

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FAITH OF OUR CHURCH

The Episcopal Church in the United States is a true part of the one Church of Jesus Christ, which he established by his death and resurrection, empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and through which God works for the redemption of all creation. Members of the Episcopal Church, like all Christians everywhere, follow Jesus Christ, confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share in his eternal priesthood.

The Episcopal Church is a daughter of the Church of England and, together with churches in other nations around the world which share that heritage, is a part of what is called the Anglican Communion. Each national Church within this fellowship is independent of the others in matters of local governance and discipline, but all share a common heritage, a common understanding of Christian tradition and worship, the same creeds, sacraments, and ministry. They look to the Archbishop of Canterbury as the spiritual head and symbol of unity for the entire Communion. Although the Archbishop has no governing authority beyond his own Church of England, his moral and spiritual authority is taken very seriously throughout the worldwide Communion.

Members of the Episcopal Church are generally called “Episcopalians.” Members of any Anglican Church, including Episcopalians, can be called “Anglicans”.

Anglican Christians accept the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as “containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith. The apocryphal books of the Old Testament – which appear in the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, but not in the Hebrew Bible – are used and read in our churches, but are not used, as Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians do, to establish any doctrine.

The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, ancient summaries of the Christian faith coming to us from the time of the undivided Catholic Church, are received as sufficient statements of the Christian faith. The Apostles’ Creed, used in the Church’s daily worship, is especially associated with the profession of faith made by candidates for Holy Baptism. The Nicene Creed, recited during the Eucharist on feast days, proclaims the Trinitarian faith of Christians throughout the world and throughout the ages.

The sacraments ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are considered essential to Christian life and worship within our tradition. Holy Baptism can be administered at any age, and the sharing of the sacramental Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Communion takes place within the service of the Holy Eucharist, the Church’s chief act of worship on Sundays and Holy Days. Other sacramental rites are recognized and used in our Church, but are not considered necessary for all persons in the same way that Baptism and the Eucharist are.

The Episcopal Church considers all baptized persons to be ministers, with the duty and privilege of witnessing to Jesus Christ and to serving others in his name. Some Christians are called to the ordained ministries of bishops, priests, and deacons, to serve the Church by teaching, governing, celebrating the sacraments, providing pastoral care, and in servant ministry to the world. This threefold ministry preserves and continues the apostolic ministry empowered by Christ himself, and transmitted in unbroken succession from the time of the Apostles. It is the same ministry shared by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and certain other bodies within Christ’s universal Church.

The Anglican Communion believes that all truth comes from God, and that new knowledge, if true, can only help our understanding of God, no matter whence it comes. We do not see conflict between “science” and “religion”. In the interpretation of Scripture, we believe that the eternal spiritual truths it presents are not compromised by confessing that sometimes its statements regarding such things as sickness or the nature of the universe were limited by the understanding of its human authors. We believe that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the proper interpreter of Scripture, and that this process continues from generation to generation.

Our Church believes passionately that a living Christian faith must show itself in reaching out to others, particularly to those in any way disadvantaged or oppressed, sick, or in need. This is not an option for Christians, either individually or corporately. Therefore our Church has always been involved, locally and nationally, in issues which concern people's welfare. The civil rights movement has been such an issue in living memory. Local helping ministries engaged in by parishes, often in interdenominational cooperation, are numerous. All of us, as individuals, are urged and encouraged to share in some way in this kind of ministry.

The Anglican Communion possesses a deep and rich tradition of Christian spirituality, once again freely using resources from any part of the Christian Church, and inviting its members to grow in holiness within this tradition according to their individual spiritual personalities. One can find as deep and rigorous a Christian discipline among us as one can anywhere, but not a "one size fits all" mentality. Among us, discipline is not imposed, but offered, and each person, on his or her spiritual journey, often in consultation with another Christian acting as spiritual director, "lives into" whatever rule of life he or she may embrace.

Finally, Anglicans seek to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness". The liturgical worship using the Book of Common Prayer is enriched by architecture, art, music, and whatever things of beauty each local congregation may be able to supply. Beautiful and inspiring worship informs and empowers our service in the world, and that service, laid before the altar, in turn deepens our worship. In all things we seek to glorify God, and to serve Jesus Christ by serving his people in the world.