

If my neighbor commented that “Episcopalians can believe in anything you want,” I would probably agree that it might seem that way, because we aren't rigid about how God works in the world. In fact, it might be as simple as saying, “Yes, as long as it is Christ-centered.” Or, I could share one of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's quotes on the connection between Jesus and love. But I think either of those answers probably would only convince the neighbor she/he is right.

Instead, I think I'd whip out my tee-shirt with Robin Williams' “Top 10 Reasons to be an Episcopalian” printed on the back. While his 2002 list was written with humor, I see theology embedded in each of the statements.

No snake-handling.

Are there still churches that do that? I'm not sure I understand what purpose snake-handling serves/served, but it appears to be some kind of faith test. Episcopalians believe in a loving God that doesn't ask us to prove ourselves by putting ourselves in jeopardy for Him, even though we celebrate martyrs, who died rather than deny the faith. At the same time, we don't dare God to save us from self-made peril. We prefer discernment over whether a thing or idea is of God, gathering two or more other persons to help. Often we use the “three-legged stool” concept, devised by Richard Hooker, who lived during the reign of Elizabeth I: Is it Biblical? Is it traditional? And is it reasonable?

You can believe in dinosaurs.

We accept sciences, including evolution, not as a contradiction to the Bible, but an explanation of how God created and continues to work in the world. We look to scientists and explorers to continue unfolding the wonders of God's creation. Some notable Anglicans who have probed science and expanded our world and well-being are: astronaut Buzz Aldrin; early computer engineer Charles

Babbage; scientist and philosopher Sir Francis Bacon; chemist, physicist, and inventor Robert Boyle; explorer and sailing Captain John Cook; naturalist, geologist, and biologist Sir Charles Darwin; motion picture film inventor Hannibal Goodwin; smallpox vaccine inventor Edward Jenner; radio inventor Guglielmo Marconi; and cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead. They and many others tell us just how vast and complex God's creation is.

Male and female God created them; male and female we ordain them.

Today the Episcopal Church strives to be as inclusive as possible. That wasn't true for most of Episcopal history. In the mid 20th century, partly in response to the women's movement in society, the church took a look at itself with the lens of the three-legged stool. As Denise Ackerman points out, "Christian tradition has consistently confirmed woman's equality with man based on our sharing in the image of God (Gn 1:27). On the other hand, nearly two millennia of Christian practice has proven otherwise." Reason, assisted by recent archaeological finds, produced evidence of full participation of women in the leadership of the early church. With much deliberation and discernment we returned to the Biblical model. Since 1976, women have been ordained to the priesthood; followed by the first woman bishop in 1989 and the first female presiding bishop in 2006.

Inclusivity didn't stop there. Beginning about 40 years ago we began to be deliberate about welcoming openly gay persons, paired or otherwise. After the election of Bishop Gene Robinson in 2003, Anglicans in other countries (as well as many Episcopalians) questioned the ordination of non-celibate, self-identifying gay persons. *To Set Our Hope on Christ*, an official document from the Episcopal Church is a thoughtful response to their queries. It methodically extrapolates from Acts 10-15 a justification for affirming the rightful place of LGBTQ persons in the Christian community; it sets forth an approval of same-sex marriage and ordination.

You don't have to check your brains at the door.

In fact, from earliest Anglican/Episcopal history people have been encouraged to question and search for understanding. Fredrica Harris Thompsett, Professor Emerita of Historical Theology at the Episcopal Divinity School, says, “Leaders of the newly reformed English church believed education in the scriptures was essential for laity and clergy. The goal of these early reformers was an educated church in which all might be theologian. Anglican theology, then as now, invites and depends on theological discernment among baptized members.” From my perspective the Episcopal attitude is sort of a corollary to J.B. Phillips' “Your God is too small;” it is pretty much impossible to get one human mind around everything “God” means. Because we are big on discernment, we encourage listening to lots of people's ideas before settling on action.

Pew aerobics.

This probably is a point that where my neighbor is right; we Episcopalians can *each* decide what gestures most enhance our worship. In most congregations there's standing and sitting, and some people also kneel and genuflect at certain points of the service. People pick and choose what is meaningful to them. Kneeling was in use by our Catholic ancestors when Henry VIII split with the Roman Church. Kneeling was part of the rubrics until our current Book of Common Prayer, published in 1977. Based on much other research about the practices of the early Christian Church, the requirement that people kneel during the service of Holy Eucharist (communion) was changed. (Although the instruction that “The people stand or kneel.” remains right after the Sanctus in the Great Thanksgiving.) Many Episcopalians, especially those who grew up with an older prayer book find it comfortable to kneel at that point and in other parts of the service. In my congregation, the priest also makes allowance for those with physical limitations, saying, “Stand as you are able” at certain points. A number of people use gestures we have in common with Roman Catholics, genuflecting, bowing, and