BEING EPISCOPALIAN

Questions and Answers about the Episcopal Church

WINFRED B. VERGARA

The Episcopal Church
welcomes you

INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

There are two persons who motivated me to write this booklet: Angela, my wife; and Genevieve, a young adult member of St. Michael & All Angels parish in Seaford, New York. After years of mulling it over, Angie decided to become a U.S. citizen, and she was a given a booklet of 100 citizenship questions and answers. After reading it, she asked me, "Why don't you write a booklet with 100 questions and answers about the Episcopal Church?" On the same day, Gen asked me, "What are the basic beliefs and practices of the Episcopal Church that make us distinct from other churches?" Right then and there, I decided it was time to write this booklet.

The Episcopal Church does not teach that we are the only true church. We do not teach that outside our church there is no salvation. However, we do claim that our church is not only a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion and the World Council of Churches, but also a part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Alongside other churches, we participate in the work of saving the lost, freeing the oppressed, and reconciling the world to God in Christ.

Many of the questions and answers that follow are based on the Episcopal Catechism, or Outline of the Faith, which can be found on pages 843-862 of the Book of Common Prayer (Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979). Please

note that the Book of Common Prayer states that the catechism "is a commentary on the creeds, but is not meant to be a complete statement of belief and practices; rather, it is a point of departure for the teacher" (BCP, p. 844). In that same spirit, the responses to the questions that follow are not offered as definitive answers, but rather as general background information on the traditions and customs of the Episcopal Church, meant to encourage further discussion.

I believe that, as Episcopalians, we must be ready at all times to justify our existence and presence in the world today. If people inquire about what we believe, we must be ready to answer them and engage in conversation. Therefore, I hope that this booklet can help readers to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" what being an Episcopalian is all about.

I am indebted to the Office of Communication of the Episcopal Church Center for their help in editing this booklet.

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Questions & Answers About the Episcopal Church

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HISTORY

Is the Episcopal Church known by any other names?

Yes, the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (DFMS) is the legal, corporate name of the Episcopal Church. When the church was incorporated 1821 its full legal name was the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, but that name was changed when the church became international; the Episcopal Church is now in 16 nations. The church has also gone by several acronyms in the recent past, including ECUSA (pronounced "ee-KYOO-sah"), which stands for the Episcopal Church in the USA, as well as TEC for The Episcopal Church.

Where did the Episcopal Church originate?

Early English settlers established the Church of England in the original colonies of the United States, and in 1789, after the American Revolution, an assembly met in Philadelphia to unify all Anglicans in the United States into a single national church. A constitution was adopted along with a set of canonical laws, and the English Book of Common Prayer of 1662 was revised, principally by removing the prayer for the English monarch. Samuel Seabury was ordained in Scotland as the first American bishop.

Why was the name "Episcopal Church" chosen?

The Greek word episcopos means "bishop" or "overseer," which is used because the Episcopal Church is governed by bishops.

Who is the head of the Episcopal Church?

The General Convention, comprised of the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops, is the governing and legislative body of the Episcopal Church. The Presiding Bishop is the Chief Pastor and Primate of the Church. The current Presiding Bishop is the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, who is not only the first female presiding bishop in the Episcopal Church, but also the first female primate in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

What is a primate?

A primate is the chief bishop or archbishop of one of the thirty-eight churches of the Anglican Communion.

What is the Anglican Communion?

An international association composed of over 80 million people in 44 regional or national churches all in full communion with the Church of England and, more specifically, with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Who is the current Archbishop of Canterbury?

The Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. Dr. Rowan Williams is the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury, since his enthronement in February 2003. He shares the primacy of the Church of England with the Archbishop of York.

What are the four Instruments of Communion in the Anglican Communion?

In the Anglican Communion, there is no one single authoritative leader. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the symbolic head of the Communion, the Focus for Unity among the other three Instruments of Communion, and the "first among equals" among the Primates of the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion is governed by three consultative and collaborative international bodies: the Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates Meeting, and the Lambeth Conference. Together with the Archbishop of Canterbury, these four institutions function as the Instruments of Communion (or Instruments of Unity) of the Anglican Communion.

THEOLOGY

What does theology mean?

The Greek word theos means "God," and logos means "study," so theology means, literally, the study of God.

What is the three-legged stool of faith in the Episcopal Church?

Scripture, tradition, and reason. The source of this metaphor is generally attributed to the Rev. Richard Hooker (1554-1600), an Oxford University scholar who wrote: "What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience are due; the next whereunto, is what any man can necessarily conclude by force of Reason; after this, the voice of the church succeedeth." Some scholars argue that the modern interpretation of a "three-legged stool" is a misunderstanding of the passage; that in fact, Hooker explained the three components as being hierarchical, not equal.

What do we mean by "scripture"?

The Holy Scriptures, commonly called the Bible, are the books of the Old and New Testaments (BCP, p. 853).

What do we mean by "tradition"?

The Episcopal Church has inherited ancient traditions from apostolic times, as well as historical customs, laws, practices, and values that have become part of the common life of the church.

What do we mean by "reason"?

Reason is both the intellect and the experience of God that illuminates scriptures and tradition as they relate to our common lives, ministries, and contemporary situations.

What are the Four Marks of the Christian Church?

The Four Marks of the church are expressed in the Nicene Creed: "We believe in [1] one, [2] holy, [3] catholic, and [4] apostolic Church" (BCP, p. 358).

What does "via media" mean?

Via media is Latin for "middle road," which refers to the tendency of Anglican theology to strike a middle ground between reformed Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.

What are the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed?

These two creeds state the Episcopal Church's basic beliefs about God. The Apostles' Creed (BCP, p. 96) is the ancient creed of baptism and is used in the church's daily worship to recall our Baptismal Covenant. The Nicene Creed (BCP, p. 358) is the creed of the universal church and is used at the Eucharist.

What is the Holy Trinity?

The Holy Trinity is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (BCP, 852).

MISSION AND MINISTRY

What is the mission of the Episcopal Church?

To "restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ" (BCP, p. 855).

What are the Five Marks of Mission adopted by the Episcopal Church in 2009?

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
2. To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers;
3. To respond to human need by loving service;
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society;
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

What are the four orders of ministry in the Episcopal Church?

The four orders are: bishops, priests, deacons, and lay leaders. "Bishop" is from the Greek word episcopos, or "overseer"; "priest" is from the Greek word presbyteros, or "elder"; "deacon" is from the Greek word diakonos, or "intermediary"; and "lay" comes from the Greek laos, which means "the people."

What is "the priesthood of all believers"?

This phrase is based in part on 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The priesthood of all believers refers to the belief that all baptized Christians have been given direct access to God, just as a priest would have, and that God is equally accessible to all the faithful, and every Christian has equal potential to minister for God.

How does the church pursue its mission?

The church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love (BCP, p. 855).

What is the duty of all Christians?

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 (BCP, p. 856).

What are the nine virtues that St. Paul called the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22)?

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

Why did St. Paul describe the church as the "Body of Christ," with Christ as its head?

Saint Paul was referring to the way in which all members of the church are united with Christ. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

What is the Great Commission to the Church according to Matthew?

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). This is called the Great Commission.

WORSHIP

What is the Episcopal Church's main guide to worship and liturgy?

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is the official book of worship of the Episcopal Church. The BCP provides liturgical forms, prayers, and instructions so that all members and orders of the Episcopal Church may appropriately share in common worship.

What are the major gestures or actions in the Episcopal liturgy?

- Standing to praise God
- Sitting to listen to God's Word
- Kneeling to pray for the church and the world Bowing in reverence
- Lifting hands in prayer, or "orans"
- Making the sign of cross, usually with the right thumb on the forehead or with the right hand on the forehead, chest, and shoulders
- Genuflecting, or bending the knee in reverence
- Giving and receiving a kiss of peace, a sign of greeting and reconciliation
- Elevating the bread and wine during the Eucharist, offering them to God or showing them to the people

- Extending hands in greeting, (e.g., when the priest says, "The Lord be with you")
- Laying on of hands or extending them over people as a sign of blessing and authorization at baptism, confirmation, ordination, and other sacraments.

What is the chief worship service in the Episcopal Church?

The Holy Eucharist, also known as the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Mass, Divine Liturgy, and the Great Offering (BCP, p. 859).

What are the liturgical seasons?

The Christian calendar divides the year into six liturgical seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. The season after the Day of Pentecost is often called "Ordinary Time," although this term is unofficial and does not appear in the Book of Common Prayer. Every season has a designated color, which is displayed on clergy vestments and altar veils during that season.

- White signifies purity and joy and is used during Christmas and Easter, and on All Saints' Day and other joyous occasions such as weddings. White is also used during funerals because death is viewed in relation to Christ's resurrection.

- Purple and blue signify penitence and patient waiting and are used during Advent and Lent. These colors also suggest royalty, indicating that during Advent we await the return of Jesus Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of Lords.
- Red symbolizes the fire of the Holy Spirit and is used on Pentecost Sunday and for the ordination of bishops, priests, and deacons. It also signifies the blood of Christ and is used in the festival of martyrs.
- Green suggests hope and growth and is used during the weeks after Epiphany, Trinity Sunday, and Pentecost.

What is a lectionary?

A lectionary is a table of readings from Scripture appointed to be read at public worship. Although there are several lectionaries contained in the Book of Common Prayer, the Episcopal Church now follows the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), which was officially adopted at General Convention in 2006. The Revised Common Lectionary, like the lectionaries in the Book of Common Prayer, is a three-year cycle of Sunday Eucharistic readings in which Matthew, Mark, and Luke are read in successive years with some material from John read in each year.

How many books are in the Bible?

Protestants traditionally have recognized 66 books in total, including 39 books of the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. Roman Catholics accept as authorized texts an additional number of books in the Old Testament. The Episcopal Church commends these additional books, which are often called the pseudo-canonical books or the Apocrypha, for private study and also uses them in public liturgy.

What is the Pentateuch?

The Pentateuch is the name for the five books of the Bible attributed to Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

What are the four books of the gospel?

The books of the gospel are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

What are the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments are a list of laws that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai for the People of Israel (Exodus 20:1-17).

- I am the Lord thy God and thou shalt not have other gods besides me.
- Thou shalt not make for thyself any graven image.
- Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
- Remember the Lord's Day to keep it holy.
- Honor thy Father and Mother.
- Thou shalt not kill.
- Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- Thou shalt not steal.
- Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
- Thou shalt not covet.

How did Jesus summarize the Ten Commandments?

According to the Gospel of Matthew, Christ summarized the Ten Commandments into two Great Commandments: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37); and "Love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:39).

SACRAMENTS

What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace" (BCP, p. 857).

How many sacraments does the Episcopal Church observe?

Seven. In addition to baptism and the Eucharist, which are the two great sacraments given by Christ to his church (BCP, pp. 858-859), the Episcopal Church also recognizes five other sacramental rites: confirmation, ordination, holy matrimony, reconciliation of a penitent, and unction of the sick (anointing the sick with oil, or the laying on of hands) (BCP, pp. 860-861).

What is the sign of baptism?

Water is the outward and visible sign, and "union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family, the Church; forgiveness of sins and new life in the Holy Spirit" (BCP, p. 858) constitute the inward and spiritual grace.

What are the signs of the Eucharist?

Bread and wine are the outward and visible signs. "The Body and Blood of Christ given to his people and received by faith" (BCP, p. 859) constitute the inward and spiritual grace.

What is the sacrament of confirmation in the Episcopal Church?

Confirmation is the opportunity for those who are baptized as infants, children, or adults to make a public confession of their faith and to renew their baptismal vows. Traditionally, a bishop lays hands on the confirmed in a public ceremony as a symbol of support for their spiritual journeys.

Who can be ordained in the Episcopal Church?

According to the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, Title III.1.2, no person shall be denied access to the discernment process. The Office of Transition Ministry explains that "in most dioceses, there are discernment programs to assist both the aspirant and the church in reaching agreement about those called to the priesthood" (http://www.episcopalchurch.org/109465_ENG_HTM.htm).

What is the sacrament of marriage?

This is currently under debate. The Book of Common Prayer describes marriage as when a "woman and man enter into a lifelong union" (BCP, p. 861). While the Episcopal Church does not yet fully recognize same-sex marriage, the 2009 General Convention voted to approve a measure that allows Episcopal bishops to bless same-sex marriages at their discretion and also voted to begin a process of writing official liturgy for the blessing of same-sex unions.

What is the sacrament of reconciliation?

Sometimes called the sacrament of penance, this is a rite by which those who truly repent of their sins may confess them to God in the presence of a priest and receive the assurance of pardon, and the grace of absolution (BCP, p. 861).

What is the sacrament of unction?

The word "unction" comes from the Latin word unctum, "to anoint." Unction is a rite of anointing the sick with oil or performs the laying on of hands with prayer that God will grant the healing of spirit, mind, and body.

GOVERNANCE

What are the three levels of governance in the Episcopal Church?

The three levels of governance are the parish, the diocese, and the General Convention.

Who is responsible for the work of the church at the parish level?

The parishioners are responsible for work at the parish, through the leadership of their rector and their elected vestry.

What is a vestry?

A vestry is a group of church leaders, composed of wardens, a clerk, and members elected by the parishioners at the annual parish meeting, as governed by its canons and by laws.

What is a diocese?

A diocese is a geographical grouping of parishes under the supervision of a diocesan bishop.

What do bishops do?

In addition to providing vision and leadership for their dioceses, bishops are charged with the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the church. The Book of Common Prayer notes that a bishop is "to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry" (BCP, p. 855). Episcopal services led specifically by bishops include the ordination and consecration of bishops, ordination of priests, ordination of deacons, celebration of a new ministry, and the consecration of a church or chapel. Bishops also preside at services of confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation. Bishops bless altars and fonts, and the blessing of chalices, patens, and church bells are also traditionally reserved for bishops.

What is a bishop suffragan?

A bishop suffragan is elected by the diocese and acts as an assistant to, and under the direction of, the bishop diocesan.

What is the General Convention?

The General Convention is the highest governing body of the Episcopal Church. It meets every three years and is composed of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies.

The House of Bishops meets concurrently with the House of Deputies during General Convention, and also holds interim meetings between conventions. The Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, presides at meetings of the House of Bishops.

The House of Deputies consists of clergy and lay representatives in equal numbers. The current president of the House of Deputies is Canon Bonnie Anderson.

The House of Bishops and the House of Deputies meet and act separately, and both must concur in identical language to adopt legislation. The General Convention alone has authority to amend the Book of Common Prayer, to amend the church's constitution and canons, and to determine the program and budget of the General Convention, including the missionary, educational, and social programs it authorizes.

What is the Executive Council?

The Executive Council meets several times each year to carry out the policies and programs adopted by General Convention between its triennial meetings. The General Convention elects twenty-two of the forty-two members of the Executive Council.

Where is the Episcopal Church Center located?

The New York office is located at 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017, but the Episcopal Church Center now has satellite offices located in Los Angeles, Seattle, Miami, and Washington, DC. There are also staff offices in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Austin, Texas; Asheville, North Carolina, and Troy, Michigan. International offices include Paris, France; Panama City, Panama; Yauco, Puerto Rico; Accra, Ghana; and Edinburgh, Scotland. The website for the Episcopal Church is www.episcopalchurch.org, and the Church Center's tollfree number is (800) 334-7626.

What does the Episcopal Church Center do?

The Episcopal Church Center includes the executive office of the Presiding Bishop, the Finance Office, the Office of the General Convention, and the mission and program offices.

Does the Episcopal Church minister to ethnic groups?

The Episcopal Church Center currently has missioners for Black Ministries, Asian Ministries, Latino/Hispanic Ministries, Native American Ministries, Intercultural Ministries, and Ministry with People with Disabilities. All the ethnic and intercultural ministries belong to the Diversity, Social, and Environmental Ministries team. The ethnic missioners also work collaboratively with the Partnership Officers for Africa; Latin America; Asia and the Pacific, and with Indigenous networks in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Does the Episcopal Church minister to children and youth?

Yes, ministries to children, youth, and young adults, as well as to the elderly, are priorities of the church.

How many people belong to the Episcopal Church?

As of 2008, there are 2,057,292 active baptized members; 300 bishops; 15,800 priests; 2,400 deacons; and 6,964 parishes and missions.

What is a province?

In the context of the Episcopal Church, dioceses are grouped geographically into nine provinces. These are not to be confused with the official member churches or provinces of the Anglican Communion.

In addition to the Anglican Communion, with what other church organizations is the Episcopal Church in full communion?

The Episcopal Church is in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ECLA); the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht; Philippine Independent Church (the Iglesia Filipina Independiente); Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, India; the Church of South India, the Church of North India, the Church of Pakistan, the Church of Bangladesh; and the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church.

What ecumenical councils is the Episcopal Church part of?

The Episcopal Church belongs to the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and Christian Churches Together in the USA. Episcopal dioceses are also members of state and local councils of churches.

PRAYER

What is prayer?

Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words. Christian prayer is "response to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit" (BCP, p. 856).

What is the Lord's Prayer?

In Matthew 6:9b-13 and Luke 11:2-4 Jesus taught his disciples the following prayer, which is called the Lord's Prayer:

> Our Father, who art in heaven,
> hallowed be thy name;
> thy kingdom come;
> thy will be done;
> on earth as it is in heaven.
> Give us this day our daily bread.
> And forgive us our trespasses,
> as we forgive those who trespass
> against us.
> And lead us not into temptation;
> but deliver us from evil.
> For thine is the kingdom,
> the power and the glory,
> for ever and ever.
> Amen (BCP, p. 364)

What are the four types of prayers?

According to the Book of Common Prayer (BCP, p. 856), the four principal kinds of prayer are adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (ACTS). Adoration means praising God for what and who God is. Confession is expressing sorrow for sins and asking God's forgiveness, mercy, and pardon. Thanksgiving is thanking God for all the blessings received and giving thanks to God in all circumstances. Supplication is asking God to provide for our needs and the needs of the world.

Who is welcome in the Episcopal Church?

All are welcome. Anyone can join an Episcopal parish or mission and be received by the bishop.

What is the Service of Reception by the bishop?

Baptized persons who have been members of another Christian fellowship and who wish to be affiliated with the Episcopal Church may make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their baptism in the presence of a bishop. The bishop lays hands on each candidate for reception and says, "We recognize you as a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and we receive you into the fellowship of this Communion" (BCP, p.418).

What is the Service of Confirmation?

A diocesan bishop may confirm all those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit by laying on of hands and praying this: "Strengthen, O Lord, your servant, [name], with your Holy Spirit; empower him/her for your service; and sustain him/her all the days of his/her life" (BCP, p. 418).

Can an Episcopalian who has not been to church for many years return to the Episcopal Church?

Yes, the person will be welcomed in any parish or mission, and he or she may choose to renew or reaffirm baptismal vows.

What is baptism?

Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble (BCP, p. 298).

Who can administer baptisms in the Episcopal Church?

Baptism is usually administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast by a bishop or priest. Water is used either for immersion or pouring, along with the words of administration, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

What vows are made by the person being baptized?

The baptismal vows include repentance of sins, renouncing the devil and all sinful desires, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior, and obedience to Jesus as Lord.

What is the Baptismal Covenant?

The Baptismal Covenant is a set of promises made by people being baptized, along with the members of the congregation. The promises include believing in God as Creator, Reconciler and Sustainer; continuing the apostle's teaching, fellowship and prayers; persevering in resisting evil and repenting and returning to the Lord if one falls into sin; proclaiming the Good News of God; serving Christ in all persons; striving for justice and peace for all; and respecting the dignity of every human being (BCP, pp. 304-305).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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He graduated Bachelor of Arts, Political Science and Journalism at Trinity University of Asia (TUA), Quezon City, Philippines in 1973; Master of Divinity at St. Andrew's Theological Seminary (SATS), Quezon City, Philippines in 1978; Master of Theology at South East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST), Singapore in 1985; Doctor of Ministry at San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS), San Anselmo, California in 1990; and Doctor of Divinity, *Honoris Causa* at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP), Berkeley, California in 2007.

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