



It can be a little intimidating walking into a church for the first time. This section may help shed some light on aspects of the 80 million-member, worldwide Anglican Communion. We hope you'll find materials here interesting, entertaining—even challenging. After all, we hold that Jesus Christ came to take away your sins, not your mind.

How Are We Different?

Good question. One answer is that our historic building, our particular challenges, our location and our dreams have led us in some distinctive directions.

The other simple honest answer is that we aren't very different from any local Christian congregation.

We seek faithfully to offer the worship of God and service to others in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are Anglicans, members of a worldwide communion of Christians whose customs and understandings of the Christian way developed from the Church of England. Anglicans have been an interesting blend of the necessity in England of somehow providing a church roomy enough for Christians with conscientious differences in practice and belief to live together.

We practice welcome. For us that means living as a community the way Jesus lived in his life and ministry. Above all, we welcome everyone in spiritual and practical ways.

Spiritually, we welcome people by struggling to live beyond the categories of race, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, age, and class. We aren't perfect at this, but our conscious self-examination has begun to build a congregation that looks more like the city we serve and the world we live in.

We find it both a joy and a challenge to learn to live together.

Practically, we welcome people by thinking through the usual physical and emotional obstacles church seekers, "shoppers" or visitors have. Lots of readable material. Clergy and ushers who are outside the doors at service times to offer a hand of greeting. User-friendly church bulletins to make our liturgical (worship) customs easier to follow. Open access to clergy and other leaders. Timely follow-up on your question and concerns.

We gather at an open table. At the heart of things, our life centers on our worship of God. At the Eucharist (Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, Mass), we make a consistent and risky invitation: all who come to us, no matter where they are on their spiritual journey, can receive the sacramental Bread and Wine with us. We see the gifts on the Altar as God's gifts to us, not our possessions. Ancient tradition teaches that the Eucharist is the meal for baptized church members. We simply say that there is more than one path to baptism and membership, and sometimes that begins in a holy and unrehearsed moment in actual worship. We care for one of Miami's most treasured landmark buildings. As our parish history, we've been on a 46-year journey to get where we are. A significant part of our identity is now bound up with the remarkable building we use every day.

Like many other mission-driven churches, we can justly be accused of deferring vital maintenance. Given our trajectory, for many years we concluded that we needed to build up our size and strength for mission before we could restore the building. But a significant, challenging campaign to restore and preserve our building has now begun.

We are reinventing the way we "do" church. Given the cost of being 'The Ancient Spanish Monastery', planted where we are planted, we've concluded, at a critical moment, that we have to grow, or go. We therefore are re-thinking the ways a church offers what it is, connects with others, manages its business affairs and runs its programs. We've learned from others along the way, innovated a little, and we are still learning.

Among the things we are learning and now practice:

- **Bias toward the next person through the door.** We are not a club of like-minded, self-focused members. We do care for one another, of course. But we tilt our work and mission toward those who might want to hear the Good News of God in Christ. We are ready to welcome them.
- **Diversity of worship style.** Our three Sunday services run from traditional to innovative, sometimes blending ancient and contemporary forms in the same service. Not everyone responds spiritually to the same stimuli; we respect that and work creatively with the possibilities.
- **Fifty-two equal Sundays:** Every Sunday is a little Resurrection, tradition teaches, so we put out our best offerings—worship, education, hospitality—every Sunday of the year. Your first Sunday will be the best we can make it.
- **We aren't afraid of growth.** The need to grow in order to have a faithful and viable ministry has called out of us a creativity we didn't always know we had. We are working to get our growth going, and we work to deal with the anxiety of change, which is always part of growing. We challenge one another, we welcome many into leadership, we practice a loving candor about money issues, and we are looking for the next thing God is calling us to do.
- **We think of our sacred space as a gift**—something bequeathed to us by our forebears but a gift we know we are called to share with others. Our members and visitors come from the whole Miami-Dade metropolitan area, from other parts of the country and as tourists and pilgrims from around the world. We practice what St. Benedict taught his monks and their households: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ" (Rule of Benedict 53:1).

The best way to see what we are is to test whether we are living what we believe.

Come and see.

Gregory Mansfield †

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The Episcopal Church
Welcomes You