

Church of England

History and role



St Botolph's Church, Boston, England

The Church of England is the established or state church in England. It is divided into two provinces - Canterbury in the South of England and York in the North. Each province has a head or Primate - the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

The Church of England is part of the Anglican Communion, which is a worldwide family of churches in more than 160 different countries. On any one Sunday more than a million people attend Church of England services, making it the largest Christian denomination in the country.

The Established Church

The Church of England is the *established* church, meaning, amongst other things, that it is the official church of England, and that the Monarch is the Supreme Governor of the church (theologically Jesus is the head).

History

The Church of England traces its roots back to the early church, but its specifically Anglican identity and its links to the State date back to the Reformation.

Henry VIII created the Church of England after his split with the Pope in the 1530s.

Role of the Monarch

Today the Monarch is still the Supreme Governor of the Church. He or she has to:

1. approve the appointment of archbishops, bishops and deans (on the recommendation of the Prime Minister)
2. formally open each new session (every five years) of the General Synod (the church's governing body)
3. promise to maintain the Church in his or her coronation oath.

Hierarchy, beliefs and worship

There are 43 dioceses in England covering the two provinces of Canterbury and York. Each diocese has a bishop.

The *parish* is the heart of the Church of England. Each parish is overseen by a parish priest, usually called a *vicar* or *rector*. Ideally, everyone in England has a parish priest to whom they can turn. Everyone lives in a parish. This means it's an organisation for everyone, not just believers.

Beliefs and worship

The Church of England is a broad church, representing a wide spectrum of theological

thought and practice. Some of the Church of England's central beliefs are:

- a belief that the Bible contains the core of all Christian faith and thought
- a loyalty to a way of worship and life that was first set out in the Book of Common Prayer
- celebration of the sacraments ordained by Jesus - that of Baptism and Eucharist
- a system of Church order that stems from ancient times and is focused in the ordained ministry of Bishop, Priest and Deacon
- a firm commitment to the ministry of the whole people of God, lay and ordained together
- a way of Christian thinking that involves Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

Individual parishes can decide how many services they hold in the week, how often they conduct Eucharistic services and how they structure the service to include hymns/songs, readings, the Creed, a sermon and prayers. However, each priest is expected to conduct a service which has been authorised by the church in the service book.