

# The Book of Common Prayer

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## What Is the Book of Common Prayer?

- The Book of Common Prayer refers to a number of related prayer books used throughout the world in the Anglican Communion that contain the words, prayers, and readings of liturgical services of worship.
- Anglicanism is unique in that it is united around a prayer book rather than a particular council, historical figure, confessional statement, or theological work.
- The Book of Common Prayer is arguably the primary bond among Anglicans throughout the world.

## Historical Background

- **Conditions Leading to the Book of Common Prayer (1549)**
  - England's break with Rome (1534)
  - Substandard nature of worship
    - Celebrated *for* not *by* the people
    - Mass in Latin
    - Complex rituals understood in terms of superstition and magic
  - Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury (1533–55)
    - Language changed from Latin to English
    - Multiple service books reduced to one
    - Revisions made according to biblical teaching
    - Preaching revived
    - Cup restored to laity
    - Congregation more involved
    - Biblical content greatly increased
- **Multiple Revisions**
  - 1552—revised to make both sides happy (banned by Queen Mary)
  - 1559—*via media* revision under Queen Elizabeth
  - 1604—slight revisions under King James' Hampton Court Conference
  - 1645—outlawed for fifteen years with the overthrow of the monarchy
  - 1662—slight revisions with restored monarchy; official prayer book today
- **Guiding Principles**
  - Grounded upon Scripture
  - Agreeable to the Early Church
  - Unifying the Body
  - Edifying the People

## Table of Contents

- **Introduction:** instructions, calendar
- **The Daily Office:** morning, noon, evening prayers and Bible readings
- **The Great Litany** (1544): a series of petitions prayed responsively
- **The Collects:** “collected” prayers
- **Proper Liturgies for Special Days**
- **Holy Baptism**
- **The Holy Eucharist**
- **Pastoral Offices:** rites for occasions in the regular lives of Christians
- **Episcopal Services:** various rites led by a bishop
- **The Psalter:** designed for vocal use
- **Prayers and Thanksgivings**
- **Catechism:** for instruction
- **Historical Documents:** creeds, Articles of Religion, etc.
- **Tables:** for finding Easter Day
- **The Lectionary:** readings for Sunday and special service gatherings
- **Daily Office Lectionary**

## Liturgy and Worship

- Liturgy means “the work of the people,” emphasizing the fact that worship is not a performance but intended to involve the people.
- In a sense, every church does liturgy. What distinguishes Anglican worship from other traditions is its use of a historically tested liturgy, one which has been passed down through the centuries.
- Good liturgy provides a structure that becomes meaningful and familiar so that people can focus on God without wondering about what’s coming next or whether or not something said or prayed is theologically orthodox.
- Good liturgy also provides balance by reflecting a full expression of generations of faithful Christians rather than one person’s feelings at a particular moment.

## The Church Calendar

The Church Calendar invites us to inhabit the redemptive story of God by remembering what God has done throughout history and anticipating where history is going.

- **Advent** (purple)—4 weeks before Christmas longing for the King to come
- **Christmas** (white)—12 days celebrating the mystery of the incarnation
- **Epiphany** (green)—6 to 9 weeks recalling how Jesus revealed himself to us
- **Lent** (purple)—40 days of self-examination preparing for the cross
- **Holy Week** (purple)—we reflect on the final events of Jesus’ life before Easter
- **Easter** (white)—49 days celebrating the resurrection of Jesus and new creation
- **Pentecost and Ordinary Time** (red and green)—the Spirit sends the church into the world