

Is the Church of England still the Conservative Party at prayer?

The CofE is the officially established church of the UK and it still plays a large role in the life of the nation. It has unelected Bishops in the House of Lords who participate in legislation, which is a thorn in the side of the secularisers. And, of course, the CofE has an important ceremonial role in all the important state events such as the opening of parliament, national funerals and the coronation. This is despite the fact that while the population of the UK stands at 65 million, less than 1 million people attend the CofE's 16,000 churches each week. But its churches and cathedrals are not simply places of worship belonging to a specific sect, they are artifacts of our cultural heritage for which the CofE acts as custodian.

So is the CofE an anacronism? Is it just a custodian of our cultural past ('The Sealed Knot at prayer' as one priest put it!) or does it still have an important cultural role to play in the modern world? The Rev Kevin Maddy from Canterbury is a CofE vicar and will be leading our discussion.

The CofE in sixty-seconds...

The Church of England dates its establishment as a national church to the 6th-century Gregorian mission to Kent led by Augustine of Canterbury.

It is also the mother church of the international Anglican Communion.

The Archbishop of Canterbury (currently Justin Welby) is the most senior cleric, although the monarch is the supreme governor.

The English church renounced papal authority when Henry VIII failed to secure an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in the 1530s.

The English Reformation accelerated under Edward VI's regents before a brief restoration of papal authority under Queen Mary I and King Philip.

The Act of Supremacy 1558 renewed the breach and the Elizabethan Settlement charted a course whereby the English church was to be both Catholic and Reformed:

Catholic in that it views itself as a part of the universal church of Jesus Christ in unbroken continuity with the early apostolic church. This is expressed in its emphasis on the teachings of the early Church Fathers, as formalised in the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian creeds.

Reformed in that it has been shaped by some of the doctrinal principles of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation, in particular in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and the Book of Common Prayer.

Dwindling membership

Official figures from 2005 showed there were 25 million baptised Anglicans in England and Wales. Due to its status as the established church, in general, anyone may be married, have their children baptised or their funeral in their local parish church, regardless of whether they are baptised or regular churchgoers.

Between 1890 and 2001, churchgoing in the United Kingdom declined steadily. In the years 1968 to 1999, Anglican Sunday church attendances almost halved, from 3.5 per cent of the population to just 1.9 per cent. One study published in 2008 suggested that if current trends were to continue, Sunday attendances could fall to 350,000 in 2030 and just 87,800 in 2050.

In 2011, the Church of England published statistics showing 1.7 million people attending at least one of its services each month, a level maintained since the turn of the millennium; approximately one million participating each Sunday and three million taking part in a Church of England service on Christmas Day or Christmas Eve.

The church also claimed that 30% attend Sunday worship at least once a year; more than 40% attend a wedding in their local church and still more attend a funeral there.

Nationally the Church of England baptises one child in eight.

In 2015, the church's statistics showed that 2.6 million people attended a special Advent service, 2.4 million attended a Christmas service, 1.3 million attended an Easter service, and 980,000 attended service during an average week.

The archbishops of Canterbury and York warned in January 2015 that the Church of England will no longer be able to carry on in its current form unless the downward spiral in membership is somehow reversed as typical Sunday attendances have halved to 800,000 in the last 40 years:

The urgency of the challenge facing us is not in doubt. Attendance at Church of England services has declined at an average of one per cent per annum over recent decades and, in addition, the age profile of our membership has become significantly older than that of the population... Renewing and reforming aspects of our institutional life is a necessary but far from sufficient response to the challenges facing the Church of England... The age profile of our clergy has also been increasing. Around 40 per cent of parish clergy are due to retire over the next decade or so.

However, Sarah Mullally, the fourth woman chosen to become a bishop in the Church of England, insisted in June 2015 that declining numbers at services should not necessarily be a cause of despair for churches because people will still "encounter God" without ever taking their place in a pew, saying that people might hear the Christian message through social media sites such as Facebook or in a café run as a community project. Additionally, the church's own statistics reveal that 9.7 million people visit an Anglican church every year and 1 million students are educated at Anglican schools.

Staffing

The Church of England has 18,000 active ordained clergy and 10,000 licensed lay ministers.

In 2009, 491 people were recommended for ordination training, maintaining the level at the turn of the millennium, and 564 new clergy (266 women and 298 men) were ordained. More than half of those ordained (193 men and 116 women) were appointed to full-time paid ministry.

In 2011, 504 new clergy were ordained, including 264 to paid ministry, and 349 lay readers were admitted to ministry; and the mode age-range of those recommended for ordination training had remained 40–49 since 1999.

Low-paid clergy

In 2015 the Church of England admitted that it was embarrassed to be paying staff under the living wage. The Church of England had previously campaigned for all employers to pay this minimum amount. The archbishop acknowledged it was not the only area where the church "fell short of its standards".

Financial situation

Although an established church, the Church of England does not receive any direct government support. Donations comprise its largest source of income, and it also relies heavily on the income from its various historic endowments.

In 2005, the Church of England had estimated total outgoings of around £900 million.

The Church of England manages an investment portfolio which is worth more than £8,000 million.

Doctrine

The canon law of the Church of England identifies the Christian scriptures as the source of its doctrine. In addition, doctrine is also derived from the teachings of the Church Fathers and ecumenical councils (as well as the ecumenical creeds) in so far as these agree with scripture. This doctrine is expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal containing the rites for the ordination of deacons, priests, and the consecration of bishops.

The Church of England's doctrinal character today is largely the result of the Elizabethan Settlement, which sought to establish a comprehensive middle way between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Church of England affirms the Protestant Reformation principle that scripture contains all things necessary to salvation and is the final arbiter in doctrinal matters. The Thirty-nine

Articles are the church's only official confessional statement. Though not a complete system of doctrine, the articles highlight areas of agreement with Lutheran and Reformed positions, while differentiating Anglicanism from Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism.

While embracing some themes of the Protestant Reformation, the Church of England also maintains Catholic traditions of the ancient church and teachings of the Church Fathers, unless these are considered contrary to scripture. It accepts the decisions of the first four ecumenical councils concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation.

The Church of England also preserves Catholic order by adhering to episcopal polity, with ordained orders of bishops, priests and deacons. There are differences of opinion within the Church of England over the necessity of episcopacy. Some consider it essential, while others just feel it is needed for the proper ordering of the church.

The Church of England has, as one of its distinguishing marks, a breadth and 'open-mindedness'. This tolerance has allowed Anglicans who emphasise the Catholic tradition and others who emphasise the Reformed tradition to coexist. The three 'parties' in the Church of England are sometimes called high church (or Anglo-Catholic), low church (or evangelical Anglican) and broad church (or liberal).

The high church party places importance on the Church of England's continuity with the pre-Reformation Catholic Church, adherence to ancient liturgical usages and the sacerdotal nature of the priesthood. As their name suggests, Anglo-Catholics maintain many traditional Catholic practices and liturgical forms.

The low church party is more Protestant in both ceremony and theology.

Historically, broad church has been used to describe those of middle-of-the-road ceremonial preferences who lean theologically towards liberal Protestantism.

The balance between these strands of churchmanship is not static: in 2013, 40% of Church of England worshippers attended evangelical churches (compared with 26% in 1989), and 83% of very large congregations were evangelical. Such churches were also reported to attract higher numbers of men and young adults than others.

Just as the Church of England has a large conservative or 'traditionalist' wing, it also has many liberal members and clergy. Approximately one third of clergy "doubt or disbelieve in the physical resurrection". Others, such as the Revd Giles Fraser, a contributor to *The Guardian*, have argued for an allegorical interpretation of the virgin birth of Jesus.

The Independent reported in 2014 that, according to a YouGov survey of Church of England clergy, "as many as 16 per cent are unclear about God and two per cent think it is no more than a human construct." Moreover, many congregations are seeker-friendly environments. For example, one report from the Church Mission Society suggested that the church open up "a pagan church where Christianity [is] very much in the centre" to reach out to spiritual people.

Modern services of worship

The Church of England's official book of liturgy as established in English Law is the Book of Common Prayer. In addition to this book the General Synod has also legislated for a modern liturgical book, Common Worship, dating from 2000, which can be used as an alternative to the BCP. Like its predecessor, the 1980 Alternative Service Book, it differs from the Book of Common Prayer in providing a range of alternative services, mostly in modern language, although it does include some BCP-based forms as well, for example Order Two for Holy Communion.

The use of hymns and music in the Church of England has changed dramatically over the centuries. Traditional Choral evensong is a staple of most cathedrals. The style of psalm chanting harks back to the Church of England's pre-reformation roots. During the 18th century, clergy such as Charles Wesley introduced their own styles of worship with poetic hymns.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the influence of the Charismatic Movement significantly altered the worship traditions of numerous Church of England parishes, primarily affecting those of evangelical persuasion. These churches now adopt a contemporary worship form of service, with minimal liturgical or ritual elements, and incorporating contemporary worship music.

Women clergy

Women were appointed as deaconesses from 1861 but they could not function fully as deacons and were not considered ordained clergy. Women have been lay readers for a long time. During the First World War, some women were appointed as lay readers, known as 'bishop's messengers', who also led missions and ran churches in the absence of men. After that no more lay readers were appointed until 1969.

Legislation authorising the ordination of women as deacons was passed in 1986 and they were first ordained in 1987. The ordination of women as priests was passed by the General Synod in 1992 and began in 1994. In 2010, for the first time in the history of the Church of England, more women than men were ordained as priests (290 women and 273 men).

In July 2005, the synod voted to "set in train" the process of allowing the consecration of women as bishops. In February 2006, the synod voted overwhelmingly for the "further exploration" of possible arrangements for parishes that did not want to be directly under the authority of a bishop who is a woman. On 7 July 2008, the synod voted to approve the ordination of women as bishops and rejected moves for alternative episcopal oversight for those who do not accept the ministry of bishops who are women. Actual ordinations of women to the episcopate required further legislation, which was narrowly rejected in a vote at General Synod in November 2012.

On 20 November 2013, the General Synod voted overwhelmingly in support of a plan to allow the ordination of women as bishops, with 378 in favour, 8 against and 25 abstentions.

On 14 July 2014, the General Synod approved the ordination of women as bishops. The House of Bishops recorded 37 votes in favour, two against with one abstention. The House of Clergy had 162 in favour, 25 against and four abstentions. The House of Laity voted 152 for, 45 against with five abstentions. This legislation had to be approved by the Ecclesiastical Committee of the Parliament before it could be finally implemented at the November 2014 synod.

In December 2014, Libby Lane was announced as the first woman to become a bishop in the Church of England. She was consecrated as a bishop in January 2015.

In July 2015, Rachel Treweek was the first woman to become a diocesan bishop in the Church of England when she became the Bishop of Gloucester. She and Sarah Mullally, Bishop of Crediton, were the first women to be ordained as bishops at Canterbury Cathedral. Treweek later made headlines by calling for gender-inclusive language, saying that "God is not to be seen as male. God is God."

After the consecration of the first women as bishops, Women and the Church (WATCH), a group supporting the ministries of women in the Church of England, called for language referring to God as 'Mother'. This call for more gender inclusive language has received the outspoken support of the Rt Rev Alan Wilson, the Bishop of Buckingham. In 2015, the Rev Jody Stowell, from WATCH, expressed

her support for female images saying "we're not restricted to understanding God with one gender. I would encourage people to explore those kinds of images. They're wholly Biblical".

Same sex marriage

The Church of England has been discussing same-sex marriages and LGBT clergy. The official position, although not allowing same-sex marriage, is that "Same-sex relationships often embody genuine mutuality and fidelity." Within guidelines, "the law prevents ministers of the Church of England from carrying out same-sex marriages. And although there are no authorised services for blessing a same-sex civil marriage, your local church can still support you with prayer."

The Archbishop's Council said that "clergy in the Church of England are permitted to offer prayers of support on a pastoral basis for people in same-sex relationships;" As such, many Anglican churches, with clergy open to it, "already bless same-sex couples on an unofficial basis."

Civil Partnerships for clergy have been allowed since 2005. By 2010, the General Synod voted in favour of extending pensions and other employee rights to clergy in civil unions. In a missive to clergy, the church communicated that "there was a need for committed same-sex couples to be given recognition and 'compassionate attention' from the Church, including special prayers." As such, some congregations have published "Prayers for a Same Sex Commitment" as allowed within the guidelines.

After same-sex marriage was legalised, the Archbishop's Council asked for the government to continue to offer civil unions saying "The Church of England recognises that same-sex relationships often embody fidelity and mutuality...Civil partnerships enable these Christian virtues to be recognised socially and legally in a proper framework."

In 2014, the Bishops released guidelines that permit "more informal kind of prayer" for couples. Some congregations invite same-sex couples to receive "services of thanksgiving" after a civil marriage. In the guidelines, "gay couples who get married will be able to ask for special prayers in the Church of England after their wedding, the bishops have agreed."

In 2016, The Bishop of Grantham, the Rt Rev Nicholas Chamberlain, announced he is gay, in a same-sex relationship and celibate; becoming the first bishop to do so in the church. The church had decided in 2013 that gay clergy in civil partnerships could become bishops.

In 2017, the House of Clergy voted against the motion to 'take note' of the Bishops' report defining marriage as between a man and a woman. Due to passage in all three houses being required for passage, the motion was rejected. After General Synod rejected the motion, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York called for "radical new Christian inclusion" that is "based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st century understanding of being human and of being sexual."

Recognition of Transgender issues

Regarding transgender issues, the General Synod received proposals submitted to offer naming ceremonies for transgender members in their transitions. The Diocese of Blackburn has already begun recognising the ceremony. Since 2000, the church has allowed priests to undergo gender transition and remain in office. The church has ordained openly transgender clergy since 2005.

Sexual abuse cases

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has taken strong action in an effort to prevent complaints of sex abuse cases being covered up. Independent investigators are examining files as far back as the 1950s and Welby hopes this independence will prevent any possibility of a cover-up.

We will systematically bring those transparently and openly first of all working with the survivors where they are still alive and then seeing what they want. The rule is survivors come first, not our own interests, and however important the person was, however distinguished, however well-known, survivors come first. ~ Justin Welby

The personal files of all Anglican clergy since the 1950s are being audited in an effort to ensure no cover-up. Welby emphasised repeatedly that no cover-up would be acceptable.

Bishop Peter Ball was convicted in October 2015 on several charges of indecent assault against young adult men. There are allegations of large-scale earlier cover-ups involving many British establishment figures which prevented Ball's earlier prosecution. There have also been allegations of child sex abuse, for example Robert Waddington.

A complainant, known only as 'Joe', tried for decades to have action taken over sadistic sex abuse which Garth Moore perpetrated against him in 1976 when 'Joe' was 15 years old. None of the high ranking clergy who 'Joe' spoke to recall being told about the abuse, which 'Joe' considers incredible.

Abortion

The Church of England is generally opposed to abortion but recognises that "there can be---strictly limited---conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative".

Euthanasia

The church also opposes euthanasia. Its official stance is that "While acknowledging the complexity of the issues involved in assisted dying/suicide and voluntary euthanasia, the Church of England is opposed to any change in the law or in medical practice that would make assisted dying/suicide or voluntary euthanasia permissible in law or acceptable in practice." It also states that "Equally, the Church shares the desire to alleviate physical and psychological suffering, but believes that assisted dying/suicide and voluntary euthanasia are not acceptable means of achieving these laudable goals." However, George Carey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, announced that he had changed his stance on euthanasia in 2014 and now advocated legalising "assisted dying".

Stem-cell research

On embryonic stem-cell research, the church has announced "cautious acceptance to the proposal to produce cytoplasmic hybrid embryos for research".

Poverty

The Church of England set up the Church Urban Fund in the 1980s to tackle poverty and deprivation. They see poverty as trapping individuals and communities with some people in urgent need. This leads to dependency, homelessness, hunger, isolation, low income, mental health problems, social exclusion and violence. They feel that poverty reduces confidence and life expectancy and that people born in poor conditions have difficulty escaping their disadvantaged circumstances.

In parts of Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle two-thirds of babies are born to poverty and have poorer life chances, also life expectancy 15 years lower than babies born in most fortunate communities. South Shore, Blackpool, has lowest life expectancy at 66 years for men.

The deep-rooted unfairness in our society is highlighted by these stark statistics. Children being born in this country, just a few miles apart, couldn't witness a more wildly differing start to life. In child poverty terms, we live in one of the most unequal countries in the western world. We want people to understand where their own community sits alongside neighbouring communities. The disparity is often shocking but it's crucial that, through greater awareness, people from all backgrounds come together to think about what could be done to support those born into poverty. ~ Paul Hackwood, the Chair of Trustees at Church Urban Fund

Many prominent people in the Church of England have spoken out against poverty and welfare cuts in the United Kingdom. Twenty-seven bishops are among 43 Christian leaders who signed a letter which urged David Cameron to make sure people have enough to eat.

We often hear talk of hard choices. Surely few can be harder than that faced by the tens of thousands of older people who must 'heat or eat' each winter, harder than those faced by families whose wages have stayed flat while food prices have gone up 30% in just five years. Yet beyond even this we must, as a society, face up to the fact that over half of people using food banks have been put in that situation by cutbacks to and failures in the benefit system, whether it be payment delays or punitive sanctions.

Benefit cuts, failures and "punitive sanctions" force thousands of UK citizens to use food banks. The campaign to end hunger considers this "truly shocking" and called for a national day of fasting on 4 April 2014.

Structure of the CofE

The British monarch has the constitutional title of Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The canon law of the Church of England states, "We acknowledge that the Queen's most excellent Majesty, acting according to the laws of the realm, is the highest power under God in this kingdom, and has supreme authority over all persons in all causes, as well ecclesiastical as civil." In practice this power is often exercised through Parliament and the Prime Minister.

The Church of Ireland and the Church in Wales separated from the Church of England in 1869 and 1920 respectively and are autonomous churches in the Anglican Communion; Scotland's national church, the Church of Scotland, is Presbyterian but the Scottish Episcopal Church is in the Anglican Communion.

In addition to England, the jurisdiction of the Church of England extends to the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and a few parishes in Flintshire, Monmouthshire, Powys and Radnorshire in Wales which voted to remain with the Church of England rather than joining the Church in Wales. Expatriate congregations on the continent of Europe have become the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe.

The church is structured as follows (from the lowest level upwards):

Parish — This is the most local level, often consisting of one church building and community, although many parishes are joining forces in a variety of ways for financial reasons.

The parish is looked after by a parish priest who for historical or legal reasons may be called by one of the following offices: vicar, rector, priest in charge, team rector, team vicar. The first, second, and fourth of these may also be known as the 'incumbent'.

The running of the parish is the joint responsibility of the incumbent and the Parochial Church Council (PCC), which consists of the parish clergy and elected representatives from the congregation. The Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe is not formally divided into parishes.

There are a number of local churches that do not have a parish. In urban areas there are a number of proprietary chapels (mostly built in the 19th century to cope with urbanisation and growth in population). Also in more recent years there are increasingly church plants and fresh expressions of church, whereby new congregations are planted in locations such as schools or pubs.

Deanery — This is the area for which a Rural Dean (or area dean) is responsible. It consists of a number of parishes in a particular district. The rural dean is usually the incumbent of one of the constituent parishes. The parishes each elect lay (non-ordained) representatives to the deanery synod. Deanery synod members each have a vote in the election of representatives to the diocesan synod.

Archdeaconry — This is the area under the jurisdiction of an archdeacon. It consists of a number of deaneries.

Diocese — This is the area under the jurisdiction of a diocesan bishop, eg, the Bishops of Durham, Guildford and St Albans, and will have a cathedral. There may be one or more assisting bishops, usually called suffragan bishops, within the diocese who assist the diocesan bishop in his ministry, eg, in Guildford diocese, the Bishop of Dorking.

In some very large dioceses a legal measure has been enacted to create 'episcopal areas', where the diocesan bishop runs one such area himself and appoints "area bishops" to run the other areas as mini-dioceses, legally delegating many of his powers to the area bishops. Dioceses with episcopal areas include London, Chelmsford, Oxford, Chichester, Southwark, and Lichfield. The bishops work with an elected body of lay and ordained representatives, known as the Diocesan Synod, to run the diocese. A diocese is subdivided into a number of archdeaconries.

Province — This is the area under the jurisdiction of an archbishop, ie, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Decision-making within the province is the responsibility of the General Synod. A province is subdivided into dioceses.

Primacy, ie, Church of England — In addition to his specific authority in his own province, each archbishop is 'Primate of All England' (Canterbury) or 'Primate of England' (York) and has powers that extend over the whole country—for example his licence to marry without the banns (marriage licence).

Royal Peculiar, a small number of churches more closely associated with the Crown, and a very few with the law and are outside the usual church hierarchy though conforming to the rite. These are outside episcopal jurisdiction.

All rectors and vicars are appointed by patrons, who may be private individuals, corporate bodies such as cathedrals, colleges or trusts, or by the bishop or directly by the Crown. No clergy can be instituted and inducted into a parish without swearing the Oath of Allegiance to Her Majesty, and taking the Oath of Canonical Obedience "in all things lawful and honest" to the bishop.

Usually they are instituted to the benefice by the bishop and then inducted by the archdeacon into the possession of the benefice property—church and parsonage.

Curates (assistant clergy) are appointed by rectors and vicars, or if priests-in-charge by the bishop after consultation with the patron.

Cathedral clergy (normally a dean and a varying number of residentiary canons who constitute the cathedral chapter) are appointed either by the Crown, the bishop, or by the dean and chapter themselves. Clergy officiate in a diocese either because they hold office as beneficed clergy or are licensed by the bishop when appointed, or simply with permission.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York

The most senior bishop of the Church of England is the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is the metropolitan of the southern province of England, the Province of Canterbury. He has the status of Primate of All England. He is the focus of unity for the worldwide Anglican Communion of independent national or regional churches. Justin Welby has been Archbishop of Canterbury since the confirmation of his election on 4 February 2013.

The second most senior bishop is the Archbishop of York, who is the metropolitan of the northern province of England, the Province of York. For historical reasons (relating to the time of York's control by the Danes) he is referred to as the Primate of England. John Sentamu became Archbishop of York in 2005.

The Bishop of London, the Bishop of Durham and the Bishop of Winchester are ranked in the next three positions.

Diocesan bishops

The process of appointing diocesan bishops is complex and is handled by the Crown Nominations Committee which submits names to the Prime Minister (acting on behalf of the Crown) for consideration.

The Church of England has a legislative body, the General Synod. Synod can create two types of legislation, measures and canons. Measures have to be approved but cannot be amended by the British Parliament before receiving the Royal Assent and becoming part of the law of England. Although it is the established church in England only, its measures must be approved by both Houses of Parliament including the non-English members. Canons require Royal Licence and Royal Assent, but form the law of the church, rather than the law of the land.

Another assembly is the Convocation of the English Clergy, which is older than the General Synod and its predecessor the Church Assembly. By the 1969 Synodical Government Measure almost all of the Convocations' functions were transferred to the General Synod. Additionally, there are Diocesan Synods and deanery synods, which are the governing bodies of the divisions of the Church.

Lords Spiritual in the House of Lords

Of the 42 diocesan archbishops and bishops in the Church of England, 26 are permitted to sit in the House of Lords. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York automatically have seats, as do the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester. The remaining 21 seats are filled in order of seniority by consecration. It may take a diocesan bishop a number of years to reach the House of Lords, at which point he becomes a Lord Spiritual. The Bishop of Sodor and Man and the Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe are not eligible to sit in the House of Lords as their dioceses lie outside the United Kingdom.

Crown Dependencies

Although they are not part of England or the United Kingdom, the Church of England is also the Established Church in the Crown Dependencies of the Isle of Man, the Bailiwick of Jersey and the Bailiwick of Guernsey. The Isle of Man has its own diocese of Sodor and Man, and the Bishop of Sodor and Man is an ex officio member of the Legislative Council of the Tynwald on the island. The Channel Islands are part of the Diocese of Winchester, and in Jersey the Dean of Jersey is a non-voting member of the States of Jersey. In Guernsey the Church of England is the Established Church, although the Dean of Guernsey is not a member of the States of Guernsey.

Origin of the CoFE

According to tradition, Christianity arrived in Britain in the 1st or 2nd century, during which time southern Britain became part of the Roman Empire. The earliest historical evidence of Christianity among the native Britons is found in the writings of such early Christian Fathers as Tertullian and Origen in the first years of the 3rd century. Three Romano-British bishops, including Restitutus, are known to have been present at the Council of Arles in 314. Others attended the Council of Sardica in 347 and that of Ariminum in 360, and a number of references to the church in Roman Britain are found in the writings of 4th century Christian fathers. Britain was the home of Pelagius, who opposed Augustine of Hippo's doctrine of original sin.

While Christianity was long established as the religion of the Britons at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasion, Christian Britons made little progress in converting the newcomers from their native paganism. Consequently, in 597, Pope Gregory I sent the prior of the Abbey of St Andrew's (later canonised as Augustine of Canterbury) from Rome to evangelise the Angles. This event is known as the Gregorian mission and is the date the Church of England generally marks as the beginning of its formal history. With the help of Christians already residing in Kent, Augustine established his church at Canterbury, the capital of the Kingdom of Kent, and became the first in the series of Archbishops of Canterbury in 598. A later archbishop, the Greek Theodore of Tarsus, also contributed to the organisation of Christianity in England.

The Church of England has been in continuous existence since the days of St Augustine, with the Archbishop of Canterbury as its episcopal head. Despite the various disruptions of the Reformation and the English Civil War, the Church of England considers itself to be the same church which was more formally organised by Augustine.

While some Celtic Christian practices were changed at the Synod of Whitby, the Christian Church in the British Isles was under papal authority from earliest times. Queen Bertha of Kent was among the Christians in England who recognised papal authority before Augustine arrived and Celtic Christians were carrying out missionary work with papal approval long before the Synod of Whitby.

The Synod of Whitby established the Roman date for Easter and the Roman style of monastic tonsure in England. This meeting of the ecclesiastics with Roman customs with local bishops was summoned in 664 at Saint Hilda's double monastery of Streonshalh, later called Whitby Abbey. It was presided over by King Oswiu, who did not engage in the debate but made the final ruling.

The Reformation

In 1534, King Henry VIII separated the English Church from Rome. A theological separation had been foreshadowed by various movements within the English Church, such as Lollardy, but the English Reformation gained political support when Henry VIII wanted an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon so he could marry Anne Boleyn. Pope Clement VII, considering that the earlier marriage had been entered under a papal dispensation and how Catherine's nephew, Emperor Charles V, might react to such a move, refused the annulment. Eventually, Henry, although theologically opposed to Protestantism, took the position of Supreme Head of the Church of England to ensure the annulment of his marriage. He was excommunicated by Pope Paul III.

In 1536–40 Henry VIII engaged in the Dissolution of the Monasteries, which controlled much of the richest land. He disbanded monasteries, priories, convents and friaries in England, Wales and Ireland, appropriated their income, disposed of their assets, and provided pensions for the former residents. The properties were sold to pay for the wars. Bernard argues:

The dissolution of the monasteries in the late 1530s was one of the most revolutionary events in English history. There were nearly 900 religious houses in England, around 260 for monks, 300 for regular canons, 142 nunneries and 183 friaries; some 12,000 people in total, 4,000 monks, 3,000 canons, 3,000 friars and 2,000 nuns....one adult man in fifty was in religious orders.

Henry maintained a strong preference for traditional Catholic practices and, during his reign, Protestant reformers were unable to make many changes to the practices of the Church of England. Indeed, this part of Henry's reign saw the trial for heresy of Protestants as well as Roman Catholics.

Under his son, King Edward VI, more Protestant-influenced forms of worship were adopted. Under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, a more radical reformation proceeded. A new pattern of worship was set out in the Book of Common Prayer (1549 and 1552). These were based on the older liturgy but influenced by Protestant principles.

The confession of the reformed Church of England was set out in the Forty-two Articles (later revised to thirty-nine). The reformation however was cut short by the death of the king. Queen Mary I, who succeeded him, returned England again to the authority of the papacy, thereby ending the first attempt at an independent Church of England.

During her co-reign with her husband, King Philip, many leaders and common people were burnt for their refusal to recant of their reformed faith. These are known as the Marian martyrs and the persecution led to her nickname of 'Bloody Mary'.

Mary also died childless and so it was left to the new regime of her half-sister Elizabeth to resolve the direction of the church. The settlement under Queen Elizabeth I (from 1558), known as the Elizabethan Settlement, developed the via media (middle way) character of the Church of England, a church moderately Reformed in doctrine, as expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles, but also emphasising continuity with the Catholic and Apostolic traditions of the Church Fathers. It was also an established church (constitutionally established by the state with the head of state as its supreme governor). The exact nature of the relationship between church and state would be a source of continued friction into the next century.

The English Civil war and after

For the next century, through the reigns of James I, who ordered the creation of what became known as the King James Bible, and Charles I, culminating in the English Civil War and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, there were significant swings back and forth between two factions: the Puritans (and other radicals) who sought more far-reaching Protestant reforms, and the more conservative churchmen who aimed to keep closer to traditional beliefs and Catholic practices. The failure of political and ecclesiastical authorities to submit to Puritan demands for more extensive reform was one of the causes of open warfare. By Continental standards, the level of violence over religion was not high, but the casualties included King Charles I and the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud.

Under the Commonwealth and the Protectorate of England from 1649 to 1660, the bishops were dethroned and former practices were outlawed, and Presbyterian ecclesiology was introduced in place of the episcopate. The 39 Articles were replaced by the Westminster Confession, the Book of Common Prayer by the Directory of Public Worship. Despite this, about one quarter of English clergy refused to conform to this form of State Presbyterianism.

After the Restoration

With the Restoration of Charles II, Parliament restored the Church of England to a form not far removed from the Elizabethan version. One difference was that the ideal of encompassing all the people of England in one religious organisation, taken for granted by the Tudors, had to be abandoned. The religious landscape of England assumed its present form, with the Anglican established church occupying the middle ground, and those Puritans and Protestants who dissented from the Anglican establishment, and Roman Catholics, too strong to be suppressed altogether, having to continue their existence outside the national church rather than controlling it. Continuing official suspicion and legal restrictions continued well into the 19th century.

England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and the Empire

By the Fifth Article of the Union with Ireland 1800, the Church of England and Church of Ireland were united into "one Protestant Episcopal church, to be called, the United Church of England and Ireland". Although this union was declared "an essential and fundamental Part of the Union", the Irish Church Act 1869 separated the Irish part of the church again and disestablished it, the Act coming into effect on 1 January 1871.

As the British Empire expanded, British colonists and colonial administrators took the established church doctrines and practices together with ordained ministry and formed overseas branches of the Church of England. As they developed or, beginning with the United States of America, became sovereign or independent states, many of their churches became separate organisationally but remained linked to the Church of England through the Anglican Communion.

(This article is based on an extract from Wikipedia... https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_England)