican Communion

We are a movement of inspiration and hope in the Anglican Communion, bringing together and strengthening lay and ordained people who recognise the positive, inclusive and joyful currents in the Catholic tradition of Christianity.

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# GUIDE LINES

for Christian Living



# GUIDELINES

## Affirming Catholicism in the whole of life

### AFFIRMING CATHOLICISM

#### **We are**

a movement of renewal and hope in the Anglican Communion, seeking to bring together and strengthen lay and ordained people who recognize the positive, inclusive and joyful currents in the Catholic tradition of Christianity.

#### **We believe**

that this tradition is vital for the identity, mission and future health of the Anglican Communion. As reformed and reforming Catholics, we seek to aid the renewal of the universal Church in its task of bearing witness in the world to Christ's healing and reconciling love.

#### **We celebrate**

the variety of traditions within the life of the Church. As affirming Catholics, it is part of our mission to promote models of love, friendship and community for all seeking to follow the gospel, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

#### **Therefore we affirm**

- Liturgy to inspire holiness and relate the greatness of God to people today.
- The church as a community of love for all seeking to follow Christ
- Lives of faith which reflect God's loving call
- Commitment to sharing in God's mission in the world
- A living Catholic tradition to carry the gifts of the past into the future.

# 1 LITURGY

**to inspire holiness and relate the greatness of God to his people today**

People are hungry for a sense of God. When we worship we bring our hunger and our need to God, and we ask God to fill us with his love. In our worship we experience the greatness of God whose power fills the universe, and yet we also meet him deep within us, as close to us and as intimate as a lover. The sacraments of the Church are promises to us of God's love and pledges of his presence. And throughout the two thousand years of Christian history, worship and the sacraments have brought us close not only to God, but to each other across the barriers of space and time, so that our worship becomes one with the worship of the angels in heaven.

The central act of Christian worship is the Eucharist, sometimes called the Mass or Holy Communion. In it we recall the last meal of Christ with his friends in the Upper Room, and we recognise him in the breaking of the bread. Although our faith is grounded in history, our worship is not a nostalgic looking back to the events of the past: we celebrate the fact that in the Eucharist Christ is truly present to us now, and his

promise of the glory that will be ours when the whole universe is made complete in him. As we bless bread and wine in remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection, his sacrifice on the cross is joined with our offering of prayer and praise, and the elements of bread and wine are transformed into our spiritual food, food we are invited to share in Holy Communion.

Neither God's love nor our worship ends when the service is over. Our whole life is to be a living sacrifice of thanks and praise. Having received the Body of Christ, we become the Body of Christ to the world. Just as bread and wine, the ordinary things of life, are taken by God and transformed and used in his service, so each Christian is called both to know God's acceptance and love, and to allow themselves to be transformed into the kind of Christ-like person God wants them to be. The Church too, as the company of those who know themselves to be both deeply loved by God and called by God to change the world, is itself to be the place where God's loving acceptance and his gospel call to mission are most clearly shown.



*Questions for reflection or discussion*

Does the worship in your church give a sense of the greatness and otherness of God? And of his love and closeness? When was the last time that your life was changed by the experience of worship?

Does your worship together lead naturally to concern for God's world? And how are the world and its concerns brought into your worship?

While the most important meaning of the Church is 'the people of God', Church buildings themselves are places where the Gospel can be experienced. How does your Church do that at times when no worship is going on?

# 2 THE CHURCH

as a community of love for all seeking to follow Christ

By definition, Catholicism is inclusive – for everybody – because God is inclusive: he welcomes us first, then loves us into what he would have us be. Affirming Catholics are committed to inclusive models of Christian life and to work against injustice and prejudice - some of which the Church itself has helped to generate down the ages. 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' (Bishop Michael Marshall).

If that is the church's task, the church's life is the place where it should become a living reality. Whether it be, the homeless poor, asylum seekers and refugees, members of the LGBT community, people suffering from mental illness, or those to whom no particular label is attached, the church should practise a non-judgmental welcome of all who wish to come. It is only in the context of that welcome that the challenge of transformation, the call to the disciple's path, can be heard and accepted. Each local church community – indeed the Church as a

whole – only continues to live the life of Christ if it is made up of pilgrim people, who always recognise that God calls us beyond what we have yet been or seen.

One significant role of the clergy is to connect the journey of individuals to the Church's story across time and space, by opening up the resources of scripture and the tradition of the church and bringing them into conversation with the experience of God's work in our place and time. In this way, they enable the people of God to grow in maturity and confidence on the pilgrim way. While rooted and grounded in the tradition of the Church, as Affirming Catholics we remain open to what the Spirit is teaching us through contemporary insights. As together we read the Scriptures, worship and pray, and live out our faith in the world, we are playing our part in the evolution of that tradition itself.

We are never perfect in that task. In the end, as Pope John XXIII wrote, "God's mercy is our only merit." That is as true for the Church as it is for each of us in our own lives.

A large crowd of people is gathered for a church service. Many individuals are holding up white cloths or banners, some of which feature a cross. The scene is filled with people of various ages and backgrounds, all participating in the service. The overall atmosphere is one of collective worship and celebration.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

Imagine what it is like for different kinds of people to walk into your church for the first time. How would they be received? Would they be welcomed?

Is your church a place in which everyone can take part in discovering what it means to live out the gospel in the world, in your local community?



# 3 LIVES OF FAITH

which reflect God's loving call


If we are to become more Christ-like, our Christian faith must be at the heart, not the edge, of our lives. It is not a hobby or one lifestyle option among others. The purpose of our Christian commitment and church life is to change us into the people God wants us to become, so that we 'may be saved through Christ for ever' (Book of Common Prayer Ordinal).

Catholic Christianity challenges us to build the whole of our lives upon Christ as our cornerstone and foundation. It draws on the spiritual wisdom and resources of the 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.

At the very centre of God's gift to us, and so at the centre of our own life of prayer, is the Eucharist in which we share each Sunday. The Eucharist is the beginning, not the end of our spirituality; the riches of the faith cannot be explored in only one hour a week, nor can we grow up into the full stature of Christ on one meal a week.

By developing a pattern of daily prayer – by sharing, if we can, in the daily offices of morning and evening prayer – we unite ourselves with the continuous worship of God throughout the world and across the seasons, feasts and fasts of the liturgical year. Through the writings of the early church, the accounts of the saints, and the insights of more recent spiritual authors we are offered a treasury of guidance to help us in our personal journey of prayer and meditation.

Catholic tradition encourages us to find a 'soul friend' for spiritual direction and support. It offers (but does not require) sacramental confession as a chance to open ourselves to God and regularly overhaul our spiritual lives. It provides retreats and times of refreshment in 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.



*Questions for reflection or discussion*

Real Catholic renewal begins with us, as praying individuals. Take stock of yourself. Are you moving on spiritually or are you stagnating? How might your spiritual life benefit from all that Catholic tradition can offer 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?

Are you helping to make your own church a place where everyone, from infants to the oldest, is helped to learn and grow to their fullest capacity?

# 4 COMMITMENT

## to sharing in God's mission in the world

The Catholic faith is universal, for everybody. By definition, Catholic Christianity cannot be privatized. God made us social beings to care for each other. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is a community of three persons existing in perfect unity – and we are made in God's image. We can only develop into the people he wants us to be through our relationships with him and with one another.

The doctrines of Creation and Incarnation also stress God's involvement in the whole of life, material as well as spiritual. 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.

At the heart of Catholic Christianity is the call to live and to proclaim the good news of God's salvation. The widespread ignorance of basic Christianity in our society calls urgently for a renewed commitment to evangelism: evangelism which has welcome at its heart, an invitation to encounter Christ in the community of his church and an opportunity to relate the questions of life to the historic Christian faith as it is lived out

in today's world. There is no division between sharing in God's mission to the poor and marginalised of our world, or working for environmental justice, or accompanying a new believer on the path to baptism into Christ's family. All are part of the same reaching out in love which characterised Jesus. This must be our pattern too.

Some of the best-known pioneers of Anglo-Catholicism in the Church of England were priests who worked in city slums that no other Christian influence was touching, and who combined their personal ministry and evangelism with political action for justice. The call is no less urgent today: concerns about discrimination, violence and social disintegration, economic oppression, genetics and medical ethics, and global threats to the environment all call for a distinctive Catholic Christian response.

Affirming Catholicism recognises and affirms the urgent social implications of our faith. Our vision is of a strong and active Catholic witness to social justice, to the equal worth and dignity of all people, and to good stewardship of God's creation. We emphasise the calling to all God's people to take up their vocation as ambassadors for Christ to those who have never thought of Jesus as 'good news' for their own lives.



*Questions for reflection or discussion*

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?

Is your church 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?

# 5 CATHOLIC TRADITION

to carry the gifts of the past into the future



With its long inheritance of profound theological thought, Catholicism challenges us to turn our mind as well as our heart to Christ. In face of the various kinds of fundamentalism on offer today our experience is 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.

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. John Newman, speaking of tradition itself, remarked, '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.

Catholic tradition is rooted and fed by the inheritance of the past, in order that it may grow and adapt to new knowledge and experience, testing the compatibility of the new in the light of the old. Affirming Catholics welcome the ordination of women because we see it, not as a radical denial of tradition, but as a legitimate development within the tradition. Far from undermining the Church's traditional understanding of priestly ministry, the priestly ministry of women deepens and enriches it. In the same way, many Affirming Catholics 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.

In keeping with this position, we encourage developments in Catholic liturgy which combine intelligibility and accessibility with the depth and mystery which have been its traditional hallmarks. We want to



explore new ways of teaching the faith. We want to promote 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 to explore new possibilities of unity with other denominations, both Catholic and Protestant, and to be

more daring in transcending ancient divisions. We believe that in all these contemporary issues, as in those of the past and in those yet to come, a genuinely Catholic approach avoids both a congealed traditionalism, opposed to all change, and a rootless liberalism, which embraces any change uncritically.

### *Questions for reflection or discussion*

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?



## Action to take

Engage as much as you can with the life of your parish.

Become a supporter of Affirming Catholicism nationally.

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 convener who will have details of the activities and meetings of your local group.

For further information or to support AFFIRMING CATHOLICISM see our website: [www.affirmingcatholicism.org.uk](http://www.affirmingcatholicism.org.uk), or telephone us on 07891 851722 or write to

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