

## **The Anglican Communion**

Today, there are nearly eighty million Anglicans worldwide. This makes us the second- or third-largest Christian group (depending on whether you consider the Orthodox one group or many). We are organized into some forty autonomous churches, including our own Episcopal Church.

Anglicanism tends to be strongest in places that were former colonies of the British Empire, including India, Australia, Tanzania, and the West Indies. But you will also find Anglicans in South Africa, Cuba, Korea, Brazil, and Japan. For a full listing of the provinces, or independent churches that constitute the Anglican Communion, set your internet web browser for <http://anglicancommunion.org/tour/index.cfm> (you may even be able to click on that hyperlink and save typing the address.)

What binds us together is a common lineage, as all of the churches ultimately derive from the Church of England. We consider the Archbishop of Canterbury to be our spiritual leader, although he has no authority or political power outside the Church of England. The current Archbishop is the Most Reverend and Right Honourable Rowan Douglas Williams, the 104th to hold the title since Augustine in 604.

There are also three other so-called “instruments of communion” that hold together this loose and vaguely defined federation. First, there are the Lambeth Conferences. These take place about once a decade, and bishops from all over the communion are invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury to consult, reflect, and pray together. Next, there is the Primates Meeting. No, this is not a group of monkeys! The Archbishop of Canterbury is the Primate of the Church of England. In the Episcopal Church, we call our primate the “Presiding Bishop.” Currently, this is the Most Reverend Doctor Katharine Jefferts Schori (who was a seminary classmate of our Rector!). The primates meet about every two years, and, their role is “leisurely thought, prayer, and deep consultation,” not jurisdiction. Finally, there is something called the Anglican Consultative Council, a group of clergy and lay persons from each province who meet every so often to share concerns and shape common mission.