



## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN EPISCOPALIAN

An Episcopalian is a person who belongs to the Episcopal\* Church.

The Episcopal Church is:

- A member of Anglican Communion
- Derived from the Church of England and shares with it traditions of faith and order as set forth in its Book of Common Prayer
- One whose traditions include attitudes that are Protestant and Catholic, ancient and reformed, liberal and conservative.

The earliest settlers brought the Anglican faith to the American wilderness. It spread rapidly as the country expanded westward.

Today, there are between 1 and 2 million members in the U.S.

\*“Episcopal” means “governed by bishops.”

## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IS A CHURCH WITH FEW “MUSTS”

Pointing out and dictating the response to God.

Episcopalians find the fullest expression of Christianity in:

- **The Scriptures**—the Word of God at work among us. See page 4.
- **Creeds**—ancient summaries of Christian belief. See page 6.
- **Sacraments**—signs of grace, ordained by Christ. See pages 8 and 9.
- **Ministry**—the orders of ordained ministries. See pages 10-11.

## FOUNDATION OF FAITH

There are 3 basic sources of Episcopal Church beliefs:

- Holy Scripture (the primary source of doctrine)
- Reason (gifts of the Holy Spirit)
- Church tradition (wisdom of generations past).

### **1. Holy Scripture—written by people inspired by the Holy Spirit.**

The Old and New Testaments contain the essence of Christian doctrine. They reveal God to humankind and tell our response to God in history. The Bible helps us to know God’s will, revealed supremely through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Scriptures are in Word of God, proclaiming that Jesus—both God and human being—is Christ, the Messiah.

### **2. Reason—helping us to penetrate the full depths of God’s truth.**

The Episcopal Church does not control interpretation and practice. Instead, members are encouraged to:

- Use reason to explore and comprehend God’s works
- Make responsible moral decisions under the guidance of Scripture, the ordained ministry and in response to sincere prayer

### **3. Church tradition—development of the Church under the Holy Spirit’s guidance.**

Tradition helps us to:

- Interpret Scripture
- Share experiences of early Christians and believers of every era



- Preserve hymns and prayers that keep our faith alive
- Strengthen our faith

Through its continuity and consistency, tradition helps preserve essential truths through liturgy.

## BASIC EPISCOPAL CHURCH BELIEFS

Interpretation of the faith varies somewhat from parish to parish, but resides within the framework of these basic guidelines:

### The Holy Trinity

- God is 3 persons in one.
- God the Creator--infinite, good, omnipotent
- God the Son--the joyous union of both God and human being, whose life, death and resurrection set us free from bondage to sin and death
- God the Holy Spirit-- God's power of love moving within us in mysterious and unexpected ways.

**Salvation-** every Christian should witness to Christ's sacrifice and express the living truth of this sacrifice to the world (evangelism).

- the end of our separation from God; the beginning of a new life, lived according to God's will.
- gained by us because of Christ's sacrifice.

**Creeds**-summarize the Christian faith. They clearly express our faith in the Holy Trinity

- **Apostles' Creed**-creed of the early Roman Church, dating from the 2nd century
- **Nicene Creed**-Eastern in origin, dating from the 4th century
- **Athanasian Creed**-sometimes called the "Quicunque Vult," meaning "whoever wishes" in Latin

**The Church**-the people of God. All baptized people are the members. The Church is:

- **One**-one body under one head, Christ
- **Holy**-the Holy Spirit dwells in it and its members
- **Catholic**-universal; holding the faith for all time, everywhere, for everybody
- **Apostolic**-continuing in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship

### Worship

- a joyous response to God's love
- an expression of hope for Salvation
- a chance to praise God and receive strength and forgiveness
- a way to share faith with other believers

## HOW EPISCOPALIANS WORSHIP

The Episcopal Church is liturgical. This means it has formal rites for public worship (drawn from past ages as well as from the present).



Episcopalians use 3 central texts:

- **Bible**-read throughout the Church year
- **Book of Common Prayer**-contains calendar of Church year, services and prayers
- **Hymnal**-contains hymns and chants.

The texts vary little from parish to parish. Services may vary greatly, from very plain services to those with great ceremony and splendor.

## **THE SACRAMENTS** are living signs of spiritual grace.

**The 2 Sacraments of the Gospel**-these sacraments were instituted and ordained by Jesus:

### **Baptism**-*initiation into the family of God.*

Baptism is administered once to each person-usually as an infant. Water is poured on the head or the child is immersed in water, to symbolize the washing away of sins. The Holy Trinity is called upon to strengthen the new Church member. Baptism is a pledge of repentance and obedience to divine will. It's a sign that a person has been reborn into a new family, the Church.

### **Holy Eucharist**-*remembrance of, and praise and thanksgiving for, Christ's death and resurrection.*

In Holy Communion, ordinary bread and wine become the sacramental vehicle for Jesus Christ's presence within his people, as he promised. When receiving Communion, Episcopalians offer themselves to God in repentance, love and faith-and recall Jesus' death, acknowledge his sacrifice and renew hope in the heavenly banquet.

### **Sacramental Rites:**

#### **Penance**

This rite involves sorrow for sinning, with a sincere desire to amend one's life. A priest gives assurance of God's forgiveness through absolution. Sinners reconcile with the Creator.

#### **Confirmation**

Conferred by a bishop, confirmation strengthens the commitment made to Christ at Baptism. It gives Christians courage to witness Christ in the world and to selflessly serve each other.

#### **Ordination**

This rite consecrates Christians in service to God. Spiritual power and grace are given to help them devote their lives to the good of the community-teaching, administering sacraments, governing the Church.

#### **Matrimony**

The rite of marriage is when God joins together two people in physical and spiritual union.



## Ministry of Healing

This is a continuation of Christ's work among the sick. It involves "laying on of hands," anointing with oil and praying for physical and spiritual health.

Through the Sacraments and sacramental rites, God sustains the life of the Church and gives us the love and strength we need to live with Christ.

## THE ORDERS OF ORDINATED MINISTRY

**Bishops** are part of an unbroken line that may be traced back to the early Church commissioned by Jesus. Bishops are spiritual overseers of their dioceses (groups of parishes or missions), which elected them to office.

Bishops:

- act as counselors to clergy
- ordain priests and deacons
- consecrate other bishops
- administer Confirmation
- are final counselors in Church matters

Together bishops share responsibility for the welfare of the Church.

**Priests** must meet high standards of personal integrity and judgment. Priests are parish leaders. The full scope of their duties covers every pastoral, spiritual and educational activity. Priests celebrate the Eucharist, baptize, pronounce absolution and perform many other duties.

To enter the ordained ministry, a candidate (male or female) usually must:

- have a college degree
- be physically and psychologically qualified
- be recommended by the parish vestry, priest, and diocesan ministries commission

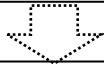
**Deacons** are an order of special ministry of servanthood. Deacons assist priests in public worship and parish work, or minister (under a bishop's supervision) in missions or unorganized parishes. They serve those in need, especially the poor, the weak and the sick. They cannot perform sacramental acts of the priesthood, but they can assist bishops and priests in the administration of the sacraments.

**Religious orders** consist of men and women who voluntarily take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Most monks and nuns live in communities. Some are active in the world. Emphasis is on a life of prayer, but members also perform social, medical and educational duties, as well as religious ones.

## STRUCTURE OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### Bishop

- presides over diocese
- is assisted by Standing Committee and councils of priests and laypeople.



### Diocese (group of parishes)

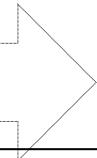
#### In a parish:

- the **rector** (priest)\* presides over the parish. The rector is elected by the parish, subject to the bishop's approval.
- the **vestry** consists of parishioners elected to be the agents and legal representatives of the parish in matters of property and relations to the clergy.
- the **laypeople** are also ministers of the Church. They take part in Church services and in its teaching mission.

\***The rector of a mission** is the bishop, who appoints a vicar to represent him or her.

The Episcopal Church is a democratic church with a system of government resembling that of the United States.

*Parishes elect lay delegates to ...*



### National General Convention

Clergy and lay delegates take part in this, the highest legislative body in the Episcopal Church. It provides guidelines for the faith, and for the whole Church in programs of Christian education, evangelism and social action. It consists of:

- the House of Bishops
- the House of Deputies



### Annual diocesan convention

- presided over by a bishop
- lay delegates and clergy conduct the Church's business in the geographic area of the diocese.

**ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY** has a primacy of honor throughout the Anglican Communion. However, every national Church within it is self-governing.

**Presiding Bishop, chief pastor, and Primate** is the chief bishop of the Episcopal Church, but not an archbishop or pope.

*The Book of Common Prayer says that private worship alone is inadequate. Religion is a fellowship. You relate to the whole Church through your parish-your local church community.*



## **GETTING INVOLVED IN YOUR PARISH HELPS YOU GROW** as a Christian witness and as a person.

### **Participate in church services:**

- Pray and work together.
- Share your faith through Christian education.

### **Participate in community work:**

- Perform acts of charity
- Work for social justice and reform, and Christian unity on a personal, day-to-day basis
- Spread the Good Word to people in the world community

### **Through giving of yourself, you can:**

- **strengthen** yourself and your beliefs by helping others
- **fulfill** spiritual needs
- **learn** more about the mystery of God, and how God shares love with us
- **answer** some of life's questions, in responding to the needs of others
- **better understand** how to keep your daily life in tune with your search for salvation
- **bring a sign of salvation** to people outside the community

### **Being an Episcopalian** means striving to fulfill Christ's mission of redemption by:

- following God's commandments
- raising children in Christ's love
- getting involved in your parish
- actively participating in the world through Christ in the Church.

"The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God."  
*The Book of Common Prayer, An Outline of the Faith.*