

WHAT IS THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH??

Sometimes visitors ask us this question. The word “Episcopal” comes from the Greek word *episcopoi*, and it means, simply, “bishop”. So, the Episcopal Church is a church that includes the ministry of bishops.

However, there is so much more to us than that! The Episcopal Church is the American member of the Anglican Communion, a worldwide network of churches that looks to the Archbishop of Canterbury as our point of unity. Our historical roots and our belief in scripture and the sacraments take us back to the most ancient days of Christianity.

When the Church of England broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in the 15th Century, the Anglican Communion had its formal beginnings.

Seeking to be a *via media* (“middle way”), the Anglican Church intentionally chose to retain the ancient rites, liturgical seasons, three-fold ministry of bishops, deacons, and priests, and the sacramental celebrations that are all a part of ancient Christianity. However, available to the laity, celebrating prayer in the native language of those gathered, and independence from the papacy. As time went on, the Anglican Church spread throughout the world.

In the United States, the name for our Church (Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America) was chosen to reflect a very deliberate stance of the new independence of a nation free from British rule. As you can imagine, the term “Anglican” would not have been a popular one during the days of the American Revolution!

What are the strengths of the Episcopal Church? There are several:

- † We believe in the primacy of the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God.
- † We remain connected with ancient Christianity and its celebrations, seasons, sacraments, and sense of the sacred.
- † Although rooted in an ancient tradition, we are also open to and believe in the necessity of being in dialogue with the world. We encourage and support strong, independent thinking! Our unity is in Christ. In most other things, we are quite diverse. We find ourselves all over the spectrum in terms of our views on a host of subjects. We do not demand conformity of thought, but we do insist on respect for others and a willingness to see others as a divine child of our loving God.
- † All baptized Christians are welcome to receive Holy Communion at our altar table. We believe that the Eucharist is not about personal worthiness, or agreement about all aspects of church governance. We believe the Eucharist to be God’s gift, and so we believe it is to be shared.

If you are looking for a church home, we hope that you will come and pray with us again. We’d love to tell you more about St. Mary’s, what brought us here, and what keeps us here.



A LITTLE LESSON IN OUR LITURGY

Not long ago some people, visiting an Episcopal church for the first time, expressed frustration because they felt they had no idea what we were “doing.” They really wanted to “be with” us but were not sure how to do that. So perhaps a bit of explanation will help us to help those who come to visit. Kneel? Sit? Stand? This is a well-known point of confusion for many people. Part of that confusion comes from the fact that practically nothing is written in stone. Anglicans/Episcopalians can make choices about how they worship.

Here is one way to explain it: “**KNEEL to pray - SIT to learn - STAND to sing.**” ... *Why?*

KNEEL to Pray: Maybe in the old days most people thought of prayer as being something mostly confessional--so we all knelt as a symbol of penitence or to receive blessings or Eucharist. Today, many still kneel for confession.

SIT to learn: Just as we sit for the “announcements,” we sit to hear the Word proclaimed by a lector/reader, and to hear the preacher identify specific points to remember about what was read. Think of it as “just like being in school.”

STAND to Sing: Now that one is easy! When one stands, one can breathe more easily and can, therefore, sing God’s praises with more gusto.

SO... why do we see some people stand while at the same time others kneel or sit? Because we are Episcopalians—and this church allows individuals to consider what seems best or most appropriate at any given time. As long as we know why we do what we do, we will be able to be respectful of God, and of those gathered with us in our corporate worship.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS -- and you still don’t know what to do--look at what the priest is doing. If the priest kneels, you would do well to kneel. If the priest sits be comfortable.

MOST IMPORTANTLY -- pray with us in the way that suits you best!

May God bless you!

Please Join Us again!