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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:  
RELIGION IN ANGUILLA**

By Clifton L. Holland, Director of PROLADES

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**PROLADES**

Apartado 1524-2050, San Pedro, Costa Rica  
Telephone (506) 2283-8300; FAX (506) 2234-7682  
Internet: <http://www.prolades.com/>  
E-Mail: [prolades@racsa.co.cr](mailto:prolades@racsa.co.cr)



## Religion in Anguilla

### Country Summary

Anguilla, the most northerly of the Leeward Islands, is located southeast of Puerto Rico in the northeasterly area of the Caribbean Sea. It is a British Dependent Territory, having separated from St. Kitts in 1980. Although known from the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Europeans, Anguilla (together with the associated Sombrero Island) was unattractive for settlement due to limited fresh water reserves, and only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did the population begin to increase. Among its few assets are extensive salt deposits.

Today, there are about 11,560 (2001) residents on less than 40 sq. miles of land. The main island of Anguilla is approximately 26 km (16 mi) long by 5 km (3.1 mi) wide at its widest point, together with a number of much smaller islands and cays with no permanent population.



Beginning in 1916, Anguilla was administered as part of a British colony including the Virgin Islands and St. Kitts. The former separated in 1871. In the 1960s, Anguillians agitated against both their continued colonial status and their ties to St. Kitts, but their autonomy was not fully accomplished until 1980. The capital of Anguilla is The Valley with 1,169 residents in 2001. Anguillians were highly religious, which accounted for their great opposition to casino gambling proposals in the 1980s.

Anguilla is known as a quiet, peaceful island, with miles and miles of white sand beaches, all ringed by crystal clear waters. Anguilla is mostly flat land, with the highest point (Crocus Hill) only 213 ft. above sea level. There are no rivers or streams, and the average high temperature is near 80°. Tourism is the major industry, and visitors (many coming to scuba dive), arrive by air, while some take one of the convenient ferries linking Anguilla with Marigot on St. Martin, its nearest neighbor to the south.

Most residents are the descendants of the Negro slaves brought from Africa, but there are some white people who descended from a party of Irishmen who landed on the island in 1698, along with a few expatriates from the USA, Canada and the United Kingdom. Demographically, in 2001, 90.1 percent of the population was black/Negro, 3.7 percent was white/Caucasian, those of mixed race were 4.6 percent, and other races were 1.6 percent (2001 census).

About 72 percent of the population is native Anguillian, while 28 percent are mostly citizens of the USA, the United Kingdom, St. Kitts & Nevis, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Nigeria. During 2006 and 2007, there was an influx of Chinese, Asian Indian and Mexican workers who were contracted as laborers for major tourist developments.

### **Current Status of Religious Affiliation**

According to the 2001 census (Anguilla Statistics Office), Christianity was Anguilla's predominant religion, with 29 percent of the population claiming to be Anglican adherents (was 40.4 percent in 1992), 23.9 percent were Methodist (was 33.2 percent in 1992), and other groupings included Pentecostal (7.7 percent), Seventh-day Adventist (7.6 percent – was 7.0 percent in 1992), Church of God (7.6 percent), Baptist (7.3 percent – was 4.7 percent in 1992), Roman Catholic (5.7 percent – was 3.2 percent in 1992), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.7 percent), Evangelical (0.5 percent), Christian Brethren (0.3 percent), Presbyterian (0.2 percent), and others (0.2 percent).

Also present were Rastafarians (0.7 percent), Hindus (0.4), Muslims (0.3 percent), and Jews (0.1 percent). Other religions/not stated were 3.8 percent, and those claiming no religious affiliation were 4.0 percent.

### **Overview of Social, Political and Economic Development**

The Dutch built a small fort on Anguilla in 1631. However, Anguilla was first colonized by English settlers from Saint Kitts, beginning in 1650. The French temporarily took control of the island in 1666, but under the Treaty of Breda it was returned to the English. In this early colonial period, Anguilla sometimes served as a place of refuge. A Major John Scott who visited in September of 1667 wrote of leaving the island "in good condition" and noted that, in July 1668, "200 or 300 people fled thither in time of war." Other early arrivals included Europeans from Antigua and Barbados.

It is likely that some of these early Europeans brought enslaved Africans with them. Historians confirm that African slaves lived in the region in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Africans from Senegal lived on St. Christopher (today St. Kitts) in 1626. By 1672, a slave depot existed on the island of Nevis, which served the Leeward Islands. While the time of African arrival in Anguilla is difficult to place precisely, archival evidence indicates a substantial African presence (at least 100) on the island by 1683. West Africa as well as Central Africa are both considered to be the ancestral homelands of some of Anguilla's early African population.

During the early colonial period, Anguilla was administered by the British Government based at Antigua, but in 1824 it was placed under the administrative control of nearby Saint Kitts. In 1967, Britain granted Saint Kitts and Nevis full internal autonomy, and Anguilla was also incorporated

into the new unified dependency, named Saint Christopher-Nevis-Anguilla, against the wishes of many Anguillians. This led to two rebellions in 1967 and 1969), headed by Ronald Webster, and to a brief period as a self-declared independent republic. British authority was fully restored in July 1971.

In 1980, Anguilla was finally allowed to secede from Saint Kitts and Nevis and become a separate internally self-governing British colony (now termed a British Overseas Territory). Its politics take place in a framework of a parliamentary representative democratic dependency and of a pluriform multi-party system. Anguilla's major political parties are the Anguilla United Front (composed of the Anguilla National Alliance and the Anguilla Democratic Party), the Anguilla United Movement and the Anguilla Progressive Party.

The Chief Minister is the head of government. **Hubert Benjamin Hughes** was the island territory's Chief Minister from 16 March 1994 to 6 March 2000, and he has held that post again since February 2010. **William Alistair Harrison** has been Governor of Anguilla since 21 April 2009.

The United Nations Committee on Decolonization includes Anguilla on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. The territory's constitution is the Anguilla Constitutional Order 1 April 1982 (amended 1990). Executive power is exercised by the government. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the House of Assembly, which has 11 members: seven members are elected for a five-year term in single-seat constituencies, two are ex officio members and two are nominated members. The Judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature.

Anguilla's thin arid soil is largely unsuitable for agriculture, and the island has few land-based natural resources. Its main industries are tourism, offshore incorporation and management, offshore banking, and fishing. Many insurance and financial businesses are headquartered in Anguilla.

The economy of Anguilla is expanding rapidly, especially the tourism sector, which is driving major new developments in partnerships with multi-national companies. This boom began in 2005–2006, accelerated through 2007, and is expected to continue for many years.

The economy, and especially the tourism sector, suffered a setback in late 1995 due to the effects of Hurricane Luis in September but recovered in 1996. Hotels were hit particularly hard during this time. Another economic setback occurred during the aftermath of Hurricane Lenny in 2000

## **Overview of Religious Development**

Most people in the Leeward Islands consider themselves Christians, although the faith of many is nominal. It is estimated that over half the population of Anguilla does not attend church regularly. The most prominent denominations are the Anglican (about 40 percent of the population) and Methodist Churches (about 24 percent of the population).

**The Church of England (Anglican)** was established on Anguilla at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the British Methodists arrived in 1813. The great majority of the islanders are members of

one of these two churches. The Anglican parishes are now part of the **Church of the Province of the West Indies** and the Methodist churches of the **Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas**; both headquartered in Antigua. The **Roman Catholic Church** established a parish in 1850, which is now part of the Diocese of Saint John's (Antigua).

Other denominations (about 14 percent of the population) that arrived during the 20<sup>th</sup> century are the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), the Church of God (Holiness), the Church of the Apostolic Faith, the Church of God of Prophecy (The Valley, West End and South Hill), the Christian Fellowship Church, the Central Baptist Church, Faith Evangelical Outreach, Gospel Halls (Christian Brethren), the Pilgrim Holiness/Wesleyan Holiness Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Other Religions**

**Marginal Christian:** Jehovah's Witnesses (Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society) reported two churches with about 60 members in 2008.

**Myalism and Obeah** are reportedly practiced in secret by some Anguillans, especially those who are not active members of Christian churches. *Myalism* is an African-derived belief system that developed among blacks in the British West Indies during the slavery period; *Obeah* is the specific practice of "black magic" or witchcraft by priests, known as "obeahmen."

From 1825 to 1967, the laws of St Kitts were in force in Anguilla. In the latter year Anguilla "seceded" from St. Kitts but remained a dependency of Britain. By 1978, Anguilla had introduced various statutes that were germane specifically to Anguilla, and had dropped various provisions that had been inherited from the St. Kitts legal code, including the anti-Obeah provision in the Small Charges Act. Today in Anguilla, the practice of Obeah per se is not illegal although people can be prosecuted if they engage in what are considered fraudulent practices.

**Rastafarians.** Although a minority on the island, the Rastafarians (0.7 percent in 2001, about 80 persons) are proud that Anguilla is the birthplace of Robert Athlyi Rogers, author of *The Holy Piby* – written between 1913 and 1917 and published in 1924 – which has had a strong influence on Rastafarian beliefs.

The total **Hindu** population of Anguilla was about 45 persons, according to the census of 2001. Virtually all were recent immigrants from India. The **Muslim** population totaled about 35 people in 2001. There were only about 10 **Jews** on Anguilla in 2001.

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