

**Book of Common Prayer (BCP)** is the short title of a number of related prayer books used in the Anglican Communion, as well as by other Christian churches historically related to Anglicanism. The original book, published in 1549 was the first prayer book to be placed into the hands of lay persons rather than the “sacramentaries” restricted to the ordained clergy. The BCP included the complete forms of service for daily and Sunday worship in English. It contained Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, the Great Litany, and Holy Communion and also the occasional services in full: the orders for Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, “prayers to be said with the sick”, and a funeral service. It also set out in full the “propers” (that is the parts of the service which varied week by week or, at times, daily throughout the Church's Year): the introits, collects, and epistle and gospel readings for the Sunday service of Holy Communion. Old Testament and New Testament readings for daily prayer were specified in tabular format as were the Psalms; and canticles, mostly biblical, that were provided to be said or sung between the readings. The amazing access to these church texts given to the faithful was and remains a unique treasure for Christian believers.

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP; also known as the Prayer Book) is the traditional service book of the Church of England and is central to its faith. Compiled in the sixteenth century by Thomas Cranmer, and modified by Churches of the Anglican Communion around the world, the Prayer Book remains at the heart of our worship, as well as of most other Churches in the worldwide Anglican Communion. The old standard of “Lex orandi, lex credendi est.” – “As we pray, so we believe.” makes the BCP an authoritative text for Anglican/Episcopal theology.

The Prayer Book has been familiar to generations of men and women for their regular Sunday worship in the Anglican Communion and beyond it. The Book makes holy the principal events of their lives, the births, the marriages and the deaths. It has been and continues to be loved for its wonderful language, dignified and memorable but always speaking to our human condition. Phrases from

it have come into everyday use and have been quoted in literature. ‘Till death us do part’, ‘read, mark, learn and inwardly digest [the Word]’, ‘peace in our time’. After the King James Version of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer is the most frequently cited book in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, and is one of the guiding influences on our language and the basis of religious expression in many nations.

The Collects, the special prayers for every week and season, are not hard to memorize and often express devotion than we cannot readily put into words. But far more important is its safeguarding of sound Christian doctrine. No book of services is based more closely on the teaching of the Bible, with words often drawn directly from biblical passages.

The Book of Common Prayer continually honors God’s awe and majesty while also reminding us that our God is a loving Father, close to each of us. It recognizes the seriousness of sin and also the assurance of pardon for all who turn to God in faith. We may never really understand the reality of human wickedness, so apparent in the world around us, until we can sincerely say of our sins ‘the remembrance of them is grievous unto us: the burden of them is intolerable’ [from Rite One—BCP].

The Book of Common Prayer appears in many variants in churches inside and beyond the Anglican Communion in over 50 different countries and in over 150 different languages. Traditional Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian prayer books have also borrowed from the Book of Common Prayer, and the marriage and burial rites have found their way into those of other denominations, and even into the secular vows statements for civil ceremonies.

The leaders of great movements in the Church have been sustained by the Prayer Book, equally with the most simple worshippers. It has inspired musical settings from some of the best church composers. It keeps its dignity and offers its comfort in every setting from the cathedral to the small country church, or the visit for a communion in the home.