

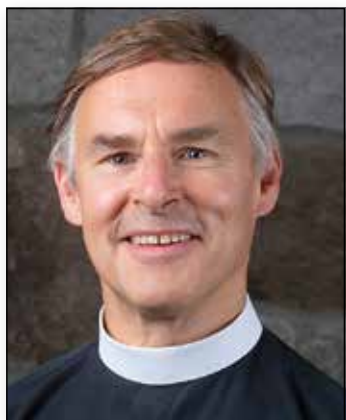
THE CALL

ST. ANDREW'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

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FALL 2025

Leaning into the Tradition

A Reflection on Retraditioning



The Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole

EARLIER THIS YEAR, while completing the annual survey sent by the national Episcopal Church to all parishes, I came to a narrative question: *What is one initiative your parish is undertaking that represents your hope for the future of your congregation or the wider Episcopal Church?*

My initial, somewhat jaded thought was to imagine what the “powers-that-be” in the Episcopal hierarchy might expect: something about informal worship services or increased social media engagement. So, I quickly scribbled a generic response about our growing online presence.

But then I paused. That wasn’t truly reflective of what we are doing at St. Andrew’s. The path we’ve been deliberately following for several years doesn’t revolve around trends or gimmicks. So, I changed my answer: *Rather than pursuing “flavor of the month” initiatives, we are leaning into the traditions of the Episcopal Church, offering traditional liturgy, excellent music, preaching, faith education, and the Anglican via media.*

A few days later, I was speaking with a clergy colleague from another parish and mentioned my survey response. He replied, “Oh, so you’re part of the retraditioning movement.” I hadn’t heard that term before, but I realized I had intuitively aligned with something broader—a spiritual current within the church where people are turning back to what is lasting and meaningful in a world marked by constant change.

In an age of overwhelming noise and distraction, retraditioning refers to an intentional return to the Episcopal Church’s roots in prayerful liturgy, sacramental life, and contemplative rhythm. It offers not an escape from the world, but a way to be recentered within it. The traditions handed down through centuries are not merely aesthetic or historical; they carry spiritual depth, communal memory, and tested wisdom. They remind us of enduring truths: that we are beloved by God, that grace is real, and that the way of Christ—marked by love, humility, and service—is not outdated but profoundly relevant.

Retraditioning is about reengaging these practices as practices—not just forms to preserve, but means of grace that shape how we live. It is not about resisting change but turning intentionally toward the elements of Christian tradition that help us live more fully and faithfully in the present.

At St. Andrew’s, retraditioning begins in worship. Rather than seeking newer or more accessible alternatives, we are reclaiming the beauty and theological depth of *The Book of Common Prayer*, valuing traditional

hymns, and emphasizing sacramental reverence. These expressions of worship often resonate with those seeking spiritual substance and rootedness in a fragmented world.

Retraditioning also speaks to how parishes engage their physical spaces. Across the church, many are rediscovering the theological significance of architecture and sacred art—restoring altars, using vestments with intention, and reintroducing icons or stained glass as tools for prayer and teaching. At St. Andrew’s, our new *Emerging Christ* stained glass window is an example of how beauty and tradition can offer both inspiration and theological depth.

But retraditioning is not limited to liturgy. It also includes teaching and discipleship. Many parishes are reviving formal catechesis, offering instruction in scripture, Christian doctrine, the creeds, and church history. This helps address a common lack of theological literacy and equips both newcomers and longtime members to grow in faith. At St. Andrew’s, as Sarah and Margaret describe in their articles, we are intentionally applying this model in both our church school and adult education programs.

Retraditioning also invites renewal in communal life. Reviving ancient practices of hospitality, parish festivals tied to saints’ days, and shared daily prayer strengthens community and fosters deeper belonging. These rhythms transform parishes from being merely Sunday gatherings into vibrant spiritual communities shaped by shared commitments.

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Importantly, retraditioning is not about ignoring the present. It allows us to draw from the wisdom of the past in order to engage more faithfully with contemporary questions—whether about justice, inclusion, or ethics. The goal is not to preserve tradition in amber but to let it flow as a living stream from the past through the present and into the future.

In the end, retraditioning is about identity. It seeks to re-anchor

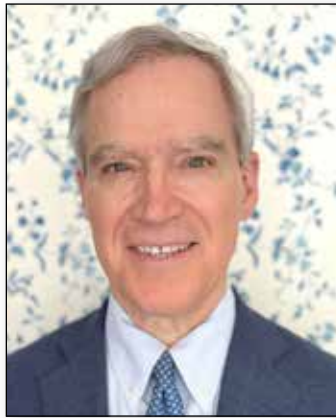
Episcopal churches in the richness of the Anglican tradition—not as a relic, but as a living inheritance. Through this, congregations can rediscover clarity of purpose, deeper discipleship, and a compelling witness to the gospel in today's complex world.

Yours in Christ,



Warden's Letter

Finding Time for Church



Tom Faust, warden

IN THE SMALL ARKANSAS TOWN where I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, the active practice of Christian faith was the cultural norm. Nearly everyone I knew belonged to a church. Sunday mornings were set aside for attending worship services, and other organized activities rarely conflicted. The schedules of even the unchurched and those of other faiths hewed to the weekly Christian calendar.

Shift several hundred miles and a few decades forward to Wellesley, Massachusetts in the mid-2020s, Sunday mornings are quite different. Hockey practice, soccer games, art lessons, the necessity of week-

end shopping, and dump runs all conflict with regular church attendance. With so many competing Sunday morning obligations, how are parishioners supposed to find time for worship at St. Andrew's? And what is St. Andrew's doing to provide worship opportunities for parishioners who can't regularly attend services at 10am on Sunday?

If your schedule does not allow you to attend the main Sunday morning service or if you prefer a smaller, more intimate worship experience, St. Andrew's offers services of Holy Communion at 8am each Sunday throughout the year and at 5pm outside the summer months. If mobility is an issue or you are away from Wellesley, the main Sunday service can be viewed online. Morning Prayer is offered online Monday through Thursday at 8:30am starting in September.

By offering services at a variety of times and both in person and online, St. Andrew's strives to make it easy for even the most overscheduled and harried among us to participate in worship. If you are like me, it is when you are the busiest and most stressed that finding time for church is most important.



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Reclaiming the Lord's Prayer



The Rev. Margaret K. Schwarzer

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN you learned this ancient prayer, which scripture tells us Jesus himself gave to us? It is almost 2,000 years old, it was delivered originally in Aramaic, the common language of Judea in Jesus' day, and it is a scant eleven lines in its English translation.

I learned the Lord's Prayer when I was seven years old and my sister and I were being babysat by my grandmother Esther, while my mom and dad got away for a long weekend. That Friday night, when I knelt by my bed and started to recite the "Now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep" prayer, my Nannie

Esther stopped me mid-sentence and asked me if I knew the Lord's Prayer. When I said that I didn't, she said, "Well, you are seven years old, that's the age of reason. You're too old to say that baby prayer. It's time to learn the Lord's Prayer." We started memorizing it that night. I can still see the light from the hall casting my grandmother's face in shadow. I remember the quilt on my bed, my sister kneeling nearby, a quiet hush behind it all. I learned it because I adored my grandmother and I wanted to say a "grown up" prayer like my older siblings, but I also remember feeling both relieved and challenged; I was old enough to speak to God directly. That felt like a promotion: "Our Father, who art in heaven."

Many bedtime prayers followed when I'd race through the prayer, as if all the words were one word, or a magic incantation for protection, only breaking to take a gulp of air when necessary. When I went off to boarding school, I stopped kneeling to say my prayers, and there were years where I didn't even say prayers, though I often attended the Sunday Protestant services in the chapel.

However, that prayer had become part and parcel of how I mapped out my world. I instinctively expected "the world" to be more than just a human one. Ideals and standards didn't depend upon mere humans: "thy will be done." And I trusted that each day was a new day, a fresh start, no matter how good or bad the previous day had been: "Give us this day our daily bread." The Lord's Prayer gave me a way of seeing the world which was hardwired into me before I even knew there was a "me."

What I know now is that this prayer will always be revealing itself to me. Each phrase is still teaching me about God and grace, depending upon the day and the occasion of its occurrence. One hundred generations before me counted on this foundational prayer for solace and inspiration, but each generation must claim its meaning for themselves if the prayer is going to continue to be a living, life-giving word. When was the last time you said the Lord's Prayer? What do you hear in its depths?

Why I Love The Book of Common Prayer

(and I Want You to Love It Too)



The Rev. Dr. Sarah Robbins-Cole

SOME OF MY MOST TREASURED possessions are not valuable in a worldly sense, but they mean the world to me: they are my well-worn copies of *The Book of Common Prayer*. One is the small prayer book my father carried with him during World War II. Some of you may remember me holding it up from the pulpit last year. Another is my 1928 copy of *The Book of Common Prayer*, given to me by my Aunt Sally—my namesake—on the Fourth Sunday of Advent in 1976,

the day of my first communion. Five years later, she gave me the 1979 edition for my confirmation. Those books meant so much to me, not just because they were gifts, but because of what they contained.

In college, I began to explore *The Book of Common Prayer* more seriously. I discovered the beauty of the Psalms, the depth of the prayers tucked in the back, the guides for private devotion, and the catechism that patiently explains what Episcopalians believe about God, the sacraments, sin, grace, and much more. I came to see it not just as a liturgical manual, but as a rich, accessible resource for spiritual formation.

And yet, I fear we're losing touch with it. Most of us now attend services where the entire liturgy is printed on 11"x17" sheets of paper folded and stapled to half size, ready to go. While I understand the convenience (no juggling books or flipping pages), I think something gets lost. The tactile experience of turning to page 355 or 814, of seeing the sweep of tra-

dition and devotion in one volume, those moments are formative.

So, here's a gentle challenge: this year, get yourself a copy of *The Book of Common Prayer* if you do not already have one. Make it yours. Learn it. Pray it. If you need a guide, I'd be happy to help. In fact, our fourth and fifth graders will be spending this entire year exploring it. Starting September 7, we'll walk from page one to page 1001, finishing just before Pentecost. I am happy to share the syllabus and the lesson plans with you.

I'm often asked, "What does it mean to be an Episcopalian?" My answer: we are people of three essential books—the *Bible*, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and *The Hymnal 1982* (and yes, the supplements too). These books form the heart of our tradition. I love *The Book of Common Prayer*, and I want you to love it too, not because it's old or traditional, but because it continues to shape hearts, guide prayer, and nourish faith.

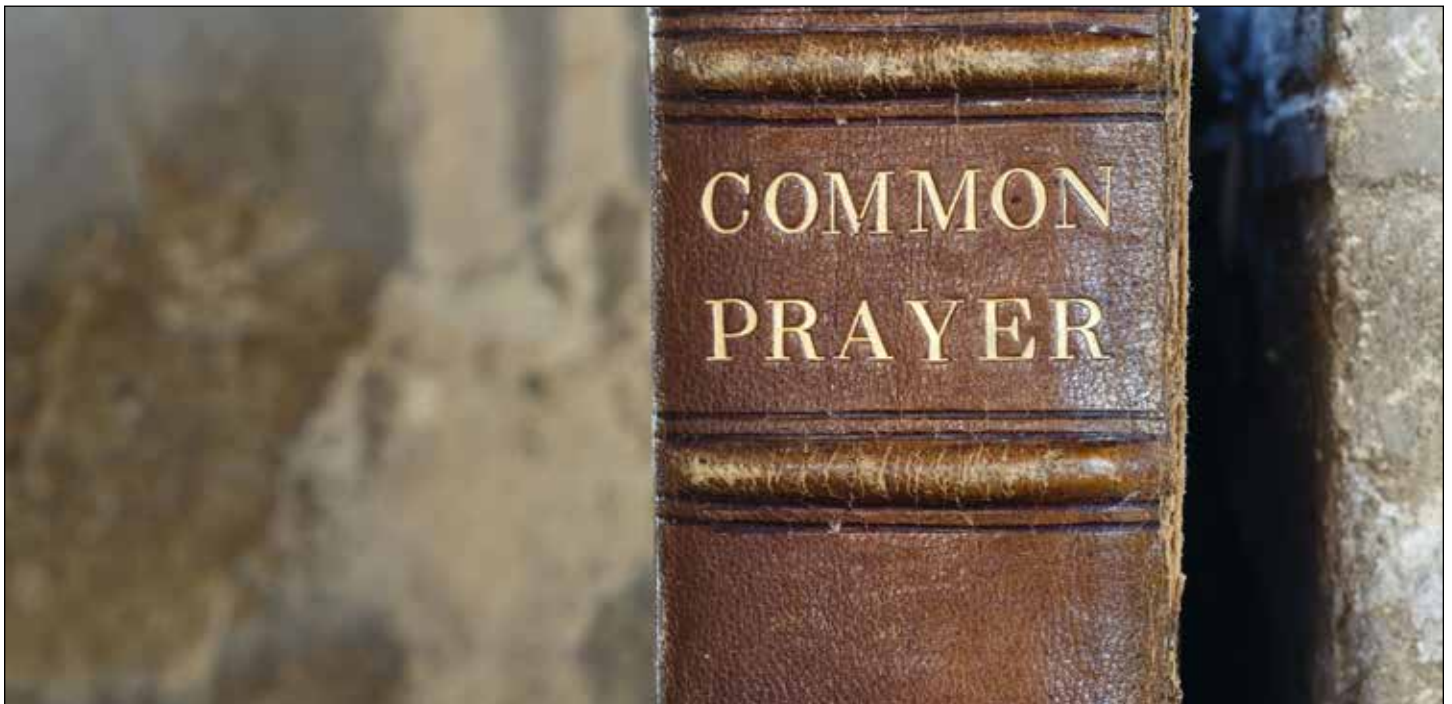


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Parishioner Reflections

What's Old is New Again

WE EPISCOPALIANS MIGHT BENEFIT in our spiritual lives by intentionally reengaging and possibly even reinterpreting our understanding of the traditions we hold dear, including scripture, the liturgy, theology, and church practices. In their articles for this issue of *The Call*, our clergy and lay

authors embrace the topic of retraditioning as it relates to injecting vibrancy and newness into our parish community. Let's consider how we can draw on our deep Anglican traditions to adapt them for today's culture, today's social issues, and our own spiritual identities.



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Tradition as a Living Gift



Hugh MacArthur

ONE WAY MANY Anglican churches describe their mission is “to make new Christians and to make all Christians new.” It’s a phrase that captures something essential about the life of faith, it’s not just about introducing people to Jesus for the first time, but also about continu-

ally growing, being transformed, and rediscovering what it means to follow Him.

This mission isn’t something we invented yesterday. It’s rooted in the deep, ancient rhythms of the church. This year marks the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, a declaration that Christians have recited for centuries as part of our worship. That liturgy, along with the prayers, sacraments, and seasons of the church, helps shape us—not just as individuals, but as a people. It gives us language when we don’t have words, wisdom when the world feels chaotic, and a pattern of life that constantly draws us back to God.

In our own family, this shows up most clearly around the dinner table. With four kids, conversations can bounce from silly to serious in seconds—but some of the richest

moments happen when we start talking about how scripture, tradition, and reason apply to what’s going on in our lives or in the world. We might debate how a biblical story speaks to modern politics, or how a church teaching resonates (or doesn’t) with something one of them experienced that day. In those moments, we’re not just passing on information, we’re helping our children see faith as something real, something relevant.

And in doing that, something beautiful happens: they make us new, too. Their questions, their insights, their willingness to engage with faith on their own terms—they push Lakey and me to grow. We realize through the steady rhythm of liturgy and the unpredictable grace of daily life, Christ is always at work, making new Christians, and making all Christians new.

Balancing Tradition and Change



Sandy Warren

WRITING THIS ARTICLE on a hot day in July, I am thinking forward to fall when life will be resuming its normal patterns and demands. Often routines are similar to the prior year and sometimes they are markedly changed, but never just the same. The changes can be welcome and exciting, or they can be just the op-

posite. There are always decisions between how much we carry forward from the past, how much we change and adapt, and how we stay balanced through the transitions.

Tradition has always been fundamental for me. I love family traditions I grew up with and have passed on to my children. The Episcopal Church with its traditional hymns, liturgy, and seasons of the church year have always been grounding for me in a way unmatched by anything else.

In 2023, I had the opportunity to go on St Andrew's Pilgrimage to England "Discovering our Anglican Roots." We saw the 1,500 year span of English church history and experienced a rich array of church tradition from magnificently beautiful buildings, to sublime choral music of Evensong, to welcoming parishioners eager to show us their own churches.

"Retraditioning" is a new word to me, but the idea is familiar. The ordination of women in the 1970s, developments in church music era by era, increased participation of laity have all made dramatic changes in their time, and ones of expansion and growth.

In a world that can feel like it is unraveling with bewildering speed, our traditions provide a stable base from which there are many ways to grow and adapt. For me, the wide-ranging topics of the Sunday morning adult Christian learning series offer new perspectives, both from the presentations and from listening to questions and insights of other parishioners.

Retraditioning encourages us to open our minds to learn and look for ways we can be more loving, more giving, and better followers of Christ.

Reflections on Tradition



Judith Boland

HAD SOME DOOZIES to pick from—family meals starting well after midnight involving ranks of silverware and table talk all in French, the annual expected eating of unrecognizable foods turned out of Jello molds . . . yes, Christmas traditions won out—as I'm sure it may for many readers!

Until our oldest child Holly and husband Travis had two children of their own, I had played Santa for 30 years, making the stockings, buying the gifts, recruiting my husband as gift wrapper. I'm not particularly well organized. Often, it was 1am on Christmas morning before I got to the most precious part—writing a large letter from Santa in which he (I) wrote of his love for the children.

It was Holly who very skillfully helped me "retradition," and with the adjusting came reflection. What did the tradition mean to our children, how will that change as they recall it, and further "retradition" it? For me, the tradition was the means to express my love to our children through those letters.

Even when they are doing their jobs well, traditions can feel exhausting, out of touch with the

times, and (to some of us some of the time) pointless. But their very repetitiveness can act as touchstones or launching pads for us to recognize and to share our deeper feelings and beliefs. Most of the group might be on autopilot (like my children ripping open another new pair of socks) but some of the rest of us might be finding untold meanings.

And for all those participating, tradition does not give up on us! By its nature it keeps on keeping on. When we next find it exhausting or pointless, we might imagine that that's the way a tradition gently nudges us; to connect with others, to be open to the meaning others derive from it, and to engage our creativity. And we might ask ourselves, "Does the tradition need to change or do I?"

Retraditioning our Outreach Mission



Herb Manning

CHRIST TELLS US TO LOVE our neighbors, to help those in need, to give comfort to those who struggle. That is the constant foundation of our outreach mission. However, the details of how we help others do evolve as needed to reflect the changes in our both our own parish and among those we support. Here

are two examples of recent changes that we have made to better align our outreach programs in 2025.

- For many years St. Andrew's has provided Thanksgiving dinners for the families in need connected to St. Stephen's, our sister parish in Boston. These originally were traditional bundles of a turkey with potatoes, onions, carrots, stuffing, green beans, corn, pumpkin, and cranberry sauce. But as the demographics at St. Stephen's have shifted with recent arrivals from Haiti and other Caribbean nations, we have worked with their parish leaders to update our menu to include items that some families prefer and are more familiar: rice, black beans, chickpeas, plus roasting hens, or pork roasts.
- Parishioners used to travel into Boston or Metrowest towns to cook or serve food, and oth-

erwise directly interact with those we serve. But now, few organizations need or want such help—and fewer busy parishioners have the time for it. We are now trying to introduce more programs that allow adults and kids to volunteer in shorter blocks of time, with brief, easy chunks of help. For example, our single morning meal packing events allow dozens of parishioners to quickly pack thousands of easy cook pasta + protein dinners. Also, our great knitters are often spotted here using an idle moment to add another row to a child's blanket or similar donated item. Bargain Haul also relies on short term volunteer bursts.

We hope to constantly evolve and improve our outreach mission. The recent outreach survey is helping to guide our response to changes in both us and our partners.



Photo: Peter B. Lull

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