While Baptism and Holy Communion are the two Gospel Sacraments, the Anglican Church also celebrates five others; those commonly called sacraments. The phrase 'commonly called' is not meant to be derogatory. Rather, it marks off these five sacraments from the two which were specifically commanded by Jesus. But while the five may not have been instituted by Jesus himself, they have certainly been part of the Christian experience since the earliest times.

**Confirmation**

At Baptism we become members of Christ and therefore members of his Church. In Confirmation we 'confirm' our baptismal vows - usually made in infancy by parents and godparents on our behalf - and claim the promises and responsibilities of Baptism as our own.

In the early Church, Baptism and Confirmation were part of the one rite, but as the custom of infant baptism became more general, the Church deemed it wise to delay Confirmation until the baptised person was old enough to understand the privileges and responsibilities of Christian faith. Nowadays, in Confirmation, we 'come of age' in the Church.

Confirmation is performed by the Bishop who, by the outward and visible sign of the laying on of hands with prayer, calls down upon the candidate the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this action the candidate receives the inward and spiritual grace of the Spirit to strengthen and confirm the act of adult Christian commitment.

**Ordination**

By Baptism and Confirmation all Christians are commissioned for ministry. But within this common ministry of the Church there is a special ministry of oversight and service. This is the ministry of Bishop, Priest and Deacon and Ordination is the sacrament whereby, through prayer and the laying on of hands, those who are chosen by the Church to exercise this ministry are gifted with the Spirit of grace and counsel.

In the Old Testament the laying on of hands signified the transfer of authority from one person to another. (see Numbers 27:18ff) This same significance undergirds the Sacrament of Ordination. The Bishop says, ‘... the work you are called to do is God’s work; it is in God’s hand, and it is done in God’s name to God’s glory.’

But the Sacrament of Ordination signifies much more in that it is also the means by which the candidate receives special gifts for ministry. During the Ordination of a Priest the Bishop lays hands on the candidate and prays, ‘God of grace, through your Holy Spirit, gentle as a dove, living, burning as fire, empower your servant for the office and work of a Priest in the Church’.

Just as Holy Communion brings to mind the Last Supper, so too Ordination brings to mind the commissioning of the Apostles at Pentecost for a particular ministry and the Anglican Church claims that this particular ministry has been passed down from the Apostles in an unbroken succession to the present day.

**Penance**

Part of the particular ministry of a Priest is, in the name of Jesus, to pronounce God’s forgiveness.

On the evening of the first Easter Day, Jesus appeared to his disciples and said to them, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’. Then he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’. (John 20:21-23) The Bishop repeats those words in the act of ordaining a Priest, thereby passing on that apostolic commission.

This ministry is exercised through the General Confession in public worship. Together the Priest and people affirm their sinfulness, their desire for forgiveness, and their intention to lead a new life. The Priest then pronounces the Absolution; Christ’s forgiveness of those who have repented and confessed their sin.

But that is not the only way the Anglican
Church provides for those who are troubled in conscience. In the exhortation printed in the Order of Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer, the Priest is directed to say: ‘...if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience...let him come to me or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God’s Word, and open his grief; that by the Ministry of God’s holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution’.

Many Christians find it helpful to accept this invitation and to make a private and specific Confession in the presence of a Priest. But no Anglican is required to make a private Confession. Our rule is: ‘all may, none must, some should’. Private Confession and Absolution is available to all but is required of none. At the same time it is part of our Church’s experience that, for some, it is a necessary way to find peace with God.

Holy Matrimony

It is claimed that human beings are naturally monogamous; that is, we mate for life. There are of course exceptions to this rule. Some primitive tribesmen collect wives like cattle. King Solomon is said to have had 700 wives and some Hollywood film stars would seem to be trying to follow his example. But most human beings, even nowadays, are still naturally monogamous and marriage is still an important human institution.

There is nothing uniquely Christian about Marriage as an institution. The Church did not invent Marriage. However, there is a Christian understanding of Marriage.

The Old Testament understanding of Marriage was determined by two basic convictions; that creation and therefore human sexuality is good, and that husbands and wives are related to each other by hesed, that same quality of love God showed for Israel. The Book of the Prophet Hosea explores this at some length. Hosea is faithful to his wayward wife with the same loyal faithfulness - hesed - God shows for Israel and the hesed of God for Israel is the Old Testament model for Marriage.

The New Testament develops this Old Testament insight by affirming that the love husbands and wives must have for each other is the same as the love Christ has for the Church; a self-giving and never-ending love.

In the Sacrament of Marriage, through the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of vows and rings, a man and woman become a sign of a much deeper inward reality. Their relationship is strengthened and sanctified by the same quality of self-giving love that was revealed by God in Christ. Their life together becomes a sacrament of love.

So what does the Anglican Church say about divorce?

Years of experience have taught us that, despite the best intentions, some Marriages turn out to be disasters. It becomes obvious that the love that should bind the couple together has died and sometimes the greatest good is served by ending the Marriage.

Divorce is becoming a common experience in our society and the Church cannot ignore this modern fact of life. In recent years many Churches in the Anglican Communion have allowed the remarriage of divorced persons. This in no way detracts from the Christian vision of Marriage. Rather, it witnesses to the love of God that allows us to face up to our mistakes and to begin again.

The Anointing of the Sick

The Gospels witness to the fact that Jesus healed the sick. The Apostles also, ‘...anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them’ (Mark 6:13)

The early Church continued that practice: ‘Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins he will be forgiven’. (James 5:14-15) So there can be little doubt that the ministry of healing has been with the Church since the very beginning.

At one time this sacrament was limited to those who were at the point of death so the arrival of the Priest was considered a sign that the patient’s condition was hopeless. But in recent times, the Anointing of the Sick has undergone a revival and it is now commonly used in the healing of those who are sick in body and in mind.

During the sacrament the patient is anointed with blessed oil while prayer is offered for his or her healing in Christ. The oil is the outward and visible sign. The healing power of Christ is the inward and spiritual grace bestowed in the sacrament.

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