

St Boniface Trust Essay Competition

Why I am an Anglican and believe I shall remain so

Aidan Fincham

(aged 10 when the essay was written)

[Aidan was the youngest participant in the essay competition. A judge commented, "A most unusual child and an engaging diary," and recommended a special prize which the Trustees were pleased to give him in recognition. Apart from the formatting, very little editing has been required for publication.]

I was first taken to the local Anglican Church before I was born, in 2001. Since then I have attended every week.

I was baptised when I was 3 months old. My Godparents include a former American Methodist teaching in a Roman Catholic School, a former Salvation Army member, a Woman Priest and her husband who was brought up as a Roman Catholic. All are Anglicans now.

I have always attended the local Anglican Church. Before I went to Nursery I used to go to the local Convent Chapel where my dad took a service on a Monday. On Wednesdays and Sundays I went to our Parish Church. I still love attending Church services especially now that I can participate in them more.

My father is an Anglican Priest but was encouraged by the Bishop to retire early because of ill health. His retirement last year meant we had to leave the only home I had lived in, a vicarage. My mother had to leave her work and I had to leave all my friends at school and at Cubs so that we could move to Eastbourne in the Chichester Diocese to live in the house my Grandparents left us.

Last year when we moved to Eastbourne I had to find another school. A vicar's wife suggested we try the Roman Catholic school as it was small and the head teacher was very pastoral. She is very kind and understanding and is happy for our Anglican family to join in with worship and activities at school. After being in Eastbourne a short time the family who recommended the school abandoned the Anglican Church. The Dad who was a vicar lost their home and his stipend as he gave up his vocation as an Anglican priest to join the Ordinariate.

During my second term at this school our choir was asked to sing at a thanksgiving Mass for a Catholic Priest who recovered from a serious illness. The choir were also asked to act the Gospel. I was privileged and proud that I, an Anglican, was chosen as Jesus. My parents received permission to have communion at this service.

Although I attend a Roman Catholic School I don't think I would ever become one. I was told October is the month of the Rosary. The head teacher said that the Rosary helps with your prayer life when unsure of what to say. I don't feel I need the Rosary to help me as I am happy to pray on my own and don't think I need this extra help. I don't enjoy saying the Rosary and I find it rather repetitive. In May, the Catholics have the month of Mary and we have more saying of the Rosary. I think God must be an Anglican as in both the months of May and October school children have a week off for half term. I know it could be worse if we had to say the Rosary for 4 consecutive weeks – twice a year!

Some Catholic children have called me a Muslim as I don't make the sign of the cross. I think prayer is more about what you share inside your heart rather than what we perform for others to see on the outside. All the Muslims I know are kind and friendly so I never saw this as a negative comment. Being at this School has made me more Anglican. When I attended my school in Chiswick, London, I was just a Christian with Jewish, Muslim and Sikh friends. Now I am at the Roman Catholic School where all pupils are Christian, I am called a Protestant, making me proud to be Anglican.

When we lived in London I made many friends of different faiths. My best friend is a Jew and I went to her synagogue for Passover this year and wore my own Kippur (Skull Cap) and she returned to my home in Eastbourne for Holy Week and Easter.

We are hoping that in 2029 we will have our own home together and will celebrate Christmas by entertaining all of our friends and family. We have already planned our multi-faith prayer room. We have our own faiths and plan to keep them special to each of us but are also very happy to share them with each other.

I have made the decision for myself to be a Christian and in particular an Anglican and last week I started confirmation classes with 4 other children and our vicar. He asked all of the candidates to name Saints they had heard of. Being named Aidan Nicholas Fincham I was able to name two with my eyes closed – I felt so lucky to have two Saints' names.

At this moment, I believe I want to be a Christian and particularly an Anglican and believe I will always remain so.

Recently I wrote to Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the USA, about the possibility of being confirmed by her. She seems very nice and wrote back to me and included a photograph of her in her mitre. I have put it in a frame and have put it on the wall of my garden shed which I am thinking of making into a Chapel.

I wrote to Bishop Katharine to explain that our local Bishop struggles with the ordination of women and I was told he will not wear a Mitre when he confirms me and this distresses me

a little, well actually quite a lot, as even I have a mitre in my dressing up box. Some of the things Bishop Katharine wrote are, "You ask about whether you have to be confirmed by the local Bishop, even though you disagree with him. That is actually an ancient issue in the Church. In the 4th century, Christians in North Africa, as a result of persecution by the state's rulers, began to argue about whether those who had denied their faith under pressure could still be worthy members of the Church. Some went so far as to say that sacraments administered by such sinners were invalid. The Church as a whole said, yes, the sacraments are valid because it is God who 'does' the sacramental work, not the sinful human being. In other words, we're all sinners." She tells me that my confirmation will be valid even if I think the bishop is wrong. She also says that she doubts that this is the last time I will decide that a bishop is wrong!

Bishop Katherine writes that she would be honoured to confirm a young man as earnest as me but that it would cause a lot of difficulty. The Church of England does not recognise the sacramental acts of women bishops to be valid. There is a lot of hope that the Synod of the Church of England will decide in the summer of 2012 to permit women to become bishops, and when that happens the difficulty will go away. She expects that there will be women bishops in England soon thereafter.

Bishop Katharine ended the letter saying that she expected I would keep my vicar on his toes for a long time to come.

I did meet Bishop Katharine when she visited London in the Summer of 2010 and I went with my parents and Jewish friend to Southwark Cathedral. We were lucky enough to have our photograph taken with her and also we took a banner that we had made saying "Wot still no Women Bishops in C of E?!"

My Jewish friend was wearing my mitre when we had a photograph taken with our banner and it is a very special photo that we have.

Regarding the possibility of the Church of England accepting women as Bishops has led me to make a chart so that our family can follow the progress of this within each Diocese in England. We hear usually on email from WATCH – Women And The CHurch – that another Diocese has accepted the motion, then I tick that Diocese and so far I am pleased that I have only ticks on my chart. So I may be confirmed by a woman after all.

When I visited our local Roman Catholic Church in London when the last Pope, John Paul II, died, the Eucharist service was very similar to our Anglican Communion Service but my parents were not allowed to have communion and afterwards there was no coffee and biscuits. Now, I always think of Catholic Churches without refreshments. When we go on holiday we always find an Anglican Church to attend and I am so happy when they have tea and coffee afterwards. I like this as you can then chat to the people you have worshipped with. When we took my Granddad's ashes to be buried in the Anglican Church of Holy Trinity in Nice, in the South of France, the adults had wine after Church. No wonder my parents enjoy visiting this church!

When our new Church was prayed for at the Diocesan Cathedral my family attended evensong in Chichester and we went early for tea and cake in the Cathedral cafe. When my dad went to pay we were told it was a gift from the Dean and Chapter – how kind was that?

I did write to thank the Dean and Chapter and the Dean replied to say if I went again we could have free tea and cake. I thought this was very kind and a great encouragement for my family to take me again to Chichester.

I have just had the most awful experience of my life. I am so wild at the policies of an Anglican Cathedral. We stopped in York on our way to Durham and visited York Minster. This has got to be the worst place in Anglicanism for welcoming anybody. I was in the gift shop when I thought I needed the toilet. My sister took me to the Cathedral entrance where we were told that we had to pay to enter. After we had made our purchases at the gift shop my mum took us back to the Cathedral entrance and discovered that entry for children was free and asked if I could go in to use the toilet. The man at the cash desk explained that the facilities were available only to visitors. My mum explained that we had travelled to York from Eastbourne and surely I was classed as a visitor. He replied that visitors were people who paid the admission cost and for children that meant they could only be visitors if accompanied by a fee-paying adult. This meant that if a parent took me to the toilet admission would be £9, if my 17 year old sister took me that would only be £8 as she is a student. My mum said the use of the Minster toilet is even more expensive than it would be to use the toilet at Harrods.

Despite all of this stress that I have been caused I still feel able to remain an Anglican. My faith in the Anglican Church has been restored. We visited Durham Cathedral today – free toilets, friendly and knowledgeable stewards, a good coffee shop and just a lovely friendly atmosphere. I joined the junior friends, hoping to visit again before we leave the NE in a few days. The best thing was finding a chapel with nine altars and the main one being dedicated to ST AIDAN! That is impressive! Even my sister was impressed.

I think when I die I would like to be buried outside Durham Cathedral. I'd have to remain an Anglican for this to be possible and also have to work hard to become Bishop or Dean of Durham. I presume the Cathedral clock chiming every quarter of an hour would not be annoying if you were dead and buried in the Cathedral Church yard but I think I may get rather frustrated if it kept me awake every night if I was the Dean. My dad said when he was a student in Durham he soon got used to it.

During our visit to Holy Island I discovered a small chapel made in a boiler house next to the United Reformed Church. It was really tiny and this has inspired me to turn my own garden shed into a small garden chapel. I think I am going to have an open chapel afternoon and invite friends from church for a cup of tea and a cake. I am going to call this quiet space 'St Aidan's Chapel'.

Recently I attended my first Evensong. I have since read a lesson at this service. I now have my own 'Evensong' box where I keep my Book of Common Prayer and my Bible. I so love being part of the Anglican Church and feel honoured that I was born into this part of Christianity.

Looking at our family history I can see that my Great x 4 Grandfather, Henry Sully was Baptized on 30th January 1820 at St Matthew's Bethnal Green. The Assistant Priest at this Church is the lady Priest who married my parents. My Grandad was a Priest in Bethnal Green and the most famous thing he did was to bury Reggie Kray who was a gangster. The gangsters could not be all bad as some of the nuns at St Saviour's Priory had them in Sunday School.

One thing I can be sure of is that I have Anglican blood. I discovered that most of my Great Grandparents were confirmed as Anglicans. All my grandparents were confirmed Anglicans. We have traced parts of our family to Normandy in 1660 where the family fled France as they were Huguenots.

I feel privileged that we have refugees in our family as Jesus was born a refugee and this helps me to feel close to him.

Last Christmas we held a Posada party at our new home where my family welcomed the crib figures of Mary and Joseph. I planned the brief service myself and asked my Jewish friend, Tahlia to assist me. We played our clarinets, wrote prayers and dressed up as Mary and Joseph. As my friend is Jewish she was happy to play Mary as she too was Jewish. I wrote a brief reflection on the journey of Mary and Joseph and we remembered many of our friends from my oold school who are refugees from Serbia, Afghanistan, Somalia and Vietnam.

This evening I went with Tahlia to Ealing Liberal Synagogue. I was welcomed by Rabbi Janet who recognised me and said, "It is nice to have Aidan with us again." Tahlia and I read at the Shabbat service. We also shared a communal meal to welcome Rabbi Janet back after her sabbatical.

I am a bit sad as Bishop Wallace wrote saying he will not bring his mitre to my confirmation but will bring his shepherd's staff. I had actually written to request that he bring his mitre for a photo with me after the confirmation.

I feel a bit let down' that I am going to be confirmed by a Bishop who doesn't value the ordination of women and will not be wearing a mitre. It is difficult but I am trying very hard to realise and believe that the Bishop will just be a messenger from God and that it is God who will confirm me. I am still wondering whether to wait a few years to be confirmed by a woman bishop.

On my chart that I made I can now see that 17 Diocesan Synods have voted for Women Bishops. I will be so excited the day I meet an Anglican woman Bishop in the Church of England. We had an email this evening from Rabbi Janet who said I was a delightful boy and that she was so pleased that I was able to participate with them at Ealing Liberal Synagogue. She also wished me and my family a very happy Autumn from her and the members at her Synagogue.

We had school Mass today and my teacher asked me to read a prayer. I don't think she knows I'm Anglican. I am thinking of writing to the Catholic Priest asking if I can have communion after my confirmation. Attending Catholic prayers and Mass makes me grateful

and privileged that I am Anglican. I feel I have the resources to pray without using the extra prayers like the Rosary and the Hail Mary (we had to say the Hail Mary and the Lord's Prayer twice during Mass today). I am coping more with this way of praying but I remain pleased that I am Anglican.

I am enjoying spending quiet times in my Chapel and library at the end of the garden. It is nice being alone with my special pictures and icons and listening to some religious music. My favourite is Handel's Messiah.

Another trip to Chichester Cathedral today with my parents and best friend Tahlia. The Cathedral had parts open not usually open to the public. As usual we were greeted at the door by a friendly helpful steward who explained about friends of the Cathedral when I asked about the possibility of joining as a Junior member.

I enjoyed looking in the Library. We noticed that some very old copies of Crockfords my dad had were missing. We thought he could donate his copies to the Library as we need the book space. I was impressed at the number of Books of Common Prayer they had and they were huge and all leather bound. They looked much grander than my own copy I am still proud to own.

We were also able to visit the song school where the choristers rehearse for the services. I did pretend I was still in my old Church choir. I do miss singing in the choir. We decided to stay for evensong and hear some good church music which we haven't really heard since we last visited the Cathedral. The choir here makes our own church choir sound like a cats' chorus. I was fascinated to see the music store which was a secret room that could have the matching panelling replaced over the door to hide it. We were also extremely lucky to be allowed into the Private Chapel of the Bishop of Chichester.

An interesting woman described the Ascension painting by Hans Feibusch commissioned by Bishop George Bell and she explained that Hans Feibusch had been a Jewish refugee. It was special seeing this and being there with my best friend who is Jewish. We also saw something else that was new to me, the rare roundel wall painting dating back to 13th Century, apparently well known as the Chichester Roundel.

I felt honoured to be able to witness these Anglican treasures at our Diocesan Cathedral.

On our way home we saw the Dean's car pull into the grounds of his house. I called and said "Hello" and told him we had been to Evensong. He told me he was unable to attend as he had just driven back from a meeting in Stafford. He seems very caring and told us that even though the Cathedral has a huge deficit he will NOT allow the Cathedral to charge visitors to enter. I think this is great and has inspired me to have a stall at Church to raise some money for the Cathedral by selling marmalade and cakes. I have emailed the vicar regarding me holding a sale in aid of our Diocesan Cathedral in Chichester.

I have now heard that I will not be confirmed by the Bishop of Lewes without a Mitre but instead by a retired Bishop at St Mary's Convent in Chiswick. I am so excited as I have known the sisters here all my life and at Easter I was an altar server in the Chapel. When we lived in Chiswick and my Nanny was being nursed at the Convent I used to go for tea at 4pm. I think if I was female I would quite consider being a nun!

I am already thinking about what hymns we could sing at my Confirmation. I hope Sister Jennifer will read a lesson as she has given permission for me to be confirmed in the Convent Chapel. My nanny's funeral was here and I read Spike Milligan's poem "Granny" because a few days before I had trapped my finger in the food blender and I wasn't sure if I would be able to play my clarinet after my operation so I prepared something else just in case, but actually I did both.

I was so excited today as when my parents met me from Cub camp they said we would go to St Mary's Convent in Chiswick for tea with the Sisters, then we would go to All Hallows by The Tower Church in London to meet a woman Bishop who had come from USA. We not only met Bishop Mary from USA but also Bishop Kay from Perth, Australia. They were so nice and suggested how to embrace those not in favour with woman clergy or Woman Bishops. The two women Bishops had their photo taken with me and both of them wished me well for my Confirmation.

I have started making my Confirmation invitations. I have some icon cards that our woman Deacon gave me. They have Jesus and his friend on. My mum calls them the Colin and Mike cards as when she was young she knew two clergy with beards called Colin and Mike. The Deacon ordered 250 ember cards but received about 1700. She is keen to share them out.

I also think it nice for the congregation attending my confirmation to be given a memento of the day reminding them to pray for me. I have started making some crosses in plastic canvas with purple cross stitch on, then a piece of ribbon and a little laminated sign saying "Aidan's Confirmation 26/10/2010 – Pray For Me".

We heard from the Bishop confirming me that he thinks two readings and three hymns are fine. I have chosen *Shine Jesus Shine* as it is a lively, jolly hymn which I think is ideal for my Confirmation. *The Lord of Sea and Sky* was sung at my Baptism and is one of my favourites, and *You shall go out with joy* has an Israeli rhythm which is good for my Jewish friends to relate to.

This afternoon I accompanied my parents to a memorial service for a dead Vicar called Donald Barnes. I am pleased there was a photo of him in the Church as I did recognise him as a man I had seen at St Mary's Convent in Chiswick after his operation.

A woman priest gave a lecture which I now realise is much longer than a sermon. The second section was very interesting as she explained about her struggles as a Lesbian priest with a partner. I wonder what message the Church gives to non-Christians about God's love. I like to think that God's love is unending and that he loves woman as much as men, black people, Gay and Lesbians and even non-Christian people. The Anglican Church does support and welcome everybody.

The service was in Belsize Park and we had to drive through Camden which was amazing. I really miss London and all my non-white, non-Christian friends. The only people we see in Eastbourne are people with tattoos, hundreds of them, but I really miss the diversity of people that we shared life with in London.

This evening was the Parish Confirmation. The Bishop entered the Church in the procession wearing his rochet and chimere looking just like the Bishops I have seen in pictures at the last Lambeth Conference, but of course as expected NO MITRE! I was quite pleased not to be confirmed at this service. It was a bit awkward when the Bishop spoke to me after the Confirmation and said he thought he would be confirming me, then his wife said she had enjoyed the mini Simnel Cake I had given them at the area Lent course. I offered to make them a large Simnel Cake next year but they said they would be retired by then.

I was expecting the Church Wardens to carry their staves in the procession but they didn't. When we asked the lady Church Warden she didn't know anything about it, then she asked the Vicar. He told her he had forgotten to tell them. How absurd is that?

Several days after this confirmation I phoned the Bishop of Lewes and spoke to his secretary to ask if he would like me to make him a Simnel Cake or a Christmas Cake. She said she will phone me when she has spoken to the Bishop's wife. I'll have to see if I get a reply!

Yes! Today my secretary (mum) took a message from the Bishop's secretary to say the Bishop would like a Christmas cake. My mum is worried about me soaking the dried fruit in her Brandy!!!

Busy preparing for my Confirmation. Most people are coming. A couple from our old Church will be on holiday and sent me some money so that I could buy something that will remind me of them. My dad suggested I buy a bottle of Sherry and keep the bottle then I'd never forget George – he enjoys a daily glass or two of sherry.

WOW!! Today I went with my parents to the most amazing place – full of worship areas and HOLY Shops. It was Walsingham. We went in the Shrine and the Holy House and we saw Mary wearing a proper dress. I'd like to go again to see if Mary is wearing a different dress.

I went to a Pilgrim shop in the High Street and bought a crucifix to remember George and Catherine. I also saw 2 mitres in the shop.

Now home I have emailed the Pilgrim shop as I would quite like a real mitre. I have £25 towards it. My Dad said, "It is unusual to buy a Mitre before somebody has a date for their consecration and even stranger to buy one before they are ordained." I feel very independent and never really follow everyone else. So I may save up and buy the blue and white mitre. I think I'll always have to be an Anglican then as I really would like to be the Bishop of Durham so that I could be buried outside the Cathedral.

On Wednesday afternoon I had my Confirmation at St Mary's Convent in Chiswick. I wasn't nervous and so many, (about 60) turned up to support me. The Bishop who confirmed me was Edward Holland and during the homily he said that we should try to include all people

in the church so I took that to be women, gays and all sorts of people who could easily be forgotten or ignored in the community.

After my Confirmation I spent the next few days in a Jewish House with my best friend and her parents. I am sure Jesus would have been very proud of me.

Whipeee! Yes!!! At last I have had a letter published in the *Church Times*. I wrote after some Clergyman was questioning when the excessive entry charges at St Paul's Cathedral would cease. I suggested perhaps it would be when he fund raises a little for the Dean and Chapter, like I did for Chichester where the Dean refuses to allow the Chapter to charge an entrance fee.

I also heard today that my letter to The Church Times was read on the religious programme of Radio Sussex. As a family we attended the Diocesan consultation for a new Bishop of Chichester when Bishop John retires. I was the second person to speak and when I finished people applauded even though the Archdeacon of somewhere asked people not to. I think there were over a hundred people present but I didn't feel nervous as The Dean was sitting near the front and he smiled at me before I spoke.

I recently asked my parents to contact the local Catholic Priest asking if I could receive Communion at the school Mass. My parents heard today from Fr Raglan that the Bishop has said NO. I understand that the Priest has sworn obedience to the Bishop and the Bishop has sworn obedience to the Pope so now I am angry with the Pope. I think I will write to the Pope. I think I might ask my mum to take me out of school during School Mass and we could go for a hot chocolate.

I am so ALWAYS, FOREVER going to remain an Anglican. I have just had a letter from the local Roman Catholic Diocesan Bishop of Arundel and Brighton in reply to my email asking him to reconsider his decision not to allow me to have Communion at the School Mass. He has written the most outrageous things. He said some would say that only Catholics could be full members in a Roman Catholic School. Also he said that their Catholic understanding of Jesus' instructions to Peter ("On this rock I will build my Church") is that the Church was placed under the authority of the Pope, an argument that the Church of England formally rejected, so they don't know how Jesus feels here. He wrote that because I said Jesus would be sad that I was invited to communion then refused it at the Mass. I still believe I am right and that Bishop Katharine was so correct with her idea that Bishop Wallace would not be the last Bishop who I thought was wrong.