

### ***Part 3 - What is the BCP?***

*Worship in the Anglican tradition is grounded in the use of The Book of Common Prayer in its various national editions. The first English Book of Common Prayer was published in 1549. Its content was a mixture of ancient materials and the theological thoughts of that day and place. Its real genius was that it provided a common English text so that priest and people could both take an active role in the worship of the Church.*

From the beginning, uniformity in thought and practice has been less a part of who we are than has been a high respect and tolerance for divergent views and beliefs. Subsequent editions of The Book of Common Prayer improved on that beginning. Some editions leaned more toward traditional Catholic doctrines; sometimes the movement was toward principles of the Reformation Churches. The intent of all of the books was simply to have the people of England, regardless of their individual religious persuasions, worship together as one people in one Church.

As the British colonial empire spread across the globe so did the Church of England. With the Church went The Book of Common Prayer. And while they were rooted in their mother Church's Book of Common Prayer, each daughter Church developed her own unique version of the prayer book. In the modern era various national editions of The Book of Common Prayer and even subsequent editions of each individual Church's prayer book can contain slight differences or shades of theology. From a historical perspective this is because some national

So, then, the history of worship in the Anglican tradition has been grounded in a common source of prayer for the Church (the prayer book) and has used the activity of worship to gather up and hold together a wide variety of beliefs and practices.

The worship of the Anglican tradition is obviously corporate and public but it is also private. We hesitate to divide one from the other because they are necessary to each other. Each Anglican is encouraged to have a personal discipline of prayer and study called a Rule of Life. Here, too, The Book of Common Prayer is our guide. Author Martin Thornton has written:

*To the seventeenth-century layman the Prayer Book was not a shiny volume to be borrowed from the shelf on entering the church and carefully replaced on leaving. It was a beloved and battered personal possession, a lifelong companion and guide, to be carried from church to kitchen, to living room, to bedside table.*

Here's a quick run through the Prayer Book...

### **Daily Prayer & Devotions**

Pages 37-140. There are two versions of the Morning and Evening Prayers and a single version of Compline – the service held at the end of the day. The daily devotions on pages 137-140 are very short, a page each for the morning, noon, evening, and close of day.

### **Collects**

Pages 159-261. A collect is a short prayer made up of an invocation, petition, and conclusion. There are collects covering all sorts of occasions and events, including Holy days and the celebration of the lives of the Saints.

### **Liturgies for Special Days**

Pages 264-295. The special days are Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and The Great Vigil of Easter.

### **Baptism**

Page 298-313. In the Episcopal Church, it is common to be baptized as a young infant – though adults can be Baptized too. The Prayer Book provides a form of words to be used when someone is not sure if they've already been baptized (Conditional Baptism), and even an Emergency Baptism, which can be performed by any baptized person (both can be found on page 313)

### **Holy Communion**

Pages 323-382. The celebration of Christ's sacrifice for us, by the partaking of bread and wine. Several variants of the Holy Communion service are provided. One, Eucharistic Prayer C starting on page 369, is often referred to as the Star Trek Communion because of its reference to '... the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, ...'

### **Confirmation**

Pages 413-419. Confirmation is performed by the bishop of the diocese and represents the adult acceptance and reaffirmation of their Baptismal vows.

### **Marriage**

Pages 423-437. The complete marriage service. If you wish to be married at an Episcopal church, the service is set out here. You can find your local Episcopal church [here](#).

### **Thanksgiving for a Child**

Pages 439-445. Prayers for the birth or adoption of a child.

### **Ministration to the Sick**

Pages 453-461. Prayers for the sick, their caregivers, those in pain, and those recovering from illness.

### **At the Time of Death**

Pages 462-467. Prayers to be used at the time of death.

### **Burial**

Pages 469-507. The details of the burial service.

### **Episcopal Services**

Pages 510-579. All sorts of celebrations, including the ordination of the clergy, and the dedication and consecration of a church.

### **The Psalter**

Pages 582-808. A complete set of 150 psalms – the ‘hymns’ or poetry, if you prefer, included in the Old Testament of the Bible.

### **Prayers and Thanksgivings**

Pages 810-841. An excellent resource of prayers for all occasions.

### **An Outline of the Episcopal Faith**

Pages 844-862. If you want a really definitive definition of the Episcopal Faith, this is where to look.

### **Historical Documents**

Pages 864-878. All sorts of interesting things if you are into details (or as one priest I know suggested, suffer from insomnia), including the preface to the 1549 Book of Common Prayer and the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral — a statement of the basis of the Anglican faith (The Episcopal Church is a part of the Anglican Communion), which was devised to find and define common ground with other faith communities, for example, the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Churches.

***Additional Reading Suggestion:***

[\*The Book of Common Prayer\*](#)

[\*The Book of Occasional Services\*](#)

[\*Lesser Feasts and Fasts\*](#)

[Lectionary Page](#)

[Calendar of the Church Year](#)

[Enriching Our Worship 1](#): Morning and Evening Prayer, the Great Litany, and the Holy Eucharist

[Enriching Our Worship 2](#): Ministry with the Sick or Dying; Burial of a Child

[Enriching Our Worship 3](#): Burial Rites for Adults, together with a Rite for the Burial of a Child

[Enriching Our Worship 4](#): The Renewal of Ministry and the Welcoming of a New Rector

[Enriching Our Worship 5](#): Liturgies and Prayers Related to Childbearing, Childbirth, and Loss

[\*The Liturgy Explained\*](#); by James Farwell

[\*Liturgical Life Principles\*](#); by Ian Markham

[\*Praying Shapes Believing\*](#); by Leonel Mitchell

[\*Inwardly Digest: The Prayer Book as a Guide to a Spiritual Life\*](#); by Derek Olsen

[\*Commentary on the American Prayer Book\*](#); by Marion Hatchett

[\*Liturgy for Living\*](#); by Charles P. Price and Louis Weil

[\*Opening the Prayer Book\*](#); by Jeffrey D. Lee

[\*Prayer Book Rubrics Expanded\*](#); by Byron D. Stulman

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