



# Anglicans and Old Catholics together in Europe



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## Further information and sources

The full text of AOCICC's *Belonging together in Europe* report was published in IKZ 102 (2012), pp. 140-158.

You can also read it here:

<http://bit.ly/rFrKvmO>

## About Old Catholics

Union of Utrecht: [www.utrechter-union.org](http://www.utrechter-union.org)

Germany: [www.alt-katholisch.de](http://www.alt-katholisch.de)

The Netherlands: [www.okkn.nl](http://www.okkn.nl)

Switzerland: [www.christkatholisch.ch](http://www.christkatholisch.ch)

Austria: [www.altkatholiken.at](http://www.altkatholiken.at)

Czech Republic: [www.starokatolici.cz](http://www.starokatolici.cz)

Poland: [www.polskokatolicki.pl](http://www.polskokatolicki.pl)

Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift:

[www.ikz.unibe.ch](http://www.ikz.unibe.ch)

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## About Anglicans

[www.anglicancommunion.org](http://www.anglicancommunion.org)

[www.europe.anglican.org](http://www.europe.anglican.org)

[www.tec-europe.org](http://www.tec-europe.org)

## About our relationship

[www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/  
dialogues/oldcatholic/](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/oldcatholic/)

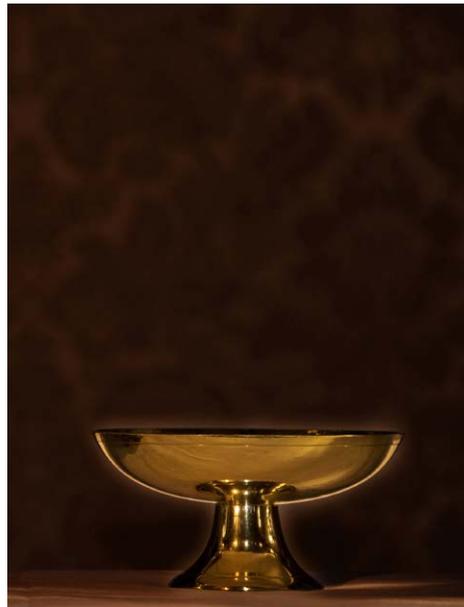
[www.utrechter-union.org/page/294/  
relations\\_with\\_the\\_anglican\\_church](http://www.utrechter-union.org/page/294/relations_with_the_anglican_church)

[www.willibrord.org](http://www.willibrord.org)

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## Belonging together in Europe



This brochure is a short introduction to the relationship between the churches of the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic churches of the Union of Utrecht. These churches live side by side in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Croatia, Poland and the Czech Republic. You can read more about our churches in the following pages. The remarks and observations are based on a paper produced in 2011 by the Anglican-Old Catholic International Coordinating Council (AOCICC) entitled *Belonging together in Europe: A joint statement on aspects of ecclesiology and mission*. We hope that it will encourage you, Old Catholics and Anglicans across Europe, to discover more about each other and reflect on how to strengthen our common life, especially at the local level.





## Who are the Anglicans?

Around 85 million people in more than 165 countries call themselves Anglican or Episcopalian. They share a tradition of common worship, resources, support and knowledge across geographical, linguistic and cultural boundaries. Although Anglicanism's unique roots go back much further to the period of Christianisation of Britain and Ireland, it found its distinctive identity, independent from Rome, in the 16th and 17th centuries. Anglicanism also spread around the globe with the growth of the British Empire. After the American Revolution, an autonomous Anglican church known as The Episcopal Church came into being in the United States. Anglican or Episcopal churches were later founded worldwide as a result of the missionary movements of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.



Today the Anglican Communion comprises 38 self-governing but interdependent member churches or provinces. As with any family, Anglicans have a range of differing opinions. Over time, Anglicans have come to agree that there are four points that are a basic expression of their core beliefs and fundamental to Christian unity. These are: 1) the Holy Scriptures as containing all things necessary to salvation; 2) the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as the sufficient statement of Christian faith; 3) the centrality of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist; and 4) the historic episcopate, locally adapted.

The largest diocese geographically in the Anglican Communion is the Church of England's Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe, also called simply the Diocese in Europe. It covers about one-sixth of the Earth's landmass, including Morocco, continental Europe, Iceland, Turkey and Russia. The Episcopal Church, whose headquarters are in New York, also has parishes and missions in Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Together these worship communities are known as the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe.

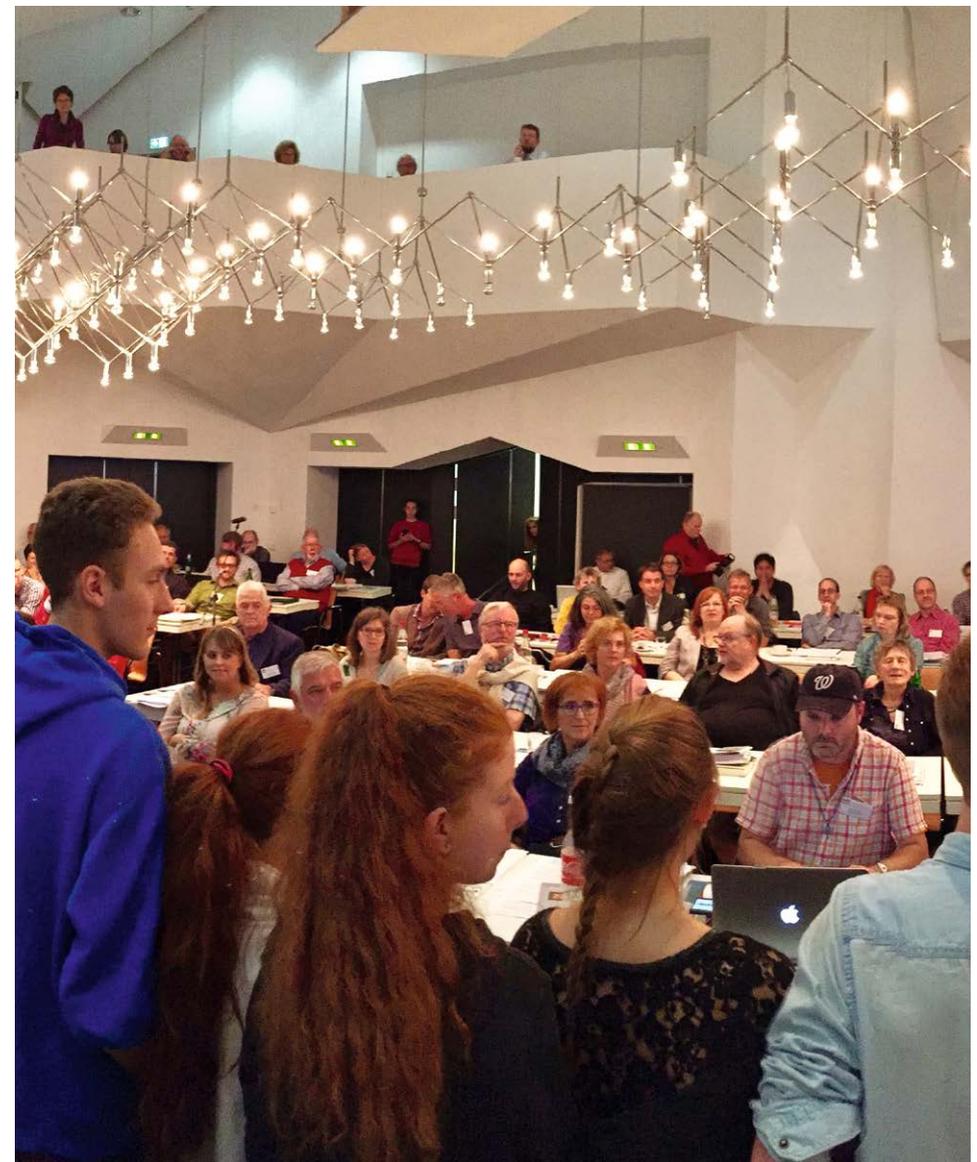


## Who are the Old Catholics?

Old Catholic as a name came into being in the 19th century to designate those Roman Catholic Christians who resisted centralising forces in the Roman Catholic Church and sought to adhere to the tradition of the undivided Early Church of the first ten centuries. It certainly does not mean that Old Catholics are 'old-fashioned' or 'elderly'.

One important feature of the Old Catholic tradition is that each diocese has a synod with both lay and ordained representatives. The synod meets regularly and is responsible for many decisions that affect the life of the church. Those people who bear responsibility (the bishop, parish priests, synod delegates and church council members) are usually elected. Although the structure of the liturgy is the same in every Old Catholic church, congregations worship in their own national language and with their own particular flavour. Seven sacraments are recognised. The Old Catholic tradition values diversity and seeks to tackle hard questions of life and faith together while respecting differences.

There are Old Catholic Churches in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland and Croatia, and Old Catholic communities in several other European countries. Together they form the Union of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches. Its bishops gather in the International Bishops' Conference (IBC) under the presidency of the Archbishop of Utrecht.





## How do we live out our relationship?

On 2 July 1931 Anglicans and Old Catholics formally gave expression to their longstanding relations in what became known as the Bonn Agreement:

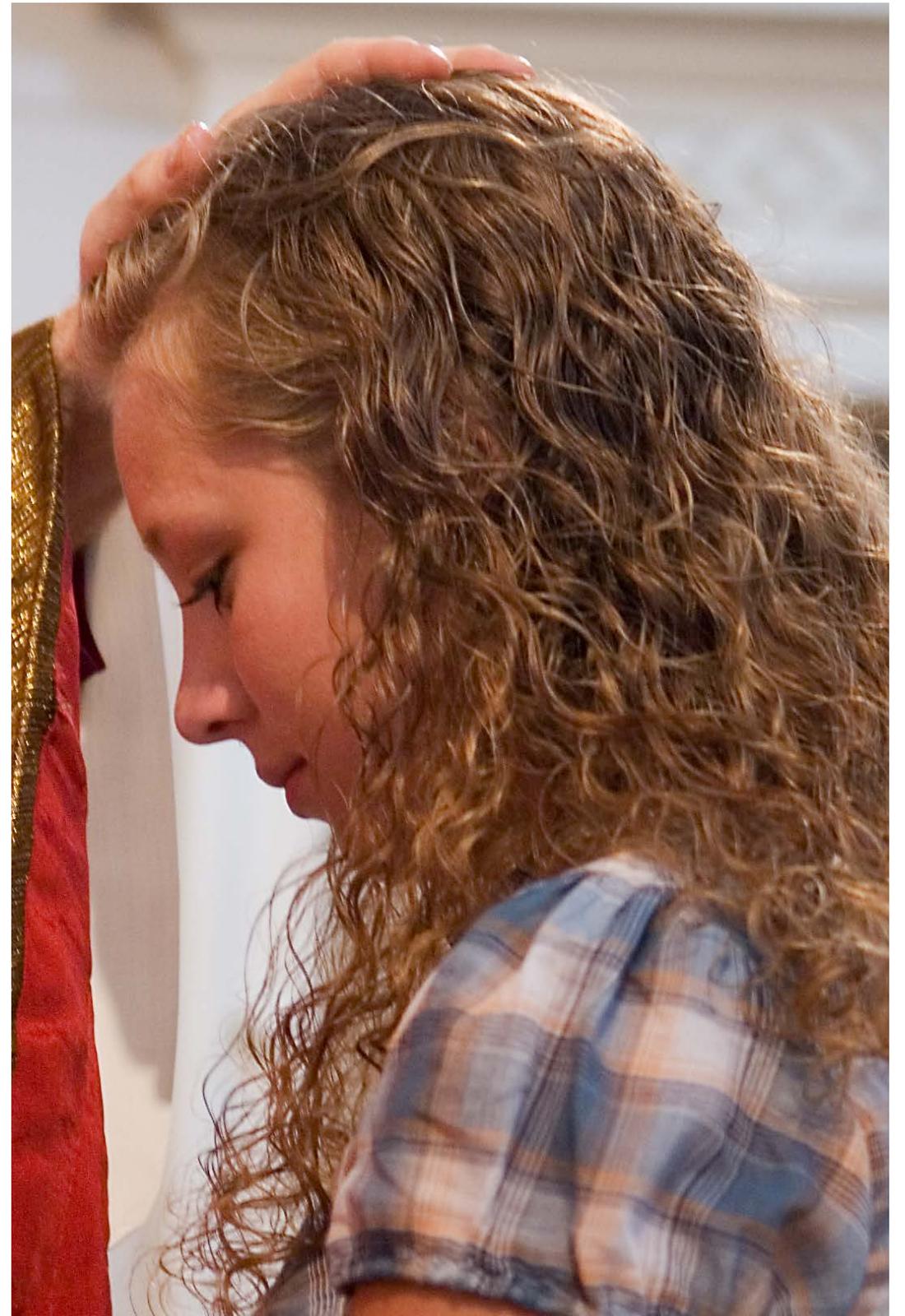
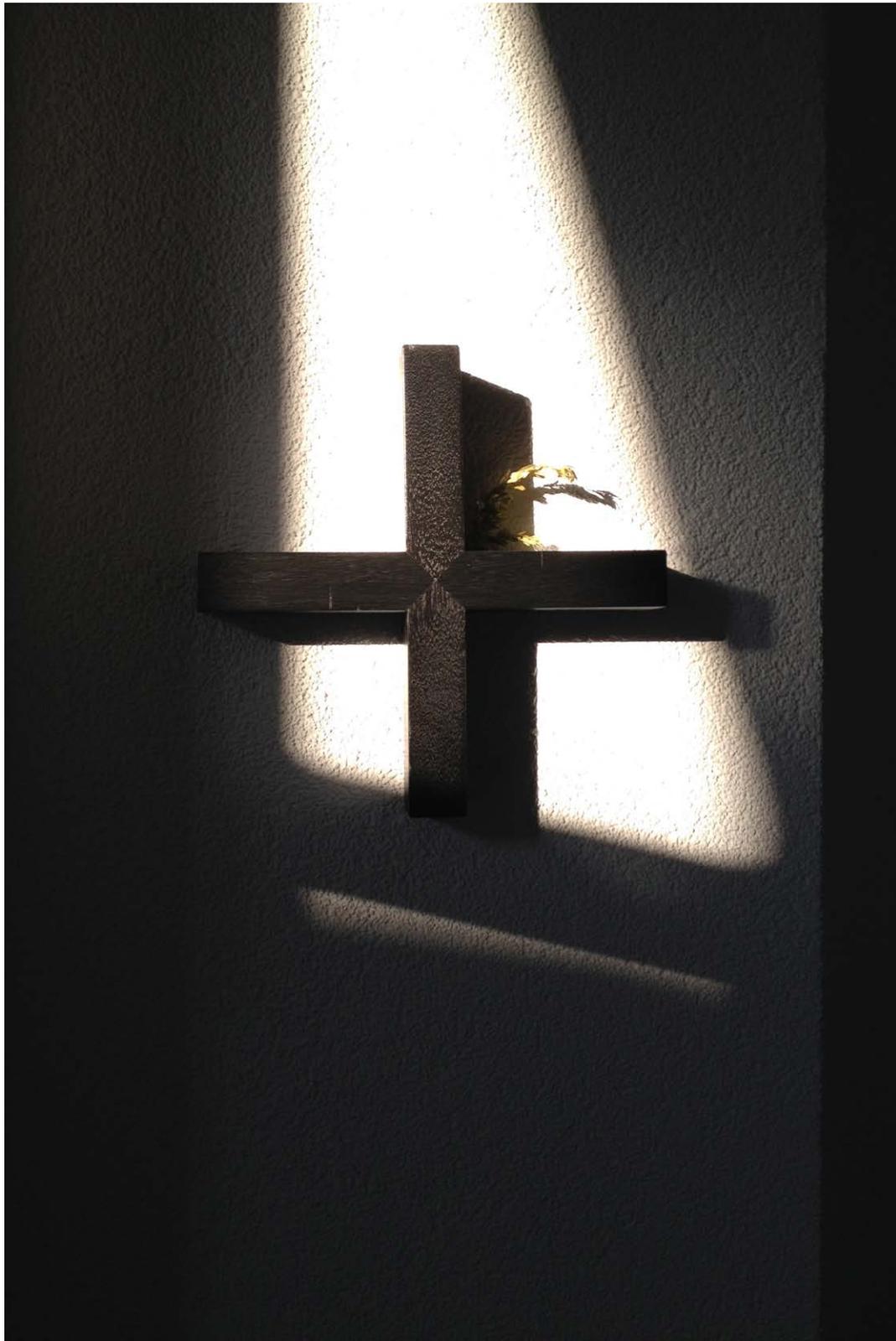
1. Each Communion recognises the catholicity and independence of the other, and maintains its own.
2. Each Communion agrees to admit members of the other Communion to participate in the sacraments.
3. Intercommunion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.

The term *intercommunion* was later changed to *full communion*. But what does full communion mean in practice for all members of our churches? All members of each Communion are allowed and encouraged to take a full part in the life of the other, worshipping together, participating in the Eucharist, proclaiming the one Gospel and cooperating in service to the world.

We can live out this full communion in many practical ways by using each other's church buildings, going on joint pilgrimages, organising youth and parish exchanges, holding events to mark special occasions, running study groups, cooperating on theological education and research, and much more.

Old Catholic clergy can serve Anglican congregations and vice versa. Bishops participate in the consecrations of bishops of both Communions and have regular consultations. So we live out our communion in many ways. Over the last decades we have become more conscious that our relationship not only can grow but needs to grow for both churches to flourish.







## How do we nurture our relationship?

In 1998 the Archbishops of Canterbury and Utrecht founded the Anglican-Old Catholic International Coordinating Council (AOCICC). It currently has 10 members from all over Europe, both lay and ordained. The Council works to discover how cooperation between the two church families can become closer and more active. Among its core tasks are to promote knowledge of our churches and their relationship and to advise on joint initiatives in mission in continental Europe. In 2011 AOCICC produced a paper called *Belonging together in Europe: A joint statement on aspects of ecclesiology and mission*. It was published in the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* in 2012. Here's a review of the main points:



### **Belonging together in Europe:**

#### **A joint statement on aspects of ecclesiology and mission**

The statement examines the Anglican and Old Catholic understanding of what the two Communion are and the relationships between them. It explores a range of questions, focusing on continental Europe.

Q: What are the key features of our understanding of the nature of the church?

A: There are many. Let's look at a few of them:

1. The Church is the historical and visible community founded on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, it is called to embody and hand on the faith through history.
2. At the heart of our common understanding of the Church is the sacramental gathering of the people of God who relate to each other and to the wider Church through their bishop.
3. The Church has a threefold ordained ministry of deacons, priests and bishops. This ministry is exercised out of, on behalf of and for the whole people of God.
4. The Church seeks to live faithfully in light of the early Christian witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and his Gospel of redemption for the whole world. Everything the Church does has its origin in the mission of Jesus Christ and the apostles.
5. The Church looks to the future, facing forwards in expectation of the coming reign of Christ in justice and truth.

Q: So if I'm an Anglican, does that mean I'm Old Catholic as well?

A: Individuals usually belong to one Communion or the other, but not to both at once. But perhaps you're one of the many Anglicans in Europe who live in towns where there's no Anglican congregation. If there's an Old Catholic church nearby, you are welcome to worship and take a full part in church life there. Of course the same is true for Old Catholics who live closer to an Anglican congregation than an Old Catholic one.

Q: Old Catholics and Anglicans entered full communion in 1931. What's changed since then?

A: The political and religious landscape has changed considerably. People move around Europe much more than they used to, especially since the creation of the European Union and after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The number of Anglican congregations across Europe has grown significantly in the last decades, attracting members from lots of different countries. Links between those congregations and Old Catholic parishes have become closer in many cases. The Society of St Willibrord, which has branches in several countries, works to strengthen the links between Old Catholic and Anglican congregations.

Q: What are the differences between the churches?

A: The variances between Old Catholics and Anglicans arise from their different histories and identities. These differences are not fundamental (otherwise our full communion wouldn't be possible) but they create a diversity that can enrich the close relationship we share. Let's look at a few examples:

- Language: Anglican congregations in Europe usually worship in English; Old Catholic congregations worship in their national languages. Joint services are therefore often bilingual, with prayers and hymns from both traditions.
- Theological emphasis: While there is overwhelming unity on the essentials of the faith, there are some differences in theological emphasis. Anglicanism sees itself as a reformed catholic church. While both Anglicans and Old Catholics emphasize the authority of the Early Church in their theology and worship, Anglicanism has been more shaped by the Reformation of the 16th century. Both churches also have diversity within their own traditions.
- Sacraments: Anglicans and Old Catholics affirm the centrality of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Both also practice confirmation, reconciliation (confession), ordination, marriage and anointing of the sick. Old Catholics, along with some Anglicans, always call these five sacraments, while other Anglicans call them sacramental rites.

Q: What major issues have our churches struggled with in recent decades?

A: Here are two examples:

- The ordination of women: Over decades both Communion have considered the question of the ordination of women to the offices of deacon, priest and bishop. Both have decided that individual member churches are free to make their own decisions about this matter. Some provinces of the Anglican Communion, and some churches of the Union of Utrecht, permit women to be ordained as deacons, priests and bishops. Others ordain women as priests or as deacons, but not as bishops. Some others do not ordain women at all.
- Marriage: Old Catholic and Anglican churches have traditionally taught that marriage is between a man and a woman. There are churches in both traditions that bless committed same-sex relationships. The subject continues to be discussed worldwide.



Q: What challenges do our churches face today?

A: Together we face common challenges in a changing Europe. We are called to be citizens of the Kingdom of God, co-workers in extending that Kingdom which is based on the Gospel values of justice, love and peace. The spread of secularisation and globalisation challenges us to reassess how we can best serve the communities and countries we live in while serving God. We need to develop deeper relationships to witness more effectively to Christ's redemptive work in the world.

Q: What can we do to deepen our relationship and make our unity more visible?

A: Our churches stand together, as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, in affirming a common faith rooted in worship of the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are called to look for opportunities to come together in prayer, worship and service. Old Catholics and Anglicans can combine resources at all levels to bring people to faith. In this way we can contribute to the worldwide unity of all Christians, as Jesus prayed to the Father: 'so they may be one, as we are one' (John 17.22).



## Over to you What can you do now?



- **Learn** more about the worship, history and practices of the other tradition. Is there a church in full communion with yours in your neighbourhood? If so, make contact! Go to a service there and meet some new people. Join in with special events. Attend a Bible study group. Engage in social ministries together in your community. Swap weekly or monthly newsletters. Organise a joint excursion or pilgrimage. Raise money together for a charity both congregations support. Or find other ways to cooperate in your local context.
- **Get a group together** to discuss what your congregation can do with your neighbour congregation.
- **Share your ideas.** AOCICC would love to hear what you're doing to strengthen church relations where you live. If you have any news, photos, stories and insights to share, let us know: [aco@anglicancommunion.org](mailto:aco@anglicancommunion.org). And how about writing a brief article for your parish newsletter or website, diocesan magazine or another church publication? Your ideas might just inspire someone on the other side of Europe.
- **Pray** for one another and deeper and closer unity between Anglicans and Old Catholics.
- **Become a member** of the Society of St Willibrord in the country where you live.
- ...and so much more!

