

Why did I leave the Anglican Church?



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I was asked this question some time ago. At first I felt that it somehow missed the point because I tend to feel that I never *was* an Anglican, although it's true that in my mid to late teens I would have called myself Anglican – perhaps?

My parents were Anglicans in the limited sense that they were not Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Salvation Army or anything else. Dad was quite dedicated, jotting brief prayers in his diary and during parts of his life often attending communion at the parish church. I doubt that he made a conscious decision on this it was just taken for granted it had been the family tradition as far back as anyone knew. Mum was different she was used to village life in Northern Ireland and had taught Sunday school at the tiny village church, a simple and plain structure. She was uncomfortable with anything remotely high church, but if you'd asked her what she was she might have said Anglican, or Church of Ireland, or just Christian.

I was christened when I was little and was encouraged to read the Bible as a child, at home, but more so at junior school and later in RE lessons at secondary school. By the age of 13 I was familiar with the outline contents of the Old and New Testaments, and with many of the stories recorded there. In my teens I was expected to attend confirmation classes and went along out of obedience rather than a desire to be there. In due course I was confirmed, though it didn't mean much to me and life continued as before. I had not yet begun to grapple with what I did and did not believe.

As I went through the processes of sitting my O levels and A levels and applying for a place at university, I began to form my own ideas about faith. I was intrigued by the Bible and began to take what I read there quite seriously. And I didn't see much there to support Anglicanism or, indeed, denominations of any kind. The message from the New Testament seemed clear to me, there was supposed to be just one Church, not a multiplicity of flavours brought about through a long series of historical disagreements and splits ... And what about the many stories of healings, and the parables about how we should live, and the Pauline teachings about gifts of the Spirit, and the letters to

churches in the Greek world of the time? I was taking all of this seriously, but saw little evidence that the denominations were doing the same. I explored more widely, visiting the Jehovah's Witnesses, signing up for a Christadelphian magazine, reading books about the Mormons and Christian Science, but none of these avenues seemed to make much sense to me.

After graduating from university, getting married, and starting full time jobs, Judy and I spent our Sundays in Bristol doing some serious denominational exploration. We went to Sunday services at every church we could find, and never once had a sense of, 'This is the one!' We were searching, but not finding.

In the end, in utter desperation, we tried a weird place just down the road from our flat. In some ways it seemed more odd than any of the other places we'd tried. It had a large sign above the door in blue and gold reading 'God is Love', and didn't look like a church building, more like a large house. This was [Zetland Evangelical Church](#) in Bristol, near the railway arches over the Cheltenham Road. We found to our surprise that we were instantly at home! The people there wanted to talk with us, and they shared some of our own thoughts about what we'd been reading in the Bible. We felt welcomed – as if by a large family. We'd found a real community, which is what we'd long hoped for. Not only that, when I went to a mid-week evening meeting I was blown away by teaching about David, perhaps from 2 Samuel, and a section I was familiar with. The fresh insights and explanations were very striking, here were people who knew their topic – and it all made perfect sense.

We still felt there was more, and we *were* joining one of those denominational 'splinter groups' that so perplexed us, but this was by far the best thing yet. At this point in our lives we would not have settled for Anglican or any other church tradition. We were particularly encouraged by the fact that there was no hierarchy at Zetland, there was no single leader, we were all equal, or so it appeared. There was no liturgy, no pastor, and once a month there was a delightful Sunday morning Open Meeting with nobody at the front and where all could contribute a prayer, a hymn, or some teaching. All, that is, except women and children. This was one of several niggling issues that we put to the back of our minds for the time being.

Eventually we discovered much more – but that's another story.

Chris Jefferies
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Explanatory note – Please don't think that I'm judging or disapproving of denominations and those who are involved with them. In this short article I'm describing how a much younger Chris Jefferies understood things. I have many non-denominational friends, but also friends from [New Frontiers](#), [Anglican](#), and particularly [Baptist](#) traditions. 'Particularly Baptist', simply because at the time of writing I take part in a small home group that meets weekly and is part of [Cirencester Baptist Church](#). I'm not a Baptist, I will not (cannot) become a church member. We are all part of one family, the family of those who follow Jesus. We are all brothers and sisters and we have individual perspectives and expressions of what that means. I honour and love each one as part of an undivided whole.

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