

## **WHAT DO EPISCOPALIANS BELIEVE?**

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While many Christian traditions were formed over sharp doctrinal issues our tradition was shaped more by our way of worship and structure. So we do not have a ‘confession of faith’ or a catechism that has historic roots that defines who we are.

Our Book of Common Prayer defines us more than anything. It does contain a catechism adopted in 1979, but we don’t relate to it like Lutherans would look to Luther’s Larger or Smaller Catechism.

We are a credal church, stating our belief in God either through the Nicene Creed or the Apostles’ Creed almost every Sunday.

During a period of strong Puritanism the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion were adopted by the British Parliament and with minor adaptations the American Church adopted them in 1801 and published them in all of the editions of the Book of Common Prayer through 1928.

The 1968 Lambeth Conference (the Bishops of all the Anglican Communion) suggested that the Articles should be considered for removal from the various national editions of the Book of Common Prayer. It suggested that where the Articles continued to be included in the Book of Common Prayer they needed to be understood “in the context of a statement which gives the full range of our inheritance of faith and sets the Articles in their historical context”.

When the Episcopal Church revised and adopted the 1979 Book of Common Prayer it included the Articles as an historical document.

## **THE BIBLE**

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Our church uses a three year lectionary (assigned Bible readings) that reveals the story of God in creation, the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the promise of the Holy Spirit’s continued presence with us.

Week by week, we are formed by the holy scripture we hear and proclaim. The lectionary is the primary curriculum of our Church.

## **HOW DO EPISCOPALIANS MAKE DECISIONS?**

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A self supporting congregation in the Diocese of Pennsylvania has a Rector, Wardens, and a Vestry. A Rector is chosen by a process that includes suggestions from the Bishop, a call from the Vestry, and approval by the Bishop.

The Vestry is chosen by the people and shares in making the decisions of the congregation with the Rector

A Diocese (a geographic jurisdiction) is presided over by a Bishop and is governed by the Bishop and the Diocesan Convention that meets annually. At convention the clergy each have one vote, and the lay delegation from each congregation each has one vote.

There are several types of Bishop. The head Bishop of a diocese is called the Diocesan Bishop. The Diocesan Bishop is chosen by a process that requires election by the diocesan convention where a majority of the clergy and a majority of the lay delegations agreed on the same person and then the other dioceses in the American church must give their consent to the election.

A Presiding Bishop represents and serves (not rule or command) the national church.

## **THE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY**

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What we call the national Episcopal Church is officially an organization called **The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society**. It is governed by a General Convention which normally meets every three years. The General Convention has two divisions: the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies.

A House of Bishops is composed of all the Bishops. It meets independently of the Deputies between General Conventions for pastoral issues.

The House of Deputies is also a bi-cameral body made up of deputations of four clergy and four laity from each diocese. The four people in each group decide how to cast their one clergy vote or one lay vote. They vote *yes*, *divided*, or *no* on legislation.

An Executive Council is elected by the General Convention and regional divisions called *Provinces* to deal with administrative issues between conventions.

The House of Bishops, the General Convention, and Executive Council are presided over by The Presiding Bishop. The Presiding Bishop is elected for a nine year term by and from the House of Bishops; the House of Deputies must give approval to the election. The elected bishop resigns from his/her diocesan office to preside over the national church.

The Presiding Bishop and national church staff have offices in New York City and the Presiding Bishop shares the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul (the National Cathedral) with the Bishop of Washington, DC.

# The Episcopal Church



*We are a community of Christian people seeking to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves.*

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## **WELCOME**

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We are glad that you are interested in learning more about the Episcopal Church. Trinity Church is a congregation of the Episcopal Church. We are a part of the American branch of the 73 million member world wide Anglican Communion which is the third largest group of Christians in the world. *Episcopal* comes from a Greek word that means *overseer* or *bishop*. A bishop is the chief pastor of a geographic area called a diocese. *Anglican* indicates our tradition has its roots in the English church.

## **CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN**

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Christianity arrived so early in Britain that we have few records to document its beginnings. You are invited to read *A Short History of the Church in England*, a companion piece to this brochure where we have captured some basic pieces of the story of our Anglican history.

## **ANGLICANS IN AMERICA**

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Our church permanently came to America in 1607 with the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia. Anglican worship had been first held in San Francisco Bay in 1579 on board Francis Drake's ship.

New England was settled by dissenters from the Church of England. Although Kings Chapel (Anglican) was built in Boston in 1689, New England was not originally a welcome place for Anglicans and our church struggled to take root there.

Whereas, the colonies of the South, Maryland through Georgia, were at one time or another 'established church' (Anglican) colonies. They tended to have less elaborate worship, strong relationship with the local government, and strong lay leadership in their vestries.

The Anglican Church in the "northern" colonies was characterized by more formal worship, a strong sense of clerical authority, and hostility towards non-episcopal churches.

A controversy about the appointment of bishops for America embittered relations among Anglicans, and between Anglicans and non-Anglicans, before the Revolutionary War.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) founded in England (1701) supported the missionary work in the colonies. In Pennsylvania they established congregations as far west as Lancaster.

During the Revolutionary War our church suffered due to anti-English sentiment although many church members supported the revolution. About a quarter of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Episcopalians as were over half of the signers of the Constitution.

The Rev. William White, the rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia, (later to be the first Bishop of Pennsylvania) was the chaplain to the Continental Congress.

## **CREATION OF THE AMERICAN EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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After the Revolution the churches formed dioceses in each of the colonies. Connecticut was the first to elect a bishop, Samuel Seabury. He was consecrated by the bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church. The Scottish bishops were not a part of the established state church and did not swear allegiance to the monarch.

Following the organization of the General Convention at Christ Church, Philadelphia in October 1785, the British Parliament removed the requirement of an oath of allegiance to the king and the Church of England consecrated Bishops William White for Pennsylvania, Samuel Provoost for New York, and James Madison for Virginia.

In 1789 the General Convention became bicameral with the creation of the House of Bishops. In 1792 the four bishops consecrated John Claggett, Bishop of Maryland, uniting the successions of the Scottish and English bishops.

Today there are 80 domestic dioceses that minister to the spiritual needs of 2.5 million Episcopalians in the United States.

## **THE MINISTRY**

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The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priest, and deacons.

The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

*~ from the Catechism*

## **THE SACRAMENTS**

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The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.

Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.

The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again.

*~ from the Catechism*

## **DIocese OF PENNSYLVANIA**

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We are a part of the Diocese of Pennsylvania. Originally covering the whole Commonwealth, four additional dioceses have been created within the state. The Diocese of Pennsylvania today encompasses the counties of Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery. Our cathedral is located on 38<sup>th</sup> Street between Market

and Chestnut in Philadelphia. The office of the Bishop and diocesan staff is located at 4<sup>th</sup> and Locust.

There are 160 congregations in this diocese. This diocese is divided into deaneries. We are a part of the Montgomery Deanery that includes 13 congregations in eastern Montgomery County.

The diocese has just begun a new camp ministry at Camp Wapiti on the Chesapeake Bay near North East, Maryland.

## **EPISCOPAL COMMUNITY SERVICES**

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ECS, the social service agency of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, has continuously served people of all faiths for over 130 years.

Every day Episcopal Community Services:

- ✠ Feeds 75 homebound elderly people
- ✠ Gives shelter to 105 homeless women and children
- ✠ Provides a loving home to more than 100 foster children, many with special medical needs
- ✠ Makes 100 home visits to the frail and the sick
- ✠ Provides a safe place to more than 100 young people through after-school programs
- ✠ Comforts those in prisons, nursing homes and hospitals throughout the region

Urban Bridges of ECS provides educational programs for youth and adults in the Olney, Logan, Feltonville and Hunting Park sections of Philadelphia.

See *Trinity's Outreach Programs* brochure to see additional ways to serve Christ through the ministry of our congregation.