



Church of England glossary

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PEOPLE

- The Church of England believes in the “threefold order of ministry”, which means there are three types of clergy: **deacons**, **priests** and **bishops**. You can be a priest only once you have been ordained a deacon, and you can only become a bishop only if you have been ordained a priest.
- **Deacons** are the first rung on the ladder. They can use the title Reverend, preach and hold Sunday services, but cannot lead a service of **communion** and do not usually (but may) conduct weddings. The vast majority of deacons spend only a year as a transitional deacon before being ordained **priest**. A small number remain permanently as deacons, sometimes known as “distinctive deacons”. They often assist priests in **parishes** and focus on pastoral work out in the community.
- **Priests** are the bulk of the clergy in the C of E. After serving one year as a deacon they are ordained priest and usually continue working in the same church as before. They organise and lead Sunday services, preach, conduct baptisms, weddings and funerals, and lead services of communion. Some priests do not work in parish ministry, and can instead become chaplains in prisons, the military, hospitals or other non-church settings. Others work in academia, C of E institutions, or take on part-time jobs mixing and matching all of the above. It is a status, not a job title, so once you are ordained priest you are a priest for life, regardless of if you are actually in any particular post.
- **Bishops** are the leaders of the C of E. There are about 150 in the Church, all chosen from the ranks of the priests. Some are **diocesan bishops**, which means they are in charge of a diocese and responsible for all the clergy and work going on in that particular geographical region. Most **dioceses** also have at least one and as many as four or five **suffragan bishops**. These are effectively assistant bishops, who either help the diocesan bishop in running the diocese, or sometimes are given specific sub-regions in the diocese to look after.
- **Ordinand** While someone is training to become a deacon (and then a priest), they are an **ordinand**. There are a wide variety of ways to train: it can be in a traditional residential college, it could be part-time (coming into a college one or two days a week), or it could be a distance learning course. Ordinands must undertake theological study, normally a degree, as well as learning more practical things about how to be a priest. “Mixed-mode” training, where the ordinand works most of the time for a church, while doing their theological training on the side part-time, is becoming increasingly popular.

- The service at which ordinands become deacons and deacons become priests, is called **ordination**. Deacons are normally ordained in a big service once a year in the summer (Petertide) at each diocese's cathedral and is led by the bishop. The ordination of deacons as priests often happens in late September (Michaelmas) in a larger church or cathedral.
- **Curate** Once an ordinand has finished their training (which usually takes two or three years), they must then serve an apprenticeship of three to four years called a **curacy**, working under a more experienced priest, called a **training incumbent**. As a curate, the deacon/priest is expected to start gradually to take on more responsibility and try the various tasks (preaching, leading communion, conducting weddings and funerals) of a priest, while also doing some extra training courses.
- **Vicar** Once the curacy is finished, the priest is now eligible to be appointed to run a parish full time. The title of this job is usually vicar.
- **Rector** For complicated historical reasons to do with how the medieval church paid its clergy, which are mostly lost in the mists of time, some parish priests are called rectors instead. There is no actual difference between the job done by rectors or vicars: it refers only to which particular parish they have been appointed.
- **Team rector/team vicar** The one exception to this is team ministries, where multiple parishes are collected into a group. Then one of the priests will become the team rector, who is nominally in charge of the group. The other technically more junior priests working underneath them are called team vicars.
- **Priest-in-charge** Another term used for priests running a parish. Again, the actual work done is exactly the same as a rector or vicar. The only difference is that a priest-in-charge has slightly less freedom to act as they please, not holding the freehold of the parish, and – unlike rectors and vicars – they work on a time-limited contract basis for the diocesan bishop.
- **Stipends** Clergy are paid a “stipend” rather than a salary if they are working an ordinary parish job. It varies in amount from diocese to diocese, but tends to be in the range of £22,000-£25,000 a year. It is not a salary but an allowance given to cover living costs, as most parish priests are not employees of the bishop or diocese, but independent office-holders with no formal contractual obligations. Bishops, deans, archdeacons and archbishops also receive stipends, which go up with seniority.

- **Non-stipendiary minister/self-supporting minister** Both terms refer to a priest who is not paid by the C of E. They can be either full-time or part-time, and are mostly older people who have come into the clergy later in life and do not want or need a salary. They can still have the same responsibilities and take the same jobs as any other priest.
- **House for duty** Another slightly different way of being an unpaid priest. A house for duty job means the priest appointed to this parish will not be paid but will be given a house to live in.
- **Permission to officiate** If a priest has retired from full-time work but still wants occasionally to lead services at churches on behalf of other vicars, they must apply for permission to officiate from the diocesan bishop. The cadre of retired clergy with permission to officiate are an essential part of keeping Sunday services going in rural areas, where there are not enough full-time clergy to cover every church.
- **Dean** A dean is a priest who is in charge of a **cathedral**. They act both as spiritual leader, organising the worship and services, and also as a professional chief executive, running the dozens (sometimes hundreds) of staff needed to keep these often ancient buildings going.
- **Rural dean or area dean** Nothing to do with a cathedral but a senior priest in a deanery, chairing the deanery synod and working in support of the archdeacon.
- **Archdeacon** Priests who work as senior members of a diocese's staff. They act as deputies for the bishops of the diocese, in particular checking up on the clergy, carrying out various inspections, offering guidance during vacancies, administering human resources issues, and lots of other administrative minutiae needed to keep the diocese going.
- **Reader** These are un-ordained **lay** people, not priests, who are still given some theological training and licensed to help lead worship, preach at services, and assist in pastoral and **evangelistic** work. Often now known as **licensed lay ministers (LLMs)**.
- **Laity** The collective term for everyone who is not ordained as a deacon or priest, i.e. most of us. The adjective form is "lay", and currently the Church of England is very exercised about trying to make sure "lay leadership" is encouraged rather than just letting the priests do everything.

- **Archbishop** In Anglicanism, an archbishop is the chief bishop of a **province**. They are the most senior of all the **diocesan bishops** and have a number of other institutional roles and responsibilities. There are two archbishops in the Church of England: the Archbishop of York and the Archbishop of Canterbury, each in charge of their own province. The Archbishop of York is also **Primate of England**, while the Archbishop of Canterbury is **Primate of All England** (the whole Church of England) and therefore the senior of the two. Each archbishop is also the diocesan bishop of a diocese, although most of the day-to-day running of it is delegated to one of their **suffragan bishops**.
- **The religious life** The term used for monks and nuns. Members take vows and follow a common rule. As well as traditional secluded or cloistered communities of monks and nuns, there are a growing number of more informal and modern groups, whose members may live among everyone else and work normal jobs.

PLACES

- **Parish** The smallest geographical sub-division in the C of E. The whole of England is divided into about 12,500 parishes. Each parish has its own church (occasionally more than one), and has a priest who is responsible for arranging regular services. With more than 16,000 churches, the Church has rarely had enough clergy to give every parish its own priest, so it is very common for priests to be in charge of several churches or parishes at the same time.
- **Deanery** The next level up, a deanery is a group of parishes in a geographic region. Other than gathering for **deanery synod** meetings, it is mostly just a way of linking parishes.
- **Diocese** A diocese is a group of deaneries. They are the main geographical sub-divisions of the Church of England, which has 42 of them, including the Diocese in Europe. They vary enormously in size but tend to have hundreds of parishes and clergy within each. They are each legally independent bodies, which have their own staff and operate often quite separately from other dioceses and the national Church. They each have a **diocesan bishop** who is in charge, and normally at least one **suffragan bishop** assisting them.
- **Cathedral** Each diocese also has at least one cathedral, which is a large church and acts as the “seat” (hence the name, from the Latin cathedra, or chair) of the diocesan bishop. The cathedral is effectively the mother church of the diocese, and hosts large events and special services. They are run by **deans**, who have complicated relationships with the bishop, who is technically their boss but actually has little power to interfere in the day-to-day running of the cathedral. There are also a group of priests and **lay** people who help the dean, known as the cathedral chapter.

- **Province** This is the next biggest geographical region, encompassing many dioceses and run by an **archbishop**. In England, there are two provinces: the province of Canterbury which is all of the south and the Midlands as far north as Derby, and the province of York, which is basically the north. Outside of a few technical legal issues, the provinces are not particularly relevant.
- **The Anglican Communion** The Church of England is just one of 40 Anglican churches across the world. These are mostly, but not exclusively, found in Commonwealth countries and tended to be started by C of E missionaries during the British Empire. They are all autonomous institutions but share a common heritage and lots of similar traditions. Sometimes, Anglican churches in other countries use the name “episcopal” instead. Although each Church is self-governing, the Archbishop of Canterbury is regarded as the “first among equals” among the archbishops and the Church of England is the mother Church of the whole communion. There are occasional gatherings of Anglican leaders globally, including the Anglican Consultative Council, **primates’ meetings** and the **Lambeth Conference**.
- **Church plant** In recent decades, the C of E has thought beyond the traditional parish structure of one church in every community. Church plants are where a new congregation is started from scratch in a particular place, even if there is already a parish church nearby. They more often come from the **evangelical** wing of the Church and are popular with younger people in their twenties and thirties. Sometimes a church will be “planted” into a small and struggling parish church, with a new leader and congregation parachuted in from outside.
- **Royal peculiar** This is any church which is not a parish church and is not part of a diocese. Examples include Westminster Abbey, or the chapel at Windsor Castle. They are not under the authority of the local bishop but instead governed directly by the Queen, who appoints their clergy.
- **Fresh expression** This is another new movement which has grown quickly in recent decades. A fresh expression of church is any kind of congregation which does not meet in the standard Sunday morning parish church style. There is an enormous range, from Christians gathering in coffee shops or cinemas on weekday evenings, to meetings which take place around an activity like hiking or dancing.
- **Messy church** This is a similar movement to fresh expressions but focused on creating church services which are more informal, child-friendly and fun to attract families who would not attend a traditional service. They can take place on other days of the week and often feature toys, sports, crafts and music quite prominently.

LITURGY

- **Liturgy** The general name for the form of worship in a service including formal written prayers, readings, and other calls and responses which make up the bulk of a traditional Anglican service. It is foundational for **Anglo-Catholics**. Most Anglican worship uses liturgy in one form or another apart from the most informal services.
- **Holy communion/the mass/the eucharist** Three names which all refer to the same thing, the main liturgical service of worship in the C of E. Canon law requires it to be celebrated each Sunday in every parish (although some more **evangelical** parishes celebrate it less often). Instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, this service involves all the congregation sharing in the sacrament of bread and wine. **Anglo-Catholics** who tend to call it mass, believe this ritual is an essential part of Christian life and the foundation of a believer's connection to God. They also mostly believe the wine and bread literally turns into Jesus's blood and body, a doctrine known as the "real presence". **Evangelicals**, who usually call it communion, see the service as a way of remembering Jesus's death on the cross for their sins, and see the bread and wine as a symbol.
- **Evensong** Another popular service, especially in cathedrals, and one of the few things genuinely unique to the C of E. Evensong normally takes place with a choir in the afternoon/evening at larger churches and cathedrals, and features singing of hymns, prayers and psalms, plus Bible readings and other elements.
- **Baptism** A service of initiation into Christian faith. All Christians are supposed to be baptised, as a sign of their belonging to the family of God. When this takes place as a child it is often called christening, but can happen at any age. Anyone who lives in a C of E parish (ie everyone) is entitled to be baptised upon request by their local priest. Often this service takes place during a normal Sunday service.
- **Confirmation** A secondary service of initiation, where those who were baptised as children can confirm the promises their parents made on their behalf. Often done as a teenager, it is common for people to undertake a short course of classes in basic Christian teaching before being confirmed. Confirmation can be done only by a bishop, and so usually involves a special service either at a parish church or in the **cathedral**.
- **Lectionary** A guide produced by the C of E which gives Bible readings to use on every Sunday and weekday of the year. This is followed very closely by most parishes but less so by more **evangelical** churches.

- **Collect** A short prayer near the start of the service when the people have gathered, collecting together the various parts of the service. There are collects for each Sunday of the year and others for special days. Most branches of the Christian church use collects and most Anglican parishes will always use them.
- **The Book of Common Prayer** The first book of liturgy to be approved for the whole the C of E. It was written by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury during the Tudor era and the English Reformation in the 16th century. First published in 1549 and in its current form in 1662, it became the standard liturgy of the C of E until the publication of Common Worship in 2000. It is the preferred liturgy used by **Anglo-Catholics**, but is seen by others as old-fashioned and featuring language too archaic to be useful in the 21st century.
- **Common Worship** The alternative to the Book of Common Prayer, used by the majority of Anglican parishes. It combines contemporary and simpler English services alongside traditional language versions and was first published in 2000.
- **Vestments/vesture** The collective name for the various items of clothing priests can wear during services. [Each item](#) has its own, esoteric name, and there is almost unlimited variety of robes (cassock, surplice, chasuble); scarves (stoles); and hoods. The colour of stoles and chasubles (the diamond-shaped garment worn over the shoulders) changes for the seasons. Some vestments were reintroduced in the last century by Anglo-Catholics imitating Roman Catholic styles. Common to all is the clerical collar, the white upright collar commonly known as a “dog collar”.

GROUPS

- **Anglo-Catholic** One of the three main groups in the C of E. Anglo-Catholics are so called because they combine Anglicanism with more Roman Catholic traditions and style. They prefer more formal services, with choral music and organs, clergy in robes, incense and bells. They tend to emphasise the tradition of the Church very highly, although in terms of beliefs can vary enormously from very conservative Anglo-Catholics who hold to almost everything the Roman Catholic Church believes, to more liberal believers who are comfortable with gay marriage and relaxed about divorce, but still enjoy a more formal style of worship.
- **Liberal** This group tends to have a middle-of-the-road worship style, which is neither very fussy nor very informal but happy to bring together elements from any tradition. Liberals believe that faith is renewed by new insights and interaction with contemporary society and are often in the vanguard of progressive change within the Church.

- **Evangelicals** The third main group tends to have a “low” style of worship, which prioritises informality. They often sing modern songs rather than traditional hymns, their priests sometimes do not wear dog collars, let alone robes, and they aim to make their services accessible to people who may not normally come to church. In terms of belief, they take the Bible as their touchstone and see it as having the ultimate authority, not modern society or traditions of the Church. A significant and growing subset are **charismatic evangelicals**, who are strongly influenced by Pentecostalism and make engagement with the Holy Spirit and the supernatural an important part of their church life.
- **Evangelism/witness/mission** Three words that basically mean the same thing – telling non-Christians about Christianity and encouraging them to become Christians. It is especially important for those in the **evangelical** tradition and has become an increasingly significant buzzword and priority for the national C of E in recent years.

SEASONS

- The Church of England’s calendar is divided into seasons, grouped around important Christian festivals. The traditional beginning is **Advent**, which starts four Sundays before Christmas at the beginning of December. Then **Christmas** season begins on the 25 December and runs until 5 January. **Epiphany** begins on 6 January (it commemorates when the Wise Men are believed to have visited Jesus) and runs until 2 February. Then there is a period called **Ordinary Time** when we are simply celebrating Jesus rather than a particular event or period. The next season is **Lent**, which starts five Sundays before Easter, so anything from mid-February to late March. **Easter** season starts on Easter Sunday and runs until Pentecost, which is seven Sundays later (and marks the giving of the Holy Spirit to the first believers after Jesus’s resurrection). The next day we are back to **Ordinary Time** which runs all the way until Advent again.

THE INSTITUTIONS

- **General synod** Effectively the parliament of the Church of England, it meets two or three times a year to pass new laws, scrutinise the national Church leadership and discuss other matters. It is divided into three houses: **laity**, clergy and bishops. The House of Laity is about 150 people, elected on five-year terms from each diocese, depending on population. The House of Clergy comprises priests, archdeacons, deans and chaplains, also elected on five-year terms from each diocese. The House of Bishops is the 42 **diocesan bishops** plus a handful of elected **suffragan bishops**. The House of Bishops also meets separately several times a year, making leadership and strategy proposals to general synod, especially on liturgical and theological/doctrinal matters. The most important decisions at the general synod, such as changing doctrine, require a two-thirds majority to vote for it in each of the three houses.
- **Diocesan/deanery synods** Each diocese and **deanery** also have their own regional synods, with elected representatives from each parish. Deanery synods discuss budgets, clergy deployment and the future of failing churches and are responsible for electing the general synod. The diocesan synod sets the budget for the diocese and discusses main items of concern to the church and society. When the general synod is debating major change, a majority of diocesan synods will have to agree them first. For example, if enough dioceses had not voted for the ordination of women as priests or as bishops, those pieces of legislation would not have continued.
- **Archbishops' council** The executive decision-making body of the Church, which distributes money and co-ordinates national activities. A relatively new institution, it was set up in 1999 and includes both archbishops, eight representatives from the houses of clergy and laity, two elected bishops, the head of the **Church Commissioners** and six other people chosen by the archbishops. It is answerable to the general synod.
- **Church Commissioners** They control the Church of England's historic endowment of about £8.3 billion, investing in various portfolios and releasing investment income each year to fund a proportion of the C of E's work and a part of the clergy pensions bill. In various forms the institution dates from 1704, and historically funded new church buildings and clergy pensions. Today they give about £220 million each year to the C of E (about 15% of its total income: the rest comes almost entirely from donations from congregants) which pays for the bishops, archbishops, national Church bodies, some cathedral spending, and other one-off new spending for **mission**. They are legally an independent body from the C of E, although they work closely together and recently have agreed to give additional money from the endowment to try to boost church growth.

- **College of Bishops** Larger than the **House of Bishops**, the college includes every diocesan and suffragan bishop. They meet fairly infrequently and tend not to take the big decisions but to advise on them.
- **Primates' meeting** This is a sporadic gathering of all the **primates** (the leading archbishop) of each province of the Anglican Church worldwide. Called by the Archbishop of Canterbury, they meet to discuss big picture strategy and handle disagreements. It has recently become more significant as liberal pro-gay provinces in the Western world become more estranged from conservative provinces in the global south.
- **Lambeth Conference** Held roughly every 10 years, this is a gathering in England of every bishop in the entire **Anglican Communion**. It is not clear if it actually has any formal decision-making powers over individual churches, but its conclusions are widely seen as significant. The next meeting is in summer 2020.
- **Crown Nominations' Commission** This is a committee formed to choose a new **diocesan bishop** or **archbishop** when a vacancy arises. It is formed of a mixture of clergy and laity representing the diocese in question, plus some consistent centrally elected members who represent the national Church. If a two-thirds majority agree on a candidate, the name is submitted to the prime minister, who then advises the Queen to appoint that person. This process is usually just a formality but in the past some prime ministers have rejected the commission's recommendation.
- **Renewal and Reform** A recent project spearheaded by the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. It seeks to re-energise the C of E and refocus its priorities on **mission** and growth. It includes a number of streams, such as boosting young **ordinands**, spending more money on new **mission** projects, streamlining bureaucracy, modernising the digital output of the Church, and better training for senior clergy leaders.

CANON LAW

- **Canon law** Canon law is basically the rule book of the C of E, comprising the current ecclesiastical law. Canon Law can be changed only by the general synod and for liturgical changes and doctrinal changes such as the ordination of women bishops, with the agreement of parliament.
- **Consistory courts** Each diocese has a consistory court which can hear cases relating to the use of a church building and grounds such as churchyards. With origins going back to the Norman Conquest, consistory courts maintain some High Court powers, for example in relation to witnesses, documents and contempt.
- **Chancellor** Each diocese has a chancellor who is the judge in the consistory court. To be appointed, a person must have been a circuit judge or had the qualifications required to do so.
- **Faculty** Legal permission to alter the fabric of a church or churchyard, e.g. taking out pews. This is requested by the vicar and granted by church courts and supersedes listed building regulations.