

Alpha and Omega

MEMORY VERSE: “I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” Revelations 22:13 (NRSV)

STUDY PLAN: To understand the importance of symbolism in the Christian Church and to seek for Jesus to be the beginning and end of everything you do.

To earn the Alpha and Omega badge, you will need to do the following:



Discern

Step 1: In Plain Sight My initials _____

The GFS program is based on **symbols**. Why are symbols important? A symbol reminds us of things unseen.

We are surrounded by symbols which represent something else. For example, the word “dog” is not a dog, but it stands for an animal that is a dog in the English language. A flag represents a country and all for which it stands. A ring often represents commitment. A handshake and kiss are also symbols. A handshake is a form of greeting that says, “I want to get to know you better.” A kiss is a symbol of affection or love.



Symbols have been an important part of Christianity from the beginning. In the Old Testament, prophets spoke of Jesus’ coming as the “Lamb of God” and “shepherd”. Jesus referred to himself as “the Bread of Life” and the “Light of the World”.

Symbols help Christians remember Jesus’ teachings. They remind us of things unseen. Symbols do not have special power in and of themselves, but they feed our minds and spirits. The Bible is a great source of word symbols which artists and all people use to create visual symbols.

Discuss

We live in a very visual age. Icons, memes, and symbols are everywhere to pass information along quickly. Discuss the symbols you use frequently, symbols you find confusing and symbols that only you and your friends understand. What symbols do you treasure the most? How do they help you?

Look at the picture of the stained-glass window to the left. How many symbols can you spot and identify the meaning?



Do It!

Play symbolic pictiography:

1. Give the girls an abstract noun, such as friendship, relaxation, time, danger.
2. Have each girl draw a symbol for the word.
3. When all have drawn their symbols, have them hold up their pictures.
4. Each person who comes up with a symbolic image gets 1 point.
5. Give 2 points to anyone who comes up with a unique image that is not replicated by the other groups.

Step 2: Our claim that Jesus is our Beginning and our End **My initials** _____



Discern

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last.

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When St. John the Divine, in the Book of Revelations, refers to Jesus as Alpha and Omega, he implies that nothing comes before Jesus and nothing comes after Jesus.

As Christians, we state in our creeds our belief that Jesus was truly human: born, lived and died in a particular place and time. We believe that he was raised by God from the dead to take a place of equality with God. And we believe that at the end of time Jesus will conclude our world with a final judgement in which he will be present and known.

In effect, we claim that the reconciling work of God, calling us to Him, extends from the moment of Creation to the final moment of life. Christ is at the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega.

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Discuss

St. John of the Cross wrote *Dark Night of the Soul* over 500 years ago. He describes the spiritual journey in three phases: beginners, progressives and perfect. To move out of the beginning stage, he argues, requires receiving God's gift of the dark night, or *the wall*. The wall is God's way of rewiring us so we might delight in his love and enter into a richer, fuller relationship with him. This is the way we grow in Christ.

Discuss some unhealthy imperfections which detour us from a path to trust and peace in God:

- **Pride** – being judgemental and impatient with the faults of others
- **Avarice** – being discontent with what we have
- **Luxury** – taking more pleasure in our spiritual blessing than in God himself
- **Wrath** – becoming easily irritated or impatient
- **Spiritual Envy** – comparing ourselves to others
- **Sloth** – running from what is hard

Discuss the first thing you do each morning and the last thing you do at night. What is it? What can you change about your habits to involve God at the beginning, end and during the course of your day?



Do any of the following:

1. Read **The New Covenant** on pages 850 to 851 in the Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer to gain a more advanced understanding of the New Covenant given by Jesus Christ.
2. Learn about the practice of the daily office as a part of Anglican spiritualism. See **Leader's List**.
3. For a week, participate in an online or private Morning and Evening Prayer to begin and end the day. Work with your leader or rector to understand how to use the BCP. Remember the BCP is available online!
4. For a week, read the Order of Compline or participate in an online service. Take to heart the readings and prayers as you settle for the night. It is on page 127 of the BCP.



Step 3: Church Architecture and Symbolism of The Way

My initials _____

Churches incorporate a great deal of symbolism in their architecture. Have you ever wondered why there is a central aisle or why the musicians are off to the side or in the back of the church? Have you noticed that the baptismal font is placed by the entrance? Do you know why these are consistent features in churches?

When you enter a church, one of the first things you notice is the long, straight aisle from end to end. Sometimes people wonder why the best seating area is left open. This is done for a very important symbolic purpose. The baptismal font is near the beginning of the aisle, representative that one gains admission to the Christian life through baptism. The altar is always at the end of the aisle, representative of God's spiritual presence. The center aisle is a parable of the Way of Life, reaching from birth to the throne of God. Christianity is a way of life. It is the work of the Church to keep open the way that leads to God and to help travelers on the journey. The Christian has a definite goal.



That is why the center aisle is always kept open. The lectern is on one side, the pulpit on the other. Neither of them is in the middle because neither of them is the goal of the Way of Life. The altar is the goal – to be in God’s spiritual presence. A similar reasoning places the instruments and the choir on either side of the aisle or at the rear of the church. Music helps a traveler on the way; it is not presented for entertainment.

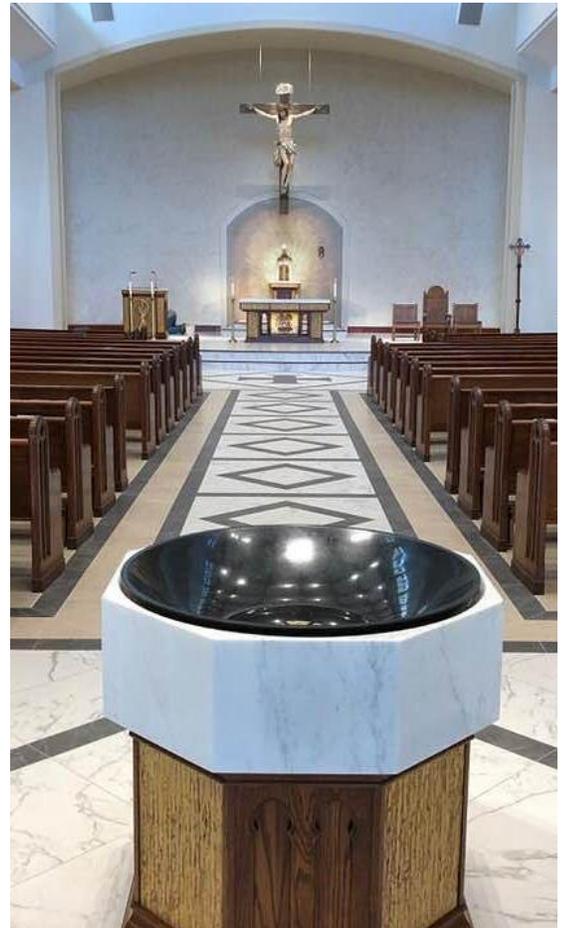
The nave is the main part of the church where the congregation sits. The word nave means a ship and reminds us of the Ark in which people found refuge from the destroying flood. The vaulted ceiling of the church reminds us of the shape of the hull of a ship. Again, these are reminders that we are all on a journey.



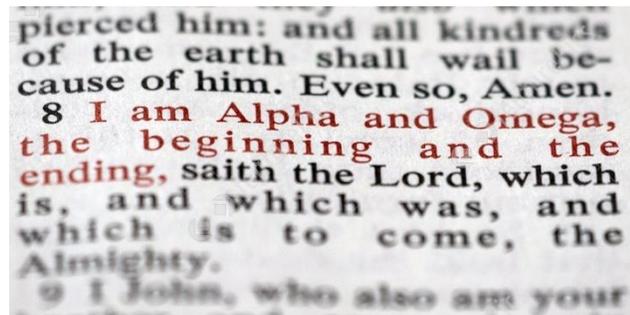
Write a prayer to reflect your desire to follow The Way and your thoughts of God as your Alpha and Omega.

As an example, here is a prayer of Thomas Merton:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. AMEN



The baptismal font is at the beginning of The Way, leading to the spiritual presence of God – the altar.



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Leader's List

From *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church* by Armentrout and Slocum, found at <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/daily-office>

What is the Daily Office?

Use of daily prayers to mark the times of the day and to express the traditions of the praying community is traditional in Judaism and in Christianity. The third, sixth, and ninth hours (9 a.m., 12 noon, and 3 p.m.) were times of private prayer in Judaism.

The congregational or cathedral form of office developed in Christianity under Constantine (274 or 288-337) with the principal morning and evening services of **lauds** and **vespers**. The people participated in the cathedral form of office.

The monastic form of office also developed at this time. In addition to lauds and vespers, the monastic form included **matins** (at midnight or cockcrow), **prime** (the first hour), **terce** (the third hour), **sext** (the sixth hour), **none** (the ninth hour), and **compline** (at bedtime). By the late middle ages, the Daily Office was seen as the responsibility of the monks and clergy rather than an occasion for participation by all in the prayers of the community throughout the day.

After the Anglican Reformation, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) reduced the eight monastic offices to the two services of **Morning** and **Evening Prayer**. These services were printed in vernacular English and intended for use by all members of the church. *Participation in the Daily Office is at the heart of Anglican spirituality.* It is the proper form of daily public worship in the church.

In addition to forms for Daily Morning Prayer and Daily Evening Prayer in contemporary and traditional language, the BCP section for the Daily Office includes forms for **Noonday Prayer, Order of Worship for the Evening, Compline, and Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families.**

These offices include prayers, a selection from the Psalter, readings from the Holy Scriptures, one or more canticles, and the Lord's Prayer. Forms for Morning and Evening Prayer include an optional confession of sin. The BCP provides a Daily Office Lectionary that identifies readings and psalm choices for Morning and Evening Prayer (pp. 936-1001), and a Table of Canticles with suggested canticles for use at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer (pp. 144-145).

The officiant in the Daily Office may be a member of the clergy or a lay person.