

Part Three



Seeking the True and Be Attentive

Recent baptism that you witnessed. What
What did you see? What did you hear? What
parents, godparents, and congregation say

king and feeling at the time? What does your
n suggest about what baptism means?

of Jesus's baptism in Luke 1:21-22. What do
reading the passages before and after may
told in Luke challenge or affirm what you
sm today?

differently as a result of the insights you

your experience with baptism suggest
personal conversion?

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spiritual discipline. Despite perennial efforts to domesticate and tame God, the God of Jesus Christ makes the most liberal among us seem reactionary.

One thing that clearly signals that the Gospels were meant to challenge rather than to provide specific solutions to life's dilemmas, for example, is the tension that appears throughout the Gospel according to Luke between poverty and possessions, between the renunciation of possessions on the one hand and the equally demanding emphasis on using our possessions to help others.

It is difficult to clear a path between the challenges of personal renunciation and proper use. The two perspectives—complete abandonment on the one hand and using possessions wisely on the other—indicate that it is wise to be wary of one-verse Christianity.

It helps me when reading God's word to think of Nicodemus, who thought he had things pretty much together. He came to Jesus looking for an answer. Jesus proposed a question. Nicodemus came to hear a new thought. Jesus suggested a new way of thinking. Nicodemus walked (John 3:1-21).

I have a rubber stamp that says, "The Episcopal Church: resisting simplistic theology since 1785." We resist simplistic theology by doing our soul searching not only with the Bible, not only with tradition, not only with our God-given reason and life experience, but with all three: testing each one with the other two. You may have heard that referred to as the Anglican three-legged stool: scripture, tradition, and reason combined with life experience.

God's word comes in image ("The kingdom of God is like . . .") and commission ("Go and make disciples . . .") and mystery ("Unless you are born from above") and question ("Who do you say that I am?"). It is more about personal response ("Here am I, send me") than about hard and quick answers.

On the one hand, the Bible is the word of God; on the other hand, only Jesus is God's Word. For Christians—obviously this would not be so for Jews, for Muslims, for Buddhists, or for other non-Christian believers in God—God's most focused, God's clearest self-disclosure is not the Bible but Jesus Christ, whose life, death and resurrection are windows into God's love, God's mercy, God's compassion, God's forgiveness.

God's word always comes to us in the flesh. Reading the Bible can be a walk with Nicodemus or a walk with Jesus. Choose Jesus.

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INTERLUDE

"I Wonder"

Where can I find a Bible?" a woman asks at a bookstore. In a *New Yorker* cartoon, the clerk tells her to look under self-help.

The Bible seems not to have a place in contemporary culture; many have trouble knowing what to make of it. Biblical literalists have added to the confusion. For the Bible is neither self-help, nor a rulebook, nor God's answers to moral questions, and certainly not a weapon with which to put others down.

The Bible is about God, not about us. People like us wrote it to tell how they experienced God. "God is like this for me," they say, or "This is how I experienced God," or "This is how the Risen Christ came into my life, as a gardener, a stranger on the road, a trusted friend, a visitor on the shore. He cooked breakfast for us. He broke bread with us." Their stories are meant for wonder.

A key moment in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, an approach to the religious formation of children rooted in the Bible, liturgy, and Montessori principles, is when the teacher, after telling a story from the Bible, looks into the eyes of the children, respecting each as persons, and says simply: "I wonder . . ."

"I wonder why does Jesus love the sheep . . . why did the shepherd leave the ninety-nine to find the one that was lost . . . I wonder . . . what Andrew thought when Jesus said, 'Follow me' . . . I wonder . . . does Jesus say that also to me . . . I wonder . . . what does that mean?"

Our scriptures, especially the Gospels we have accepted as normative for life, are radically challenging writings. For God is always in front of us, calling us to be our best selves.

The Gospels may be the most radical writings we could ever read if, indeed, we read them as a soul searching, open-hearted, open-minded

spiritual discipline. Despite perennial efforts to domesticate and tame God, the God of Jesus Christ makes the most liberal among us seem reactionary.

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CHAPTER TWO



Bible Stories

A Walk with Jesus and God

Walk with Jesus and imagine your own journey as part of the history of the people of God told in the Bible. The Bible isn't a cohesive and chronological narrative. It is collection of stories, songs, and prayers for and about special gatherings, important events, and family trips. It tells us something about who God is and who we are as people of God. The primary characters are God and God's people. The Bible tells of God's creative and redeeming actions throughout history as understood from the perspective of God's people. Through these stories, prayers, and songs we see threads of common traditions, identities, and cycles of creation, sin, redemption, and restoration. The Bible is an honest account of human history filled with love, community, and faithfulness as well as tricksters, murder, deceit, greed, and power. The Jewish scriptures (also called the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament) teach us about God and God's relationship with God's chosen people. God initiates this relationship with a covenant in which God promises to love, guide, and provide for the people. In turn the Israelites promise to worship the one God and live by God's laws. The Jewish scriptures are made up of stories, laws, poetry, and history about God's steadfast love. The Christian scriptures continue the story of God's love and covenant. They tell of God coming into the world as a person, Jesus, whose life and ministry shows us what it means to live the way of eternal life, loving God and our neighbor as ourselves. God entered our history as a human to deliver us from whatever separates us from God.

We never finish reading the Bible. Each time we return to the Bible, we don't just remember; we learn more about ourselves and about our walk with God.

A Library of Books

The word "bible" comes from the Greek word *biblos*, which means books. Notice that *biblos* is plural. You can think of the Bible as collection of texts housed in a one-book library. This library is comprised of sixty-six books: thirty-nine in the Jewish scriptures and twenty-seven in the Christian scriptures. As we discuss below, in addition to these sixty-six books, the Roman Catholic and the Episcopal Churches include writings some call the Apocrypha. Knowing that the Bible is best thought of as a library rather than a book helps us be attentive to the fact that its contents reflect the variety of literature and time periods in which they were developed. It also suggests how to approach reading it. First of all, just as we don't take the first book off the shelf in a library, it might not be helpful to begin reading the Bible with page one and continue to the end. Generally, we choose a book from among many books in a library based on what question we want to explore or our particular interest. The Church's Sunday lectionary—the cycle of readings appointed for Sundays throughout the year—is largely not consecutive. Second, just as a library contains many kinds of books, the books of the Bible also reflect many types of literature. The Bible includes histories, sermons, legal documents, poetry, hymns, romances, stories of intrigue, and letters. Because each is written for a different purpose, we read them differently.

The Jewish and Christian Scriptures

The Bible has two major parts—the Jewish scriptures (Old Testament) and the Christian scriptures (New Testament). We use the word "scripture" instead of "testament" purposefully. While most people use the terminology Old and New Testaments, the word "testament" doesn't accurately reflect its contents. The Old and New Testaments do *testify* to, or show, the way of God's salvation throughout history. The word "testament" as it's used in the Bible really means *covenant*, or *agreement*. We call the Old and New Covenants "Old Testament" and "New Testament" because the people who translated the Bible from Greek into Latin in the fifth century ce (Common Era) wrongly translated the Greek word for covenant as *testamentum*.

In this book, we'll refer to the Old Testament as the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament as the Christian scriptures. By using the words "Jewish scriptures" we are recognizing that these writings are the sacred stories of the Jewish people, the stories of the Israelites. These sacred stories are also sacred stories for Christians. Jewish scriptures are also known as Hebrew scriptures. We call them Jewish because they are the sacred stories of the

Jewish people today. No one so far has agreed on a good parallel term to replace "New Testament." The words "Christian scriptures" highlight the fact that the New Testament is comprised of writings by individuals and communities who followed Jesus.

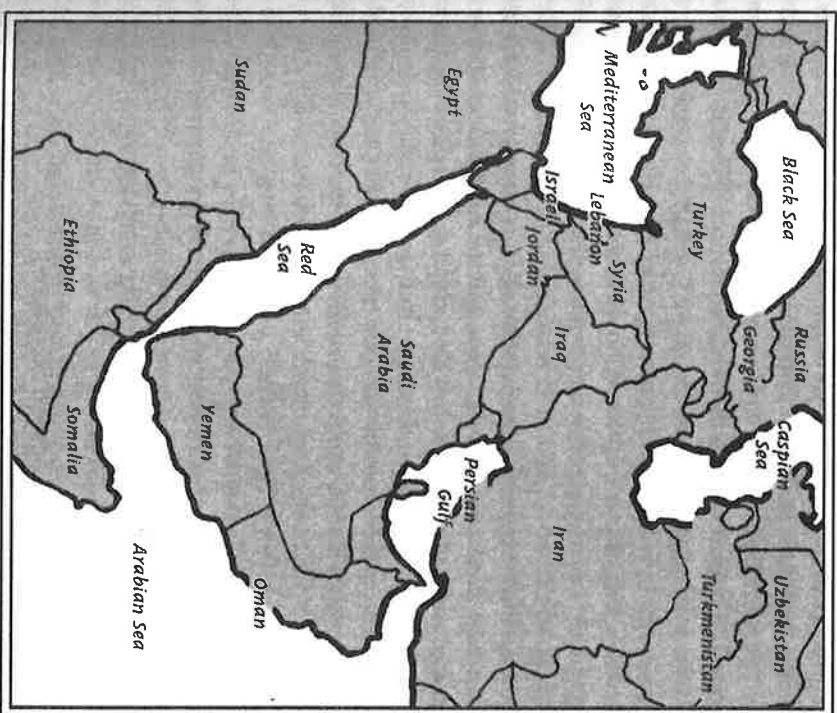
The **Jewish scriptures** tell the stories of the Hebrew people and God's covenant relationship with them. In this covenant God promises to be with them, provide for their well-being, and strengthen and encourage them. God's people respond by promising to keep God's law. The **Christian scriptures** tell how God renewed and strengthened the covenant by becoming human, establishing a new relationship with us in the person Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection open new ways to respond to God's love freely given to us.

Christians and Jews share the books of Jewish scriptures. What Christians commonly call the Old Testament, Jews call the Tanakh. Muslims also include some of the books of the Jewish scriptures and the Gospels of the Christian scriptures as holy writings.

Origins of the Bible

The Bible was written over a period of about eleven hundred years—from about 1,000 BCE (Before the Common Era) to about 100 CE (Common Era)—by many authors, editors, and communities of the ancient Near East, a region of the world we today call the Middle East, which includes the modern-day countries of Egypt, Palestine/Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, as shown in the map on page 37. The earliest writings began as songs and stories people sang and told when they gathered in their homes and at religious festivals. Elders passed these stories on to the next generation who passed it to the next, forming a community with a shared memory. These stories shaped their identity and helped them make choices that determined their future. The Israelites understood themselves as descendants of Abraham and Sarah, whom God promised would be the forebears of a great nation. They knew that they belonged to a community that strove to uphold the law given through Moses and could live knowing that God would always love them deeply. Now, that doesn't mean they always remembered that God loved them or they made good choices. But God showed them, as God shows us, that we are loved no matter what.

Jewish and Christian scripture are much like the stories we share at family gatherings. They convey values and shape our identities. Telling and



This map shows the modern-day nations of the Middle East. This is the geographic area of the ancient Near East—the land of the people in the Bible.

retelling the stories of a great-grandma who served her city as mayor of a city, for example, helps a family remember and pass along its sense of civic duty. Knowing this history may inspire future generations in the family to share a commitment to public service. Every family will have a different identity and different stories.

Although some of the stories in the Bible tell of historic people and events, they were not necessarily intended to be an objective record of events as they actually happened. The stories in the Bible were meant to address basic questions of existence such as "Who are we?" and "What is the purpose of our life together?" Ancient storytellers were sharing and celebrating the community's primary identity as the people of God, and to whom God promised

a specific land. The storytellers were helping their listeners remember that they were expected to live in a way that preserved their friendship with one another and with God. In lots of different ways, and through many, many characters, the stories explored the central question: "What does it mean to be and live as the people of God?"

As an example, let's look at the creation stories in Genesis. They are not meant to be a scientific description of how and when the world was created in its physical form. They express a people's understanding of God, God's relationship to the world, and their relationship to God, one another and all creation. God is an intimate and divine ruler of creation and the source of all blessings. God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in it. God created night and day, the dry land, the seas and all living creatures. God created humankind in God's image. And it was good. Throughout the first creation story (Genesis 1:1–2:3), we hear this refrain, "And God saw that it was good." This is a world that is ordered by the Divine and, indeed, is very good.

The book of Genesis has two creation stories. The seven-day creation story begins with Genesis 1:1 and another creation story begins with Genesis 2:4b.

Jewish Scriptures

The oldest books in the Bible are the Jewish scriptures, most of which were written in Hebrew. The earliest stories were passed down from generation to generation orally from memory. As the Hebrew language developed into written word, scribes began to write them on papyrus scrolls. The basics for the story of how the Israelites were led by Moses out of slavery in Egypt to their rise as an independent nation, for example, is believed to have been written in the tenth century BCE—a thousand years before the birth of Jesus—by a poet commissioned by King Solomon. The poet, and his scribes, did their work by hand—after all, the printing press wouldn't be invented for more than two thousand years—so few copies would have been made.

More than one written tradition developed, each explaining past events in different ways, for different cultures and different circumstances. Writers of ancient sacred texts drew on existing stories and texts, following a rule of not deleting anything that was accepted by the community as sacred, only adding material. Scribes would insert contemporary ideas and practices into earlier stories, giving authority to current understandings and practices.

Ancient editors (often referred to as redactors) collected, adapted, and reinterpreted the collective stories in light of their community's experiences. The result was not a single, clear account of a community's history and laws, but a set of stories that sometimes repeat previous accounts and sometimes even contradict one another. The intention of the editors was not to present one single perspective, but to preserve the diversity of experiences and theologies and various views reflected in sacred literature. The editing likely occurred over a long period of time, but was mostly complete by the sixth century BCE.

By the first century CE, Jewish communities recognized a common set of texts as the official Jewish scriptures. These texts became their **canon** or standard (the collection of books accepted as Holy Scripture), because they were the most commonly used among the Jewish communities. The Jewish scripture was the Bible for the Jews in the first century, including Jesus and early Christian communities. Jewish scriptures were among the texts read when early Christian communities met to remember and celebrate Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Indeed, these scriptures were an important lens through which these early communities understood who Jesus was and continued to be as the living Christ among them. The Jewish and Christian canons of the Jewish scriptures are similar, but not identical. For example, the Roman Catholic canon (also recognized by the Episcopal Church) includes sacred Jewish writings not part of the Jewish canon called apocrypha. The Jewish canon has not changed since the first century CE and the Christian canon has not changed since the sixteenth century CE. Finalizing the Jewish and Christian canons was a gradual process, not without controversy.

Christian Scriptures

The Christian scriptures developed differently than did the Jewish scriptures. First of all, the texts of the Christian scriptures were written over the latter half of the first century, about fifty years—and were written in *koiné*, the common Greek that was spoken in the Roman Empire at that time. Like the early writings of the Jewish scriptures, news of Jesus's life, ministry, and resurrection spread by word of mouth at first. Early Christians believed that Jesus would return at any moment and the reign of God was about to begin. It didn't seem necessary to write down the story of Jesus for future generations.

The earliest writings in the Christian scriptures are letters written by the apostle Paul to various Christian communities he visited throughout the Greco-Roman world. The earliest letter is 1 Thessalonians, most likely written in about 50 CE, not quite twenty years after Jesus died. Paul's letters

proclaimed the gospel, addressed the problems within these communities, and encouraged their new faith. Written in Greek, Paul sent his letters by messenger who read them aloud to the communities who gathered around a belief in the risen Christ. These communities did not, at first, consider themselves to be Christians, but rather, followers of Jesus, some of whom were Jewish and others Gentiles (non-Jews).

Scholars believe that the earliest of the four Gospels is the Gospel according to Mark, written after Paul's letters between 60 and 70 CE, about thirty to forty years after Jesus's death and resurrection. Next came the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke, both written sometime in the second half of the first century. It is likely that the writers of Matthew and Luke were familiar with the Gospel according to Mark, as well as a third text that no longer exists, but that scholars think probably contained sayings of Jesus. Evidence that Matthew and Luke both drew on Mark is that they share the narrative structure of Mark and follow Mark's passion narrative. Scholars refer to the lost document with Jesus's sayings as "Q" (*quelle*, the German word for "source"). Q includes sayings of Jesus common to both Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark. Matthew and Luke drew on Mark and Q and also include their own material. The story of the good Samaritan, for example, is only in Luke. The Gospel according to John was written last, probably completed in the last part of the first century.

All four Gospels tell the story of Jesus's life and ministry, but they do not present it in the same way. Mark, for instance, ends the story with the empty tomb on Easter morning, while the other Gospels tell about the many times Jesus appeared after his resurrection. The Gospel writers each had different thoughts about who Jesus was, and they wrote for different audiences. Together, they proclaim the good news of God's only Son, Jesus.

While the Gospels and letters of Paul and others were first written on scrolls like Jewish sacred writings, in the second century Christian communities began to collect copies in the form of **codexes**, folded sheets of paper (at that time papyrus) stitched together and covered into what we might call notebooks. Christian communities favored codexes because different writings could be bound together and passages could be located more easily. Codexes also differentiated Christian from Jewish writings, which were scrolls. Our familiar bound Bible didn't exist until the European-style printing press was invented in Germany in the sixteenth century.

The earliest written Christian scriptures found by modern archaeologists are fragments of the Gospel according to John on second century papyrus.

As the stories, liturgies, hymns, and letters of early Christian communities were circulated and used in worship, a common set of writings began to emerge. By the end of the fourth century, the Church determined which writings would be considered part of the canon (that is, Holy Scriptures). The Christian biblical canon was set. During the Reformation in the sixteenth century, some denominations removed writings from the Bible known as the Apocrypha while the Roman Church affirmed their inclusion. The Episcopal Church recognizes the Apocrypha as part of the Christian canon.

A Variety of Forms of Literature

As we mentioned earlier, the Bible is composed of a variety of types of literature—laws, history, fiction, hymns, romances, letters, and so on. Here's a look at some of the genres we find in the Bible.

The Law. The **Pentateuch**, the first five books of the Bible, is a combination of laws and history. We've talked a little about history. The law, or *torah*, is the code by which people lived that determined community worship, daily living patterns, moral behavior, and business ethics. The laws with which you are likely most familiar are the Ten Commandments, the covenant law delivered by Moses. But these aren't the only laws in the Pentateuch. There are laws about how land is inherited, what to eat, and how to treat criminals. These laws were written for a particular time and don't always apply to the way we live today. Indeed, because the Pentateuch includes laws from a variety of time periods, they sometimes contradict one another.

The law of the covenant is much more than the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses. In fact, the Hebrew word for law is *torah*, which also is the word for the first five books of Jewish scripture.

Poetry. Examples of poetry in the Bible are Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, and Song of Songs. This poetry sings of love and life (Song of Songs), provides moral instruction (Proverbs), and provides the hymns for worship (Psalms).

Fiction. Some books in the Bible are works of literary fiction. Just like today's novels, these books aren't meant to describe actual events. Trying to determine whether the events in the books of fiction could actually have happened misses the point. They are meant to be read for pleasure, teach a moral, or convey a truth. Most scholars agree that Jonah, for example, was

an extended parable teaching that God is forgiving and merciful to all, not just the Israelites. A modern example of a fictional moral tale is the story of George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. It's likely a fable, and whether he actually cut down the tree is not important. What is important is that it conveys the belief that George Washington was an honest man.

Prophecy: Many of the prophetic books (Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah, for example) include speeches given by a prophet to teach the community how to live good lives. Others are written to communities that experienced war and catastrophe, interpreting devastation as God's wrath, and urging them to mend their ways. Still others assured the people in exile of God's providence and liberation from their situation. The prophetic books also include narratives and biographies. The prophetic book Isaiah is often quoted in the Christian scriptures. Mark 1:2 ("It is written by the prophet Isaiah") is an example.

Letters: We call the letters in the Christian scriptures the Epistles. The Epistles are mostly letters that Paul and others wrote to communities they had visited to help them address their problems and concerns. It's easy to see that these are letters by their opening words—they begin with words like "Dear So-and-So," just as we begin our letters and e-mails today. Paul's letters to Corinth, a town in Greece, for example, begin "To the Church of God that is in Corinth . . . Grace to you." The letters are half of a complete conversation, making them sometimes challenging to understand. Some of the letters that bear Paul's name are penned by people other than Paul. The authors were not being unethical. They were indicating that they intended to convey messages and teachings consistent with Paul.

It is important to keep the genre in mind when you are reading in the Bible. Just as you wouldn't read a clothing catalogue for spiritual inspiration, you wouldn't read laws in Leviticus the same way you'd read the hymns in Psalms or the history in Kings. The laws in Leviticus are literally legal codes that governed behavior for a particular people at a particular time, while the hymns in Psalms appeal more universally to human experiences such as joy, pain, sorrow, and forgiveness.

Unity of the Bible

The various origins and many kinds of literature found in the Bible might make you wonder why they are considered as one word of God. The unity

of the Bible can be understood in the *Shema*, the Hebrew declaration of faith in one God:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

This is the prayer devout Jewish people say every day. It reminds them, as the many books of the Bible remind us all, that the Lord is our God. The Bible is the result of the interaction between human beings and the divine. The Bible is an important way we hear just that. The storytellers, writers, and editors were inspired to know—and to share with others—that God enters human history to care for God's people and communicate God's will. The Bible is one way that God speaks to us.

The Bible is a witness to the Lord our God. God is the source of all life, and creation bears God's divine imprint. God is one who speaks first in creation and is the end of all. Jesus is the revelation of God in the flesh, mediator par excellence. The stories of the Bible narrate the events of human history toward the fulfillment of God's purpose.

With that broad introduction, let's take a closer look at the Bible.

Jewish Scriptures

The Jewish scriptures are divided into four major parts—the Pentateuch (Torah), the historical books, the poetical and wisdom books, and the prophetic books. The thirty-nine books of the Jewish scriptures are listed in the box on page 44.

The Pentateuch (Torah)

The first five books of the Bible are known as the Pentateuch, a word that comes from two Greek words: *penta* meaning "five" and *tekhnoi* meaning "books." The first eleven chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, tell about the beginnings of humanity—from the creation of the world and the first people, to the fall of Adam and Eve, the Great Flood, and the scattering of people into different nations with different languages (the tower of Babel). These early stories, known as primordial history, express basic beliefs about the origin of the world and the nature of humans and explain why there were different tribes and people who worship different gods. After the story of the tower of Babel, the particular story of God's chosen people begins with the birth of Abraham, the one to whom God promised land and many descendants. The remainder of Genesis chronicles the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and concludes with the story of Jacob's son Joseph in

THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

Pentateuch (Torah)

Genesis	Leviticus	Deuteronomy
Exodus	Numbers	

The Historical Books

Joshua	1, 2 Samuel	Ezra
Judges	1, 2 Kings	Nehemiah
Ruth	1, 2 Chronicles	Esther

The Poetical and Wisdom Books

Job	Proverbs	Song of Solomon
Psalms	Ecclesiastes	

The Prophetic Books

Isaiah	Joel	Habakkuk
Jeremiah	Amos	Zephaniah
Lamentations	Obadiah	Haggai
Ezekiel	Jonah	Zechariah
Daniel	Micah	Malachi
Hosea	Nahum	

Note: The arrangement of these books and their divisions differ from the Jewish arrangement.

Egypt. Genesis is grouped with four other books, and together these first five books of the Jewish scriptures are called the Torah.

Torah is the Hebrew word for law or teaching. These books contain the Law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments) and legal codes as well as the central story of God's chosen people, the nation of Israel, from the covenant established with Abraham, to the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt, to the giving of the Ten Commandments, to the forty-year journey in the wilderness. The last book of the Torah is Deuteronomy, which ends with the death of Moses, before the Israelites enter the land of Canaan. A central theme of the Pentateuch is the covenant relationship between God and God's people. Together, the laws and the stories tell of the relationship between God and God's people, and how God's people are to live.

The Historical Books

The historical books aren't just history. They contain a variety of types of literature. The historical narratives in Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings tell the continuous history of Israel from the end of Moses's life to the exile of the Israelites in Assyria and Babylon, a thousand years later in the 500s BCE. Dates, particularly those for stories of ancient Israel, including the flight from Egypt, are difficult to pin down.

The historical books contain stories rich with meaning even today. The account of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:1-24, who shows great hospitality to the prophet Elijah, for example, may provide a companion for people who live on life's margins.

Central actions in this history are the conquest of the land by Joshua and the building of the temple by King Solomon as a place to keep the Ark of the Covenant, a chest that contained the Ten Commandments and was believed to represent God's presence among the people. During this time Israel was governed first by judges and then by kings. Israel was a small nation that faced continual threats from foreign invaders. In the tenth century BCE the unified kingdom divided into two: the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). The Northern Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE and the Southern Kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BCE when many Jews were sent into exile in Babylon, marking the beginning of the Jewish diaspora. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell about the return of Israel from their exile. Ruth and Esther are believed to be historical fictions written to teach important lessons to the community. The historical books are rich with individual characters whose stories teach us about sin, repentance, and redemption and about God's steadfast love for the people.

Poetic Books and Books of Wisdom

The five books in this category also contain diverse types of literature. Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are known as wisdom literature. Unlike other books in the Jewish scriptures, they do not focus on the details of the nation of Israel. Instead they address individual concerns about maintaining right relationships with God and one another. Proverbs addresses the moral life with warnings about the consequences of behavior. An example is "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may

bring" (Proverbs 27:1). Through the tale of the suffering of a righteous man, Job asks whether suffering is punishment for sin, while Ecclesiastes says that suffering and joy are part of a natural cycle of existence: "For everything there is a season" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Psalms and the Song of Solomon are books of poetry. Psalms are prayers sung at temple worship and express an array of human emotion—from praise to sorrow to anger. Even so, most psalms read in worship on Sunday are psalms of praise even though forty percent of psalms are psalms of lament, so the psalms can give words to those who are suffering. The Song of Solomon is poetry that celebrates human love.

The Prophetic Books

The prophetic books are comprised of mostly long speeches by prophets to a gathering of people that were later written down either by the prophet or one of his associates. As with other biblical writings, later writers added biographies of the prophets, as well as edited and added to the original material in the books.

The age of prophets began with the rise of kings and ended during the return of the people from Babylonian exile in 538 BCE. Prophets, holy men and women of wisdom and vision, were called by God to play unique roles as the people's advocates to God and God's messenger to the people. Prophets criticized rich and powerful people and urged them to help the poor and helpless. In terms of the Loneran imperatives, the prophets reminded the people to be responsible. Prophets supported social justice; prophets brought God's word to the people ("Thus says the Lord"), which often condemned current practices as against God's will. At the same time, prophets took the side of the people before God, begging for mercy and forgiveness. The prophetic books bring the books of the Jewish scriptures to a close.

Christian Scriptures

The Christian scriptures are composed of twenty-seven books divided into four categories—the Gospels, history, epistles, and apocalyptic literature. These books were chosen by early Church councils from among a wide range of early Christian writing based on their consistency with the teachings of the apostles, the tradition of narratives of Jesus's life and ministry, and the accepted literature of Christian communities. They were the readings most commonly read at worship within the diverse early Christian communities. On page 47 is a list of the books in the order they appear in the Bible. As we

THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

Gospels

Matthew	Luke
Mark	John

History

The Acts of the Apostles

Epistles

Romans	Colossians	Hebrews
1, 2 Corinthians	1, 2 Thessalonians	James
Galatians	1, 2 Timothy	1, 2 Peter
Ephesians	Titus	1, 2, 3 John
Philippians	Philemon	Jude

Apocalyptic

The Revelation to John

noted above, Paul's letters predate the Gospels, so, as you can see, the books do not appear in the order in which they were written.

The Gospels

The Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—proclaim the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ by telling about Jesus's ministry, teaching, death, and resurrection. At the time the Gospels were written, the word "gospel" referred to the announcement of a happy event such as the birth of a son or a marriage. So the Gospel according to Mark begins, "The beginning of the good news [gospel] of Jesus Christ, the son of God."

Matthew, Mark, and Luke repeat many of the same the stories and sayings of Jesus. Because of their similar point of view, they are called the *synoptic* Gospels. Each, however, emphasizes different aspects of Jesus's life and teaching. Matthew presents Jesus as a *great teacher* and emphasizes the authority and wisdom with which Jesus interpreted Jewish law. Mark presents Jesus as the *suffering servant* in terms of the great prophets of the Jewish scriptures—Elijah, Moses, and Jeremiah. Luke presents Jesus as the *savior for all nations* and emphasizes his royal heritage as a descendant of the celebrated King David. Reading the Gospels closely by noting words that are repeated,

how material is organized, what material is unique, and which Jewish scriptures are quoted reveals these differences in viewpoints. An instructive activity is to compare the Gospels by using a *gospel parallel*, which displays similar accounts from each Gospel next to one another (Google "gospel parallels" to find one on the internet).

The Gospel according to John, the last Gospel to be written, departs markedly from the other three Gospels in terms of the chronology and details of Jesus's life. This Gospel emphasizes the divinity of Jesus (the teaching that Jesus is God) to a much greater extent than do the synoptic Gospels. Throughout the Gospels are sayings of Jesus, parables, details of Jesus's life, and even hymns sung by early Christian communities. The synoptics include a particular type of story called a **parable**, some of which are allegorical stories and others that are similes. Parables teach, surprise, and provide insight into difficult concepts such as the nature of the kingdom of God. Examples of kingdom parables found in Matthew include where Jesus tells the disciples that the kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field, like a mustard seed, and like yeast. Because parables teach by comparison,



The traditional symbols of the four evangelists: Matthew as the "Divine Man"; Mark as a winged lion; Luke as the winged ox; and John as a rising eagle.

or metaphor, we understand them by calling to mind our own experiences. For example, to understand the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), we remember our own experience of losing, and then finding, something. Parables remain alive because they engage our thoughts, feelings, and curiosity.

Early Christians listened to the gospel, sometimes for long stretches of time. Acts 20:7-11 tells of a young man named Eutychus, who, while listening to the apostle Paul, fell asleep, and plummeted three stories out a window.

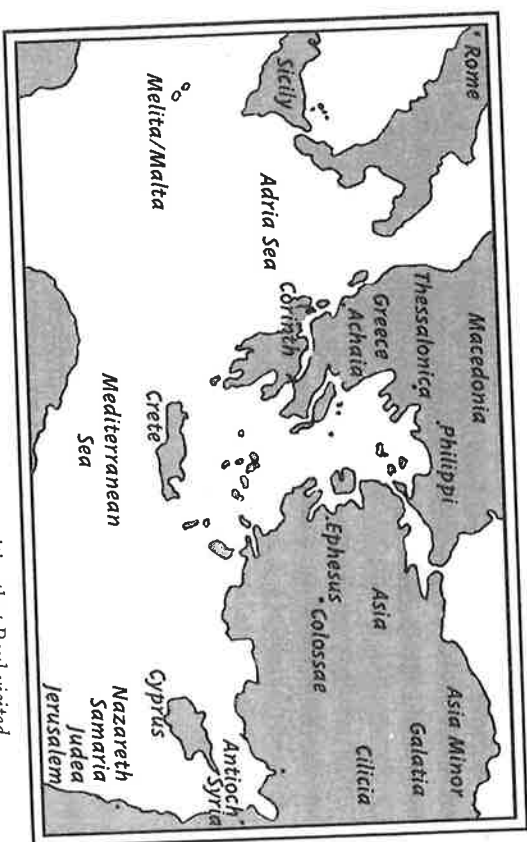
Acts of the Apostles

A sequel to the Gospel according to Luke and written by the same author, Acts is the account of the birth and growth of the Church from the ascension of Christ to the arrival of Paul in Rome. Acts tells us about how the early Church began, how Christianity spread, and how early Christian communities tried to solve the problems that the new communities of Christians faced.

A central figure in Acts is the apostle Paul, a Jew who grew up in the Greek city of Tarsus. Paul experienced a dramatic vision of Christ, converted to Christianity, and dedicated his life to establishing and guiding Christian communities. (The map on page 50 shows major communities Paul visited.) Two central themes of Acts are that the Church continues the history of the Jewish people and that Gentiles, or non-Jews, are welcome into Christian communities and can share God's promise of salvation. By portraying the expansion of the early Church as being led by the Holy Spirit, Acts provides early Christians the confidence that their communities are living according to God's will.

The Epistles

The Epistles are a set of twenty-one letters and writings in the form of letters. Thirteen were written either by the apostle Paul or by one of his followers in Paul's name. Paul's letters (except Romans) were sent to early Christian communities he had established while traveling throughout the eastern part of the Mediterranean to provide them with continued guidance. Letters were a common way for leaders of various church communities to communicate. They address issues such as leadership and gifts for ministry, as well as questions such as when the Messiah—Jesus, the savior promised by God—would return and whether Gentiles had to follow Jewish law to join a Christian community.



This map of the Mediterranean shows major communities that Paul visited.

DEUTEROCANONICAL WRITINGS (APOCRYPHA)

Tobit	Wisdom of Solomon	1-4 Maccabees
Judith	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)	Daniel (additions)
Esther (additions)	Baruch	

Reading the Epistles can be like listening to one end of a telephone conversation. We know one side of the conversation from the letters that we have in the Bible, but we don't have the letters that asked the questions or posed the problems in the first place. We sometimes have to guess what the initial problem or question was as well as the details of the particular issue. Because they represent half of a conversation, the letters are sometimes tricky to understand.

The Revelation to John

The Revelation to John is a vision that is meant to sustain early Christians in the face of persecution. It is called **apocalyptic** because it *reveals* something that is unknown. Revelation was written during a time when the world was hostile to Christians. You could be put in prison and even be put to death for being a Christian. With great symbolism and complexity the author assures

a Church under persecution that Christ is with them and encourages them to keep faith. Revelation can be a difficult book to understand without a good commentary or teacher to guide the reader, who needs to be especially careful not to interpret it simplistically or take its confusing symbolism literally.

The Apocrypha

The thirty-nine books of the Jewish scriptures and twenty-seven books of the Christian scriptures compose the sixty-six books of the Bible. In addition to these books, the Episcopal Church (along with the Roman Catholic Church) also recognizes the deuterocanonical texts listed in the box on page 50 as Holy Scripture.

These additional books are known as **Apocrypha**, meaning "things hidden away," or deuterocanonical, meaning "second canon" because they were added to the Christian canon in the sixteenth century, about twelve hundred years after the Christian canon was first established. These additional books, generally located between the Jewish and Christian scriptures, are literature found in either the ancient Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures, called the Septuagint, or in Latin translations of the Greek, but are not contained in the Jewish scriptures. In the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church accepted them into the canon, and the Church of England followed suit. Most Protestant churches do not recognize deuterocanonical literature as Holy Scripture. The Apocrypha include histories, historical fiction, wisdom, devotional writings, letters, and an apocalypse (a vision of the end times).

Reading the Bible

Why Read the Bible?

We read the Bible for a variety of reasons. The Bible reveals who God is and who we are as creatures of God. Throughout the Bible we learn about God's promises to us and about how to live within the covenant relationship. We may be able to recite the commandment that Jesus gave: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). The Bible guides us in how to live this commandment, as well as the two greatest commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind"; and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

The Bible is neither self-help, nor a rulebook, nor God's answers to moral questions, and certainly not a weapon with which to put others down.

It won't tell you for whom to vote in an election, but it can guide important decisions. Through stories, hymns, and sayings in the Bible, we come to know the very presence of God—a God who cares, guides, strengthens, comforts, and inspires us. We are transformed by the knowledge that we are beloved creations and we respond by seeking to live in ways that reflect that knowledge.

Read the Bible in Community

So Philip ran up to it [the chariot of an Ethiopian eunuch] and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. (Acts 8:30–31)

This conversation between Philip and a eunuch in Acts reminds us that we are meant to read the Bible with others. The Bible is a public book, a book about community meant to be heard, studied, and explored in the company of others.

The Episcopal Church firmly recognizes the Bible as a public book. Each Sunday Episcopal congregations usually read four passages from the Bible—a reading from the Jewish scriptures, a psalm, a reading from the Epistles, and a Gospel reading. The readings are selected according to the **Revised Common Lectionary**, a three-year cycle (denoted as Years A, B, and C) of passages of the Bible for Christian worship. Over a three-year period, you will hear almost all of the Christian scriptures and a good chunk of the Jewish scriptures. We also hear scriptures in hymns and prayers found in the Book of Common Prayer. Hymn 645 ("The King of Love My Shepherd Is") for example, is based on Psalm 23. Our service of Holy Communion is filled with scriptural references. The Sanctus ("Holy, holy, holy") is based on Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8. The words of institution during the prayers of the Eucharist are based on 1 Corinthians 11:23–25. (A familiar joke among Episcopalians is that upon reading the Bible they are amazed at how often it quotes the Book of Common Prayer.) The hymns, letters, and stories of the Bible are at home in worship.

Hearing the Bible in worship provides a particular context for the Bible. That is, we hear the stories of the Bible in light of the good news that God loves us so much that God came to dwell among us as Jesus Christ. In the Episcopal worship service, we recognize this when the congregation stands to say, "Glory to you Lord Christ" before the gospel is read. In that simple statement, we are saying that Christ is present through the gospel proclaimed. Hearing the Bible in worship also gives us the opportunity

to hear the variety of interpretations of scripture through the sermon, hymns, and prayers.

By reading the Bible in community we can share our insights and understandings with one another. The wisdom of the community widens our biblical understanding, adds richness to interpretation, and encourages us to take care in interpretation.

When reading anywhere in the Bible, be attentive: What is the author saying? What version am I reading? New Revised Standard Version? Common English Bible? The King James Version? The Message? How might the words differ in another version? Be intelligent: What have I understood? Are there other ways to understand this? Be reasonable: Among several understandings, which is best? Is there a best understanding? How might my understanding change if I discussed it in community? Be responsible: Based on how I understand what I've read, is there something of value I ought to do?

Steps for Reading the Bible

Here are five steps to read a passage in the Bible:

1. *Read the passage and ask what's important. Circle key words and phrases. Share these phrases with others in your study group.*

Of course, the first step is to choose a reading. One way to choose is to look at the readings for the coming Sunday or for each day of the week called the Daily Office Lectionary. You find it beginning on page 934 in the Book of Common Prayer or on a number of websites and smartphone apps. These readings begin and end in logical places, such as the beginning and ending of a story or parable, and provide a set of readings that will help you become familiar with the diversity of experiences of God.

The downside of choosing the Sunday readings is that some parts of the Bible are not in the Sunday lectionary cycle and you may want to read longer selections than those in the lectionary. The Daily Office Lectionary, which you can find online by searching "daily office lectionary" will cover a wider range.

Read the passage. Are there any words that catch your attention? Circle them. Share them with others in your group. Reading and

hearing the Bible today in your specific context is how the Bible remains the living word of God. While the text itself does not change, the readers do. It is likely that others in your group will be drawn to different words and phrases. We hear the stories of the Bible through our own experiences. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit these stories become our stories.

2. Read the passage again, writing down any questions that come to mind. Share your questions and look together for answers.

While you read the passage the second time, write down your questions. General questions might be about how to approach the passage. What kind of writing is it? Is it a hymn, a historical writing, or a code of law? Does the passage refer to unfamiliar cultural beliefs and practices? Is there an idea you haven't encountered before? Do you recognize the characters and events in the passage? Help one another find the answers. One place to look is in introductory essays and notes found in annotated Bibles as well as in other books that comment on the Bible. Introductory essays will answer general questions such as these:

- What is the type of literature?
- Who wrote it?
- When was it likely written?
- What are the main themes?

A commentary might discuss customs and ways of thinking of the time and symbolism as well as additional word translations. Remember, the Bible wasn't first written in English. It had to be translated, and there are many translations available. You may even want to ask members of your group to read from different English translations for comparison.

Knowing the practices, beliefs, and culture at the time the passage was written is important. It will help you understand, for example, that the prescription in Exodus "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:23–25) is a law that limited retribution at a time that allowed unlimited vengeance. As you study the Bible, you will get better at answering questions and learn more about the world in which the Bible was written. Don't worry if you cannot find

answers to all your questions. But continue to keep them in mind as you explore the meaning of the passage.

3. Read the verses immediately before and after the passage.

The verses just before and after the passage often provide great insight into the meaning of your reading. For example, the story of the woman who poured very expensive oil over Jesus's head in Matthew 26 comes just before the Last Supper. Knowing this context shows us that her action wasn't a random act of adoration, pouring oil on Jesus was preparing his body for death and, for readers, foreshadows the crucifixion.

4. Discuss the main themes of the passage.

Once you have a sense of the context, look back at the words and phrases you circled. These will help you identify the main themes of the passage. Discuss these themes with others in your group. Ask each other if these themes remind you of other stories in the Bible. If so, which ones? See if these themes remind you of experiences in your own life. Do these other stories help you understand the passage? If you were reading the eye-for-an-eye passage in Exodus, you might remember that Jesus taught a new standard of mercy and forgiveness: to love your enemies, to do good to those who hate you, and to turn the other cheek (Luke 6:29 and Matthew 5:39).

5. Ask, "What is the passage asking me to do?" and share your reflections.

The final step is to apply the themes and messages to your life and faith today. The Bible is the living word of God meant to help us understand God, ourselves, and our world and the relationships therein. Ask one another, "What does this mean for what I believe and how I choose to live?" Again, be aware of the original context of the writing. The texts were written in a specific time and culture that is quite different from ours. Consider your answer in terms of the practices and teaching of your faith community. Your faith community will give you a variety of viewpoints, provide wisdom, knowledge, and experience, and help you explore the meaning of the passage in your life.

Read the Bible: It's Our Journey with God

The Bible reflects our central beliefs: The Lord alone is our God, the Lord alone; God freed us from the bonds of death by sending his only Son, Jesus and calls us to love one another. Read the Bible as a story that tells you who God is, who you are, and what we are asked to do as people of God. The struggles of the people you read about in the Bible are often a lot like our struggles today. The life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus will help guide us in our lives today. His death and resurrection gives us new life today.

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Find the readings for the coming Sunday, choose one, and read it slowly. (The website textweek.com provides the Revised Common Lectionary readings.) What happens in the reading? Who are the characters? What do they say and do? Does anything surprise you?
2. **Be Intelligent:** What situation today does the reading address? What is the reading saying?
3. **Be Reasonable:** Consult a commentary. (The HarperCollins Bible Commentary is an example.) What do others say about the meaning of the reading? What new insights do these sources offer?
4. **Be Responsible:** What is the reading calling you to do?
5. **Be in Love Transformed:** What does this exercise suggest about how you might approach reading the Bible?

INTERLUDE

"Four Words toward Aha: Today We Remember Tomorrow"

FOUR words once stopped me in place. I now pray them when I prepare to celebrate Eucharist. They thrill me. A colleague at Diocesan House, about to preside at our weekly Eucharist, explained that we would use the readings and prayers assigned for the next day. She concluded: "Today we remember tomorrow."

The words sang: *Today* (any day), *we* (three or three hundred) *remember* (we give thanks by remembering) *tomorrow*. Imagine remembering tomorrow! Remembering God's promises, we project our hope.

As we make Eucharist, we pray: "We give thanks . . . for the goodness and love you have made known to us in creation, in the calling of Israel to be your people, in your Word spoken through the prophets, and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus your Son . . . On the night before he died for us, he took bread . . . Do this for the remembrance of me. After supper, he took the cup of wine . . . he gave it to them . . . Drink this . . . for the remembrance of me." Give thanks. Remember. Hope.

A former nun is the protagonist of the novel *Severina* by Italian author Ignazio Silone. As she lays dying, a sister from her former convent takes her hand: "Severina, tell me you believe." Severina says, "No . . . but I hope."

Might you express your faith that way? You've wondered about God, about how God is represented, about history. You hope, you trust, you remember . . . tomorrow.

Though it may not be at the forefront of your consciousness, that you are reading this book suggests you have had some history with God. You may be seeking to discover the radical center of your faith and hope: acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord. Do not allow anyone or anything to domesticate that radical center.

God challenges us to dream. To pray is to dream, to hope, to expect, to trust, to imagine. Whether worshipping with a community, reading alone, reflecting on the Bible, considering a personal experience, a story, or a movie, we are at work in an ecosystem of prayer, the research and development aspect of the Church.

Only the pray-er knows that the really real is God breaking into human history—breaking through our prejudices and preferred notions with questions about poor and powerless persons, about justice and peace, about personal and systemic transformation so we might break out with new God-given hearts to pursue God's heart's desires.

Allow God to transform you and the world around you. Don't let anyone define and reduce reality for you. Don't let anyone imprison you in that most secure prison without walls, without the context of history, the prison you don't know you're in, the prison of *non-saints*. Imagine the reality of God. See things differently. Remember tomorrow.

Look back on your history. Have you not been drawn by God? Look back on the idols you have abandoned. Might you be at a stage in your life where you are coming to believe less, but more so?

Over the past few years, I have read many columns of David Brooks. He seems often to write four columns, then a sermon. I'd be proud to preach his sermons.

"You'd think faith would be a simple holding of belief, or a confidence in things unseen," he wrote in a recent column titled *The Subtle Sensations of Faith*, "but, in real life, faith is unpredictable and ever-changing. It begins, for many people, with an elusive experience of wonder and mystery."

The "main business of faith," he continued, is "living attentively every day." He concluded:

Insecure believers sometimes cling to a rigid and simplistic faith. But confident believers are willing to face their dry spells, doubts, and evolution.

Faith as practiced by such people is change. It is restless, growing. It's not right and wrong that changes, but their spiritual state and their daily practice. As the longings grow richer, life does, too.⁶

Brooks noted that Christian Wiman wrote, "To be truly alive is to feel one's ultimate existence within one's daily existence."⁷

Today, we remember tomorrow.

6. David Brooks, Column, "The Subtle Sensations of Faith," *New York Times*, Dec. 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/23/opinion/david-brooks-the-subtle-sensations-of-faith.html>

7. Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE



History

As Bill reminds us in the interlude "Four Words toward Aha: Today We Remember Tomorrow," we already have a history with God. And your history is part of a long history. Just as God has drawn you, God has drawn countless saints before toward God's heart. So let us hear their witness so that we can continue on our journey toward God and remember tomorrow.

The Birth of the Church

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41–42)

This passage from Acts tells us that fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven like a violent wind. Tongues of fire rested on the apostles and they began to speak in many languages. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they were enabled to live in the **Great Commission** that Jesus had given them:

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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

As the people of God—the Church—we are called to this same great commission, which, as we sing in Hymn 527, is to "heal the sick and preach the word." How do you understand the Great Commission?

On that day of Pentecost the apostles baptized those who believed, about three thousand. We celebrate this day the Church was born each year as Pentecost, the fiftieth day of Easter. The Greek word translated as "church" is *ekklesia*, which literally means the people called out from the world and gathered, or the congregation. The word "Church" in this sense does not refer to a building, but to a community of believers.

After Jesus's resurrection, the apostles spread the teachings of Jesus first in Jewish communities near Jerusalem and later during mission journeys outside Jerusalem. These early communities understood themselves to be Jews who followed Jesus, a reform movement within Judaism. It was not until about 90 CE, nearly sixty years after Jesus's death and resurrection, that the followers of Christ began to be called "Christians."

The apostle Paul played an important part in spreading Christianity. Originally known as Saul, he was a Jewish Roman citizen who started out zealously persecuting followers of Jesus, but as we learn in Acts 9, on the road to Damascus, in what is now the country of Syria, everything changed. Saul met the risen Jesus for the first time through a vision telling him to spread the good news to the Gentiles, that is, people who were not descendants of the Israelites. He became a follower of Jesus after his conversion experience on the road to Damascus, and was then known by the name we use for him today: Paul.

Paul and his traveling partners began to establish Christian communities throughout the area around the Mediterranean Sea, which was at that time controlled by the Romans and was part of the Roman Empire. These early Christian communities—who believed the world as they knew it would end soon when Jesus returned—shared meals, teachings, and prayers in one another's homes. New converts joined the community through baptism, and they broke and ate bread together to remember Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism and the breaking of the bread are the two central sacraments of the Church today.

Throughout his letters, Paul developed a theology and a morality that might be summed up in this way: *Because Christ lives within you, you are something new. You are a new creation. That's the theology. And this is the morality. Therefore, be who you are. Live as a new creature. Be attentive in your own life to experiences that might lead you to change in some way.*

Communities of the Early Church

The map on page 50 in chapter 2 shows the location of many early church communities. Antioch, Ephesus, Alexandria, Corinth, and Rome, the large

cities of the Roman Empire connected by trading routes, had larger Christian communities. During the first few hundred years after Jesus's resurrection, the rest of the world had no—or at least very little—knowledge of Jesus. Christianity began as small communities in a specific region of the world—the Roman Empire—and from there it spread from Asia into Europe and Africa. During the fifteenth century, European colonization spread Christianity to the Americas. Today Christian churches exist throughout the world.

Episkopos in the Early Church

The apostles were the leaders of the early Church and had the authority of Jesus's teaching. The leader of a local Christian community was called, in Greek, *episkopos*, or "overseer." The word "Episcopal" in fact comes from the Greek word *episkopos*, and the English translation of Greek *episkopos* is "bishop." In the Episcopal Church, the bishop oversees the diocese, the primary geographic and administrative unit of the Episcopal Church. Early Christians also referred to their local leader as *presbyteros* (presbyter, or priest) and *diakonos* (deacon). Today the Episcopal Church has a three-fold ordained ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon, each with a distinct role in the Church. The apostles passed their authority to local leaders by laying their hands on new leaders. The continuation of the authority of the apostles' teaching by the laying on of hands is called **apostolic succession**. Apostolic succession and a threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons are defining characteristics of the Episcopal Church.

The Roman Empire to the Middle Ages

Christianity began to spread quickly in 324 CE, when Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity. Until that time, Christians were periodically persecuted by fines, imprisonment, and even put to death for refusing to worship Roman gods. When Constantine gained control over the entire Roman Empire, he moved its capital from Rome to Byzantium, in what is now the city of Istanbul, Turkey. He renamed the city "Nova Roma," or New Rome, but it was popularly known as Constantinople (the city of Constantinople later became the center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, while Rome became the center of Western Catholic Christianity. Constantine saw Christianity as a way to unify his vast empire and began the process of creating a uniform belief by calling the bishops together in 325 CE to Nicea, located in the present-day city of Iznik, Turkey. Their job was to find a common understanding of who Jesus was and his place in history. The result was the Nicene Creed, which we recite at church every Sunday.

By the fifth century, the Roman Empire had grown weak from invasion by tribes from northern Europe and political fighting in Rome. The end of Roman rule began the eleven-hundred-year period from about 400 to 1500 CE that we call the **Middle Ages**. The Western empire (Europe) broke into small regions with numerous languages, each ruled by different kings and noblemen. The Church provided both religious and cultural unity for Europe. The Roman emperor ruled the eastern part of the Roman Empire until 1453, when the Muslim Turkish rulers from Asia conquered the city of Byzantium.

During the Middle Ages in Europe, communities were organized around land owned by local noblemen and protected by knights. The peasants worked the land and produced goods for the nobility in exchange for protection. The Church, particularly monasteries, owned much of the land and became increasingly involved in social, political, and business aspects of daily life. Many monasteries were responsible for the spiritual as well as the economic and physical well-being of the people. Monks and nuns prepared medicine, sewed, and taught reading and writing. Monasteries were also the libraries for society and preserved important early Christian writings. The magnificent cathedrals in city and town centers such as the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, France stand in witness to the importance of the Church to life in the Middle Ages.

"The experiment of St. Benedict, St. Francis [both monks] . . . represented the revolt of a heroic soul against surrounding apathy and decadence; an invasion of novelty; a sharp break with society" (Evelyn Underhill).⁸ What response does the witness of St. Benedict call from us?

The Middle Ages were also the time of the Crusades. You may have seen movies such as *Kingdom of Heaven* or learned about the Crusades in grade school. The Crusades, which lasted about a hundred years, were launched in 1095 by the Church to recover the Holy Land—the region of the world where stories of the Bible took place and where Jesus lived—from the Muslims. The kings and other leaders in Europe supported the Crusades to acquire land, riches, and control over trading routes. During the Crusades, non-Christians, especially Jews and Muslims, were targets of persecution.

8. Evelyn Underhill, *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922), 6.

The Reformation

As the Roman Catholic Church grew more wealthy and powerful, church leaders limited the people's freedom to express opposing ideas. The Church used its power over the spiritual lives of the people to sell *indulgences*—pieces of paper that claimed to guarantee entry into heaven. Some people believed indulgences were abuses of Church power and violated the teachings of the Bible.

People began to protest these and other practices and called for reforms. This movement, which gained momentum in the sixteenth century, is called the **Reformation**. **Martin Luther** of Germany and **John Calvin** of France were two of the many leaders of the Protestant Reformation in Europe.

Martin Luther's most famous act was nailing ninety-five theses—or theses stated his disputes with the Roman Catholic Church, including selling indulgences. He argued against Roman Catholic Church teaching that salvation came through the Church. Instead, Luther promoted a doctrine called **justification by grace through faith**, which states that God has given people salvation freely. We cannot earn salvation through good deeds, but we can accept it with faith. Luther believed that people didn't need the Church between them and God and that the sacraments of bread and wine weren't necessary for salvation. God's grace was sufficient.

Meanwhile in France, John Calvin accepted Luther's doctrine of justification by grace through faith. But he also believed in the fundamental doctrine of predestination. **Predestination** is the belief that God directs the course of history down to the smallest detail. It is the job of people to maintain the order created by God. The Reformation resulted in the establishment of Protestant churches that broke with the traditional practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Both Luther and Calvin were important to this movement.

People had opposed doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church in earlier centuries. So what made the Protestant Reformation take off in the sixteenth century? Historians agree that the printing press played a big part in the Reformation's success. The printing press, first used in Europe in the mid-1400s, allowed dissenting opinions to be widely distributed, strengthening the Reformation movement.

The Reformation and the printing press also helped make it possible to produce translations of the Bible from Latin, the official language of the Church, into languages that people spoke every day, such as French, German, or English. New doctrines encouraged people to come to their own decisions about belief, so they needed to read the Bible in their own languages.

By 1524, Luther had translated the Christian scriptures into German, and by 1526 **William Tyndale** had translated them into English. This brought the words of the Bible and its interpretation into the hands of more believers than just educated clergy and monks educated to read Latin.

England during the Reformation

The Episcopal Church traces its roots directly to the Church of England, which, until **Henry VIII**, was part of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church of England had always recognized the pope in Rome as the head of the Church, and at first King Henry VIII supported the pope. For his loyal support, the pope named Henry VIII “Defender of the Faith.” Soon after, though, a dispute erupted. Henry VIII asked the pope to annul, or end, his marriage with Catherine of Aragon because she did not bear Henry an heir to the throne. The pope’s refusal to grant the annulment was a catalyst for the Church in England to recognize Henry as its head. In 1534 Parliament confirmed Henry as the supreme head of the Church of England with the “Act of Supremacy.”

The Church in England did not split from the Roman Church over differences of belief and, so, unlike Protestant Churches, the Church of England kept many of the practices and beliefs of the Roman Church, including its system of government by bishops and its style of worship. Like Protestant churches, the Church of England worshiped in the language of the people (in this case English), and the Church of England affirmed that salvation comes from God’s grace alone, not the deeds of the believer.

To make worship understandable to the common person, **Thomas Cranmer**, archbishop of Canterbury, compiled the *Book of Common Prayer*. Published in 1549 during the reign of King Edward VI, this prayer book is the first to present daily and Sunday services in English and in one volume. The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* has its roots in Cranmer’s 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*.

In 1553 Queen Mary I restored England to Roman Catholicism, but in 1558 Queen Elizabeth I inherited the throne and within one year reestablished an independent

Church of England. The Act of Uniformity (1559) made the *Book of Common Prayer* the official book of prayer for the Church of England. With Queen Elizabeth, the Anglican Church was set on a path to being a people of common prayer, rather than common belief.

“I have no desire to make windows into men’s souls.” –attributed to Queen Elizabeth I

The Church of England in North America

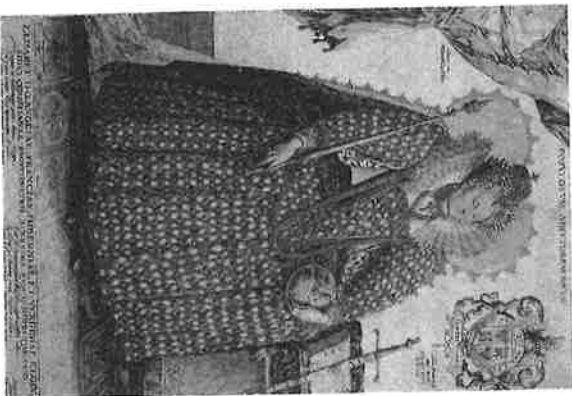
The Episcopal Church is uniquely American. Our history has greatly affected who we are, how we worship together, and how we govern ourselves. And it will continue to help define us into the future.

Just as Americans began to see themselves as a new nation apart from England and the crown, members of the Church of England in America also saw their church as separate from the Church of England. In 1607 the settlement town of Jamestown, Virginia, organized itself as a congregation with a priest ordained in England and supported its clergy with local government taxes. Because these settlers provided for their own financial needs, they began to see themselves as independent of the Church of England.

The situation was a little different in the northern colonies. Taxes in northern New England supported the Congregational Church, not the Church of England. In New England, members of the Church of England retained greater ties to England because religious societies in England paid for their priests. During the colonial period, no bishops ever visited or lived in America. The leaders of the Church of England and the British Parliament did not want to grant American communities the independence that having a bishop would provide. But the colonists didn’t really mind—as long as they had a sufficient number of priests, they were happy to be far from the rule of the Church of England.

American Bishops

After the Revolution, New England Anglicans wanted to organize themselves formally and felt they needed a bishop. In June 1783 they elected **Samuel Seabury**, the rector at a church in New York State, and sent him to England to be ordained a bishop. Because Samuel Seabury was an American citizen and couldn’t take the oath of the King’s Supremacy, the English bishops couldn’t ordain him a bishop. Seabury turned to the bishops in Scotland, who were not



Queen Elizabeth, 1533–1603



Samuel Seabury was the Episcopal Church's first American bishop.

bound by English law. In November 1784, they ordained Samuel Seabury as the first American bishop.

Two years later, Parliament granted the archbishop of Canterbury the right to ordain three bishops who would not be asked to swear an allegiance to the crown. By 1790 three American priests had been ordained as bishops, a sufficient number to bring the historic episcopate, or system of governance by bishops, to America.

The Birth of the Episcopal Church

When Samuel Seabury returned to America in 1785, he began to unify various Anglican churches as one American Episcopal Church. It wasn't an easy job. The communities in the North wanted to have bishops while those in the South had become accustomed to governing themselves without a bishop. The two groups also promised: They would have bishops, but the priests and members of the congregation would help choose bishops and write church canons, or laws.

The constitutions of the Episcopal Church passed in 1789 said that priests and members of parishes would elect bishops instead of being appointed by the king or queen as was done in England. Two houses—the House of Bishops, comprised only of bishops, and the House of Deputies, comprised of priests and general church members—would govern the Episcopal Church. The Laws can originate in either house, but both houses must agree on them. The two-house system was much like the two-house system of the US Congress. The year 1789 was a banner year for the Episcopal Church. It approved its constitution and adopted the first American *Book of Common Prayer*. The American Book of Common Prayer was much the same as the *Book of Common Prayer* in England, minus prayers for the king and royal family. Plus, it added a call to the Holy Spirit, or *epiclesis*, to the Eucharistic prayer, reflecting the influence of Scottish bishops on Samuel Seabury.

The Episcopal Church in the 1800s

After the American Revolution, the Episcopal Church continued to be shaped by the life and culture of the United States. During the 1800s, as the West was settled, the Civil War was fought, American industry expanded,

and a great number of people from Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia, southern Europe, and Asia immigrated to the United States. This immigration changed the country from a nation of people with a largely British background to a people with diverse practices and beliefs. Worship practices and social activities became likewise more varied in the Episcopal Church.

Westward Expansion and Missionaries

During its first few decades, the Episcopal Church struggled. General Conventions were poorly attended, several dioceses had no bishops, and membership did not grow. But along came John Henry Hobart, with his great energy and enthusiasm for evangelism. As bishop of New York from 1816 to 1830, Hobart was responsible for establishing Episcopal churches in nearly every major town in New York State, increasing their number from 50 to 170. During his first four years as bishop, the number of priests and deacons doubled and the number of missionaries quadrupled. By 1820 the number of Episcopal churches in the United States had doubled to four hundred. In 1835, the General Convention ordained missionary bishops who, instead of overseeing an established diocese, were sent to the frontier to establish new dioceses. Jackson Kemper was the first missionary bishop.

Traveling by horseback and open wagon, he organized eight dioceses and established two colleges. Kemper worked particularly among the Potawatomi, Seneca, Oneida, and Huron people, urged the Church to pay more attention to Native Americans, and encouraged the translation of the Bible and the prayer book into their native languages.

Jackson Kemper ordained Enmegabowh, an Odawa (Ottawa) from Canada, as a deacon in 1859. Twelve years later in 1867, Enmegabowh became the first recognized Native American priest in the Episcopal Church. In 1869, Paul Mazakute was ordained the first Dakota priest, and in 1881, David Pendleton Oakerhater became the first Cheyenne deacon. These men worked hard, often without the financial support of the wider church, to spread the gospel among Native American people. The Church's hard work in the missions paid off. From 1820 to 1859, the number of Episcopal congregations grew more than fivefold from 400 to 2,120.

African Americans and the Civil War

America was a nation of slavery and racial bigotry. Just after the Revolutionary War, 800,000 African Americans lived as enslaved people; only 59,000 African Americans were free citizens. America was also a place of great change. Absalom Jones, who was born in 1746 into slavery, purchased his wife's and his own freedom and later became the first African American to be



Absalom Jones was the first African American Episcopal priest. He was ordained in 1802. (Raphaelle Peale, Absalom Jones, 1810, oil on paper mounted on board, Delaware Art Museum. Gift of Absalom Jones School, 1971. Reproduced with permission).

ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church. Jones actively worked against the oppression of black Americans. He and other blacks had left St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia when its vestry decided to segregate blacks and whites, making blacks sit in the balcony during worship. He and others walked out and began another church that later joined the Episcopal Church as St. Thomas African Episcopal Church. Before the Civil War began, fifteen other African Americans were ordained Episcopal priests.

Born in 1820, **Harriett Tubman Ross** was another African American Episcopalian who fought for the freedom of enslaved people and against the oppression of blacks in America in the 1800s. Tubman Ross is a well-known leader of the Underground Railroad and is said to have delivered between sixty and three hundred people out of slavery into Canada. She also served as a nurse, scout, spy, and cook for the Union Army and was a staunch advocate for women's rights alongside Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Just as the nation was divided about slavery across North-South lines, so was the Episcopal Church. Southern agriculture was built on slave labor. Slaves didn't worship alongside their owners. Rather, southern Episcopal plantation owners built for their black slaves their own churches ministered to by white clergy. Northerners, for the most part, supported abolition, but some northern white churches segregated their members according to the color of their skin. The Episcopal Church never took an official position on slavery.

When the South seceded from the United States and declared itself a separate nation, many southern dioceses organized themselves as a breakaway church called the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America. The Episcopal Church did not recognize the split and continued to list southern bishops on the roster at general conventions. At the end of the Civil War, the southern dioceses were invited to return to the Episcopal Church; in 1865, the Episcopal Church was once again united.

Rise of Industry and the Church's Response to Social Problems

After the end of the Civil War, American industry grew by leaps and bounds, moving from fourth to first largest in the entire world. As people moved away from farms and small towns to seek jobs—and opportunity—in the factories, newcomers came to America from other countries, and our cities grew quickly. But the factories offered poor working conditions, low wages, and long hours. Many employed children. Two new social classes emerged—the working poor and the wealthy capitalists (those with money to build the factories and earn profits). New social problems appeared: unemployment, unsafe working conditions, child labor, and poor housing.

Episcopalians, who share a baptismal commitment to helping people in need, responded with action. **William Augustus Muhlenberg** was a proponent of the social gospel—an early twentieth-century movement that applied Christian ethics to issues of social concern. He founded the Church of the Holy Communion in New York City in 1844 as a rent-free church at a time when many churches charged people for the pew they sat in on Sunday mornings. He also started a parish school, a parish unemployment fund, and a fresh-air fund to send poor city children to the country for the summer. Muhlenberg also introduced his church to some traditionally Roman Catholic practices, such as weekly communion, altar flowers, choir robes, Christmas greens, and special services for Holy Week, the days when Christians recall Jesus's crucifixion and death. But Muhlenberg still retained the Protestant emphasis on a personal relationship with God.

⁵⁰So let the name brotherhood prevail, let there be no differences of worldly rank, in the Church of the Holy Communion."—William Augustus Muhlenberg⁵⁰

The Women's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions, organized in 1871, provided much of the funding for church-wide programs to help people in need. The Women's Auxiliary gave way in the 1970s to the **Episcopal Church Women (ECW)**, a church-wide organization whose mission is to empower women in a life of discipleship. In 1883, **William Rainsford**, rector at St. George's in New York City, created clubs for girls, boys, women, and men, as well as societies for different interest groups. He also built

⁵⁰ William Augustus Muhlenberg, "Address by the Rev. Dr. Muhlenberg at the Laying of the Corner Stone of the Church of the Holy Communion," transcribed by Wayne Kempton from *The Gospel Messenger and Church Record of Western New York*, Utica, August 3, 1844, <http://anglicanhistory.org/wmuhlenberg/corner-stone1844.html>

church schools with gyms for the city's poor children and started parish nursing programs.

The Oxford Movement

Augustus Muhlenberg's introduction of "Roman Catholic" traditions in the mid 1800s paved the way for other "high church" practices in other congregations around the country. Followers of the **Oxford Movement**, started in England in 1833, wanted the Episcopal Church to readopt Roman Catholic practices such as putting candles on the altar, having priests wear chasubles and other vestments, processing with a cross, and bowing at the passing of the cross. With huge numbers of immigrants from Roman Catholic backgrounds arriving in America during these years, many newcomers to the Episcopal Church felt at home with these rituals.

Many other people, however, were offended by these rituals and felt they were too similar to Roman Catholic practices. They worried that these formal rituals would make the Episcopal Church similar to the Roman Catholic Church in other ways, too. They feared that a more "Roman" Episcopal Church would try to exert power over people's individual beliefs.

This controversy, known as the "ritualist controversy," was not insignificant. For example, the bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts refused to visit a Boston church because it had candles and a crucifix on the altar and its rector wore vestments. In 1868 the General Convention considered a proposal to ban such practices. But Presiding Bishop John Henry Hopkins felt that diversity was good for the Church and kept most of these practices in place. Only bowing and lifting the bread and the wine during Eucharist acts of adoration were forbidden.

The Episcopal Church in the 1900s and Early 2000s

The 1900s were marked by interest in worldwide Church unity, continuing concerns about social issues, and growing attention to the role of women in the Church.

Church Unity

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, US church leaders wondered whether the various US church denominations (for example, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic) could address modern problems more effectively as one body. **William Reed Huntington**, an Episcopal priest, outlined four principles that the Episcopal Church believes are necessary to restore all denominations to unity as one Church. This important document

for the Episcopal Church became known as the *Chicago Quadrilateral* and is reprinted on pages 876–77 of the Book of Common Prayer in the section called "Historical Documents." In the early 1900s, **Charles Henry Brent**, an Episcopal bishop, led the way toward worldwide ecumenical discussions. In 1927, he presided over the World Conference on Faith and Order, which later became part of the **World Council of Churches**, a fellowship of about 350 Christian denominations worldwide.¹⁰

The Episcopal Church continues to work toward

*This is the symbol
for the World Council
of Churches.*

unity with other churches. In 1950 the Episcopal Church helped found the National Council of Churches.¹¹ The Episcopal Church entered into full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in 2000 and with the Moravian Church in 2010. Denominations in full communion recognize each other's members, ministries, and sacraments and can exchange pastors and priests. Full communion is not a merger. Rather, denominations respect differences and unite in a common witness to Christian faith and service in the world. Formal discussions of communion continue between the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Methodist Church.

Most member churches of the World Council of Churches are based in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific.

Blacks and the Episcopal Church

Partly because of its emphasis on envisioning its mission through a lens of the incarnation—God's presence and action in the world—the Episcopal Church has historically committed to being engaged in social issues. Even so, as we have noted earlier, the Episcopal Church has at times fallen short of living gospel values, just as the United States was largely segregated after World War II, so was the Episcopal Church. Segregation and racism were major political issues in the Church in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1960s, the Episcopal Church began to work more actively to address racism, by supporting civil rights laws and giving time and money to organizations that worked to end social inequalities. We remember a number of Episcopal civil rights



¹⁰ ecumenism.org.

¹¹ www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us

activists as part of the Church year. **Jonathan Daniels**, a young European-American Episcopal seminarian martyred in the civil rights movement and **Pauli Murray**, a civil rights lawyer, political activist, and the first African American woman ordained to the priesthood are two among many.

While African Americans had been attending seminaries since the 1800s, it wasn't until the 1950s that the Episcopal Church began to welcome both blacks and whites at the same seminaries. Some of the priests in the Episcopal Church were black, but their congregations were likely to be black, too. Some dioceses merged black and white congregations in an effort toward integration. In 1970 **John Burgess** was elected the first African American diocesan bishop to serve a diocese in the United States. The Union of Black Episcopalians,¹² established in 1968, is an organization devoted to preparing and encouraging black Episcopalians to live out the Baptismal Covenant and to participate fully in the mission and governance of the Episcopal Church. It has members throughout the continental United States, the Caribbean, Canada, Africa, and Latin America. In 1991, General Convention declared that the practice of racism is a sin and called on all Church members to work to remove racism from society.

Today about 3 percent of priests, 8 percent of bishops, and 6 percent of members of the Episcopal Church are African American. In 2008 as part of worship service held in the church founded by Absalom Jones, the Episcopal Church publicly apologized for its involvement in, and support for, the institution of slavery and for its support of segregation for years after the abolition of slavery in the United States. This apology is part of a long path of reconciliation that continues today.

In 2015 the Episcopal Church elected **Michael Curry** as its presiding bishop, the first black person to hold that position. In his first address as presiding bishop, he set out his vision for the Episcopal Church as a branch of the "Jesus Movement," called to go out into the world and be "instruments of God's reconciliation."

Michael Bruce Curry, the 27th Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, elected in 2015. He was previously bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina.



12. www.ubce.org

Remembering difficult history is an opportunity to notice God breaking in, challenging our prejudices, that we might hope, trust, and remember . . . a tomorrow filled with God's dreams.

Native Americans and The Episcopal Church

The history of the Episcopal Church among Native Americans isn't a proud one. The 1606 charter of Jamestown, Virginia, called for the Church of England to convert the "infidels and savages" who "live in darkness and miserable ignorance of true knowledge." In the late 1800s, the Episcopal Church established missions among Indians of the Southwest, but rarely supported these ministries financially or permitted Native Americans to be ordained to the priesthood.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the Church began to work in earnest to respect the spirituality of Native Americans and recognize their full participation in the Church. Two Native Americans—David Pendle-Native Americans. In 1977 the General Convention created the Navajoland Area Mission from parts of the Dioceses of Arizona, Utah, and Rio Grande in New Mexico as a diocese of its own, serving the Navajo Nation. The General Convention of 1997 designated a Decade of Remembrance, Recognition, and Reconciliation "for welcoming Native Peoples into congregational life and developing an outreach partnership among urban Native Peoples." Today, the Episcopal Church has a Missioner for Indigenous Ministries whose office is charged with full inclusion of Native and Indigenous people in the life and leadership of the Episcopal Church.

In 2012 the Episcopal Church joined with the World Council of Churches to renounce the **Doctrine of Discovery**,¹³ the belief by Christian colonialists in the right to claim ownership of "discovered" land that already belonged to sovereign indigenous peoples. Americans of European descent benefit even today from this doctrine. A mission of the Episcopal Church is to acknowledge and address the long-term effects of colonial occupation and policies of dominating indigenous peoples.

Latino-Americans and Asian-Americans and the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church has fifty-plus years of history of ministry in Latino communities and an Office of Latino/Hispanic Ministries that seeks to support

13. Katherine Jefferts Schori, "Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery," www.episcopalchurch.org/papers/indigenousministries/repudiation-doctrine-discovery

the work of the Church in forming disciples within Spanish-speaking communities. Reaching out to this fast-growing segment of Americans continues to be a priority for the Episcopal Church.

Asamericans have been part of the Episcopal Church since the late 1800s. **Hiram Hisanori Kano** was the first Japanese American priest ordained in the United States in 1936. Kano served as a missionary to Japanese Americans in Nebraska and ministered to many in Japanese internment camps during World War II. The Office of Asiamerican Ministries offers resources to spread the good news of Christ among Asian American communities.

Women and the Episcopal Church

Historically, women have not enjoyed the same rights to church governance, leadership, and participation as men. In 1889 the Episcopal Church adopted the office of female deaconate as a way for young single women to help care for the needs of the poor and sick and to train young people in the faith. But deaconesses did not have a liturgy of ordination in the Book of Common Prayer and had to resign if they married.

The Episcopal Church also revived religious orders for women. In 1845 **Anne Ayres**, a parishioner of the Church of the Holy Communion in New York City, became the first religious sister in the United States in the Anglican tradition. But women still were not invited to leadership positions in the Episcopal Church.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, the number of deaconesses declined. Instead, many women interested in serving the Church worked as directors of Christian education or teachers at seminaries.

In 1944 Florence Li Tim-Oi became the first woman ordained a priest in the Anglican Communion. She was ordained in Hong Kong to minister to Chinese refugees in Japanese-occupied China.

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that women gained greater rights within the Church. In 1964, deaconesses were given the right to marry and in 1970, women could serve as lay readers and deputies to General Convention. After a resolution in 1973 to ordain women as priests, on July 29, 1974 eleven women deacons—known as the “Philadelphia eleven”—were ordained as priests by three retired bishops.

Two years later, the General Convention changed canon law to allow the ordination of women into the threefold ministry of deacon, priest, and bishop. In 1989, **Barbara Clementine Harris** became the first woman bishop.

Louie Crew Clay (on the right) founded Integrity and has played an important role in the movement toward full inclusion of LGBTQ in the life of the Church.

the Episcopal Church. In 2006, the General Convention elected **Katharine Jefferts Schori** as presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church. In 2017, fewer than 10 percent of all Episcopal bishops were women.

LGBTQ and the Episcopal Church

Like all people, those who identify themselves as LGBTQ are children of God. The Church, however, has not always treated them as full members. In 1976, however, General Convention officially declared that LGBTQ people have “a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.” Integrity USA, founded by lay activist **Louie Crew Clay**, has been working since 1975 to make that resolution a reality in the life of the Church. In 1994, sexual orientation was added to the nondiscrimination canons for ordination and in 2003, **V. Gene Robinson** became the first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church. In 2012 the Episcopal Church officially prohibited discrimination based on gender identity or expression. Today two people, regardless of gender, can get married to one another in the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church Today

The Episcopal Church still works for greater unity among all churches in the world and takes social issues just as seriously as ever. Presiding Bishop **Michael Curry** suggests that every Episcopalian is a part of the Jesus Movement, called by God to be an evangelist who proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ, embodies Jesus’s reconciling way of life, and cares for creation. You are invited to orient your heart, mind, and body toward the teachings of Jesus in your life every day. Most of the Episcopal Church’s responses to injustices are enacted by local churches as congregations strive to live the gospel imperatives to feed the poor, clothe the naked, comfort the afflicted, and release the prisoner. On the churchwide level, the Episcopal Church’s Office of Government Relations in Washington, DC, advocates for laws that address racial reconciliation, climate change, the environment, and

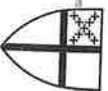


social justice issues. The House of Bishops, Executive Council, and presiding bishop add their voices, doing so recently for issues such as gun violence, climate change, marriage equality, racial reconciliation, and sacred land rights of indigenous peoples. Internationally, the Episcopal Church actively works toward just peace and eliminating global poverty, fostering sustainable development in support of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

The Episcopal Church today has about 6,500 congregations and missions and 1.8 million active baptized members, about 580,000 of whom regularly attend Sunday worship. About three-fifths of the laity and one-third of clergy are women. The Episcopal Church is growing more ethnically diverse and has the opportunity to show how we can live together in diversity as one community. About 6 percent of Episcopalians are black, about 4 percent are Latino, and about 1 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander.¹⁴ Our buildings, cultures, languages, and our styles of worship vary greatly, but we are a people bound by a shared faith in one God, common ministry, and common prayer.

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Select a contemporary issue facing the Episcopal Church today. What do you believe about the issue? Have you prejudged the issue or those who espouse one position or another?
2. **Be Intelligent:** Identify an experience that relates to your belief. How does this experience affirm or challenge your belief? What other understandings are possible?
3. **Be Reasonable:** What do others believe about this issue? You may want to confirm your understanding with others. What new information or perspectives do these other positions bring to your own beliefs?
4. **Be Responsible:** Do your new insights suggest that you might act differently?
5. **Be in Love Transformed:** What might you do in the future to invite others to share different perspectives on an issue?



Part Four

Be Intelligent

14. Tables, Charts, and Research Reports, The Episcopal Church, www.episcopalchurch.org/research-reports

INTERLUDE

"I Set My Heart on God"

More than fifty-five years ago in a Gregorian University classroom in Rome, my alma mater, a professor introduced his course on the theology of revelation—what we know about God because God told us—with this image.

In a large lecture hall, accommodating several hundred students from perhaps fifty countries, he paced, slowly, along a raised platform.

He pressed one white dot with chalk on an enormous blackboard. After a dramatic pause, he said in Latin, "The white is what we know about God. The black is what we don't. What we know is little. But the little God has given us to know is precious."

Among the precious little, one might say, is the Nicene Creed, a fourth-century profession of faith prayed during Sunday celebrations of Eucharist. "I believe," at Roman Catholic Mass. "We believe," at the Holy Eucharist in Episcopal churches.

Though you may have said this creed for ten, twenty, or fifty years, has it been for you prayer or recitation? For much of my life, the Nicene Creed at worship seemed to be a recitation of beliefs, hardly a prayer.

I was delighted, a few years ago to read a *New York Times* op-ed by T.M. Luhmann, a Stanford professor of anthropology, in which she claimed "the role of belief in religion is greatly overstated, as anthropologists have long known."¹⁵

I was drawn in by the clever headline: Belief is the least part of faith. The headline is overstated—but, I think, not greatly so.

Part of the problem with seeing faith only as belief is that, although belief has a verb form in English (to believe), faith does not. To faith? Rather, "faith" has commonly borrowed "to believe" as its verb. Therein lies the problem. Perhaps the English verb form for faith might better be "to trust."

"Religious belief as we now conceptualize it," Ms. Luhmann writes, "is an entirely modern phenomenon."

She refers to the comparative religion scholar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who pointed out that when the King James Bible was printed in 1611, "to believe" meant something like "to hold dear."

Smith once wrote that the affirmation "I believe in God" used to mean: heart and soul. I committedly opt to live in loyalty to him. I offer my life to be judged by him, trusting his mercy."¹⁶

The argument has been made that "Credo" (I believe, the first word of the Nicene Creed in Latin) has the same root as "heart."

Saying "I believe," then, isn't just a statement about whether I believe God exists. It's a statement about where my heart is. When I proclaim, "I believe," I say I am giving my heart to God. To give my heart changes how I choose to live.

Try praying the Nicene Creed in this way. In place of "I/we believe," think and pray, "I set my heart on."

I set my heart on one God, the Father almighty. I set my heart on one Lord Jesus Christ. I set my heart on the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. I set my heart on one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Related to this is a lovely old story about the difference between "I believe that" and "I believe in" (I set my heart on). If you watch a man pushing a wheelbarrow along a tightrope between two tall buildings and bet ten dollars that he will make it across, you believe "that." If you place yourself in the wheelbarrow, you believe "in."

15. T. M. Luhmann, "Belief is the Least Part of Faith," *New York Times*, May 29, 2013.

16. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Belief and History* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1977), 44.

CHAPTER FOUR



Faith: Whom Do We Trust?

Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. (Mark 10:52)

In a few words, "Go; your faith has made you well," Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus. Without sight the world was threatening, dangerous, limiting, and full of fear. Blind Bartimaeus made a life begging at the side of the road, taking more than giving. But, sensing that Jesus was near, Bartimaeus cried out, "Have mercy." Jesus answered, "What do you want me to do for you?" "My teacher, let me see again," he said. Jesus then proclaimed, "Go; your faith has made you well."

Bartimaeus's faith gave him a new way of seeing, and it showed him a world filled with light, hope, and possibility. In this new world with God's love, Bartimaeus need not be afraid. Perhaps Bartimaeus had been taunted as a beggar. We do not know. We do know that Bartimaeus was healed. God loved Bartimaeus, and he was so changed by this new way of seeing that he got up immediately and followed Jesus. Just like that, he became a disciple. Our faith too is a new way of seeing. Through faith we see the world as a place in which God blesses us and invites us to respond with loving actions. When we see the world as God invites us to do, we are drawn to become followers of Jesus, just like Bartimaeus. We express how we experience God's love in our statements of belief.

Statements of Faith

We have three official statements of faith in the Episcopal Church—the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We say the Nicene Creed during Holy Eucharist and we say the Apostles' Creed during

the service of Holy Baptism and the "Daily Office" of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer. You can find the Athanasian Creed among historical documents in the Book of Common Prayer (pages 864–65).

In his interlude to this chapter, Bill points out that when the King James Bible was printed the words "I believe" were best understood as meaning "I hold dear." What does it mean to hold God dear?

These creeds are ancient statements of belief that grew out of questions and disputes in the early years of the Church. Questions such as: Who exactly are Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit also divine? Is Jesus both divine and human? Is belief in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit belief in one God? How are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit related? Church councils in Nicea and Chalcedon, towns in present-day Turkey, met during the fourth and fifth centuries to ponder these questions, and in response wrote the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is a statement of faith by a community, so it begins with the phrase "We believe."

The Apostles' Creed developed from the answers to the questions the Church asked candidates for baptism in the early years of Christianity. Those questions are:

Do you believe in God the Father?
Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

Candidates for baptism—or their godparents—continue to answer these very same questions today along with the entire congregation gathered to witness the baptism. The Apostles' Creed is a personal statement of belief, so it begins with the phrase "I believe"—"I believe in God, the Father almighty."

The Apostles' Creed

Take a minute or two to read the Apostles' Creed slowly.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Setting Your Heart on God

The Apostles' Creed begins with the words "I believe in God." When we say, "I believe in God," we aren't asserting that God exists. We are saying that we are in relationship with God. It's like saying to someone you love, "I believe in you." In his essay that precedes this chapter, Bill reminds us the words "creed" and "heart" share the same Latin root. So, as Bill suggests, when we proclaim our belief in God, what we're really saying is, "I set my heart on God." What a difference this makes—by setting our hearts on God we are entering into a relationship of trust. The creeds are statements about the God we love and trust.

Say the Apostles' Creed, substituting the words "I love" for the words "I believe." How does this change your understanding?

The Trinity

The Apostles' Creed (like the Nicene Creed) is Trinitarian: I believe in God . . . I believe in Jesus Christ . . . I believe in the Holy Spirit . . . Three persons in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We call God who exists in three eternal distinct, and equal persons, the Trinity. The word "trinity" comes from two Latin words—*tri* meaning "three" and *unitas* meaning "unity." God's nature is three persons united in one God.

Theologians in ivory towers did not invent that God is three-in-one. That understanding of God reflects the experience of early Christians of the resurrected Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. That experience then led the Church to an understanding of God as a community of outpouring love—a God in-relationship, a God who is being-in-community. To believe the God is Trinity is to believe that relationship is at the heart of the universe.

To believe that God is Trinity is to believe that you and I do not exist as genuinely human persons unless in relationship with others and with God.

A traditional doctrine of the Trinity is that the three persons that are One God are one, equal, and coeternal.



The triquetra is a symbol of the Trinity.

One. There are myriad analogies to understand the Trinity. None are perfect. But try thinking about the Trinity as analogous to time: Time is composed of past, present, and future. Each is distinct from the other, yet each is an expression of the same concept, that is, time. The past does not represent one kind of time, the present another, and the future still another. They are one. Likewise, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each distinct persons, yet each is God.

Equal. Past, present, and future each represent a different aspect of the same time. One isn't more important than the other; you can understand one only alongside the others. You cannot, for example, understand the past without also knowing about both the present and the future. Suppose you went to church on Sunday. On the next day, Monday, you can say that your going to church happened in the past. How do you know it was in the past? Because you know it is an event that happened before the present day, Monday. You see, you know the past only in relation to the present. The same is true for the future. All times—present, past, and future—are equal and are known only in relation to the other. This represents their *equality*. In the same way, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are equal persons as One God. The way we understand the Son, for example, helps us understand the Father and the Holy Spirit, too.

Coeternal. We can't really understand the time without a past, present, and future—those three elements are **coeternal**. That is, all three are part of the same time. The Son and the Holy Spirit were with God the Father before creation, are with God the Father now, and will be with God the Father to the end of time. In much the same way, the three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, have existed and will exist together as one for all time.

The basic belief regarding the Trinity is as follows: "The Father is God, the Son is God, Holy Spirit is God, Father is not the Son, Son is not the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit is not the Father, There are not three gods, but one God." Theologians throughout the centuries have tried to understand and explain how this is so. Some understandings may have been better than others. None

has been absolute. For whenever we talk about God, we can say no more than "God is like . . ."

What the Words in the Apostles' Creed Mean

When praying any creed, be attentive to the words and only those words, not to particular understandings that you or others may lay on the words. Recognize that people and churches have laid more than one understanding on creedal statements and that the Episcopal Church does not require that you choose one or another of those understandings in order to be an Episcopalian.

I believe in God

We begin with the first person of the Trinity—God the Father. We're affirming that God is real, that there is a wonderful and magnificent "other" to whom we're faithful, in whom we trust, and who is intimately concerned with each of us—our well-being and our relationships with other people and all creation. But even more than that, we're proclaiming that we love God, we give our hearts to God, and we want to have a relationship with God.

the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

We don't believe in just any God. The God we love adopted us as daughters and sons and enters human history again and again with mighty acts that continually reconcile us to God. We believe in the God who made all things, both in heaven and on earth, and who is the source of all things, everywhere.

God as Father is just one image that Christians use to express their experience of God. Throughout the Bible, God is described in many ways. God is described as both male and female. In Isaiah 66:13, for example, God is depicted as a mother who comforts her child. God is described as nature. In Psalm 134, for example, the psalmist calls God "my Rock." The prayers we use during church services express many images for God: God as ruler of the universe, fountain of life, source of goodness, holy Lord, shield and armor of light, wisdom, and giver of life. These images acknowledge that God reveals God's self in many ways. Any one image cannot adequately describe God.

Acknowledging God—and our loving relationship with God—makes a difference in the way we see the world in a totally different way. When the Israelites faced a wilderness as they journeyed out of Egypt and wondered how they'd ever find their way, God guided them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. When they had nothing to eat, God gave them manna from heaven.

enough for their daily needs. When they were thirsty, God led them to a rock that Moses struck, ordering it to gush with water to quench their thirst. In the Christian scriptures, Jesus continued to show us new ways of seeing the world. The poor, he said, will receive the kingdom of God, the hungry will be satisfied, the sad will laugh, and mourners will be comforted. When we see the world the way Jesus sees it, we look at the world a lot differently. Later in the chapter, we'll explore how believing in God changes who we are and how we respond to others in the world. Receiving the kingdom of God with new eyes prompts us to be part of making God's dreams for the world come true.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

We proclaim our belief in the second person of the Trinity—Jesus Christ. By saying "I believe in Jesus Christ," we're doing more than acknowledging that somebody named Jesus lived in a little country in the Middle East two thousand years ago. Instead, we're committing our lives to this Jesus and becoming his followers, or disciples. We're committing ourselves to the Law of Moses (the Ten Commandments) and to the new commandment of Jesus: to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The second part of this phrase (his only Son) affirms that Jesus is the perfect human image of the Divine. His life and ministry show us the essence of God, which is love. We call Jesus "our Lord" because we know he brings us to God the Father. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Christians who acknowledge Jesus as their way to the Father need not believe that God does not relate to those who commit to God in ways other than Christian.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

This is a strong statement. It says that we believe Jesus is both human and divine. By entering our world as a human being, God entered history and became a person just like you and me. God became one of us. Jesus was born, just like us, into a human family, and grew up in that family. The Gospels focus on Jesus's public ministry as an adult and don't say very much at all about Jesus's youth. This shouldn't surprise us. The Gospels aren't modern biographies. They are proclamations of the good news that God's kingdom has arrived in Jesus, the risen Christ.

But the Gospels do tell us lots of things about what Jesus was like. Like us, Jesus slept, ate, laughed, and cried. Like us, Jesus faced temptations. Like

us, Jesus faced times of weakness and asked God to take away his troubles. Like us, Jesus needed his closest friends for support. Like us, Jesus felt pain and abandonment. Jesus was subjected to the great suffering on the cross.

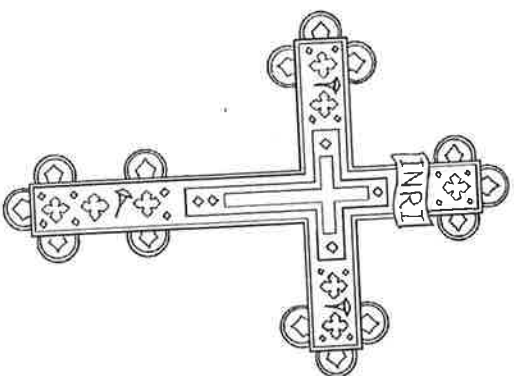
Our belief that Jesus was God in the flesh is called the **incarnation**. The Word became flesh and lived among us. We say the words "Virgin Mary" both to emphasize Jesus's humanity and to connect Jesus with the ancient prophecy in Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel [meaning God is with us]."

The words "born of the Virgin Mary" proclaim our belief that Jesus did not simply take on the appearance of a man, but was truly human, as well as truly divine. The scandal of our faith is that God redeemed creation by entering into it.

Jesus was also fully divine. Nothing separated Jesus from God. Jesus expressed the love of God in his life by healing the sick, forgiving sins, mending broken relationships, turning away from evil, and calling everyone back to friendship with God. We don't mean that Jesus was just a man who led a good life, but that God the Father lived completely in Jesus. God took on human nature in Jesus.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

It might seem odd to mention Pontius Pilate in a statement of belief about God. He receives a bad reputation in our reading of the Bible as the Roman leader who questioned Jesus at his trial and condemned him to death on the cross. So why mention him in the creed? Mentioning Pontius Pilate by name sets Jesus squarely into human history. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, an ancient region in Palestine that was part of the Roman Empire, which from 26 to 70 CE, the time of Jesus's crucifixion, included the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish historian Josephus, who lived shortly after Jesus, records Pilate's rule. God became flesh at a specific time and place.



The cross is a central Christian symbol.

was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

Jesus really did suffer and die as a human on the cross. Through Jesus, God chose to suffer and die as one of us. We say he descended to the dead not necessarily to say that Jesus literally went to a place where the dead resided, but that God offers salvation through Jesus to all people—to the living and those who had already died before Jesus was born into the world. Death is not the last word for anyone. God offers freedom from death, or salvation, to all people.

On the third day he rose again.

After Jesus died a number of women came to the tomb where Jesus was laid to anoint his body with perfumes and oils. But they were amazed to find that the tomb was empty. In the Gospel according to Luke, two angels told the women that Jesus had risen from the dead, or resurrected, and they ran to tell Jesus's closest friends, the disciples. For forty days, the risen Jesus revealed himself to the disciples, who recognized him whenever they shared a meal together. The Road to Emmaus in Luke 24 is a poignant story of two disciples who recognize that the stranger with them is Jesus right at the moment that he breaks bread for a meal.

By conquering death, Jesus opened the way for eternal life. "Eternal life and salvation" has a variety of meanings. Eternal life and salvation means a life without physical or emotional suffering and a life where our sins are forgiven. We cannot experience salvation completely as human beings living on earth. But through our faith in God and with God's help we can make choices that lessen human suffering and demonstrate God's love to others.

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we no longer have to live completely separated from God. And just as he revealed himself to the disciples, Jesus continues to reveal himself to us through the Eucharist, the special meal Christians share together, and through the loving actions of people toward one another and creation. Death did not end the story.

The resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Through Jesus's resurrection we are made a new creation and given a way of eternal life.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

We believe that Jesus dwells with the Father just as someday we will, too. The words "seated at the right hand" don't mean that Jesus is literally sitting next to God on God's right. In the ancient world, the most important person at dinner sat to the right of the host. It is a way of saying that Jesus shares in the authority and power of God as ruler of all creation.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus came to proclaim the good news of God: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). God created the world and rules the world today. What we mean by ruling the world is that God has a purpose and order for the world. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to take care of the earth and all living creatures. God sent Jesus to show us the way to live according to God's will and to offer the healing we need to love ourselves, others, and creation. We also look forward to a time when we are no longer separated from God and live in accordance with God's will. We look for the time when our relationship with God is completely restored, when we meet God face-to-face, so to speak.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

The **Holy Spirit** is the third person of the Trinity—God's power and presence in our past, our present, and our future. The Holy Spirit is God at work in the world and the Church—from the beginning of time to eternity. The Holy Spirit is the breath over nothingness at creation, the manna from heaven that fed the Israelites in the wilderness, the words of God at the start of Jesus's ministry saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Holy Spirit is the rush of violent wind at Pentecost when the apostles began to spread



The descending dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

the good news of Jesus in other languages (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity that strengthens, nourishes, and sustains us. Through the Holy Spirit, we live in Christ and Christ lives in us. Through the Holy Spirit, we bring Christ's joy, peace, and justice into the world.

the holy catholic Church,

"Catholic" is another word for universal, or worldwide. When we say that we believe in the **catholic** Church, we mean we support one universal faith community, all those who believe in Jesus. According to tradition, the Church was founded when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles on Pentecost. On that day, three thousand were baptized. We, like those baptized at the founding of the Church, devote ourselves "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

the communion of saints,

The word "saints" here means a community of faithful people, the many members of the Body of Christ, who believe in God and Jesus Christ. When we are initiated into the life of the Church at baptism, we become a saint with a lowercase "s." This is different from the uppercase "S" Saints who are given particular honor in the Roman Church for their devout lives and miracles. Affirming our membership in the community of saints means that we're related in our faith with all other members of the Body of Christ, or the Church. We care for that relationship through worship, prayer, and serving one another.

the forgiveness of sins,

No matter what we do wrong, God wants to restore friendship with us and forgives us even before we ask. At baptism, we—or our parents and sponsors—renounce evil and turn to Jesus Christ as our Savior. But inevitably we miss the mark and fail to live up to our baptismal promises by things we do—and sometimes we don't do. Sometimes our actions bring evil into the world, the brokenness of creation. So again and again we need to turn away from evil, say we're sorry, and ask for God's forgiveness. We can be confident that God will always forgive us.

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

We believe that God will raise us in our entirety to a new life with God. Because we are living members of the Body of Christ—the Church—we share in Jesus's resurrection. Just as Jesus conquered sin, suffering, and death, we will no longer experience pain or suffering. We will be resurrected in perfection by God and, as resurrected people, we will be united with God, living in that perfect joy and peace with one another, loving God and each other in a way that is not possible now. Ultimately, nothing—not sin, not suffering that we know now on earth, not even death—will separate us from the love of God.

Faith as Seeing and Responding

Bartimaeus's faith opened up his eyes and made him jump up and follow Jesus. Notice those two actions: faith gave sight and sight prompted a response. The same is true for our faith. Our faith means we see the world within a relationship with God. And we respond in ways that maintain our relationship with God and the world. Like Bartimaeus, we're called to follow.

We say we believe in—set our hearts on—God almighty. What we see is a God who is with us, loves us, and takes care of us. God is at the center of our lives and we promise to live according to God's will. We say we believe in—set our hearts on—Jesus. What we see is a world in which God knows us intimately—our pain, our joy, and our fears—because through Jesus he became one of us. Jesus still shows us signs of the kingdom of God, a world marked by life, joy, plenty, and justice. In return, we promise to be disciples of Jesus, to make the world more like the kingdom of God. We say we believe in—set our hearts on—the Holy Spirit. That means we see a world in which God acts in the world today, offering forgiveness, sustaining life and growth, and guiding the world toward its fulfillment. We respond by welcoming God's guidance, accepting God's forgiveness, and seeking to align our actions with God's will. We do this by taking the time to worship God and to pray each day, offering God our questions, and asking for guidance. Through prayer we invite God into our decisions and continue to ask ourselves whether what we are doing is sharing the love that God gives us.

Believing changes how we see things and how we respond to the world.

Belief without action is not belief.

How Do We Know How to Respond?

Remember, our relationship with God is a covenant relationship. The stories of the Jewish scriptures (Old Testament), the life and ministry of Jesus, and the promises we made at baptism tell us about how to live into that sacred covenant. When God established the covenant with the Israelites through Moses, God promised to be their God, guiding them and giving them life, food, and drink. In response, God required the people to be faithful, to love justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God. Christians respond to the sacred covenant God established with the Israelites as the **Old Covenant**. Think of the word "old" here as a term of respect. It does not mean that this covenant is no longer life giving or relevant.

As part of the covenant with the Israelites, God gave the Ten Commandments to show what it means to live within the covenant. You can read them in Exodus 20:1–17 and also in Deuteronomy 5:6–21. The first four commandments define our relationship with God. We worship one God. We honor God through love and respect and by putting God first. The last six commandments define our relationship with others. To be faithful to our respect for all life.

Jesus came into the world to fulfill the laws that God gave to the Israelites. That is, Jesus fulfilled God's laws by loving God and loving his neighbors as he loved himself. And more, through his resurrection, Jesus fulfilled the laws by offering us forgiveness for all the times we disobey God's laws. Through Jesus, God established a new covenant, a new relationship with humanity. In the New Covenant, Jesus promises us the kingdom of God, a Christ calls us to respond in love by keeping his laws, especially the following two **Great Commandments**:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

and

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:35–40)

Notice how these two Great Commandments mirror the Ten Commandments. The first commandment is about loving God while the second is about loving others. To live within the covenant relationship with God, our every action should reflect our love for God, self, and neighbor. The Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer (page 847) offers a specific guide on how to do this.

Honoring our relationship with God means that we:

- love and obey God and bring others to know God;
- put nothing in the place of God;
- show God respect in thought, word, and deed; and
- set aside regular times for worship, prayer, and the study of God's ways.

We choose to take these actions as free responses to our loving God. Imagine meeting a person who brings out the best in you, who makes you

laugh, who stays by your side through both good and bad times, and who asks something of you. We introduce that friend to our other friends, and we make time to be together.

These first four actions place God at the center of our lives. They help us to know God's generous love. Knowing that love, we can see the goodness that God wants for the world. By taking time to love God and putting God at the center, we allow God to draw us toward actions that share God's love. These actions will be to:

- love, honor, and help our neighbors;
- respect life and do things that bring peace to the world;
- respect ourselves and our bodies;
- be honest and fair in all that we do;
- speak the truth;
- honor the life and gifts of others.

God loves all creation. When we join God's kingdom we also love all creation as God loves us—without reservation. We take care of the earth and everything in it. We live honestly. We usually think of rules as a nuisance, but they're really a way of freedom because they help people flourish in community. The Old Covenant and the New Covenant reveal what it means to be in life-giving relationship with God and with others.

Breaking Relationship

Following God's will isn't always easy. Sometimes we fall short. That is, we sin. The Catechism defines sin as "seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation" (BCP, 848). When we sin we are breaking our promise to God and our relationship with God and one another. We often put ourselves—not God—first. Every day, things that are bad tempt us away from the love of God. This evil takes away our faith and takes away with God's love know God's love and see the possibilities for a world filled with God's love.

We cannot promise not to sin, but we can promise to acknowledge when we have acted wrongly, seek forgiveness, and with God's help promise to make right choices.

Asking for Forgiveness

The second of the five baptismal promises is "to persevere in resisting evil, and whenever [we] fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord." We don't promise to be perfect or never to sin; that would be a promise we could never keep. We promise that when we sin we will acknowledge what we'd done, turn away from sin, and turn toward God by asking forgiveness from God and those we've hurt. We promise to restore a right relationship with God and with other people. We can seek forgiveness in many ways. We can ask God's forgiveness anytime at all. We also confess our sins as a community during our Sunday worship. And we can participate in a rite called the Reconciliation of a Penitent, confessing our sins privately to a priest and receiving absolution, or forgiveness. Chapter 9 explores this rite.

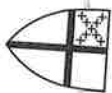
Putting Your Faith Into Practice

Like Bartimaeus, we see the world in a whole new way when our eyes are opened up by faith. With our every action, we try to follow the two Great Commandments of Jesus, and our baptismal promises help us do that. Our actions are the ways we put into practice the faith that's in our hearts.

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Identify a time when you felt embraced by God's love. Describe the event. What happened? Who was present? What was said or done?
2. **Be Intelligent:** How does it feel to be embraced by God's love? What were you thinking and feeling at the time? What do they suggest about what it means to be embraced by God's love?
3. **Be Reasonable:** Share your story with a companion and invite your companion to share with you a story about feeling God's embrace. What do your stories have in common? How are they different? What do the similarities and differences suggest?
4. **Be Responsible:** What are you able to challenge yourself to do as a result of God's embrace?
5. **Be in Love Transformed:** What do you need to give up to take up that challenge? Pray for the grace to do so.

Part Five



Be Reasonable

INTERLUDE

"A Troubling Call"

His mother Mary once took a troubled teenager named Jesus to a monastery, to a monk who had a reputation as a teacher and healer. The monk asked Jesus what was troubling him. "God," Jesus said. "God is making me wonder about things. About who I am. About what I might do. I don't know why."

The monk suggested that Mary allow Jesus to stay with him for a while. He convinced Jesus that God would not trouble a young man in this way. The teenage Jesus was healed. He returned with his mother to Nazareth where he lived a relatively happy life as a carpenter—and died of old age.

Commenting on this story he heard from Jesuit peace activist Daniel Berrigan, Tom Roberts, now of the *National Catholic Reporter*, then a journalist/columnist with the old Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) *Globe-Times*, wrote "Christian communities should stand as signs of contradiction in any age. If they don't, then either the kingdom promised is here in all its fulfillment or we're doing something wrong."¹⁷

The remedy is God's, Roberts continued. Nevertheless, "God's action takes us into account. We live at the intersection of very mysterious freedoms, God's and our own. . . . Never did those freedoms brush against each other more intimately than with the life of that wild holy that began two thousand years ago in another Bethlehem."

All we have been given—energy, talent, time, money—has been given for the sake of God's remedy, the kingdom where everybody is someone. God's remedy begins with God's troubling call. May we not tame it.

The perennial Christian strategy of Acts 2:42—"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"—has been paraphrased as (1) gather the folks; (2) break the bread; (3) share the stories.

Though it is crucial that the stories be told far beyond the close quarters of churches, the true story upon which our lives as Christians are based—the life, dying, and new life of Jesus Christ—is rehearsed again and again where the folks are gathered to break the bread. Re-membering our subversive story in our faith communities is at the heart of Passover and Eucharist.

As a teen, I struggled with "being called." I had read Damien the Leper. The Belgian priest who took the name Damien volunteered to work on Molokai where those afflicted by leprosy were left with no aid. He engaged Damien ate and worshiped with those he served. He invited them into his home, to the point that he was able to begin a sermon, "We lepers."

I went to seminary in Philadelphia and Rome, then served as a priest in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Allentown for eighteen good years. Around 1980 I began to hear another call. I listened, struggled, and resigned from the Roman Catholic priesthood. In 1981, I married. Monica and I joined the Episcopal Church.

Ironically, during those middle years, two Roman Catholic priests and Dorothy Day had been my heroes. All, including Damien, are commemorated in the Episcopal Church.

Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was martyred in 1980, shot to death while celebrating Mass. He had preached a sermon calling on soldiers to disobey orders that violated human rights.

Jesuit priest, groundbreaking paleontologist, and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) developed a vision of creation, which, according to an Episcopal Church book that commemorates the saints, "held that evolution was the process by which matter inexorably arranges itself toward greater complexity until recognizable consciousness emerges . . . in which the universe will come to perfect unity and find itself one with God . . . the highest point of pure consciousness, always pulling the evolutionary process towards its promised destiny."¹⁸

His church forbade him to teach. He had to defend himself against charges of heresy. Do you think? Still, he remained loyal. During the year before he died, he prayed: "O God, if in my life I have not been wrong, allow me to die on Easter Sunday." He did.

17. Tom Roberts, "Mysterious Freedoms and a Wild Holy," *Bethlehem Globe-Times*, December 1979.

18. *The Episcopal Church, A Great Cloud of Witnesses* (New York: Church Publishing, 2016).

Dorothy Day adopted a life of voluntary poverty, opened a chain of soup kitchens and hospitality houses for the poor of New York City's Lower East Side, protested war, and supported labor unions. Michael Harrington described her as "a mystic out of a Dostoevsky novel." The late Cardinal John O'Connor, in 2000, then Archbishop of New York, recommended her for sainthood. "Rare was the young priest untouched by her life," he wrote. "She worried us. That was her gift to us."¹⁹

As a relatively young priest, I was asked to lead a retreat for some one hundred nuns, many infirm, waiting to die. I spoke of the crucial difference between the occasion of a call, perhaps long ago, and its meaning, which comes later.

Some of us may not experience the joy of mining the depths of the meaning. Some of us may receive periodic insights, renewed zeal, and other consolations—including that the wisdom and rhythm of Christianity is the law of the cross, allowing God to draw greater good from whatever evil comes our way.

The most powerful meanings are often those we don't recognize until we look back, reflecting in completely different contexts on the occasions of the calls. Then, having waited for the unfolding of meaning, we may experience God opening to us new life and new possibility.

CHAPTER FIVE



Navigating the Church: From Local to Worldwide

The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, literally means "called out." The Church is a people called out by God to be a particular people. Just as Bill heard a call, so do we all. The entire Church does. As you read this chapter about the structure of the Episcopal Church today, ask yourself, "Is the Church helping you to hear and respond to God's call?" "Is the Church standing as a sign of the kingdom of God, a contradiction in this age?" Knowing about how the Church works will help you explore these questions.

One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic

As you read in chapter 3, the Episcopal Church in the United States was established in 1785. About seventeen hundred years or so earlier, on Pentecost, the Church was born.

As we say each Sunday with the words of the Nicene Creed, the Church that was born on Pentecost is "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." Let's look at these four words more closely.

By *one* we mean that the Church is one body with Christ as its head. All denominations are not the same, but all worship the same God. By *holy* we mean that the Holy Spirit dwells among us and continues to guide us in representing Christ in the world. By *catholic* (lowercase c) we mean universal. Our faith is a faith for all people and for all time. God intended the Church to be for all nations, for the wealthy and poor alike, for both men and women, and for people of every social class and level of education. In the Prayers of the People each week, we pray for the whole Church, all Christian people.

19. Ibid.

The oneness of the Church is about how the Church is the community of those who are led to the one place at the Father's heart where he can be known, where he can be seen. —Rowan Williams²⁰

The Church is **apostolic** because the Church continues in the teaching and community that the apostles began in the years after Jesus's death and resurrection. Just after the baptism of thousands on Pentecost, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that the newly baptized "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The Church continues those central actions in an unbroken history from its birth on Pentecost to the present day.

As a whole and in its parts, the Church is the community of people who, at baptism, renounced evil and turned to Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Church is a people who believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Episcopal Church is part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

A Living Organism

The homes of bee colonies are a beautiful arrangement of hexagonal cells that fit perfectly together. More amazing than the beauty of their homes is their behavior. Bees act in a colony as a single organism, each with a specific role to play that keeps the entire community healthy. One queen bee lays about 1,500 eggs each day. Depending on their stage of life, worker bees (female bees) take care of larvae (the newly hatched eggs), clean house, or forage for food. When the nectar flow increases, more bees begin to forage. When the egg population rises, more bees attend to larvae. Drones (male bees) mate with virgin queens from other colonies to pass along their colony's genes. The colony's survival depends on the community's ability to discern what is needed to flourish and on each bee fulfilling its duties. Bees are so committed to their colony that they will give up their lives to protect it. A honeybee dies soon after it stings what it has perceived to be a danger to its community. Just like a bee hive, the Church is a living organism with thousands of members, each with a specific role to play. When working well, the "church hive" acts as one body with one mission: "to restore all people to unity with

God and each other in Christ" (BCP, 855). To grow the kingdom of God the Church needs each of its members to carry out his or her role, and it needs these members to act in a coordinated way.

Everyone Has a Ministry

Baptism is full initiation into the Body of Christ, which makes a baptized person, no matter how young or old, whatever profession or personal history, a *full* member of the Church. Nothing more is needed to complete membership in the Church. You don't need to pass a test. At baptism a person is marked as Christ's own forever. As a member of the Body of Christ, every member is also a *minister* of the Church, called to serve others on behalf of Christ. This broad definition of "minister" may surprise you. Most people reserve the word "minister" for the ordained. But because each member of the Church is called to live out the promises made at baptism, each member has a ministry and is a minister of the Church. The baptized can also think of themselves as missionaries sent out on behalf of the welfare of the world.

The ministers of the Church include laypeople, bishops, priests, and deacons. While all ministers share the basic ministry and mission of representing Jesus and his Church, each person is called in a different way to fulfill that mission in the world as students, workers, parents, community activists, and acting on. The remaining three ministries are ordained ministries, and so ministry is to support the ministry of the laypeople. We discuss the specific ministry of each of the ordained ministries, also called holy orders, in chapter 9. In the next chapter, we explore the ministry of the laity. Here is a brief explanation of the holy orders. Bishops serve as pastor to the people. Deacons perform special ministries of serving the needs of others, especially the poor, the sick, and the suffering. Deacons also assist priests or bishops in worship. Laypeople, bishops, priests, and deacons are all ministers in the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church comprises about 1.8 million members in about 6,500 churches and missions organized in 109 dioceses, three hundred bishops, 14,000 priests serving congregations, and nearly 3,000 deacons throughout the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, Taiwan, and Europe. Latin American and Caribbean countries included in the Episcopal Church

20. Rowan Williams, "One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church: Archbishop's address to the 14th Global South to South Encounter, Ain al Sukhna, Egypt," October 28, 2005. Transcript found at <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1675/one-holy-catholic-and-apostolic-church>

are Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Venezuela. The Episcopal Church in Europe comprises US churches whose membership is made up mostly of US citizens living abroad, for example those serving in the military, employed in business, or studying in a foreign country.

Episcopalians understand themselves as both Protestant and Catholic—Protestant because they worship in their own language, use a Book of Common Prayer, and rely on scripture, reason, and tradition to interpret the Bible; Catholic because they uphold the faith of the early Church through the sacraments and creeds.

The Episcopal Church affirms a principle of comprehensiveness, and considers itself to be a Church of the radical center, Catholic and Reformed, at once fully Catholic and Protestant. "While applying this principle of comprehensiveness is extremely difficult to do in practice," writes John Westerhoff in *A People Called Episcopalians*, "the struggle to do so is an important aspect of our tradition."²¹ Nevertheless, the Episcopal Church is commonly counted among Protestant churches (that is, distinct from the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches).

While just over half of US citizens are members of a Protestant church, only 1 percent are members of the Episcopal Church. (The largest Protestant denominations in the United States are the Southern Baptist Convention and the Methodist Church.) More than half of all Episcopal churches have two hundred or fewer members. A few have members numbering in the thousands.

Structure of the Church: A Bird's Eye View

A helpful way to get a handle on the way the Episcopal Church is governed is to look at its parallels to US government. The box on page 103 shows the similarities. Just as the US government has three levels of government—federal, state, and local—the Episcopal Church is divided into three levels too—churchwide, diocesan, and congregational, each with its own elected leader. The presiding bishop is the leader of the Episcopal Church; bishops lead dioceses; and rectors (or vicars or priests-in-charge or missionaries) lead

Parallels between the United States Government and the Episcopal Church

Nation	Episcopal Church
President	Presiding Bishop
Congress	General Convention
Senate	House of Bishops
House of Representatives	House of Deputies
State	Diocese
Governor	Bishop
State Legislature	Diocesan Convention
City	Congregation or Mission
Mayor	Rector, Vicar, Missioner, or Priest-in-Charge
City Council	Vestry

congregations. Just as with the US government, each level of the church polity has its own governing body. The House of Bishops and the House of Deputies (with laypeople and clergy elected by their dioceses) meet every three years at a General Convention, its primary responsibility being the maintenance of the Constitution and Canons of the Church (governing documents) and other resolutions concerning national and world affairs, interreligious and ecumenical relations, and social issues, among other topics. You probably recognize the parallels with the two houses of the US Congress. The churchwide level is to partner with local churches in their ministry to participate in the mission of God.

Your Local Church

What it means to be a church has changed over the centuries. Jesus didn't belong to a church (he was Jewish) nor did he establish churches. Jesus was

21. John H. Westerhoff, Sharon Ely Pearson, and Tobias Stanislaus Haller, *A People Called Episcopalians: A Brief Introduction to Our Way of Life, Revised Edition* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), 22.

on a mission. Traveling with a group of people who shared his mission, his was a ministry of "The Way." Communities of people who followed Jesus and established unique Christian practices in a specific geographic region didn't emerge until fifty or so years after Jesus died. As mentioned earlier, these communities were referred to in the Epistles as *ekklesia*, translated most commonly as "church" in the Bible. What it meant to be Church changed in the fourth century when Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the state. No longer was it illegal to be a Christian. Quite the opposite; being Christian benefitted a person's social standing and career.

At its founding, the Episcopal Church was a collection of parishes within a particular geographic territory. Many served dual roles—an assembly that gathered for worship and for community governance. Again today, people are reimagining what it means to be Church, with more and more local faith communities defining themselves not by the structure and traditional practices of the Church, but by a shared sense of what it means to participate in the mission of God. Participating in the mission of God is often understood to be caring for God's people and creation, sharing faith stories, and working toward changing unjust social structures. Some of these new communities are known as **emergent churches**. Faith communities are as diverse as the community of individuals gathered by the Holy Spirit. Because the nature of emerging faith communities are diverse and cannot be easily described as a whole, in this section we will introduce traditional local church communities.

A **congregation** is a group of people organized into a local church. Most of the nearly 7,000 churches in the Episcopal Church are self-supporting communities that worship regularly together. A priest who leads a church is called its **rector**. The governing board of a church is called a **vestry**. Churches that receive financial support by their diocese have mission status and have a priest assigned by the bishop.

Members of a Church

A member of a church could be defined as someone who shows up and contributes to the community in some way. That's all that is important for most communities. The Episcopal Church, however, has an official definition. Although all baptized are members of the universal Church, the particular congregation you belong to depends on Episcopal Church rules. When a person is baptized, their name is recorded as a member of that congregation and they become a *member of record*. Membership can be transferred from one congregation to another by requesting a *letter of transfer* from its original congregation. So a person is a member of the church he or she was

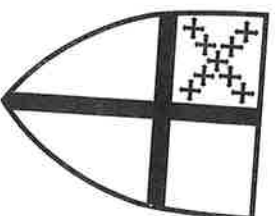
baptized in or a member of the church that has received a letter of transfer and then recorded him or her as a member. Not everyone who attends church becomes a formal member of a congregation, and not all formal members attend regularly.

The **Canons of the General Convention**, the written rules that govern the Episcopal Church, recognize members who are sixteen years and older as adult members. Whether this is sufficient for voting at a particular church depends on that church's bylaws and the laws of the state. **Communicants** are members who have received communion at least three times in the previous year. A **communicant in good standing** is a communicant who has been "faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the kingdom of God."²²

Governance of a Congregation

Churches govern themselves in a variety of ways depending on the laws of each diocese and state, as well as on the congregation's bylaws, the written rules that set out how a congregation is governed. Your church could be different than presented here and you might want to investigate your own church's way of doing things. Every year, a congregation has an annual meeting when members discuss plans for the coming year and share their concerns. At this meeting, members usually vote on the congregation's budget and elect members of the vestry. They also elect delegates to the diocesan convention. Because it's difficult for every single member of the church to get together to discuss all the issues of running the congregation, the elected vestry supervises and makes decisions about the local church's mission, finances, term of office, and requirements for election depend on the bylaws of the vestry, congregation and in some cases the laws of the state.

The church membership or the vestry elects two officers—a senior warden and a junior warden—either from among the church members or from the vestry. In some congregations, the rector selects the senior warden. Traditionally the senior warden acts as a link between the rector and the congregation, while the junior warden supervises the buildings and grounds. Rectors preside at vestry meetings, unless they ask the senior warden to do so.



The shield of the Episcopal Church.

²² The Episcopal Church, Canon 1.17.2–4 in *Constitution and Canons: The General Convention of The Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 2015).

Every legally incorporated congregation has bylaws. These laws, adopted by the members of the congregation, determine such things as who is eligible for election to the vestry, how officers are elected, and when the annual meeting is held. The bylaws of a church must be consistent with the canons (rules) of its diocese and the Episcopal Church.

Mission and Ministry

The Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer (page 855) tells us that the mission of the Church is "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." It doesn't say anything about buildings, clergy, vestries, or budgets. But every community faces practical, ordinary details that help it carry out its primary mission. At most congregations, vestries oversee budgets, the clergy lead worship, and committees carry out the work of Christian formation and mission. In the next chapter we carefully explore the ministry of the Church. For now, let's continue to look at the way the organization of the Episcopal Church helps make that ministry happen.

How does your church live into God's strong verbs: repent, be, do, give, forgive, go, sow, pray, judge not, fear not, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, welcome the stranger . . . ?

Your Diocese

The Episcopal Church isn't a congregational church: it acts not on its own but as part of a **diocese** led by a bishop. A diocese is the basic mission and administrative unit of the Episcopal Church. Individual churches act within the rules of the diocese—and share a common mission.

Your diocese is one of 109 dioceses in the Episcopal Church (99 domestic and 10 international), which range in size from fifteen (the Diocese of Fort Worth in Texas) or thirty to almost two hundred churches (the Diocese of New York, one of six in the state of New York). The Diocese of Haiti is the largest diocese with over 84,000 members in 111 churches.²³ Many dioceses cover entire states. Others, in densely populated states, cover only portions of a state. The state of California, for example, is made up of six dioceses while the entire state of Wyoming is one diocese.

23. The Episcopal Church, "Table of Statistics of the Episcopal Church from 2015 Parochial Report The Office of General Convention, January 2017, found on https://www.episcopalchurch.org/table_of_statistics_english_2015.pdf.

Each congregation contributes money to the diocese to pay for the salary of the bishop and diocesan staff and to help run diocesan programs, with a portion of those contributions given to the Episcopal Church to support churchwide programs and staff. Members of churches also serve on diocesan committees, called *commissions*, that guide the bishop and the work of the diocese. Examples of commissions are those for ministry, for evangelism, for social justice, and for youth and young adults. Commissions will reflect the priorities of a diocese. Dioceses also have *standing committees* that advise the bishop and play important roles in the governance of the diocese. Ultimately, all funds are to further the mission and ministry of the Church.

Your Bishop

Your bishop is an ordained priest and serves as the chief priest and pastor of the Church. In the early Church, a bishop (in Greek, *episkopos* means "overseer") was an elder appointed by a community of believers. As Christian communities grew, bishops began to lead additional congregations in geographic proximity in addition to their own. The responsibilities of a bishop continue to be to oversee and supervise the churches in the diocese and to serve as pastor to the clergy and their families.

Bishops symbolize the unity of churches within a diocese, the unity of all dioceses in the Episcopal Church, and the unity of the Church today with the early Christian Church established by the apostles.

Bishops have authority over matters of faith, discipline, and worship within their diocese. Bishops ordain priests and deacons, ordain other bishops, confirm those who wish to receive the sacrament of confirmation (confirmation of all churches and missions within a diocese, the connection of all dioceses to one another, and the connection of the Church today with the early Christian Church established by the apostles).

In most dioceses, one church serves as the diocese's **cathedral**. The word "cathedral" is derived from the Latin word *cathedra*, that is, the teaching seat of the bishop and the oldest sign of the authority of a bishop. It's similar to the county seat of government. A cathedral doesn't have to be a big, fancy outdoor church whose roof is a canopy of trees in the Shenandoah Valley. What makes a church a cathedral is that it houses the bishop's cathedra. A cathedral is the central church for the diocese and commonly hosts diocesan

events and Episcopal services such as ordinations of priests and deacons and the ordination of a bishop. The lead clergy person at a cathedral is called a **dean**; assisting clergy at a cathedral may be called **canons**.

The Diocesan Convention

Each year the diocese holds a **diocesan convention** of both laypeople and clergy. All clergy in a diocese, plus a number of elected laypeople from each congregation, are given seat, voice, and vote at convention. Some dioceses have youth representatives. (The number of laypeople that a congregation sends varies from diocese to diocese.) All representatives to convention, clergy and laity alike, elect officers to various commissions and councils of the diocese and vote on the diocese's mission, ministry, and budget. They may also vote to change the diocesan constitution and canons. Every three years, every diocese elects deputies to the General Convention.

Diocesan Constitution and Canons

Diocesan constitution and canons are similar to a church's bylaws. They're the rules that govern a diocese. These rules determine things like starting new churches, supporting churches whose membership or finances are dwindling, electing a bishop, sending delegates to convention, choosing committees, making rules about church governance, and deciding on the duties of diocesan officers. The constitution and canons are accepted and modified by diocesan convention, but they must always be consistent with the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church.

Diocesan Council

Between conventions, the business of the diocese is coordinated by a **diocesan council**. Diocesan councils are similar to vestries in a church. They act on behalf of the diocesan convention during the year. The diocesan council is usually made up of the bishop and other elected clergy and laypeople.

Election of a Bishop

When a bishop retires, dies, resigns, or is called to another ministry, a special diocesan convention is called to elect a new bishop. Usually a nominating committee is formed that reviews resumés and interviews candidates. Delegates to convention meet the candidates and vote to elect a bishop. A two-thirds majority of both laypeople and clergy delegates at the special convention are usually required to elect a new bishop. Just as the diocesan bishop must approve a priest for a church, the election of a bishop must be confirmed by a majority of standing committees (a body that serves as advisors to the bishop) in the Episcopal Church. Once a bishop is elected and confirmed,

three other bishops consecrate a new bishop by the laying on of hands. This expresses our belief that the ministry of a bishop is a gift of the Holy Spirit and symbolizes a continuous apostolic ministry and the communion of all Christian communities with one another.

Some dioceses are so large that one bishop can't serve all churches in the diocese alone, so they elect another bishop to help. The diocese can elect additional bishops: either a *bishop suffragan* (who cannot succeed a diocesan bishop), or a *bishop coadjutor* (who can succeed a diocesan bishop). A bishop diocesan can also appoint a *bishop assisting*.

Companion Dioceses

Some dioceses in the Episcopal Church have developed companion relationships with other dioceses throughout the Anglican Communion. Over one hundred companion relationships exist today. Examples are the relationship between the Diocese of Bethlehem in Pennsylvania and Kaijo Keji in South Sudan, and between the Diocese of California and the Beijing Christian Council of China. Companion dioceses usually pray for one another each week during worship, support one another with material and spiritual resources, and initiate joint programming to share their experiences and learn together.

Companion diocese relationships acknowledge a shared mission by all dioceses throughout the world—to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

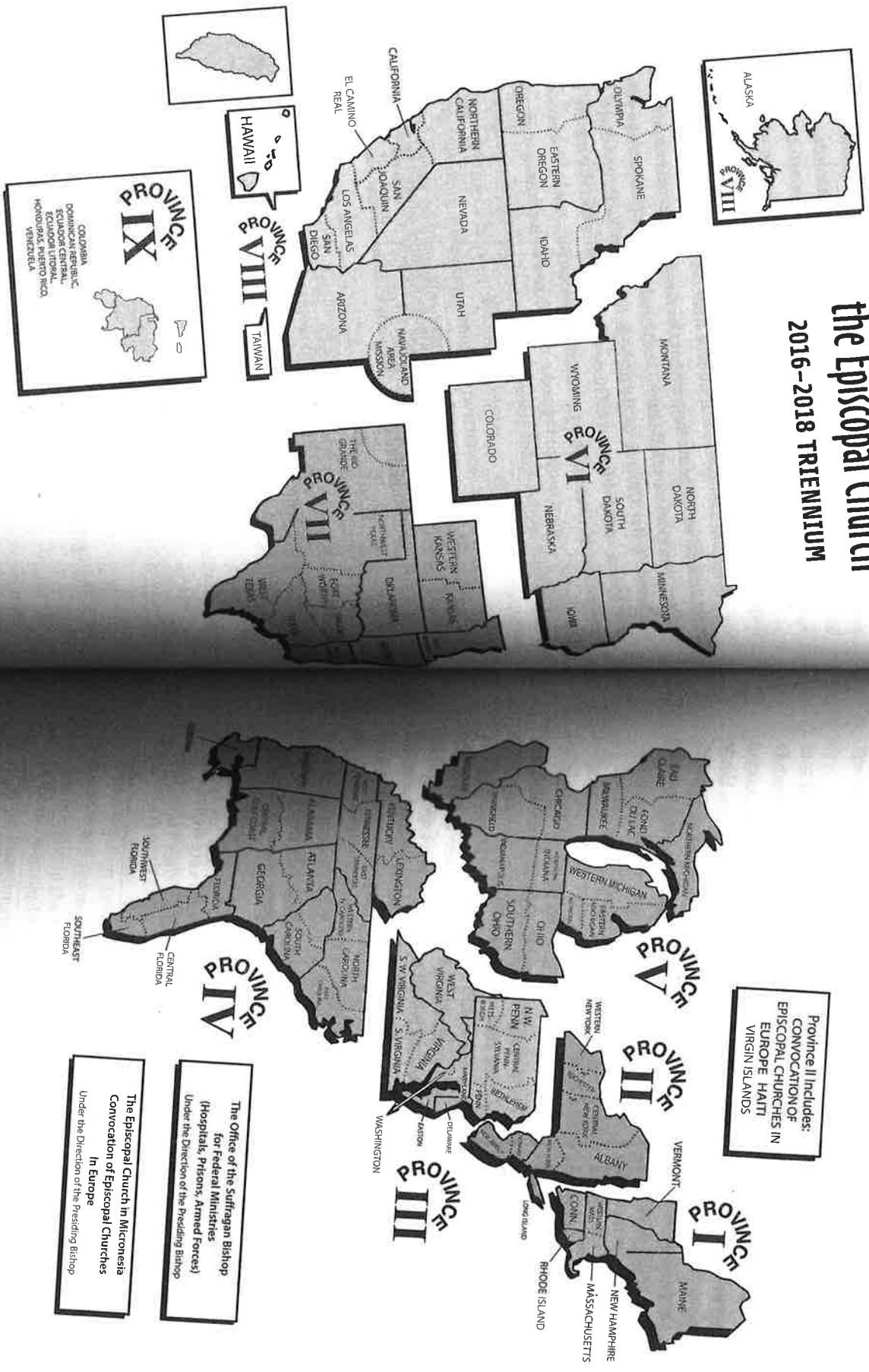
Provinces

Dioceses are clustered geographically into nine provinces. The map on pages 110 and 111 shows all nine provinces of the Episcopal Church. Notice that Province IX is made up of churches in Central and South America. Each province provides networking across diocesan lines and often offers leadership conferences to discuss common issues. Provinces, however, hold no governing authority over their member dioceses.

The Episcopal Church at the Churchwide Level

Each diocese is part of the Episcopal Church, whose chief pastor is the presiding bishop. Governance within the Episcopal Church rests in the **General Convention**, the legislative body of the Episcopal Church, which meets once every three years to approve programs and budget.

Provinces of the Episcopal Church 2016-2018 TRIENNium



Just like the US Congress, General Convention is made up of two legislative bodies—the **House of Bishops** and the **House of Deputies**. The House of Bishops is made up of about 300 bishops—both active and retired. It meets once every three years during General Convention to consider legislation and twice a year between conventions for worship, prayer, study, and dialogue. At these between-convention meetings, the House of Bishops often issues pastoral statements that offer guidance and advice to members of the Church.

The House of Deputies has about 900 members—four clergy and four lay deputies from each diocese. Each province may also send two youth to General Convention, each of whom can be present and speak but cannot vote on resolutions in the House of Deputies. A president of the House of Deputies is elected from among the deputies. With bishops, deputies, youth, and a multitude of observers, over fifteen thousand people attend General Convention.

The Presiding Bishop

The **presiding bishop** is the Episcopal Church's chief pastor and primate, representative to the world. At one time the presiding bishop was the senior bishop present at the meetings of bishops, today the presiding bishop is elected by the House of Bishops and confirmed by the House of Deputies serving for a period of nine years, or until his or her seventieth birthday. The presiding bishop leads the Episcopal Church by serving as its spokesperson to churches throughout the world and providing guidance and vision for the Episcopal Church. The presiding bishop presides at the House of Bishops and General Convention, visits all dioceses of the Church, and is often the chief consecrator at the ordination of a bishop. As is true for all members of the Episcopal Church, the presiding bishop must act within the constitution and canons of the church.

Not all the heads of churches in the Anglican Communion are elected. For example, the archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Church of England, is appointed by the prime minister of England.

Executive Council

Between General Conventions, the business of the Episcopal Church is carried out by the **Executive Council**. The Executive Council takes care of the ordination, development, and implementation of the ministry and mission

the Church." It serves as the decision-making body of the Episcopal Church between General Conventions and provides oversight of the General Convention budget. The presiding bishop and the president of the General Convention are respectively president and vice-president of Executive Council.

Budget

The Episcopal Church sets its budget every three years at General Convention. The 2016–2018 triennium budget for the Episcopal Church was about \$125 million, about \$25 per year for every baptized member of the Episcopal Church. Individual churches have a combined budget of \$2.2 billion for their mission and ministry, over \$1,250 for every member. This reflects that most of the ministry of the Church is at the congregational and diocesan levels. Through their dioceses, congregations fund about 60 percent of the Episcopal Church's budget. The rest comes from earnings from investments, rental income, and other miscellaneous sources.

The budget of the Episcopal Church is divided into mission, governance, and administrative expenses. Nearly 60 percent of the budget funds mission, including efforts that address the Five Marks of Mission as well as local and percent administration.

The budget is proposed by the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance and reflects the priorities adopted by the General Convention. The 2016–2018 budget priorities are guided by the **Five Marks of** mission developed by the Anglican Communion and adopted by a number of churches and dioceses around the world:

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, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

A major new initiative reflected in that triennium's budget is a commitment to racial justice and reconciliation to enable the Church to respond to systemic racial injustice in the United States.

What story is God telling through these five priorities of the Episcopal Church?

Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church

Although there is a lot of diversity within the Episcopal Church, local congregations can't do whatever they please. They must abide by the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church. There are, for example, specific rules about marriage and remarriage as well as which prayers we can use during services, although these rules aren't set in stone. Delegates can vote to change these rules through resolutions. Those passed by General Convention become **Acts of the General Convention** and govern our life as Episcopalians. All Acts of Convention are published at www.episcopalarchives.org.

An Example of Legislation: The Book of Common Prayer

The Book of Common Prayer, and some additional resources such as a series called *Enriching Our Worship*, contains the liturgy, prayers, and instructions for common worship in the Episcopal Church. For a liturgy to be *official*, General Convention must pass a resolution to authorize its use. Every church in the Episcopal Church worships using the Book of Common Prayer; the bishop can reprimand a priest who doesn't follow the instructions within the prayer book. But because our language and culture change continually, along with the way we understand God and the Church, from time to time we change and update the prayer book; the 2015 General Convention took steps to begin to revise the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Reading the opening Prayer of the Eucharist in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer shows how language changes

ALMIGHTIE God, unto whom all hartes bee open, and all desires knownen, and from whom no secretes are hid: cleanse the thoughtes of our hartes, by the inspiration of thy holy spirite: that we may perfectly love thee, and worthely magnifie thy holy name: through Christ our Lorde. Amen.²⁴

Revisions and additions to the prayer book are developed by the Standing Liturgical Commission on Liturgy and Music, a group of clergy and laypeople elected by General Convention that meets both at and between conventions.

Let's consider the process that led to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Beginning in 1950, the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music published a series of studies on the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, the official prayer book at the time. In 1967, it proposed a new Rite of Holy Eucharist which was passed at General Convention for trial use. In 1970, a series of new rites of Holy Eucharist were passed. These new rites were used as

trial basis by a number of congregations throughout the country that gave feedback to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. In 1973, additional rites and revisions, which included Rites of Initiation, the Daily Office, and the Psalter, were authorized and again tried out throughout the Episcopal Church. In 1976, the commission submitted a draft Book of Common Prayer, which was passed.

At each of these General Conventions, both the House of Bishops and House of Deputies discussed the revisions and additions. The prayer book became official with the approval of a majority in both houses in 1979 under Title II, Canon 3 of the Canons of the Episcopal Church. The process of approving the prayer book is a good example of the conversations among all members of the Church, which is how the Episcopal Church is governed. The process of prayer book revision that gave rise to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer took decades of study, revision, and trial use.

The Anglican Communion

The Episcopal Church is a member of the Anglican Communion, a group of 44 independently governed churches with 85 million Christians in more than 165 countries that share a common faith, history, and tradition. Member churches of the Anglican Communion, such as the Church of England and the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, are called provinces. Each church has its own chief bishop, known as a **primate**, and its own rules. (The primate of the Episcopal Church is the presiding bishop.) No primate has jurisdiction over the members of another province within the Anglican Communion.

Anglican churches share a common history in the Church of England and express their faith, liturgy, and sacraments in a *Book of Common Prayer* (though not all with the same *Book of Common Prayer*). Four principles unite churches in the Anglican Communion:

- 1 The Old and New Testaments are the revealed word of God.
- 2 The Nicene Creed is our statement of Christian faith.
- 3 Two sacraments are baptism and Holy Eucharist.
- 4 Bishops follow a succession of ordination from the apostles to the present.



The compass rose is the official symbol of the Anglican Communion.

24. *First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1910), 212. justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/BCP_1549&52_intro.htm.

You can read the exact wording on pages 876–77 in the Book of Common Prayer.

Sharing in these principles, however, does not by itself mean a province is a member of the Anglican Communion. A province is recognized as a member of the Anglican Communion when the **archbishop of Canterbury** (the primate of the Church of England) invites that province's bishop to the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Consultative Council recognizes that bishop's membership in that particular province. The Lambeth Conference is a gathering of bishops held every ten years at Lambeth Palace, the official residence of the archbishop of Canterbury.

The archbishop of Canterbury is considered the *first among equals*, emphasizing the equality and joint authority of all primates. The archbishop does not have the authority to tell any church in the Anglican Communion what to do.

The archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meetings, and the Anglican Consultative Council are the four "instruments of communion" for the Anglican Communion.²⁵

The most basic way Anglican churches express their unity is to meet in dialogue, prayer, fellowship, Bible study, and Eucharist. The Lambeth Conference is one way of doing this. Another is the **Primates' Meetings**, an annual gathering of all primates in the Anglican Communion. A third is the **Anglican Consultative Council**, a gathering of laypeople, bishops, priests, and deacons from churches throughout the Anglican Communion.

By gathering together as one, the Anglican Communion can work together to serve God's mission in the world. The Lambeth Conference, Primates' Meetings, and the Anglican Consultative Council are responsible for activities and projects such as helping to relieve suffering in the world. It also maintains the Office of the Anglican Observer to the United Nations to express its concerns and collect and share information about UN initiatives.

The Anglican Communion, as you can see, has a loose definition and not every province shares the same practices. One example is marriage between two people of the same gender, a source of active disagreement among primates in the Anglican Communion. Another is the ordination of women as bishops. Provinces, diverse in their histories, cultures, theologies

and practices, are joined in the Anglican Communion by what some call *bonds of affection*. These bonds can be strained by their differences.

God's Promise to the New Church

After the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, Peter spoke, recalling the words of the prophet Joel:

In the last days it will be, God declares
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh
and your sons and your daughters shall flesh
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams, (Acts 2:17)

What can we learn from this sermon? After receiving the Holy Spirit, we are called to "prophesy" and "see visions." We are invited to become part of God's dream. We are the active hands of Christ in the world who can work with God to bring God's kingdom near. We are charged to do the work of the Church. The structure of the Episcopal Church is a mechanism to do that good work. Some ways you can become involved in the structure of the Church are:

- Attend the annual meeting at your congregation.
 - Consider serving on the vestry. The vestry helps define how the ministry of the Church is applied in your community.
 - Attend diocesan conventions and consider running for delegate to convention.
 - Subscribe to your diocesan newspaper in print or online to become informed of the mission and ministry of your diocese.
- Dream dreams and prophesy your vision to the Church. The governing bodies of the Church set the policy and rules of the Church so important to its ministry.*

25. See www.anglicancommunion.org for more information about the instruments of communion.

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Look at the five priorities of the Episcopal Church during the 2016–2018 triennium. (You can find the list on page 113.) Recall an instance of when you did something that fulfills one of those priorities. What do you remember?
2. **Be Intelligent:** What does your experience mean for you? What other meanings are possible?
3. **Be Reasonable:** What story from the Bible, hymn, or liturgy relates to your experience? Read it. How does it challenge or confirm your understanding? Does your understanding provide new insights?
4. **Be Responsible:** What will you do as a result of your understanding?
5. **Be in Love Transformed:** Research the new priorities of the next triennium. (Look on www.episcopalchurch.org.) What does your experience explored here and the new priorities suggest that you do differently?

Part Six



Seeking the Good and Be Responsible

INTERLUDE

"Do"

During one of your readings through the four Gospels, circle or underline the strong verbs of God's good news. Repent. Be. Do. Give. Forgive. Feed. Clothe. Go. Sow. Pray. Heal. Judge not. Fear not. Cast out. Trust.

You will find that many of those strong verbs introduce gospel imperatives. Marching orders. Mission statements.

Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Heal the sick. Welcome the stranger. Visit the imprisoned. Raise the dead. Proclaim good news. Sell what you have and give the money to the poor. Love God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Be reconciled. Take up your cross. Follow me. Lose your life for my sake and you will find it. Make disciples.

An impossible job description begins to be written on our hearts with our baptismal promises to "believe in God the Father . . . in Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . in God the Holy Spirit [and] to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers . . . to persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord . . . to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ . . . to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself . . . to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being" (BCP, 92-94).

"I will, with God's help," we say.

"Jesus of Nazareth is a troubling and troublesome figure," the late Verna Dozier wrote in *The Dream of God*, "and it seems to me the Church has never known what to do with him."²⁶

This is why your best way into or through the Episcopal Church is to read and inwardly digest the sacred scriptures. Not as individual verses, but each book in the context of all the others, the tradition of the Church, your experience of God's love and your love for your sisters and brothers, your your critical thinking and reasoning about all of this.

Jesus challenges us to dream. The Holy Spirit draws God's dream from deep within us. To pray is to dream, to hope, to expect, to imagine. Whether worshipping with a community, reading alone, reflecting on the Bible, considering a personal experience, a story, or a movie, we can be at prayer.

"Only the contemplative," Thomas Merton used to say, only the prayer-God breaking into human history so we might break out with new God-given hearts to pursue God's reality, God's heart's desires.

Don't let others tell you what is real. Imagine God's reality. See things differently. Magnify the Lord; see God large in your life. Allow God within you to transform you and the world through you.

26. Verna Dozier, *The Dream of God: A Call to Return* (Boston: Cowley, 1991), 67.

²⁷ The late Bishop Mark Dyer used to mention this frequently.

CHAPTER SIX



Ministry: Participating in the Mission of God

The “strong verbs of God’s good news” that Bill reminds us in the interlude before this chapter are gospel imperatives—feed, clothe, heal, welcome, visit, raise, proclaim—verbs of servant ministry. The call to servanthood is found throughout the Bible. We begin by looking at ministry with the “Servant Song” from Isaiah:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
(Isaiah 42:1–3)

Read the passage above slowly to yourself. Pause. Read it again. After the second reading, ask yourself, “Who is the servant?” “What is the servant being called to do?” This Servant Song was written as a call to Israel. God calls his chosen people, Israel, to a particular mission—a mission of justice. We see this song again in the Christian scriptures, but this time for God’s servant Jesus:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.”

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
(Luke 4:18–19)

In this passage Jesus proclaims his mission to the elders in the synagogue—to release the captives, give sight to the blind, free the oppressed, and let everyone know God’s kingdom has come. We share Jesus’s mission. Just like Jesus, we are given the ministry of servanthood that is proclaimed in Isaiah.

As baptized members of the Body of Christ, we are a missional community, chosen by God and helped by the Holy Spirit to bring justice to all people and creation. Through our baptism we become the Body of Christ, promising to take up Christ’s mission. Indeed, as Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said, we are a people “living their Baptismal Covenant, following the teachings of Jesus, living the way of Jesus.”²⁸ The Episcopal Church is the “Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement in the world.”²⁹ Jesus started a movement and showed us the way of servanthood.

Return to the Servant Song on page 122 and read it one more time. Cross out each “he” and “him” and insert your own name. Read it again and imagine yourself as the servant of God who upholds you and whose Spirit rests on you. How does that feel? What are you called to do as a servant of God? Be attentive to what you have read from Isaiah and Luke—and to matters of the heart. Be intelligent. How do you understand what you have heard? Be reasonable. What is the best way in your life situation to understand what you have heard? Be responsible about what you intend to do as a result of how you understand what you have heard. Be in Love as you do it.

Baptismal Promises

At baptism, candidates, or their parents and godparents, make five promises, called **baptismal promises**. These are promises to do the work God has given us to do in the world—our mission. Whenever we witness a baptism, confirmation, or reaffirmation we renew our promises by answering the following questions with, “I will, with God’s help.”

²⁸ Michael Curry, *Crazy Christians: A Call To Follow Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), 101.

²⁹ Michael Curry, First address as Presiding Bishop. Found at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/pope/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-michael-curry-jesus-movement-and-we-are-episcopal-church>.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers? *I will, with God's help.*

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent, and return to the Lord? *I will, with God's help.*

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ? *I will, with God's help.*

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? *I will, with God's help.*

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? *I will, with God's help.*

Let's look at these more closely. Our promises begin with the community—the community of Christ's body, the Church—which nourishes us and encourages us to keep our baptismal promises. This first promise reminds us that we know ourselves first as members of a community of faith and that praying and receiving the sacraments prepares us for our work in the world. The second promise reminds us that before going out into the world we must make things right with ourselves—we must live according to God's will. We promise to resist evil and when we sin, to turn away and return to God.

We get our moral authority, as Christians, as Episcopalians, from our baptismal vows. . . . These promises we make are a bit like the chicken egg swallowed by the snake. It is in there, but it takes a while to digest.

—Bonnie Anderson³⁰

The final three promises tell us about our mission in the world—how we are to serve others. We are to share the good news of God's love of all people both with our words and how we behave. That is, our actions are to reflect God's love. We are to seek and serve Christ in all people. That is, to look for the goodness in others and treat others as if they are Christ himself. As the thew's Gospel says in the parable of the goats and sheep, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (25:40). We do this by feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, providing shelter for the homeless, and caring for the sick. In all this

we do, we promise to strive for justice and peace among all people, that is, to deal fairly and honestly with others and work toward bringing all people together as one community. Because we are baptized Christians, living out these promises is our ministry and mission.

One way the Church expresses its mission is with the Five Marks of Mission mentioned in the previous chapter:

TELL: To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

TEACH: To teach, baptize and nurture new believers

TEND: To respond to human need by loving service

TRANSFORM: To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation

TREASURE: To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The word "mission" can bring to mind the practice of increasing church membership, introducing people to Christianity, or sending individuals or groups abroad to teach or provide services. Mission, however, is correctly understood in terms of what God's up to—healing and restoring creation. Mission is participating in God's project. When we are participating in God's mission, we are actively doing ministry.

Ministry: Sharing God's Mission

In the last chapter you read a little about **ministry**—our ways of serving others. The Episcopal Church recognizes all baptized people as ministers of God's kingdom. The ministers are laypeople, bishops, priests, and deacons. Everyone who's been baptized shares a common ministry: representing Christ and his Church.

We carry out most of God's mission in our daily lives by greeting people kindly, doing our jobs with love and respect for others, lending a hand when needed, cooking for our family, and laughing and consoling friends and co-workers. We also carry out God's mission by working to change laws to ensure people are treated fairly. Occupations such as researching cures for disease, seeking to address climate change, lobbying government for just laws, and spending a year serving the poor either domestically or abroad are also ways of participating in God's mission. Through these actions we "carry out Christ's work of reconciliation in the world."

30. Bonnie Anderson, sermon delivered to Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, October 19, 2004. https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/attached-files/10-21_bonnieanderson_sermon-grace.pdf

Let's look at reconciliation in the world more closely. What does reconciliation mean? Have you ever reconciled a bank statement? You compare your written record of deposits and withdrawals with the bank's records and make adjustments to your account until the two balances match. Think about the reconciliation of the world the same way. There are two things: the world as we actually live it and the world as God calls us to live (God's kingdom). So the work of reconciliation is making adjustments in how we live in an effort to make the world be a place of peace and wholeness.

Anointed into a Royal Priesthood

You might still feel a little uncomfortable thinking of yourself as someone with a ministry. Our ministry in God's kingdom is rooted in baptism. Just as the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus when he was baptized, so are those who have been baptized today. After being baptized with water, a person is anointed with oil of chrism and blessed to share in the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 2:9, the writer tells early Christians the very same thing: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."

The oil of chrism has a long history that symbolizes priesthood and ministry. Samuel poured an entire horn filled with oil on David's head to anoint him king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13). God anointed prophets (Isaiah 61:1). A woman with an alabaster jar anointed Jesus with expensive oil before his death and resurrection (Matthew 26:7). The baptized are anointed into ministry with the oil of kings and prophets.

Our Ministry Proclaims God's Dream for Creation

So how do we live our ministry today? Many of us have loving families and friends, times when we laugh with others, basically healthy minds and bodies, and not too many roadblocks getting in the way of what we want. Some of us may face difficulties—loneliness, grief for the loss of a loved one, sickness and disease, discrimination and hatred, and perhaps days we don't have enough to eat or warm clothes to wear. The world falls short of what God would like. Although we may see signs of God's kingdom, it isn't here completely. To know what our ministry is, we need to understand what that kingdom looks like and figure out what we can do to help make it happen.

"God says to you, 'I have a dream. Please help me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts'" —Desmond Tutu.³² What dream does God tell you?

God's Dream in the Jewish Scriptures

From the very start, God was always telling us what his kingdom is all about where needs are met, and a world where people are honest and fair. The creation story in the first chapter of Genesis tells us about God's intention for creation. At the beginning, God created plants and creatures of every kind, of the land, air, and sea—and then blessed them. God created human and blessed them too. God's kingdom is filled with life and joy. God made humankind. That is, humans have companions. This reminds us that God's kingdom is filled with relationships and community. To each of the creatures he made—the plants, the animals, and the humans—God commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). God's kingdom is a world where there is enough for everyone. It's a world of abundance. And finally, God gave humans command over every living thing—not for power, but for servant-hood. God's kingdom is a world of order and service and a world of justice.

The Bible also has stories about when the world was far from being joyful, abundant, and just. During these times God reminded the people about the kingdom and what God wanted for them. One such time was when the nation of Israel lived in exile in Babylon. The Israelites lived in a foreign land as slaves, suffered disease, and didn't live long. But in the midst of this hardship, God sent a prophet Isaiah to tell them about God's dream for them:

I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;

31. I am indebted to John L. Kater, Jr. and his unpublished work, "The Persistence of the Gospel," which is much of the discussion of the reign of God.

32. Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrams, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 19.

for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;

for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.

Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;

but the serpent—its food shall be dust.
They shall not hurt or destroy

on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.
(Isaiah 65:19–25)

God desires people to live long lives, so long that those who live to be a hundred will be called young. In God's kingdom, people live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of plants they grow. All people are treated fairly. People do not live without because God provides. God's vision of creation is marked by abundance. They live in community without enemies—where the wolf and lamb feed together. God longs for a community of peace.

Jesus's Ministry Proclaiming the Kingdom of God

The four Gospels tell the story of Jesus proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God. In Mark, for example, Jesus proclaims, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). Jesus spoke about God's dreams as the kingdom of God, a place where God's will rules. Jesus used the metaphor of kingdom because in the first century, the Jews longed for the restoration of Judea as a nation. They were eagerly looking for someone who would overthrow the Roman Emperor who ruled unjustly and establish a new kingdom ruled by a just king.

Jesus' words and actions show us God's dream for us by bringing joy, community, abundance, and justice to the world. One of the first things Jesus did after his baptism was to call together a community of people—his disciples. They worshiped, studied, and prayed together, and they

Jesus performing miracles, healing, forgiving, and gathering more people together. Jesus also sent this group of ordinary people to continue to do God's work in the world.

If these seemingly unworthy followers of Jesus could help bring about God's kingdom, we can too.

The people Jesus called were ordinary people just like us. Some were fishermen; others did work that was despised in the Jewish community, like collecting taxes. The disciples weren't the smartest or the most faithful. Lots of times they doubted Jesus, and they fought over who was the most important. They weren't particularly reliable either. After all, they fell asleep in the garden the night before Jesus was crucified, even though he asked them to stay up with him. They had weaknesses just like we do. All this tells us that we too, even in our shortcomings, are part of God's beloved community called to carry out God's mission. If these seemingly unworthy followers of Jesus could help bring about God's kingdom, we can too. God does extraordinary things through ordinary people.

A Kingdom Marked by Justice

Soon after calling the first disciples Jesus told them about the kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount, or the Beatitudes: blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are the persecuted and the reviled (Matthew 5). They are blessed because they will be comforted, inherit the earth, be filled, receive mercy, see God, and be called children of God. God's kingdom will be filled with justice.

A Kingdom Filled with Joy

Throughout Jesus's ministry he healed the sick and forgave those who had done wrong. Jesus brought them joy. What is amazing in these stories is how important touch was to his ministry of healing and forgiveness. For example, in Mark Jesus touched a leper and said, "Be made clean," and the leper was cured. A woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years touched Jesus's cloak and was healed. Jesus laid his hands on the blind man to restore his sight. Touched by Jesus's healing power, these people could live out their lives with joy, free of disease. What we can learn from this is that while we might not be able to heal like Jesus, we can bring others joy by reaching out to them to let them know we care. And we can offer an embrace

or handshake of forgiveness to those who have hurt us. By our touch we can bring joy to the world.

A Kingdom of Abundance

Jesus's ministry demonstrated what life is like when people are given more than they can ask or imagine. When the disciples were faced with a hungry crowd of more than five thousand people and only a few fish and a couple of loaves of bread, Jesus fed them all—with twelve baskets of food to spare. Nothing ran out. When people asked him to describe the kingdom of God, Jesus told about a mustard seed that grows into a tree that provides a home for the birds, yeast mixed with flour that expands into nourishing bread that can feed a village, and a field that yields a hundredfold. In Jesus's life of abundance, out of little comes much. We too can share what little we have, and together with others who have little, provide enough for everyone.

A Kingdom of a Community

Jesus was always calling a community together. He called the disciples, welcomed the outcast, and forgave the sinner. Consider the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus, a Jewish tax collector, in Luke 19. Because Zacchaeus collected taxes for the Roman Empire, his own community considered him to be unclean and a sinner. He was an outcast. When Jesus came to him, he announced that they would dine together at Zacchaeus's house. So even before Zacchaeus confessed his sins, Jesus forgave him and invited him into his group of friends. Zacchaeus responded by repenting and giving back the taxes he'd stolen. Jesus gave Zacchaeus the strength to change his ways by forgiving him and bringing him back into the community.

Jesus's acts of forgiveness restored community and brought peace. For Jesus, there's always more room at the table, and the community can always be expanded. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells us that our neighbors are those who society says are unclean—those whom nobody seems to love. We, like Jesus, can invite others to our community—especially those who don't seem to belong.

We, Too, Are Called to Proclaim God's Dream

Jesus shared this ministry with his disciples, granting them the power and authority to heal and proclaim the kingdom of God. They continued the ministry after Jesus's death and resurrection, and with the power of the Holy Spirit they baptized believers to do the same. Through our baptism we are part of the community that is sent out to do God's work. We too are

called to a ministry of supporting relationships within community. We are called to a ministry of abundance by providing for the needs of those who are mourning. We too are called to a ministry of justice by treating others fairly and honestly and asking others to do the same.

The Baptismal Covenant contains perhaps the strongest statement the Episcopal Church has ever put forward concerning the obligations Christians take on in terms of faith and life. —Paul Marshall³³

It's no mistake that our baptismal promises and the Five Marks of Mission are all about living as God intends. We promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. And we promise to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. We are called to do this, as Jesus did, from our community of faith. Through baptism we share in the mission and ministry of Jesus, a hand on ministry marked by healing, forgiveness, blessing, and supporting others. That proclaims that God's kingdom is near. We are members of the Jesus movement. Through our ministry we participate in God's kingdom of life of joy, community, abundance, and justice.

Where Is Our Ministry and Mission?

As we said earlier, we share God's mission wherever we are, not just in church. In fact, most of the mission and ministry of the people of God is out in the world. Just as Jesus sent the disciples out into the world to spread the good news, so we too are sent out to serve God throughout the week. Your ministry, then, happens at work, at home with your family, out with friends, and with your neighbors. Where you see people calling people together in fellowship, living with a joyful heart, giving generously, and acting justly, you're seeing God's kingdom being proclaimed.

Gifts for Mission and Ministry

In letters to early Christian communities in Corinth, Galatia, and Rome, the apostle Paul wrote about **gifts of the Spirit**: talents and abilities God gives us to fulfill our mission in the world. Paul was addressing the struggles these

³³ Paul V. Marshall, "Answers to Questions to Bishop Candidates for the Diocese of Bethlehem" (unpublished manuscript, 1995).

communities were facing. What were their ministries? What gifts did the people have to fulfill their mission? How could the individuals in the community work together as one? We continue to ask ourselves these very same questions. This is what we learn from Paul.

There Are a Variety of Gifts

There are a variety of gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:4–10, Paul lists the following gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. And in Paul's letter to the Romans he lists more gifts: ministry, teaching, exhortation, generosity, diligence, and cheerfulness (Romans 12:6–8). Both lists addressed the needs of the communities to whom Paul had written; neither was meant to be exhaustive. The Spirit gives different gifts at different times to meet the changing needs of the community. So, let's look at the nature of spiritual gifts.

Everyone Has Spiritual Gifts; Nobody Has All the Gifts

Every member of the Body of Christ has been given spiritual gifts to take their place in God's mission and each person's gift is different from everyone else's. Remember, community is important to God. So you shouldn't be surprised to know that, while everyone has at least one gift, no one has them all. No one is meant to pursue God's mission alone. The Body of Christ has many members and the gifts of each are to be used in partnership with others. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul talks about the Church as a human body. The body has many parts, each necessary to the health of the body but none sufficient on its own. "If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body." And also, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Corinthians 12:15, 21). Suppose the person with vision didn't share her gift? Imagine the harm a body could do if it couldn't see what it was doing. You need to use your gifts along with the gifts of others to serve God's kingdom.



The seven doves represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (see Isa. 11:2; Rev. 5:12).

God Gives Generously

Have you ever read a Bible story where God gives just a smidge? God provides spiritual gifts generously. Hidden behind what might not seem like much is something beyond imagination. You, together with

YOUR MISSION AND MINISTRY

What does your mission and ministry look like? People minister in a variety of ways. Some help others as healthcare givers, some bring joy to life through music and art, some prepare people for a life of service as teachers, and still others . . . the list goes on and on. To consider how you minister, begin by remembering one way that you fulfill each of the Five Marks of Mission.

I proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to bring wholeness to the world by:

The last time I taught and nurtured new believers to support them in their mission and ministry was when:

One time I responded to human need by loving service is when:

One way I can seek to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence, or pursue peace and reconciliation is by:

This week I strove to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth by:

Looking at the actions you've already taken and considering possibilities for how to address the Five Marks of Mission gives you some idea of how you might participate in God's mission in the world. The way each of us answers these questions is different because each of us is uniquely and wonderfully made. Each of us has received our own unique gifts to fulfill this mission.

others in your community, have all the gifts you need to do what you need to bring about God's kingdom. In fact, God gives even more than we need. Think about the parable of the sower in Mark's Gospel (4:3-9). The farmer threw seeds all over the place: on the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil. God is like that—giving generously and hoping that the seeds will take root. Our job is to receive God's gifts and nurture them to bear fruit.

Superheroes in the movies can show us what's possible with abundant gifts. Superman flies with lightning speed to save a person in need. Wonder Woman lifts meteors the size of small cities. Batman has supersized powers to fight evil and crime in Gotham City. That's what abundant gifts look like—enough to fight oppression, avert disasters, challenge violence, and renew life. Take a minute and imagine what you could do if your gifts were supersized. If you had unlimited generosity or wisdom, what would you do differently?

Use Your Gifts for the Good of Everyone

We are to use our gifts not to boost ourselves, but to serve others. The apostle Paul tells us the same thing. Each member uses his or her gifts for the good of the family, bringing the community to its greatest ability to live into their call.

An important step in using your gifts for ministry is to claim them and be confident that, indeed, you have enough. What might your gifts be?

You may not be a superhero fit for the big screen, but when you use your gifts in everyday acts of ministry you're an everyday hero. What may seem like simple acts to you can be great acts of ministry to others. A friend told me that once, when going through customs, she greeted the officer with a simple, "How are you doing today?" The officer paused and then smiled and replied, "Thank you. No one asks about my day. You've just made it a good one." A simple "hello, how are you?" can sometimes change a person's whole outlook for the day.

You Bring Joy to the World When You Use Your Gifts

God created you and blessed you and wants you, and all of God's people to have joy. So using your gifts will also energize you and make you feel good. Paul talked about joy in terms of the fruit of the Spirit. In his letter to the Galatians (5:22-23) he lists the following fruit: love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The qualities suggest a life of joy in relationship with others.

We are adept at doing many things. Modern life seems to require this, your daily life, when managing your household and fulfilling your work, community obligations, you may be required to write reports, lead meetings, plan events, diagnose diseases, operate heavy machinery, and so on. You are likely good at many things. But just because you might be good at something doesn't mean it is your gift. What makes a skill a gift is that you look forward to using gifts; using your skills tends to deplete your energy. This doesn't mean you cannot or should not use your skills; it is just a way to look for those things that come from your heart—your gifts.

You can use your gifts for lots of purposes. You can use them to bring people together or use them selfishly for your own gain; you can use them to build relationships or to tear them down; to nourish life or to destroy it. What we learn from the Bible and the Christian community is that God has given you gifts to build community, strengthen relationships, nourish and support life, and bring people closer to God. As Christians we recognize that our gifts originate with God and we must use them for God's mission, the kingdom of God, and not for our own purposes.

Finding Our Spiritual Gifts

So each of us has gifts for ministry. And each of us has the responsibility to find out what those gifts are. Once we come to know those gifts we can nurture and honor them by offering them to God and practicing them in our ministry to proclaim the kingdom of God.

The process that helps us come to know our gifts is called discernment. The process of **discernment** pulls apart the various possibilities to allow us to see each more clearly. It is a process of distinguishing the variety of gifts, distinguishing our gifts from those of others, and distinguishing those of the Spirit from gifts not of the Spirit.

Two questions to ask when discerning your gifts are: (1) What do I long to do? and (2) How do the things I long to do fit into God's dreams?

The work of discernment is never finished. Our gifts change, the needs of the community change, and consequently our call will change. The two very broad questions listed above are ones you can ask yourself from time to time. You might want to try a more structured exercise of discernment. Here

are three exercises that will help you identify specific gifts grounded in scripture and God's work in your life. Try each and see which one most clearly helps you find out who you are and discover what God is calling you to do.

Discernment Exercise: Listing Gifts

Paul listed a number of gifts of the Spirit, which provide a good place to begin. But because communities and cultures change, those gifts will also change. So to add to and update his list, write the four characteristics of the kingdom of God in four columns on a piece of paper: life of joy, abundance, community, and justice. What abilities do you think would help someone create a world where there is less sorrow and sickness (filled with joy); one where people are no longer hungry, homeless, or in need (is abundant); one where people relate to one another with care (has community); and one that treats people fairly and honestly (has justice)? Write those gifts below each quality that defines God's kingdom. Write as many as you can. Share your list with someone else. Examples are:

Life of Joy	Justice
Can play an instrument	Knows right from wrong
Laughs and is cheerful	Can persuade others of what's right
Comforts and/or cures the sick	Encourages others
	Teaches truth
Community	Counsels others
Forgives	Abundance
Shows compassion and mercy	Gives generously
Oversees projects	Forgives
Has a strong faith	Shares faith
Likes to invite	Has a strong faith

Gifts likely address more than one aspect of the kingdom of God. Your list provides you with gifts that are actively used today.

Discernment Exercise: People We Admire³⁴

Continue with the following exercise to see additional gifts you might have. We often share the spiritual gifts of people we admire. Who do you respect whose life brings about joy, community, abundance, and justice? They can be

people you know personally or someone you have read about. They can be contemporary, historical—or even fictional characters from a book or a movie. List as many of these people as you can. When you're done, underline traits that stand out. For example, suppose you wrote the name of a coworker who supports your work and with whom you can discuss new ideas. So next to that name, you might write, "encouraging," "wise," and "well-spoken." If you wrote the name of a great leader such as Mahatma Gandhi, you might write, "compassionate," "dedicated to peace," and "perseverant" next to his name. Do this for each person you wrote down. When you've finished, look at the qualities you've named. What are the common characteristics you find among those you admire? While the people may live or have lived very different lives from one another, you will likely find similarities in their characters.

What this exercise reveals are the gifts that you value and have yourself. If you do this exercise in a group, you will find that no two people will have the same list. The people whom you name might be similar, but the characteristics that are common to your list are unique to you.

Discernment Exercise: Considering Your Own Life

Already in this chapter you listed examples of how you contribute to the Five Marks of Mission. Whether you realize it or not, you're already using your gifts. In this exercise of discernment you reflect on your actions to recognize fulfilling the Five Marks of Mission on page 133. Next to each write how you're using the gifts you are already using. So return to your answers to how you're using the Five Marks of Mission on page 133. Next to each write the talent you used to fulfill that Mark. If you wrote a letter to a congressperson to enlist her support for affordable housing in your town as an example of transforming unjust structures, you might write "wisdom" and "compassion." Be specific in your answers. How, for example, did wisdom and compassion guide you? You might say "knowledge of local housing ordinances and my knowledge from the Bible of what Jesus asked of his community." And you might add "sense of responsibility for the poor." You see opportunities for ministry differently than everyone else does. Remember, no one has all the gifts—and our gifts complement one another.

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. —Parker J. Palmer³⁵

34. This exercise is based on one in Lloyd Edwards, *Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1988), 55.

35. Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3.

You now have three lists: one that shows the possibilities, a shorter list of those gifts you see in yourself, and another list of those gifts you've already realized you have. Keep all these gifts in mind as you continue in your ministry, and see how they guide you to respond to the needs of the world.

Discerning Gifts in Community

It's always important to discern our spiritual gifts with a group or someone else. We do this for many reasons. Discernment is difficult. Our friends, mentors and family members can give us guidance and perspective. Because we're human, we can be led astray by our own egos and lose sight of God's call to us. Abba Moses, a fifth-century monk living in the deserts of Egypt, told this unfortunate story of another monk, Hero. Hero believed he could discern God's call without the help of his community and so he went to live alone. After a time, Hero came to believe that God, wanting to test his faithfulness, called him to jump into a deep well. Hero jumped in. A few days later, the brothers found Hero and pulled him out. Hero died two days later. Now, this is a dramatic story of someone hearing and acting on voices other than that of God. But we too can be led astray by our own desire to prove ourselves.

Our community's guidance doesn't just keep us from going astray; it may also identify gifts we might not recognize ourselves. God wants us to use our gifts in a community that has discerned God's will, and God will give us the gifts we need to do that. But we can't do it by ourselves.

Ignatian Examen

Two very basic questions you can continue to ask yourself each day as a practice of ongoing discernment are:

When did I feel most alive?

When did I most feel life draining out of me?

These two questions come from the practice of the **Ignatian Examen**, a practice of listening for God's voice in everyday events developed by a Spanish saint named Ignatius Loyola in the early 1500s. The examen helps people understand God's desires and will for them within their daily lives. The examen is based on the belief that God actively guides us. God speaks to us both in the good and the bad times. The questions might not appear to relate to God directly. By asking God to guide us as we ask ourselves the questions and seek the answers, our reflections and answers are more likely to reflect what God wants of us. Other sets of questions to use in the practice of examen include:

*For what moment today am I most grateful?
For what moment today am I least grateful?*

and

*When was I happiest today?
When was I saddest?*

The examen is to be practiced regularly. By asking ourselves these questions each day, we will begin to see patterns in our choices and experiences. These patterns suggest our gifts and God's call to us. As you may guess, times we are happiest, energized, and most grateful are likely to be times when we are using the gifts that God gave us. By asking simple questions, we can be open to God's continual call to us to be ministers, bringing our work closer to God's dream for it.

The Importance of Church to Ministry

Each week we gather from our various ministries out in the world in worship to thank God for creation and blessings. We offer our prayers for other and ourselves and confess our shortcomings. We ask for God's mercy and forgiveness to help us return our lives to God's way. And we are nourished by the communion of bread and wine. We end our worship together each Sunday by asking for the strength to return to the world to participate in God's mission:

Eternal God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ,
and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.
Send us now into the world in peace,
and grant us strength and courage
to love and serve you
with gladness and singleness of heart;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(BCP, 365)

* These questions are from Dennis Linn, Shella Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with the Lord: Finding What Gives You Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1995), 6-7.

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Think of a time when you ministered to the needs of a person or group of people. Describe what happened. Where were you? What did you see, hear, taste, smell, and feel?
2. **Be Intelligent:** What does this experience suggest about what God is calling you to do? What does it say about those to whom you were ministering?
3. **Be Reasonable:** What past experiences led you to this ministry? How do these past experiences affect your current understanding? What other meanings are possible? Does the forgotten detail suggest a new insight about the meaning of your experience?
4. **Be Responsible:** Does this experience lead you to new ministries or to deepen your commitment to this ministry?
5. **Be in Love Transformed:** What do you need to make this change or deepen your commitment? Ask God for new possibilities or new opportunities to practice to fulfill your ministry.

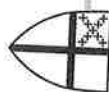
Part Seven



Seeking God and Be in Love

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Think of a time when you ministered to the needs of a person or group of people. Describe what happened. Where were you? What did you see, hear, taste, smell, and feel?
2. **Be Intelligent:** What does this experience suggest about what God is calling you to do? What does it say about those to whom you were ministering?
3. **Be Reasonable:** What past experiences led you to this ministry? How do these past experiences affect your current understanding? What other meanings are possible? Does the forgotten detail suggest a new insight about the meaning of your experience?
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Part Seven

Seeking God and Be in Love

INTERLUDE

"Created to Be in Relationship"

Listen to a variety of podcasts. The following is my abbreviated version of a story told recently on one. It lacks the impact of the woman's 15–20 minute powerful telling of her story, but it retains the surprising ending.

She spoke in detail about her addiction to drugs. At a low point in her life, she found a piece of paper on which her mother had written the telephone number of a Christian counselor. She hadn't spoken with her mother for some five years.

She dialed the number at 2:00 a.m. She heard the rustling of bedclothes and the turning down of a radio as a man said hello.

She told him about the note with his number and said she hoped he could help her.

He replied gently . . . and listened, listened, and listened. Until the sun came up.

"You've been so kind and have helped me a lot," she said after some four hours.

"I've been expecting that you would say some prayers or give me a few Bible verses," she said, "and I want you to know that I am quite willing to hear them. After all, that is part of your profession, and you have already helped me so much."

The man said he wanted to tell her something and asked that she not hang up after he did. She agreed.

"You dialed the wrong number," he said.³⁷

Catch your breath, folks. Four hours? The wrong number? Staying awake? Now there's a spiritual discipline.

Brother Martin Smith once said that some words we commonly cry out to be partnered with other words.³⁸ One is incomplete without the other. Spirituality seems to me to cry out for at least three words: relationship, mission, and transformation.

Our inner journey of spirituality focuses on relationships—with our sisters and brothers, and with all of God's creation. It works out in what might be called our public journey of mission. Through it, we yearn for transformation.

Crucial for Christian spirituality in the Episcopal tradition is that we have a personal fit among the classic practices and disciplines outlined in the Book of Common Prayer. Also crucial, lest we make the mistake of acting as though spirituality is a go-it-alone enterprise, is that we center our spirituality—our relationship of mission, and our personal transformation—in our community celebration of the Eucharist.

Limiting spirituality to pious practices or ethereal reflection gives spirituality a bad name. It's normal for spirituality to simmer in mind and heart, prompted likely by personal experiences, but it must continually get down to work in history.

You may know the quip about how to make God laugh: tell God your plans. There's another about how to bore God: limit your spirituality to pious practices.

We are created to be in relationship. This mystery may be our best clue to reality. We need others: to be and to become.

That we are so created reaches deeply into the mystery we call Trinity. The name of our Christian tradition has given to the shared, giving, loving relationship of God whom we invoke as Father/Mother, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's "is"—being-in-relationship, being-in-community—trickles down. Everything that rests not on relationship—even belief—rests on sand.

37. Auburn Sandstrom, "A Phone Call," *The Month: True Stories Told Live*, podcast audio, July 5, 2016, <https://themoth.org/stories/a-phone-call>

38. During a forum at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, 1997.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Spirituality: Created for Prayer

The Book of Common Prayer defines **prayer** this way: "Prayer is rising to God, by thought and deeds, with or without words" (BCP, 856). In the last chapter, we will explore other forms of prayer here.

In his essay, "A Troubling Call," Bill tells a story of an accidental phone conversation transformed into prayer. Can you remember an experience that became a practice of prayer?

Jesus spent most of his years of ministry among people, studying, celebrating, worshipping, and being in fellowship with others. These are *spiritual disciplines* that support a life of unceasing prayer. **Spiritual disciplines** are intentional practices that keep us in relationship with God. Spiritual disciplines reinforce a life of unceasing prayer—and are also the result of unceasing prayer.

A number of spiritual disciplines can bring you to a closer relationship with God. We are not meant to practice all the disciplines all the time. Seasons of fasting, while Easter is a season of celebration. Be attentive to your body: you might love to hike in the mountains while your best friend might be happiest swimming in the ocean. Be intelligent: take a look at each of your spiritual practices that follow, and be reasonable: decide which ones might help you find a closer relationship with God.

Conversations with God

When we talk with friends, we generally talk about the many different things happening in our lives. Sometimes we share a hurt or celebration. At other times we might say how much we appreciate their friendship or give them a compliment. If we have hurt a friend, we might ask for forgiveness to restore our friendship. Think about prayer as conversations with God that are just as real and wide ranging.

The principal kinds of prayer are adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. An easy way to remember them is the acronym ACTS. Prayers of **adoration** are words and actions that express our love for God and creation. An example is the Gloria during Holy Eucharist when we sing or say "Glory to God in the highest." We ask for nothing; we just give praise for God's presence.

A Relationship with God

The early-morning conversation Bill describes in the interlude between an accidental listener and a woman in need of prayer can be thought of as a spiritual practice. It was no accident; the man woken in the middle of the night by a wrong number did not hang up. Rather, he listened. He was literally called, unsuspecting, into a practice of prayer. Your life, too, calls you into prayer, sometimes in unsuspecting ways.

The Bible is filled with examples of people being drawn into a life of prayer. Abraham negotiated with God to save the city of Sodom. Hannah asked God for a son. Moses spoke with God many times—revealing his own weaknesses and telling God, "I can't do it." Jesus was always talking with God. In fact, we might say that Jesus lived a life of unceasing prayer. But what does that mean?

Well, Jesus spent time alone and in silence, an activity many of us easily identify as prayer. In Matthew 14, for example, Jesus went up the mountains by himself after feeding the five thousand who had come to hear him preach. Prayer, though, is much more than getting away now and again. Living a life of unceasing prayer is acknowledging God's presence in all that we do. It is living a life of transformation in close relationship with God and others.

The apostle Paul urges the Thessalonians to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Be attentive to the rhythm of your life. Is there a discernible pattern, or are your days chaotic? Try to understand how you might "pray without ceasing." Which of the practices that follow might best enable you to be in relationship with God throughout your day?

In a prayer of **confession** we admit that we have done something wrong, turn away from sin, and seek to restore our relationship with others through God. An example of a prayer of confession is the general confession during worship in which we say, "We have not loved you with our whole heart. . . . We are truly sorry and we humbly repent."

When we express our gratitude to God for all the blessings and mercies God gives us, we are offering a prayer of **thanksgiving**. Before eating dinner, people often return thanks to God for food and drink and the day that is ending. The Eucharist is a prayer of thanksgiving.

Supplication is asking God's blessings and healing grace for yourself or others. Supplications can either be requests for oneself, called petitions, or for someone else, called intercessions. We might ask God for guidance in making a decision, protection from evil, or the healing of pain. The Prayers of the People said during Holy Eucharist are intercessions said for the Church, the nation, the world, the community, people who suffer, and those who have died.

We can pray in other ways than words. Kneeling in confession or lifting up our hands in praise are prayers too. When you pray, you don't have to include a prayer of every type. Let your heart guide your prayer.

The Daily Office

The **Daily Office** in the Book of Common Prayer provides a disciplined way of acknowledging God's presence in our lives through regular prayer and readings. (Morning Prayer begins on page 35 of the Book of Common Prayer.) With Morning Prayer we declare the day sacred and invite God to begin the day with us. In the morning hours of new light we look forward to the day, praising God, maker of heaven and earth. As the sun sets we turn to Evening Prayer to reflect on the day and thank God for providing a Savior, a light to enlighten the nations.

Setting aside time each day for prayer and study is an opportunity to invite God into our daily routine, to recognize that God is continually at work in our lives, and to respond to God's presence with praise and thanksgiving. The practice of setting aside time each day for study and prayer dates back to the times of the Jewish scriptures. The *Shema*, a declaration of faith, found in Deuteronomy is the oldest fixed prayer in Judaism to be prayed twice daily—in the morning and in the evening. Psalm 119 says, "Seven times a day I praise you, Jesus and the disciples prayed daily, and so did early Christian communities. Early Christian communities continued the Jewish practice of marking every day with prayer, as did Jesus and the disciples. In the early centuries

The Monastic Horaria (Hours)

Matins and Lauds	daybreak
Prime, the first hour	6:00 a.m.
Terce, the third hour	9:00 a.m.
Sext, the sixth hour	noon
None, the ninth hour	3:00 p.m.
Vespers	sunset
Compline	bedtime

of the Church, some Christians organized and lived in **monastic communities**. A monastic community is a group of Christians who live together apart from society and dedicate themselves to simple lives of study, prayer, and service ordered by a rule. Early communities developed seven Daily Offices, or times of prayer, beginning with Lauds (morning prayer) upon waking and ending with Compline before going to sleep. See the box above for a list.

The Daily Offices in our prayer book are based on these monastic offices as well as cathedral offices of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. Just as in the monastic offices, Evening and Morning Prayer include the psalms, scripture, and prayers. We call these elements the **Invitatory** and **Psalter**, the Invitatory and the Prayers. The **Invitatory** is a sentence and response that invites our hearts and minds to the purpose of the gathering. In Morning Prayer, for example, we say,

Officiant Lord, open our lips.
People And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

And at Evening Prayer we begin with:

Officiant O God, make speed to save us.
People O Lord, make haste to help us.

Notice the difference in the tone between Morning and Evening Prayer. At day's break we begin with praise and thank God for the coming day. After the day has passed, we ask for God's forgiveness, knowing that we have fallen short of what God calls us to do. We ask for forgiveness even though God has already forgiven us before the day began.

In the morning the Invitatory and Psalter continue with an antiphon, the Venite or Jubilate, and a psalm. **Antiphons** are sentences, usually from the Bible, that we say before and after the psalm. The Venite (Psalm 95:1-7) and the Jubilate (Psalm 100) said in Morning Prayer invite us to rejoice in the God of creation and praise God's goodness. In the evening we say the Phos hilaron ("O Gracious Light"), which acknowledges the day has ended, but continues to be filled with the light that God brought into the world through Jesus Christ.

A psalm is known by its opening phrase in Latin. Psalm 121 is called *Levavi oculos* because its first phrase is "I lift up my eyes."

Both offices continue with a psalm followed by one or more lessons. You can find one cycle of appointed psalms and readings in the back pages of the Book of Common Prayer, beginning on page 934. If you follow the cycle of psalms and readings for the two-year cycle, you will have read a lot of the Bible. After the lessons we say a **canticle** (a "little song" based on scripture), and the Apostles' Creed. The traditional canticles for Evening Prayer are the Magnificat, the Song of Mary in Luke's story of the birth of Jesus, and the Nunc Dimittis, the Song of Simeon when he saw the Christ Child, also in Luke's Gospel. Both canticles acknowledge God's greatness and gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The final element of both offices is the prayers. These prayers have four parts: the Lord's Prayer, suffrages, collect, and intercessions and thanksgivings. With the prayers we give thanks and ask God to remember our needs, as well as the needs of our community, both close by and around the world.

Both Evening and Morning Prayer have optional beginnings: an opening sentence of scripture, confession, and absolution. Evening Prayer can also begin with "The Service of Light," which focuses on the fading of the day and acknowledges that even the darkness is radiant in God's sight.

The Book of Common Prayer offers two additional daily prayers: Noonday Prayer, said at midday, and Compline, said just before turning into bed for the night. For those whose days do not have room for these liturgies, the prayer book provides briefer "Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families" (BCP, 136-40). Whether you pray the Daily Offices alone or in a group, when you pray, you pray with many other Christians around the world.

Silence and Listening

Prayer is a conversation. It requires the presence of you and God. God always with us, but we aren't always aware of it. Most of us aren't in tune often we allow little time for God to talk to us. Imagine the possibility that God is speaking to us, calling to us, asking us for something, or praising us. Conversations are, after all, two-way. By hogging the conversation, we hardly give God time to talk. The spiritual exercises below will help you listen to what God has to say and offer your own words now and then, too.

Centering Prayer (Listening beyond Words)

Have you ever been in love? At first, you want to be with the other person all the time. What you do doesn't seem to matter—talking or just sitting quietly together is enough. Just being in the presence of the other is fulfilling. That is how it is with God. But the difference is that God is with us always, even though we are not always aware of it. While the world might seem to be physically separate from God, just as the air we breathe is all around and inside us, but unseen, so is God. Feeling the presence of God, the one who loves you fully, is like taking a deep breath. God fills our entire being.

Like the spiritual life itself, prayer is initiated by God. No matter what we think about the origin of our prayers, they are all a response to the hidden workings of the spirit within. —Marjorie Thompson³⁹

Centering prayer is a prayer of quieting and stillness that lets you know the presence of God in your innermost parts. It is a prayer without words and a journey to the center of your being.

Centering prayer has its beginnings with the Desert Fathers and Mothers—Christians who lived in the deserts of Egypt during the fourth and fifth centuries and followed a life of solitude and self-discipline. This form of prayer was the primary way of prayer for monks for centuries, and more people have become interested in it today, thanks to the writings of modern-day Tappist monk Thomas Keating.

The practice is simple. If you've ever entered a church and sat down quietly to prepare for a service, you've begun the practice of centering prayer. Its simple form, however, hides how difficult it can be in practice—and its rich rewards.

³⁹ Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 3.

Centering Prayer: The Practice

First, find a quiet and comfortable place to sit. Choose a sacred word, giving God permission to be present within you. Common sacred words are "God," "Jesus," "Amma," "Father," and "Spirit." Choose a word that reflects the love of God, but one that brings forth the fewest images—either positive or negative. The idea is to empty yourself of thought. The word itself is not important. It's just a word that says you're ready to welcome God.

Close your eyes and introduce the sacred word gently. As thoughts, feelings, or images surface, gently acknowledge them and let them go. An image that may be helpful is a stream. As you see thoughts of the day come down the stream, don't be alarmed. Gently let them continue to float down the stream. Centering prayer is not a prayer of words, but a silent prayer to God to whom "all hearts are open, all desires known, and from [whom] no secrets are hid" (BCP, 355). God knows our needs and answers our prayers before they are even asked.

Your body may twitch or itch during centering prayer. This is your body's way of working through its stress. If this distracts you, repeat your sacred word gently. You don't have to say the word constantly. When you notice that your mind is wandering or thoughts are getting in the way, reintroduce the word. As you continue, you may find a peacefulness within yourself. Rest in that peace. Don't worry if thoughts interrupt that peace. If they do, gently say your sacred word and let the thought go by.

A good image of how centering prayer works is to imagine that you are stepping into a holy circle. The circle is separated from the busyness of the day, and at the center is God. You journey in a continually inward spiral away from your thoughts and the noise of the day toward the center of yourself—and God. Keep this image of the circle in mind as you try centering prayer. Practicing contemplative prayer for ten minutes a day is a good beginning. You can mark the time in a variety of ways. Some use smartphone apps that chime after a set time. When your time of stillness is over, return by reciting the Lord's Prayer.

The fruit of centering prayer is knowing that God deeply yearns for you, God's beloved. Centering prayer is not meditation in a void. It is creating empty spaces deep within to allow the Holy Spirit to grow inside. You will

be amazed: knowing God's love and deep presence will open windows to God in all of creation and to respond to God's creation with loving action.

Mantras

Inviting God to be with you is the beginning of any prayer. Some people find saying **mantras**—sacred words or phrases said repeatedly for a period of time—helps quiet their body and mind and invites God to be with them. An example of a simple mantra is "Come, Holy Spirit, come." This simple mantra names the presence of the divine and invites God to be with you. Another mantra is the **Jesus Prayer**: Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

<i>breathe in saying</i>	Lord, Jesus Christ,
<i>breathe out saying</i>	Son of God,
<i>breathe in saying</i>	have mercy on me,
<i>breathe out saying</i>	a sinner

A final example is the **Trisagion**, a Latin word that means "thrice holy" Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy on me.

<i>breathe in saying</i>	Holy God
<i>breathe out saying</i>	Holy and Mighty
<i>breathe in saying</i>	Holy Immortal One
<i>breathe out saying</i>	Have mercy on me

Mantras: The Practice

Find a quiet place to sit and get comfortable. Be sure to remain sitting up and attentive. You want to be relaxed so that you are aware, but not so relaxed that you fall asleep. Take a deep breath in and say, "Come, Holy Spirit." Say it aloud. Breathe out saying, "Come."

<i>breathe in saying</i>	"Come Holy Spirit"
<i>breathe out saying</i>	"Come"

Repeat this cycle of breathing in and out with the words, "Come, Holy Spirit, come" for five minutes. At the end of your prayer, stay in the silence for a few minutes and notice where your heart leads you. At the end of your prayer, thank God for your time together. "Come, Holy Spirit" is one mantra. The text offers two other examples.

The Jesus Prayer and the Trisagion, like the words "come, Holy Spirit, come," invite God and Jesus Christ to be present in our hearts. Repeating the words of invitation begins to empty your heart and mind, providing room for the Holy Spirit to grow.

The result of this prayer is intimacy with God, a closeness that reveals for the Holy Spirit to grow.

If it's difficult to remain physically still for longer than five minutes, that's okay. We are, after all, physical beings. If you quickly become restless you might find it helpful to use Anglican prayer beads along with a mantra.

Anglican Prayer Beads

Anglican prayer beads—sometimes called the rosary—are a set of thirty-three beads joined together in a circular pattern. You hold them in your hands and say sacred words as you travel with your fingers around the string of beads. Because it adds a physical element to prayer, the rosary engages our mind, spirit, and body. Fingering successive beads creates a focus for sometimes fidgety hands and links that focus to the words of our lips. In addition, the structure of the rosary and repetitive action of the beads creates a rhythm for prayer that stills our hearts.

The diagram illustrates the structure of an Anglican prayer beads, which is a circular wreath of prayer beads. The beads are arranged in a circle, with a cross at the top. The diagram is divided into sections by lines, with labels indicating the number of beads in each section and the total number of beads in the circle.

- Four Cruciform Beads:** A label pointing to the top section of the circle, indicating that there are four beads in this section.
- Each group of seven beads forms a week:** A label pointing to the right side of the circle, indicating that the beads are grouped into seven groups of seven beads each, representing the days of the week.
- Praying with Anglican prayer beads is:** A label pointing to the bottom left of the circle, indicating the purpose of the beads.
- Invitatory Bead:** A label pointing to the bottom of the circle, indicating the starting point of the prayer.
- Praying moving around the circle bead by bead:** A label pointing to the right side of the circle, indicating the method of prayer.

The Origin of Beads. Beads were first used for prayer in the second century BCE by followers of the Hindu faith as a way of counting prayers. The practice spread to Buddhism, Islam, and finally to Christianity. In the mid-sixteenth century Pope Pius V decreed that St. Dominic, founder of the Dominican Order, invented the rosary and the classic form for the Roman Catholic rosary. Leaders of the Protestant Reformation discouraged people from using rosaries for devotions, and today rosaries are most commonly associated with the Roman Catholic Church. The pattern we know as Anglican prayer beads developed in the

1980s. It has a cross, an invitational bead, and twenty-eight beads divided four weeks by four cruciform beads.

The modern word "bead" comes from the old English word *bede*, meaning prayer. A bedesman was someone whose duty it was to pray for others.

The Symbolism of Anglican Prayer Beads. The structure of Anglican prayer beads is richly symbolic, connecting our prayer with time and space. Each of four groups of seven beads is called a week. The number seven reminds us of the seven days of the week, the seven days of creation, and the seven sacraments. In Jewish and Christian traditions, the number seven represents perfection and completion. Four larger beads called cruciform beads divide the weeks. The four cruciform beads form the points of a cross, reminding us that by Jesus's death and resurrection we are freed from the power of sin and reconciled to God. Dividing the beads into groups of four also reminds us of the four seasons of the year and the four directions on a compass. The circular pattern symbolizes a journey and reminds us that the cycles of life—joy, sorrow, birth, and death—often repeat themselves.

Anglican Prayer Beads: The Practice

We often use prayer beads along with words. Before you begin, choose four simple prayers. Two of the prayers are said as you enter the circle—one for the cross and another for the invitory, or first, bead. A simple prayer for the cross is, "In the Name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen." You might try using the Trisagion for the invitory bead and the cruciform beads and the Jesus Prayer for the weeks.

Prayer for each of the seven beads, followed by the Trisagion for the entire rosary three times before ending with the invitory and cross three rounds, you will have said one hundred prayers. More than that, you may find your heart to be still and your mind to be at rest. Before completing your prayer, spend some time in silence and thank God for being with you.

With Anglican prayer beads, earthly and divine symbols are intertwined, reminding us that our souls and bodies are intimately connected: we believe with our bodies and our souls. God came to earth as a human being with a body. Jesus suffered in body on the cross and rose from the dead. We live our faith as the Body of Christ in the world—a physical world with days, seasons, and geography—all made sacred by God.

Prayer beads are meant to help you pray. At first, remembering the words might be difficult and the beads might be confusing. Relax. Start with simple prayers—perhaps only two: one for the weeks and one for all other beads. With practice you will become more comfortable. Trust your intuition; other prayer practices might better help create the space where you and God can meet.

Lectio Divina

As Christians we believe that the Bible is the revealed word of God. God inspired human authors who wrote the texts through which God speaks. So a natural place to listen to God's voice is the Bible. People read the Bible in many ways—for its literary value, for instruction, for inspiration. The first two kinds of reading use the human intellect and invite us to study the history, translation, and setting of the Bible stories. The third way requires us to listen with our hearts to what the word of God is saying to each of us personally at that particular moment.

One way of listening deeply to scripture is *lectio divina* (Latin for divine reading). Specifically, *lectio divina* is a four-step process of prayerfully reading the word of God. See the box on page 155 for the steps. St. Benedict, a Christian monk who lived in the fifth century CE and who believed reading and study are a central part of a sacred life, encouraged a widespread practice of *lectio divina*.

Lectio divina is not meant to replace the study of scripture. Studying scripture with commentaries helps us to understand the communities and times when various books of the Bible were written. It helps us interpret the Bible with the insights of scholars.

The process of *lectio divina* can also be used with poems, pictures, objects from nature, or life events. God speaks to us today through the created world as well as through the Bible. Follow the four steps for *lectio divina*, but instead of focusing on a word, focus on the subject you have chosen. Doing this will help you begin to see all of God's creation as sacred. If you're interested in trying *lectio divina*, you might try the daily podcast at www.pray-as-you-go.org offered by Jesuit Media Initiative.

Lectio Divina: The Practice

Lectio divina has four steps: reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating. To begin, find a place where you can listen quietly and select a brief passage from the Bible. Quiet your body and your mind with slow breathing. Perhaps say a mantra (see page 151).

Read. Read the passage slowly, savoring each word and allowing the words to sink deeply into your inner self. Ask yourself, "What word or phrase is speaking to me right now?" This question helps you to hear God's still, small voice speaking to you softly, gently, and in love.

Meditate. Take that word and recite it over and over again. This step is meditation. Open your heart to that word. It is a gift from God. Let your thoughts and imagination play with the word. What images does the word suggest? What thoughts or desires surface within you? By meditating on the word God has given you, you can find the word to be part of you.

Pray. Now let the word touch you deeply. Pray with the word. What emotions does this word bring to mind? Hold these feelings gently, without judgment, and repeat the word. Imagine yourself before God for healing grace and guidance.

Contemplate. Finally, rest in God's love. Accept God's loving embrace. Enjoy God's presence and thank God for the gift you have received. This final step is called contemplation.

Praying through Icons

Some people like to use visual images such as icons when they pray. Icons are visual images that point beyond themselves. The Nike logo with its message "just do it" is just one of the many icons in our culture. It tells people to get moving and do something. The image of George Washington printed on a dollar bill is another US icon. That icon tells us that this little green piece of paper is valuable. We can give it to a clerk at a store, and the clerk will give us the product we've chosen. Icons can be powerful instruments that instruct us and change our behavior and attitude. Their power comes from what they represent or point to. George Washington's image on the dollar represents



Rublev's fourteenth-century Russian icon of the Trinity invites the viewer into a relationship.

ple. Nature is filled with icons that point to God the Creator: a dandelion, a blade of grass, a bird's nest. Although all of them serve a purpose in nature, they are also beautiful images pointing to their creator. Taking the time to gaze into these icons can help us see the beauty of creation. Consider the hexagonal honeycomb. The fact that it both incubates bees and stores food with mathematical beauty reveals an immensely complex and creative creator.

The heavens are telling the glory of God. . . . There is no speech, nor are there words, their voice is not heard, yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. (Psalm 19:1, 3-4)

How can you pray through an icon? First select an icon. Focus your gaze on the image. Quiet your body, mind, and spirit. Ask God to be present and focus on the beauty and inner life of the icon. What is the icon saying about itself? What is it saying about God? What feeling does the icon evoke in you? Focus on and rest with this feeling. Respond to God as you are moved—with adoration, confession, thanksgiving, or supplication. End with a familiar prayer such as the Lord's Prayer.

Praying with Your Body

SPIRITUALITY: CREATED FOR PRAYER

So far, we've talked about praying without words, with words, and images. In each of these practices—except with Anglican prayer beads—bodies have not been active participants. We are physical beings and love all of who we are, so our worship and prayer practices reflect that. During our worship, for example, we kneel or stand for prayer. Many people make the sign of the cross and bow as the cross is processed by.

Our bodies hold memories. Kneel or take your common position of prayer. How does this posture affect how you feel or what you are thinking?

These motions hold **ritual memory**—the remembering of actions that deepen our experiences as they are repeated. An example of ritual memory is kneeling to pray. Try it. Because many of us have done it so often, we kneel our bodies remember other times we have knelt—the emotion, smells, sights, and sounds that surrounded us while kneeling. Ritual memory is powerful. So be mindful of our bodies and prayer. The following practice engage other parts of our bodies in prayer.

Mandalas

Creating visual images while we invite God to be present can be a powerful way to pray. Being creative with our hands focuses our minds and hearts and allows us to explore our innermost selves. Many people reveal themselves best by doodling, drawing, painting, or coloring.

One visual method of prayer is to draw a **mandala**, a circular pattern of lines and colors. You can find mandalas throughout nature. The cell with its nucleus, the nautilus, the earth seen from space, and the pattern of our spiraling galaxy, even the atom, are all mandalas. The stained-glass rose windows in many churches and the labyrinth are also mandalas. Because a circle has no beginning or end, mandalas represent the wholeness of creation at the cosmic and micro levels. The circle creates a safe place within which we can reconcile our feelings and thoughts with God.



This mandala is from an Egyptian liturgical fan used to keep insects away from the bread and wine.

Mandalas: The Practice

To begin praying with a mandala, draw a large circle with a compass on a large blank sheet of paper. Actively invite God to the circle and to your prayer. Let your thoughts and emotions suggest a color and pattern and begin to draw. Be creative with pencils, paints, crayons, magic markers, and other drawing tools. Draw what comes to mind—there is no “right” or “wrong” mandala. Each mandala is unique. Empty yourself into the circle, offering your worries, thoughts, hopes, and desires to God.

Mandalas have a long history. Buddhist monks in ancient Tibet began the practice of creating mandalas by making beautiful and intricate circular patterns with sand. The word “mandala” comes from the Sanskrit word that means circle. Twelfth-century German mystic Hildegard von Bingen, known for her visions and musical and artistic abilities, created many mandalas.

Drawing a mandala is a way of paying attention to your inner self. When you have finished your mandala, look at it as a whole to see what themes emerge. Where is God in the pattern? After a period of reflection, give thanks to God for drawing you closer.

Journaling

Journaling is a discipline of putting our thoughts on paper as a way of reflection, self-examination, and prayer. Journals can free your inner voice to speak with raw honesty. Journaling can help you make sense of where you have been and where you are headed, work out complicated thoughts and feelings, and understand what God is calling you to do. Journals are meant to free the soul. They can be filled with words, drawings, and doodles. Pour your stories and feelings out. They often reflect our innermost hopes, fears, anger, and love.

Every person has an inner voice. Journaling can often help us hear it more clearly.

As with any kind of prayer, journaling is personal. You can journal in spiral-bound notebooks, on the computer, in a scrapbook, or even using an

app on a smartphone. Begin by inviting God to your journaling. Be attentive to your experiences. Be honest, even if it is painful or you think that doesn't want to hear it. Without honesty you cannot truly face yourself God. Writing will help you find your own voice. Seeing your thought paper helps to recognize your own authority. Try it. Reading past journal entries will help you notice repeating themes and changes in the pattern of your life.

Written words have a permanence not matched by spoken words remain for you to read and reread. You might notice that when you return to past entries your thoughts are different than you remember, or have changed. Reading past thoughts will help you identify those changes in your life. If you cannot find words to write, try journaling with images. Perhaps journaling with mandalas will help you hear your inner voice.

Author Parker Palmer says, “Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you.”⁴⁰ God speaks to us through our lives. Ask yourself where God is in your journal. What is God saying to you? Journaling can bring our lives together and remember parts so that we can see its wholeness with common themes, questions, and directions. Journaling can help you be aware of God's transforming work in your life. As you close your journal, offer what you have written to God.

Walking a Labyrinth

A labyrinth is a sacred pattern in the shape of a circle with one path that winds to the center and back out again. With its circular shape of a mandala, the labyrinth reflects the unity and wholeness of creation and our lives.

A particularly famous labyrinth is the eleven-circuit labyrinth on the floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France. This labyrinth was built in the twelfth century for Christian pilgrims. The Crusades had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela in Spain dangerous, and alternate pilgrimage destinations. After arriving, pilgrims would walk the labyrinth before receiving the Eucharist.

Lauren Artress, a priest at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, led the installation of the eleven-circuit labyrinth at Grace Cathedral and in the 1990s founded the modern labyrinth movement. Today, you can find labyrinths in nearly every major US city (you can find a nearby labyrinth at www.labyrinthlocator.org). Small “finger labyrinths” are available for people who are unable to walk,

⁴⁰ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999).



The labyrinth is a mandala that you walk to pray.

do not live near a floor labyrinth, or just like having a labyrinth at hand. You can also find labyrinths on the Internet.

Just like any journey, walking a labyrinth can be transformational. Once you enter the labyrinth, you begin a journey that takes you to the center and out again. All you have to do is focus on taking the next step on the path with God, without worrying about the destination. Unlike a maze, which is designed to make us lost or confused, a labyrinth has no wrong turns and no dead ends. Because you don't have to think hard to walk the labyrinth successfully, you can free your heart to wander and listen to God. People who have walked labyrinths often say they find that God has given them an answer to an important question while they were on their labyrinth journey.

A labyrinth is a metaphor for life with a loving God who does not deceive or lead us astray. Walking the labyrinth is a journey with a God who calls us to a journey of wholeness.

Just like our real life, the journey on the labyrinth includes relationship with others. If you walk the labyrinth with a group, you will pass others along the way or brush the shoulders of people walking along other circuits. Sometimes you will be walking toward someone and other times away from someone. Everyone will be on the same path.

Fasting

Fasting is actively choosing not to do something for a short period of time so that we can draw our attention toward God. Often, fasting is associated with abstaining from food. For centuries the physical discipline of abstaining from food has been recognized as a way of developing self-control and of emptying oneself. At the time of Jesus, Jews fasted regularly. In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus fasted for forty days before beginning his ministry, and from historic writings we know that early Christians recognized Wednesdays and Fridays as fast days. Today, Lent—the forty days leading up to Easter—is a common time for Christians to practice the discipline of fasting.

By fasting we give up our physical attachment to material things and, just as in centering prayer, allow space for the Holy Spirit to enter us. It is not meant to be a time of deprivation nor is it meant to cause bodily harm. By removing food from our day, fasts can free us to center on God. By abstaining from food we allow our spiritual needs to take priority.

God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them. —St. Augustine

If you choose to fast from food, begin with a twenty-four-hour fast starting with lunch. With a normal fast, you abstain from food but continue to drink liquids such as water and juice. Begin by praying to God about whether would be a good day to fast. Select a day you will not be particularly physically active. Two days of the Church year traditionally designated for fasting are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Having the support of your family or community is especially helpful in a fast. Begin the day by eating breakfast. Skip snacking, lunch, and dinner. Remember, it is important to continue drinking liquids. Go about your day in inward prayer, thanking God for the tasks before you. When you find yourself reaching for the door of the refrigerator, remember your fast and God. The following morning, break your fast with a small meal and with thanksgiving.

Abstaining from food is not the only way to fast. You might try fasting from television or the computer. Just remember, the intention of the fast is to take the time and energy previously dedicated to that activity and give it to God in prayer.

Celebration

Birthdays are often cause for great celebration: a special meal of favorite foods, a cake, and gifts. Celebration, or feasting, is a way we mark life events. Celebration is also a spiritual discipline and part of a life of prayer.

In which many practice fasting, is followed by a longer fifty days of Lent, time of great celebration. After Jesus fasted for forty days, angels ministered to him. Does this surprise you? It shouldn't. The very word "gospel" means good news. In the Gospel according to John, the first sign Jesus performed at the coming of the kingdom of God was turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana. Jesus uses the image of a banquet to describe God's kingdom. And in the face of his coming death, Jesus, with his closest friends, celebrates Passover, a meal in which those gathered remember the liberation of the Jews from the Egyptians. That death has been conquered and God's reign is now is cause for celebration.

The Eucharist that we celebrate every Sunday, in fact, is a celebration and the central act of the Church. What marks celebration as a spiritual and prayerful act is that it is an intentional act of praise and thanksgiving that reflects our joy in God. We acknowledge that God is with us and mark the day with special foods and close friends.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, a book that lists the church calendar with feast days that commemorate events of the life of Jesus as well as the lives of men and women who have dedicated their lives to active witness of God, gives us many opportunities for celebrating. This book includes collects, psalms, and lessons that you can read as part of a celebration at home. You might incorporate prayers and readings to the celebrations of God's abundance in your life.

A Rule of Life

Leading a spiritual life means developing an *ongoing* relationship with God. This chapter offers a number of spiritual disciplines to help you develop that relationship. But which ones will be good for *you*? How will they fit in with all the other things you have to do? Leading a spiritual life doesn't mean kneeling or drawing mandalas all day in prayer. We need to live balanced lives, with God at the center.

Maintaining a balance or even knowing what balance should look like isn't easy. Demands by others and demands we put on ourselves get in the way. A helpful way to find and maintain balance is to develop a **rule of life**. A rule of life is a set of guidelines for living that helps us keep our lives in balance with God as its center.

Monastic communities live today—as they have for centuries—by rules of life. The best-known rule of life is the Rule of St. Benedict, written by Benedict of Nursia in the sixth century. The Rule of St. Benedict balances work and prayer and is guided by three overarching vows: stability, obedience, and conversion. The rule is a guide for monks on how to live in community. The box on the following page provides steps for developing your rule.

When a person joins a monastic community he or she vows to follow a rule of life that is different from other rules of life. For one, not everybody's called to a life of poverty or chastity, both common vows in monastic communities. Each of us is called by God to live a particular rule.

Rule of Life: The Practice

Writer Debra Farrington suggests that a way to begin to develop your rule of life is to write a list of activities that bring you joy that lasts beyond the moment. It may include running, writing, drawing, reading or spending time alone. This list is the beginning of your rule of life. Put your activities into five categories: work, study, prayer, play, and service to others. Study might be reading the Bible or books about the Christian tradition. Play could be your favorite hobby.

Bring this list to God and pray for guidance. You may begin to recognize for the first time that some activities are spiritual. Running for example, takes care of your body and therefore is a way of returning the blessing of health to God. Time with friends and family creates a community of love and support. You may want to rebalance some parts of your life. If so, take on a discipline that is reasonable. A rule of life is a realistic set of guidelines.

Once you have written your rule, check it over with a trusted friend who can help you refine it. Keep it handy. It will help you remain accountable and help you see when the rule needs to be modified. A rule of life is a living rule and will change. Most of all, a rule of life that makes God the center of your life is a blessing that can bring you into closer relationship to God.

*The categories of a rule of life and steps of creating rules are loosely based on Debra Farrington's "Balancing Life by the Rule," *Spirituality & Health* (winter 2001), 44.

Spiritual Direction

Some people find spiritual direction helpful in developing an awareness of God in their lives. **Spiritual direction** is the art of helping others enjoy a deeper relationship with God.⁴¹ Spiritual directors are trained to listen deeply to others and to help listen to God and learn where God is leading them. They can help you develop an awareness of God working in you and help you discern what spiritual disciplines will bring you closer to God. They are not therapists or problem solvers. They are holy listeners and people who can, with God, help guide you in creating spiritual disciplines that bring you closer to God.

41. If you are looking for a spiritual director, consider looking at <http://sdiworld.org>, a website that maintains a list of spiritual directors.

Developing Your Spirituality

There are many more spiritual practices we didn't explore—retreats, simplicity, study, and service are just a few. With all of the possibilities of spiritual practices, you might wonder, "Where do I begin?" Begin with a prayer of petition from Psalm 19:14:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Remember the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 and Mark 4? A sower sowed seeds. Some fell on a path, and the birds ate them up. Some fell on rocky ground. They sprang up, but the soil was too shallow and the plants withered. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns choked the plants. Some seeds fell on good soil and grew into an abundant harvest. If we till our lives and cultivate the spirit, God's love and blessings will grow abundantly. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, and faithfulness—will be plentiful.

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Describe a recent time when you prayed (Remember, the ways to pray.). What was your prayer? What did you say or do? Or were you silent? What did you hear and see?
2. **Be Intelligent:** What was the purpose of your prayer? Might there be other purposes? Let these other possibilities come to you without judgment.
3. **Be Reasonable:** Which purpose rings most true? What new insight does this bring to your understanding of prayer in general?
4. **Be Responsible:** In light of this experience, how might you change your practice of prayer?
5. **Be in Love Transformed:** What new ways of praying might you consider?

INTERLUDE

"A Thin Place on Sunday Morning"

Have you had a religious experience? More than one? Bet on it. It happens from within. In-sight. You may not perceive it as religious. Somewhere in time, however, eternity opened for you a significantly different outlook on life or relationships or responsibility, even religion.

It may have been a sudden inner appropriation of something you already knew in some way but whose energy and intensity had not until then erupted from within—Aha!—and became entwined with everything that identifies you as you.

Having had an insight experience—religious or not—you can never be as you were before. You may contradict it by how you live—that's essentially what sin is, inauthenticity—but you can't ignore it. You've had a revelation, such as taking a step out of hiding into the light created by God. The next step would be conversion.

You may think of it simply as experiencing integrity. Transformation, however, ought not be reduced to "simply." Our experiences of integrity are part of the process of God's self-communication. In the process, you became a more authentic you. You may have experienced that many times. The path to integrity or authenticity is lifelong. Many conversions, many transformations. Born again and again and again, as some Episcopalians suggest.

Don't limit revelation, for example, to truths handed down, to facts rather than acts. Open up God's self-communication to the concept of insights that bring us out of hiding.

"God's self-communication," Jesuit priest William Reiser wrote in *Drawn to the Divine*,

continues to take place . . . in the desires of the human heart, in the questioning and wondering of the human mind, in our thirst for true freedom, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in the experience of having been loved and forgiven, in the conviction that we have been personally called to know and follow Jesus, in countless circumstances of daily life, and in the deep-down sense that we are meant to carry the divine presence within us.⁴²

Sometimes God's self-communication feels like wrestling with God. When you wrestle with God about what you have been resisting, one of two things eventually happens. Winning isn't one. You walk away from the relationship or you wrestle until you lose. When God wins, you have reason to celebrate.

When you allow God to find you and bring you out of hiding, you are on the verge of a religious experience. You are in a "thin place."

Thin places in Celtic spirituality are where ordinary reality and God's holiness meet, where we move easily between realities, where the veil between heaven and earth seems transparent.

A thin place is anywhere our hearts are opened, according to theologian Marcus Borg. The Celts perceived the entire world as saturated with the glory of God. Though every place is potentially a thin place, we have to stop, look, and listen in order to sense it. We can, of course, be thick even about thin places—and not get it.

Worship is a thin place. We gather for Eucharist that we might remember—tomorrow.

It is a gradual experience—Sunday after Sunday—during which we are drawn from being attentive to learning how to see the spectacular in its apparent absence to deciding to "love one another as I have loved you," to serving the least of these, to being in Love transformed.

Expect to hear God's voice in thin places. Expect that God will touch you. Expect to hear God's voice in thin places. Expect that God will touch you. Expect to hear God's voice in thin places. Expect that God will touch you.

It happens. Be attentive. Expect God.

Getting tangled up with God will have implications you've not yet considered. Not simply an adjustment here, an adjustment there. Changes in the way you see and think and judge and do. Transformation. You will notice yourself living differently.

In the 2000 film *Chocolat*, a young priest preached at Easter: "Y measure our goodness, not by what we don't do, what we deny or by what we resist, or whom we exclude. Instead, we should measure o by what we embrace, what we create, and whom we include."⁴³ A Easter celebration and the chocolate festival in the town square, the control freak was "strangely released."

May we be released and transformed through the death and resur of Jesus and through personal encounters with the risen Lord in thin

⁴² Robert Nelson Jacobs (screenwriter), *Chocolat*, directed by Lasse Hallstrom (2000, Santa Monica: Miramax Films).

⁴³ William Reiser, *SL, Drawn to the Divine* (Chicago: Ave Maria Press, 1987), 12.

CHAPTER EIGHT



Worship: Responding to God's Blessings

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. (Genesis 1:26a)

In the beginning, God brought order out of chaos by separating the heavens from the earth, the dry land from the sea, and light from the darkness. God said let the trees and plants grow and bear beautiful flowers, fruit, and insects that creep, and monsters of the sea. God looked it over and saw that it was good. And on the sixth day, God made humankind. God looked at all creation and thought, "This is *very* good." Immediately after God created us humans, God blessed us and God continues to bless us each and every day. We respond to the blessing of creation and God's continual blessings through history and our lives by worshipping God. **Worship** is a response of praise and thanksgiving to the God who created us, a God who knows us, blesses us each day, and wants to fulfill our heart's desires. We respond by giving our love and offering thanks. As created beings, it is our nature, as Bill says in the interlude before this chapter, to enter the thin places where ordinary reality and God's holiness meet.

Worshipping God can be as simple as lighting a candle at home, saying a few words that tell God of our love, and giving thanks. Corporate worship is when God's people, who are scattered throughout the week, gather to worship together.

Be attentive as you worship with your faith community. Try to understand how worship and gospel imperatives are in dynamic relationship.

this seems not to be so in your life, why not? What might you do about that? The Book of Common Prayer offers a number of ways to worship God.

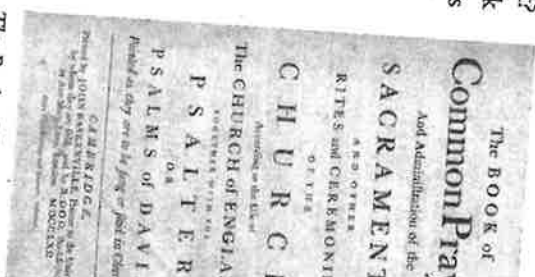
The Book of Common Prayer

The Book of Common Prayer is the manual for community and personal worship in the Episcopal Church. It contains the words and actions, called **liturgies**, which define and order our common worship as a community. Liturgy is something people do, not something people read or watch. In the Episcopal Church, the liturgy is truly the work and words of the people. The words of the Sunday liturgy are shared by all Episcopalians and reflect the theology of our community. Every Sunday, Anglican churches throughout the world follow similar forms of worship.

Liturgy is powerful. It enacts and shapes our beliefs. Consider the Eucharist. When the priest gives us the communion bread saying, "The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven," and we respond with "Amen," we receive Christ as spiritual food for our lives today. By eating the bread of heaven we participate in God's promised kingdom, and we leave the table transformed and strengthened to be the Body of Christ in the world. Although we may repeat the same beautiful words and actions of the liturgy week after week, no liturgy is the same. The Eucharist changes us; when we return to the communion table the following week we bring with us the experience of having lived as the Body of Christ in our lives. We are different people; we are fed again, and we embody Christ more deeply. Liturgy transforms who we are as God's people.

Liturgy transforms who we are. How might you approach Sunday worship expecting a transformation so dramatic that you would be wise to wear a crash helmet?

Sometimes our Episcopal liturgies can seem pretty complicated. The Book of Common Prayer includes rules and directions for the variety of



The Book of Common Prayer was first published in 1559. The title page is from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

services. "Concerning the Service of the Church" (BCP, 13) describes the regular services appointed for public worship and who participates in those services. You'll find a similar page before most services, explaining what the service is about and giving instructions, or **rubrics**, for doing it. "The Calendar of the Church Year" (BCP, 15-33) lists principal feasts, lesser feasts, and holy days, as well as the liturgical seasons.

The Book of Common Prayer is a treasure chest of our faith. Besides the liturgies, it also contains one complete book of the Jewish scriptures—Psalms—plus prayers of praise and thanksgiving for many occasions, an outline of the faith, historical documents of the Church, tables to find the date of Easter and other holy days, and a list of readings from the Bible for services throughout the church year.

Holy Eucharist

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42)

Our principal act of Christian worship, **Holy Eucharist**, follows the model of the early Church—we gather, hear the scriptures, break bread, and pray. Episcopalians typically celebrate Eucharist on the first day of the week. Sundays, and other major feast days, such as Christmas and Ash Wednesday. Eucharist is also called the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, and Mass. The word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, meaning "the giving of thanks." In the Eucharist we remember and celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and proclaim that we await his coming again in glory. Through the Eucharist we are strengthened and nourished for our lives today and are given a foretaste of God's heavenly banquet. The Eucharist is a celebration by God's family of God's love for us.

The format for worship has ancient roots. Nehemiah 8 describes a service with readings from the Law of Moses and an exposition of the reading by the priest followed by a meal. Our service has similar parts: the Liturgy of the Word, during which we hear the word of God read and proclaimed, and the Liturgy of the Table, during which we take, bless, break, and give the bread and wine of communion. It's no surprise that the Eucharist is based on Jewish practices. The first to gather in Jesus's name were Jews gathered in Jewish places of worship called synagogues.

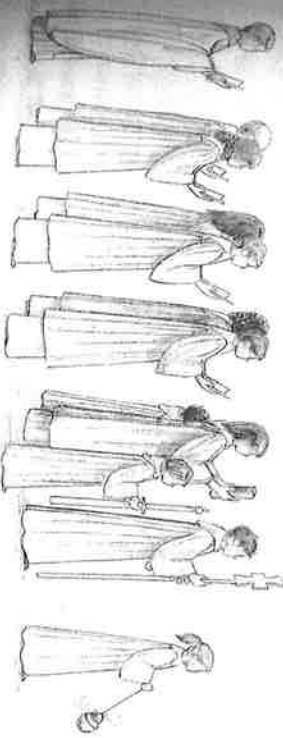
Liturgy of the Word

We are a people scattered throughout the world into different activity locations, but we gather as one to worship. So it shouldn't be surprising the Liturgy of the Word begins with a brief entrance rite that focuses minds and hearts toward God and one another as a community of faith in the opening hymn the acolytes, choir, deacons, priests, and sometimes bishop process through the people to their places to lead worship. The procession is through the people because the people together are worshipping.

Once everyone is in place, the **presider**, the person who leads two continues with the **opening acclamation**, a greeting to God's family then sing the **Gloria**, a song of praise to God. The entrance rite ends with **collect**, a short prayer that "collects" the themes of the readings of the

I'm writing a collect for grace one evening at supper. Use what happened to you that day to respond to these prompts: "God who . . ." "I ask for . . ." "So that . . ."

We believe that God is present in both word and sacrament. Both our lives as a people of God. We are fed in the Liturgy of the Word by listening stories from the Bible about God's redeeming acts throughout history. This portion of the liturgy generally includes four readings, although we allow for three: a Jewish scripture reading, a recitation from the Psalm reading from the Epistles, and a reading from the Gospels. The reading prescribed by a three-year lectionary cycle denoted by the letters A, B, C. In lectionary year A we read from the Gospel according to Matthew



The order of the opening procession is a matter of tradition. The cross or Gospel Book often leads the procession, followed by the choir, and ending with the priest and, if present, the bishop. The procession reminds us that Christian life is a pilgrimage.

lectionary year B from Mark, and in lectionary year C from Luke. Readings from the Gospel according to John are interspersed throughout each of the three years, especially during the year that the Gospel according to Mark is read. The Epistles are read in sequence and the Jewish scripture readings are chosen to complement either the Gospel or Epistle readings, or read in sequence. During Easter the Acts of the Apostles may be read in place of the Jewish scriptures. Having a lectionary means that every Episcopal church can read the same scriptures on any given Sunday.

Because the lectionary readings come from all parts of the Bible, following the lectionary challenges us to understand the way God has worked throughout history, through events that are sometimes confusing and writings that sometimes contradict one another. Following the lectionary means we cannot just keep to our favorite verses. We must grapple with the difficulty of interpretation and application of a wide variety of beliefs about God. By including the Jewish scriptures we are reminded that the roots of Christianity are in Judaism and that the God of the Jewish scriptures is the same God as in the Christian scriptures. Without the Jewish scriptures we would not have a complete understanding of the many ways God works to reconcile people to himself, one another, and all creation.

Laypeople read the Jewish scriptures and Epistle readings, and a deacon, when present, or a priest reads the Gospel reading. Before the gospel is read, the people often say "glory to you Lord Christ" to acknowledge that Jesus is present in the proclamation of the Gospel. As the good news for the people of God, the Gospel is often read in the midst of the people. A period of silence for reflection may follow the reading, after which a priest gives a sermon or homily, which is intended to provoke our thoughts about how to apply God's Word to our lives and bear witness to that Word.

The people respond to hearing God's Word proclaimed and preached by affirming its beliefs with the words of the Nicene Creed. The gospel message calls the people into action on behalf of the world. The people do this liturgically in this part of the worship service by praying for the needs of others in the Prayers of the People. The Book of Common Prayer presents six optional forms for the Prayers of the People and provide models for congregations to write their own prayers. The prayers are meant to arise from the concerns of the assembly and written by the community either by season or week. The only requirement is to offer prayers in six areas:

- The Universal Church, its members, and its mission,
- the nation and all in authority,
- the welfare of the world,

- the concerns of the local community,
- those who suffer and those in any trouble, and
- the departed.

During the prayers we also offer our thanksgivings.

The Book of Common Prayer requires that when we come to the Eucharist "we should examine our lives, repent of our sins, and be in love and charity with all people." ("An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism" begins on page 860 of the Book of Common Prayer.) The sign of reconciliation among people and with God is the **exchange of peace**, greeting among the people shared as a sign of reconciliation and renewed relationships. Therefore, before exchanging peace, we confess our sins against God and our neighbor. Because we fail to love God with our whole hearts and continually choose not to love our neighbors as ourselves, we are in need of—and God grants us—mercy and forgiveness regularly.

Forgiveness is healing and renewing, something we need throughout our lives to go forward.

After reestablishing a right relationship with God we exchange the peace. The exchange of peace originates in Jewish practices of being reconciled with one's neighbor before offering a gift to the altar (Matthew 5:23–24). In John 20:19–21, when the risen Jesus appeared to the frightened disciples behind locked doors, he proclaimed, "Peace be with you." The peace we share is the peace given to us by the resurrected Christ. The peace ends the Liturgy of the Word.

Liturgy of the Table

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19)

The Liturgy of the Table, or the Holy Communion, is the climax of our liturgy. It is a response to Jesus's commandment at the Last Supper: we "[d]o this in remembrance of" Jesus. That is, the priest takes, gives thanks, breaks, and gives bread in remembrance of Jesus's life on earth, his resurrection, and his coming again in glory. Holy Communion, however, is a special kind of memory called *anamnesis*, a term we will explore in the next chapter.

Through the prayers at Eucharist and by the power of the Holy Spirit the bread and wine become for us the body and blood of Christ. In the Eucharist we actively participate in the celebration of Christ's sacrifice, and our lives and actions become part of the offering. Augustine explains the mystery of our participation in the Eucharist in this way: "So if it's you that are the Body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery (meaning you) that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you."⁴⁴ In the Eucharist we are again made members of the Body of Christ, broken and sent out for the sake of the world.

We have six choices for Eucharistic prayers in the Book of Common Prayer: two Rite 1 Eucharistic prayers (I, II) and four Rite 2 Eucharistic prayers (A, B, C, and D). The supplemental text, *Enriching Our Worship* I, provides three additional Eucharistic prayers. Eucharistic Prayer I was first adopted in 1789. The other prayers expand on this prayer by recounting the stories of creation, the incarnation of Christ, and the coming of Christ.

Take, Bless, Break, and Give

When Jesus shared bread with the disciples at the Last Supper, he *took* bread, *blessed* it, *broke* it, and *gave* it. These are the same four actions Jesus took when he fed a crowd who had come to hear him preach in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. And after he rose from the dead, the disciples recognized Jesus by these same four actions—take, bless, break, and give—at a meal in Emmaus (Luke 24). Not only do we say these same words during Eucharist, they shape the Liturgy of the Table.

Take

The Liturgy of the Table begins with the offertory by gathering gifts from among the people and taking them to the altar, presenting them to God and the Church. By presenting our gifts of bread and wine, music, and resources, we return the blessing that God gave us—the blessing of creation and our labor. Our labor transforms grapes into wine and wheat into bread. Because God is the giver of all things, ultimately we are *returning* these gifts to God. During the offertory, the deacon or priest sets the altar table for communion. He or she spreads a white square cloth called the **corporal** on the altar, brings the bread on a plate called a **paten**, and pours the wine and some water into a **chalice**. One paten and one chalice is placed on the altar,

symbolizing that we share one bread and one cup of wine at communion.

Give Thanks

The Liturgy of the Table continues with the people returning the blessings, or thanking God, for all that God has given. The **Great Thanksgiving** begins with a dialogue between the presider and the people in which we ask God to be present and the people lift their hearts and give thanks to God in the words of the **Sursum Corda** ("Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord."). The assembly takes its part among the hosts of heaven and earth to sing praise to God in the **Sanc** ("Holy, holy, holy Lord . . .").

The Eucharistic prayers follow the same framework but vary in imagery and theology. Each emphasizes different aspects of salvation history. Eucharistic Prayer 3, for example, draws on imagery of Wisdom while Eucharistic Prayer 1 remembers creation, the covenant established with Abraham a Sarah and renewed with the people of Israel, and the provision of prophets. Both of these are found in *Enriching Our Worship* I. All Eucharistic prayers remember the incarnation, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Thank God for these mighty works and enduring mercies.

This time of remembering continues by recalling the **words of institution** given by Jesus at the Last Supper: "Take, eat: This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." It is important to remember that this is not a reenactment of the Last Supper, but a prayer to God. The words of institution are part of the Eucharistic prayer, and therefore are addressed not to the congregation, but to God. Following the words of institution, we remember the greatest mystery of our faith with the **memorial acclamation**:

You can identify the epiclesis visually during the Eucharistic prayers by noticing when the priest raises his or her hands over the bread and the wine.

44. Augustine, Sermon 272 in *Sermons*, part 3, volume 7, translated by Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), 300–301.



Christ has died.
Christ has risen,
Christ will come again.

In all Episcopal Eucharistic prayers the presider asks God to send the Holy Spirit to sanctify the bread and the wine to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This is called the **epiclesis**. The presider has no special powers. In fact, a priest cannot consecrate bread and wine alone. It is through the prayers of all present—laypeople and ordained ministers alike—and God's blessings that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ. We believe that Christ is present in the bread and the wine, and this presence nourishes us and heals us. By partaking in the bread and the wine we are made one with Christ and strengthened to serve God in the world.

After the Great Thanksgiving and before the Breaking of the Bread, together the congregation says the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer reminds us that God's kingdom is breaking into the world today and we are to participate in that kingdom here and now. We ask God to provide nourishment to do so, and we ask for forgiveness that we have already been given and that God offers freely.

The bread and the wine are consecrated by the prayers of all the people present. A priest alone cannot consecrate bread and wine.

Break

Following the Great Thanksgiving, the presider breaks the bread to distribute it among the people gathered just as Jesus broke the bread to distribute among the disciples. During the breaking of the bread, the congregation sings the **fraction anthem**. The fraction has its name because the word "fraction" means break.

Give

Immediately following the breaking of the bread the people are invited to the altar table to receive both the bread and the wine. In the Episcopal Church all baptized people are welcome to receive communion. Those who are not baptized may receive a blessing. While this is the liturgically normative practice, a number of churches welcome all those gathered in worship to receive communion. The congregation comes forward together because we are one people partaking in one body of Christ. Taking communion is also intensely

personal. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are nourished in way by Christ's presence and healing grace in our lives.

Go Out

The final part of Holy Eucharist—the post-communion prayer—proclaims our going out. Unlike all other prayers in the service, this prayer announces our readiness to go out into the world to love and to serve. We have been made ready to do God's work in the world.

Our worship together shapes our lives. As we come together we are made into who we are: we are God's people. During the Liturgy of the Word we hear about what God has done for us, for all of creation, and we hear how we apply those stories to our lives today. When we pray for others, we recognize our places in the world that need God's, and our, attention. As we pray for forgiveness, we practice acknowledging our shortcomings and confessing our sins. We know that our lives depend on God. During the Liturgy of the Table we remember Christ's death and resurrection and take part in a sacred meal. When we come together to worship each Sunday in these two parts of the liturgy, we continue the work of the earliest members of the Church: "I devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Participants in Worship

All the members of the Church participate in worship through song, prayer, giving thanks, and receiving communion. God has created each of us differently, and we each have different gifts to contribute to worship. The table on page 179 lists several of the ways the ministers of the Church use their gifts to help with worship.

The Church

Churches are the places within which Christians most often worship together. Because we understand "the Church" to be much greater than stone, brick, and mortar, it seems somewhat odd to define the Church merely as a physical place. But that is what most people think of when they hear the word "church." The Catechism tells us, "The Church is the community of the New Covenant" (BCP, 854). During the Prayers of the People, therefore, when we pray for the Church, we pray for the community of the baptized. In Form I of the Book of Common Prayer, we pray "that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world" (BCP, 166).

388). When we pray for the Church we are praying for the baptized members of a living Body of Christ who are called to bring God's kingdom to this earth through their presence and actions in the world.

We use the word "church" to mean a community just as the writers of Acts and the Epistles did. The word for "church" in Greek—the language of the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles—is *ekklēsia*. For example, in the letter to the Colossians, Jesus is called the head of the body, the *ekklēsia*. *Ekklēsia* comes from two Greek words: *ek*, which means "out" and *kaleo*, which means "to call." *Ekklēsia* literally means "called out." The church, then, is a community of people who believe in the risen Christ called out for a particular purpose.

The church is also a physical building—a sacred place Christians have set aside for corporate worship. As was their Jewish practice, followers of Jesus found places to gather to share meals and stories. Two Gospels (Luke and John) tell us that until the day of Pentecost the disciples gathered in the room where the risen Christ revealed himself. And as members of the Jewish community, they continued to pray and to teach in the Temple in Jerusalem until it was destroyed in 70 CE. As Christianity spread and grew apart from Judaism, believers met in houses that they converted into places of worship. Sometimes, Christians secretly met in catacombs, hollowed-out tunnels

used for burial, because the government persecuted them. The earliest known complete church is a mid-third-century Roman house that was converted into a gathering place for Christians in Dura-Europos (present-day Syria). It included a pool close to the entrance, which was likely used for baptism, and a reception area further inside the house with a table around which the community broke bread. This design is similar to the setup in churches today—a baptismal font near the entrance and a raised sanctuary with an altar for the Liturgy of the Table.

Unlike the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem or temples of Greek gods, Christian churches are not considered to be a dwelling place for a god, but a central meeting place. Many churches today follow the basic design of the fourth-century civic basilica—a rectangular building with a curved apse for a throne at which a magistrate or military governor could hear civil cases of dispute. The reason the churches took on this style is that the civic basilica was the standard gathering place when the emperor Constantine

Leaders in the Liturgy

Acolyte: A lay minister, often a young person, who helps in a variety of ways, including lighting the candles, carrying the cross and candles in a procession, and assisting in setting the table. Acolytes sometimes wear a white alb or a white cotta over a colored cassock.

Presider (also Celebrant): The bishop or priest who leads the celebration of the liturgy and presides at the Eucharist and at baptism. Deacons may also preside at a Eucharist using consecrated elements. During the Eucharist, the presider says the collect, leads the Great Thanksgiving, and administers the bread at communion. The presider generally also reads the Gospel and gives the sermon unless a deacon is present, in which case the deacon reads the Gospel. The presider often wears a white alb. Priests assembled around the altar wear a stole over both shoulders. The presider at Eucharist usually wears a decorated chasuble over the alb. Deacons wear a stole over one shoulder.

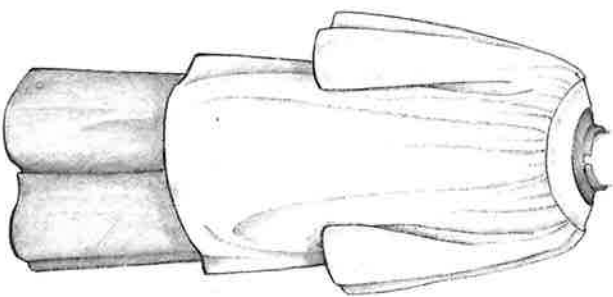
Choir member: A lay minister who leads sung music during worship. Choirs often sing anthems as musical offerings during the offertory. Choir members often wear robes.

Deacon: If a deacon is present, the deacon should read the Gospel and may lead the Prayers of the People. Deacons also assist at the Table, assist in the administration of the bread and the wine to the people, and dismiss the people. In the absence of a priest, a deacon may distribute Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament, bread and wine that has already been consecrated in a previous Eucharist.

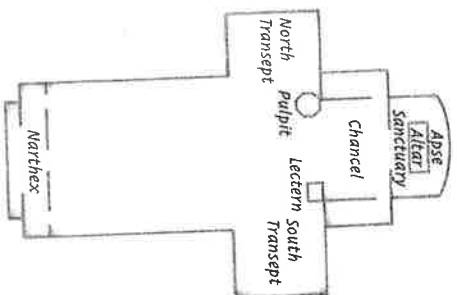
Eucharistic minister: A lay minister trained in administering the elements. Preference is that a priest or deacon administers the bread and wine during Holy Eucharist.

Reader (also Lector): A lay minister may read the lessons and lead the Prayers of the People. Deacons may also lead the Prayers of the People. In the Liturgy of the Word, the one who leads the Prayers of the People is called an intercessor.

Vergers: A lay minister who assists in the processions of liturgy. The vergers are usually robed in a black cassock and carries a verge (a rod or staff).



An acolyte often wears a cotta over an alb.



Cruciform church.

is the table around which Holy Communion is celebrated. The altar represents the presence of God and is a focal point of our worship, so it's situated at the head of the cross. Often churches are designed so that congregation faces the east—the direction of the rising sun, a symbol of the resurrected Christ. In these churches, the altar is in the eastern-most part of the church. The **transept** is the horizontal part of the church extending from the nave and chancel. The **nave** is where worshippers gather to hear the Word and participate in the consecration of the bread and wine of communion.

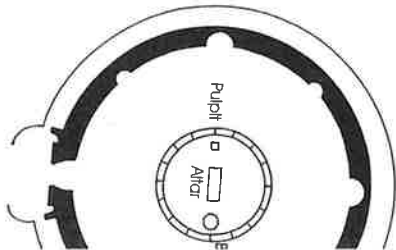
The word "nave" comes from the Latin word *navis*, meaning ship. A ship is an early symbol of the Church.

Because baptism is the rite through which one becomes a member of the Church, a **baptismal font** or pool is usually close to the entrance of the church. This grand design emphasizes the transcendence and mystery of God. St. John the Divine in New York City (www.stjohndivine.org) and our National Cathedral in Washington, DC (www.cathedral.org) are cruciform-style cathedrals.

Another design is illustrated on page 181. In this circular layout, the altar is more clearly the central element around which people gather. This simple design returns to the layout of the synagogues that would have been familiar to Jesus and is likely closer to the worship spaces of early Christians rather than the cruciform layout. This design emphasizes the participation of all

legalized Christianity in the fourth century. We can trace much of our church furnishings to the early Church and to the secular buildings of the fourth century.

The diagram on the left shows the layout of many Episcopal churches today. The overall shape is a Latin cross, or cruciform, which developed when Gothic architects added two rooms—one for the priests and another for the remains of the dead—on either side of the long nave and circular apse of the Roman basilica. The cruciform is comprised of three main areas: the nave, the transept, and the chancel. The **chancel** contains the sanctuary, pulpit, lectern, and altar. It may end at the apse and is often raised in elevation and separated from the nave by a rail or screen. The **altar**, which rests within the sanctuary, is the table around which Holy Communion is celebrated. The altar represents the presence of God and is a focal point of our worship, so it's situated at the head of the cross. Often churches are designed so that congregation faces the east—the direction of the rising sun, a symbol of the resurrected Christ. In these churches, the altar is in the eastern-most part of the church. The **transept** is the horizontal part of the church extending from the nave and chancel. The **nave** is where worshippers gather to hear the Word and participate in the consecration of the bread and wine of communion.



Circular church design.

We can even worship in cyberspace. At geraniumfarm.org, for example, you can light a candle and offer a prayer, and you can say the Daily Office at www.dailyoffice.org.

Symbols in Worship

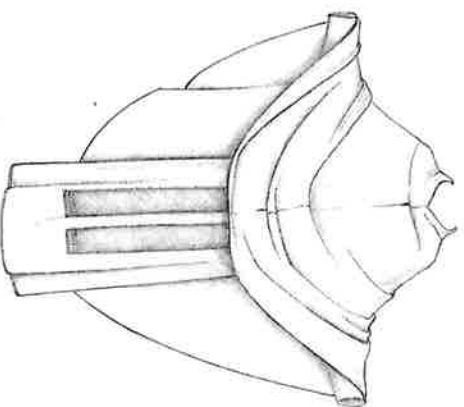
Perhaps you have smelled fresh-baked bread or pie at home. Your mother begins to water. You turn the corner into the kitchen almost expecting to find your family gathered around the table as they have done many times before. In that one smell many memories of grace are piled up and brought in the present. And it calls out a response of gratitude. Worship is similar. When you enter a church and see familiar Christian symbols that remind us of God's never-ending love. We might see Jesus the Good Shepherd in a stained-glass window or a carving of a vine with grapes reminding us that Jesus is the true vine or the cross in front of the church reminding us of Jesus's death and resurrection. Inside a church, even our sense of smell, in the lingering scent of incense, can remind us of God. Through our senses we know the presence of God—the many moments of prayer and worship offered to us, begging from our whole being a response of love and thanksgiving.

The liturgy stimulates our senses. We see the cross being processed with candles to the altar, we listen to the word of God, we proclaim God's praises, and we exchange the peace with our hands, we smell the scent of incense, and we eat and drink at the table. By using all our senses we are reminded that Christ is alive with us today, guiding us and nourishing us. The richness of our worship is our response to the first commandment: to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength.

These sights, sounds, and smells are symbols of our faith. Each symbol is rich with meaning and experience, pointing beyond itself to God's actions in the world throughout history. To understand the power of a symbol, think about the cross. The cross symbolizes Jesus's suffering of dying on the cross as well as the joy of the resurrection. For some it signifies comfort in times of trouble and for others Jesus's conquering of death and dominion in the world. The cross carries all these meanings. Symbols engage our thoughts and emotions, our whole selves and create spaces to encounter God.

Vestments

In the Episcopal Church leaders of the liturgy usually wear vestments. Vestments, special garments set apart to be used only for worship, express both the solemnity and joy of worship.



The presider wears a poncho-like garment called a chasuble over a white alb along with a long narrow piece of fabric called a stole placed over the shoulders.

Because special vestments are reserved for particular participants, vestments become symbols. The **stole**, a long strip of cloth worn by a priest or bishop over both shoulders or by a deacon over one shoulder and to the side, for example, is a symbol of their ordination. The Book of Common Prayer does not require particular vestments, but allows for the variety of customs of the local community. If you visit different churches throughout the year, you'll see a variety of vestments depending on the church's liturgical style. If you attend the National Acolyte Festival held each fall at Washington National Cathedral in Washington, DC, you'll see an amazing display gathered at one service. Still, some customs, such as wearing a stole by those who are ordained, are shared by all Episcopalians.

Vestments

A **stole** is worn by bishops and priests over both shoulders and by a deacon over the left shoulder.

An **alb** is a white garment worn by bishops, priests, deacons, and acolytes during the entire liturgy.

A **chasuble** is a long sleeveless garment worn over the alb by the celebrant. When laid out flat it is generally oval with a hole in the middle for the celebrant's head. Chasubles vary in color based on the church season.

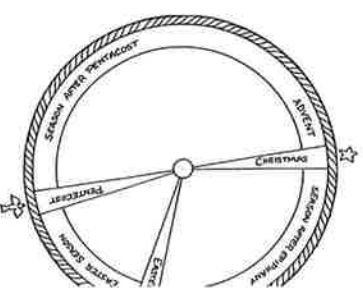
A **miter** is a tall pointed hat worn by the bishop.

A **crozier** is a pastoral staff that symbolizes the pastoral ministry of the bishop. A bishop generally holds the crozier during the reading of the Gospel, while walking into and out of the service, and during the absolution and blessing. It is a sign of authority.

The Church Year

Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness: God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. (Genesis 1:3-5)

The Church keeps track of time and seasons with a calendar that is different from the familiar calendar of months. Instead of months such as January and seasons such as spring, the Church divides the year by liturgical seasons. A common way to show the Church year is with a calendar wheel as shown on the right. The year is anchored by two feasts: Christmas Day and Easter Day—that is, the birth of Jesus and Jesus's resurrection. These two feast days determine the dates of the seven seasons of the liturgical year. Christmas is always December 25 while Easter Day is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox, March 21. As you follow the wheel clockwise beginning with Advent, you can see that



Calendar Wheel

the year is divided into Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and the Season after Pentecost. Each season is associated with a color that we use in church vestments, altar cloths, and banners. Colors are visual reminders, and symbols, of each season.

The Liturgical Calendar

We begin the Church year with **Advent** as we wait in expectation of Jesus's coming into the world and his return at the end of time. Paradoxically, in Advent we wait for both a beginning and an end. Advent, which means "coming," begins four Sundays before Christmas Day. The typical color for Advent is either blue, for hope of the peace that Christ brings, or purple or linen, for penitence in preparation for welcoming God's coming to this world as the Christ child. The season of **Christmas** begins on Christmas Day and ends twelve days later on January 6, the **Feast of Epiphany**, the day we celebrate when the Magi visited baby Jesus in Bethlehem. During Christmas we remember the stories of Christ's birth. Because Christmas is a time of celebration, its color is either white or gold. The word **epiphany** means "to show forth." The color of the Feast of Epiphany is white. Some churches use green vestments on all other days in Epiphany to symbolize life and growth. Epiphany ends on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent.

The season of **Lent** is a time of prayer, fasting, and penitence in preparation for Easter. During Lent we renew our commitment to Christ and resolve to take on the difficult task of living as Christians in this world. Lent lasts forty days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending with the Saturday of Holy Week. If you count the days between Ash Wednesday and Holy Saturday, you'll find that there are forty-six days. From forty-six subtract the five Sundays during Lent and another one for Palm Sunday. We don't count these Sundays as part of Lent because Sundays celebrate Christ's resurrection. The early Church trained new believers in the faith during Lent, preparing them for baptism at the Great Vigil of Easter. The Great Vigil of Easter today is still a time for baptisms. The color of Lent is purple for royalty and penitence, or rough linen, the color of sackcloth worn as a sign of mourning in stories of the Jewish scriptures. The color for the week between Palm Sunday and Easter is red for the death of Jesus.

Three days in Holy Week, called the **Paschal Triduum** (Latin for "three days of Easter"), are the most sacred days of the church year. The Paschal Triduum is one service over three days—Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and the Great Easter Vigil. The Triduum liturgy begins on the Thursday evening before Good Friday. This day is known as Maundy Thursday. On Maundy Thursday we remember three actions of Jesus: washing the feet of

the disciples, instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist, and giving the commandment, "to love one another as I have loved you." This service celebrates the darkest day of the year: Good Friday, the day we commemorate Christ's death on the cross.

The traditional colors for the seasons of the church year are:

- Advent—blue or purple
- Christmas—white or gold
- Season after Epiphany—green
- Lent—purple or linen
- Easter—white
- Pentecost—red
- Season after Pentecost—green

Good Friday is essential to our celebration of Easter. It is through death that Christ overcomes all death. The day between Good Friday and Easter is Holy Saturday, the day that we remember Jesus lay dead in the tomb. This day, we remember Jesus's absence in the world, so we do not celebrate the Eucharist. The Great Easter Vigil begins after sundown on Holy Saturday and before sunrise on Easter Sunday. It is the first service of Easter Day. During this service we light a new Paschal Candle to represent the light of the living Christ in our world, hear the story of God's saving deeds in history, baptize new members, as well as celebrate the Eucharist. The Easter Vigil begins in the darkness of death and ends in the light of the resurrected life.

Easter is so important that we celebrate it for not just one day but fifty days, beginning on Easter Sunday and ending with the day of Pentecost. The liturgical color of Easter is white for purity and joy. The fortieth day after Easter is Ascension Day, the day we commemorate Christ's ascension into heaven. The final day of Easter is the **Feast of Pentecost**. On this day we celebrate the day the Holy Spirit came from heaven as tongues of fire rested on the twelve apostles and celebrate the beginning of the Church. The color of the Feast of Pentecost is red, representing fire and symbolizing love and zeal.

The weeks after Pentecost and before Advent are called the **Season after Pentecost**. It is the longest season of the church year, lasting twenty-two to twenty-seven Sundays. This is a time for growing in faith and doing the work of ministry, emphasized by its liturgical color, green.

Worship is Giving Thanks to God

Worship reflects a long and rich tradition that goes back to when God first created the world. It is our response to the many blessings that God gave us in creation and in Jesus, and continues to give us today. By intentionally participating in worship with our church families throughout the year, we return thanks and are shaped into the people God intends us to be.

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Recall a recent experience in corporate worship. What did you notice? Include all your senses. Write words that you recall from hymns, prayers, and readings. What experiences from your week did you bring with you to worship? What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
2. **Be Intelligent:** What does your experience of worship mean?
3. **Be Reasonable:** Bill's interlude, "A Thin Place on Sunday Morning," talked about getting tangled up with God. Where have you gotten tangled up with God? It may not be a spectacular entanglement, but a movement nonetheless.
4. **Be Responsible:** Does your worship experience suggest a response in your daily life? What might that be?
5. **Be in Love Transformed:** The next time you prepare for worship, be ready to encounter God. Is there something in the experience you described that is nudging you to act differently to be in that "thin place" of worship?

INTERLUDE

"Called To Be . . . In Love"

It was Friday, January 12, 2007, the morning rush hour in Washington, D.C. A white man in jeans, a long-sleeved t-shirt and a Washington National cap stood against a wall at the L'Enfant Plaza metro station. He removed a violin from a case, swiveled the open case toward the foot traffic . . . and began to play six classical pieces for 43 minutes.

The social experiment was sponsored by the *Washington Post*. If a world famous musician played some of history's most beautiful music in a D.C. metro station, would people stop to listen?

Hardly anyone noticed. Twenty-seven people stopped to listen. On thousand and seventy walked on by. Hardly anyone noticed when world renowned violinist Joshua Bell played some of the most elegant music ever written on one of the most valuable violins ever made. Some thirty-two dollars was dropped in the case that ordinarily held a three million dollar fiddle. Journalist Gene Weingarten received a Pulitzer for his feature story about this non-event. (I have drawn some of my description from his story.)

Readers who have received emails from me may have noticed my signature line—be attentive; be intelligent; be reasonable; be responsible; be in love; and if necessary, change.

The first phrase, be attentive, is about noticing. It's about being attentive to all of our senses—to what we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. It's about being attentive to our experience, to our imagination, to the voices and hearts of those around us. Be not among those who hardly notice.

Eight years later, Joshua Bell gave it another try. This one was advertised, and he dressed in his concert attire. The area was crowded. People not only stopped to listen; they came to listen.

"We don't deserve grace, to be sure," Jim Naughton of *Canticle Communications* reflected, "but what we need to reckon with is the fact that we don't recognize it." He goes on:

It wears the wrong clothes . . . shows up in the wrong places . . . at the wrong times. It comes in the guise of people we generally avoid. We hardly notice. We fail to see it for what it is.

We take the word of others—experts, advance teams—for what grace is and what it isn't, when we must pay attention and when we can walk on by.

Perhaps we don't trust ourselves to recognize and respond to grace when we see it or hear it. Or perhaps life is constructed in such a way that grace needs references and a spot on our calendar before we can give it its due.

Henry James once urged readers: "Try to be one of those on whom nothing is lost." This is among the few spiritual disciplines that still make sense to me.⁴⁵

Let us pray: Guide us, gracious God. May we be attentive to our experience, to the voices and hearts of those around us; insightful in our interpretation of what we have been attentive to; reasonable in our judgments; responsible in our decisions; and always open to inner conversion, to transformation in your truth and your love.

Be one on whom nothing is lost. Especially grace. Be not among those who hardly notice. Be attentive. Be in Love.

45. Jim Naughton, "An Analogy for Grace," *Episcopal Café*, September 25, 2014, <https://www.episcopalcafe.com/an-analogy-for-grace/>

CHAPTER NINE



Sacraments: Symbols of Grace

The Sacraments

Jim Naughton suggests that "Perhaps we don't trust ourselves to recognize and respond to grace when we see it or hear it. Or perhaps life is constructed in such a way that grace needs references and a spot on our calendar before we can give it its due."⁴⁶ The sacraments of the Church are just such references that invite us to stop, notice, and open ourselves to conversion. Sacraments mediate grace. The greatest outward sign God gave us of his love was particular time in a particular place. Jesus suffered for us on the cross and was resurrected, defeating death.

God continues to be present in our lives through sacraments. The Book of Common Prayer defines the **sacraments** as: "outward and visible signs which we receive that grace" (BCP, 857). The Episcopal Church recognizes two great sacraments of the Bible (baptism and Eucharist) and five sacramental rites (confirmation, ordination, holy matrimony, reconciliation of the penitent, and unction of the sick). In Christ, God came to dwell among us. Through the Holy Spirit, God and Christ continue to dwell with us. In the sacraments we recognize God's active presence in our lives.

Each sacrament has something visible or sensibly perceptible. We can see and hear the water poured into the font at baptism. The baptized get

46. *Ibid.*

wet. We see and feel the laying on of hands at confirmation and ordination, and the rings exchanged at marriage. We see, feel, smell, taste, and touch the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

God is "the one in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Because we are physical beings God is revealed to us through our senses. Sacraments reflect that reality.

Be attentive to how God calls you to be in Love. What does that mean for your life? How do God's invitations to you to be in Love relate to the sacraments of the Church? How might you respond again and again and again?

Outward Visible Signs

The signs and gestures of the sacraments are living symbols that God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are alive in our human experiences, transforming us into the image and likeness of God. For each sacrament, an external sign mediates an internal transformation of the human spirit by grace. The water of baptism signifies dying and rebirth, eating and drinking signifies refreshment and restoration, the laying on of hands signifies the power of the Holy Spirit, a ring signifies union, and oil signifies strengthening or healing. Through the sacraments Christ enters our lives and continues God's work of redemption. God is with us here and now, in our lives today and every day in very real and tangible ways.

Inward Spiritual Grace

The power of the sacraments comes from God. Grace after all is not something that we can earn or achieve—God gives it freely and abundantly. And the effect of grace does not depend on the personal faith or moral character of the person administering a sacrament nor the faith of the person receiving the sacrament, but on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Recall the story Bill told about Joshua Bell. The first time he played in Union Station in Washington, DC unannounced, hundreds of people passed him by without noticing. While grace is a free gift from God, we can prepare ourselves to notice, receive, and respond to God's transforming grace in response to the gift of baptism, we turn away from evil and accept Jesus Christ as our greatest value. In Holy Eucharist, before receiving the bread and the wine we examine our lives, repent of our sins, and restore right relationships with others. In each sacrament we respond to God's love. God

TWO GREAT SACRAMENTS

	Outward Visible Sign	Inward Spiritual Grace
Baptism	water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> death to sin birth into God's family
Eucharist	bread and wine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> body and blood of Christ forgiveness of sins strengthening of our union with Christ and one another foretaste of heavenly banquet
FIVE SACRAMENTAL RITES		
	Outward Visible Sign	Inward Spiritual Grace
Confirmation	laying on of hands by a bishop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthening of the Holy Spirit
Marriage	exchange of rings and vows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> love of Christ for the Church
Reconciliation of a Penitent	absolution by a priest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> forgiveness of sins strength for right living
Unction	oil and/or laying on of hands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> healing of mind, body, and spirit
Ordination	laying on of hands by a bishop for a priest and deacon and by three bishops for consecration of a bishop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> authority and grace of the Holy Spirit

shows grace on everyone, but like the seed that falls on rocky ground or fertile soil, our response can either keep that seed from taking root or it can nurture that seed of grace to bear fruit. So let's look at each of the sacraments and explore the outward signs, inward graces, and what we can do to make the seed that is planted by grace grow strong in us.

Baptism

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

In the Episcopal Church we baptize in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Baptism** is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, the Church. Through baptism we enter a covenant relationship with God who adopts us into God's family and makes us members of Christ's body, the Church. As such, it is a necessary sacrament for all Christians and is the foundation for all participation and ministry in the Church.

Outward and Visible Sign

The water of baptism is rich with Christian history and symbolism. God breathed over the waters at creation. God led Israel through the Red Sea into the Promised Land. In water Jesus was baptized by John and anointed by the Holy Spirit. The water with which we baptize is this very same water of creation, liberation, and rebirth.

Inward and Spiritual Grace

By our baptism we share in the experiences of the creation, the freedom of the Israelites, and the baptism of Jesus. Through our baptism we also share in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Paul told the Romans in the scriptural passage beginning this section, at baptism our old selves die. Our sins are washed away. We are buried with Christ in



A dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit hovering over a pedestal font.

his death, and we also share in his resurrection. Just as we burst into this world through the waters of the womb, we come out of the waters of baptism a new creation, reborn into God's family and marked as Christ's own forever. Through baptism we share, like ancient Israel, the promise of God's kingdom. Through baptism we are brought into the fellowship of believers. We are forever changed, and so is the community. The inward and spiritual grace of baptism is fourfold: union with Christ, birth into God's family, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.

If sacraments are "so what" encounters with divinity, what's the "so what" of baptism?

Baptism is full initiation into the Body of Christ. Nothing can take membership away. In baptism we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and made as Christ's own forever.

In the early Church, adults preparing for baptism, called **catechumens** allowed for two or three years before being baptized. Catechumens unbaptized had to leave before the Eucharist. Once their lives conformed to the teachings of Christ and their faith was strong, they were baptized. After baptism they were fully welcomed to participate in the holy mystery that is, Eucharist. Being a Christian in the early centuries of the first millennium is much different than today. The world was hostile toward Christians. And to be a Christian might have meant giving up one's livelihood in order to live rightly. Years of preparation gave fledgling Christians the knowledge and strength needed to persevere in their new faith.

Today, the Episcopal Church still requires candidates for baptism to certain things and make certain promises. They must promise to turn away from evil (renounce Satan) and turn toward Jesus Christ (accept Jesus as the Savior). In ancient liturgies, candidates faced the west (the setting sun) renounce Satan and physically turned toward the east (the rising sun) to profess their faith in God. Today, in the service of Holy Baptism, candidates recall this early practice by three times renouncing Satan and three times accepting Jesus into their lives. When babies are baptized, the parents and godparents make these statements in their behalf.

During the baptismal rite, the congregation promises to support the newly baptized in their life in Christ. Baptism transforms not just the one being baptized, but the whole Body of Christ—every member of the Church. Together with the candidate, the community renews the Baptismal Covenant, professing a faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and God the Holy Spirit and promising to continue to live a life in Christ.

Eucharist

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he

said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new Covenant in my blood." (Luke 22:14–20)

We explored Holy Eucharist in the last chapter in detail. Here, we focus on the bread and the wine of Eucharist as signs of Jesus's presence. Holy Eucharist sustains us in the covenant relationship with God that was initiated at baptism, and empowers us to witness to God's love. At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Eucharist with these words, "Do this in remembrance of me."⁴⁷ Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. "This is my body, which is given for you."⁴⁷ He instructed his followers to do the same. The bread and the wine are the outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual grace of the body and blood of Christ.

According to Anglican belief, Christ's body and blood are truly present in the consecrated bread and wine. This doctrine is called **Real Presence**. According to this belief, knowing how Christ is present in the sacraments is not central. What is central is the belief that by eating the bread and the wine recipients are united in communion with Christ. This doctrine contrasts with **transubstantiation**, a Roman Catholic and Orthodox belief that when consecrated, the substance of the bread and the wine are transformed into the substance of Christ's body and blood, while the appearance as bread and wine continues to be unchanged. The Episcopal Church embraces a theology of Real Presence.

You can hear the doctrine of Real Presence in the words of Eucharistic Prayer A:

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the body and blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. (BCP, 363)

The presider asks that Christ be present for the people.

Through the celebration of Holy Eucharist we remember Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and await Christ's coming again in glory. We understand the celebration of Eucharist as a **memorial**, not as a reenactment of a past event of the Last Supper. Rather, Eucharist is the acclamation of a

present reality of Christ among us, a living sacrifice, for us today. The Eucharist makes God's saving acts throughout history and the future reality of our union with all creation present to us today.

Having been invited, through the Eucharist, to be in love transformed, how do you live God's love?



The elements of Eucharist—bread and wine.

A way to understand what we mean by memorial is by looking at the word *anamnesis*. **Anamnesis** is an active form of memory that connects the past to the present in a way that allows us to become a present participant in the past events. Have you ever smelled perfume that reminded you so strongly of a person that you could almost hear her voice speaking to you or hear the pattern of her footsteps nearby? You look around, feeling her presence as if she were with you. That is akin to *anamnesis*: a remembrance of a past event in a way that it becomes present to you today. *Anamnesis* is likewise remembering something that has yet to happen, the future kingdom of God that has yet to be realized. As we eat the bread and drink the wine we are receiving a foretaste of the kingdom of God and being shaped into the people who live in that kingdom.

In the Eucharist the past events that become present to you are God's saving actions throughout history—at creation, in the covenant made with Israel, and most of all sending his only son to dwell among us, allowing him to die on the cross and raising him up in resurrection. Not only are past events made present to us; so too is the future when we become fully on with God.

Another word—*kairos*—might help. You and I are most familiar with linear progression of time with a distinct past, present, and future—think of the timelines in history textbooks, for example. This type of clock time is called *chronos*. But there's another way of thinking about time. *Kairos* transcends time and instead defines the *quality* of a particular moment. In the *kairos* of the Eucharist, we can partake in all of God's saving acts—past, present, and future—when God draws us close. Through Eucharist we're forgiven our past sins, strengthened in our current union with Christ, and given a taste of heaven. Jesus often talked about heaven as an elaborately prepared meal. An image that we commonly use to refer to heaven therefore is a banquet. In *kairos*, time collapses into one moment, in the Eucharist—a concentrated dose of communion with God and all of creation.

47. 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

Confirmation

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

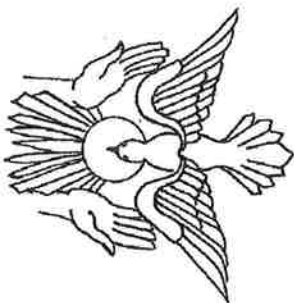
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:14-22)

In this passage, Jesus announces to his hometown that he has been called to serve. In the eyes of his fellow villagers, Jesus had grown from a baby presented to God in the Temple to a young man reading in the synagogue, proclaiming his purpose. The elders, looking at Joseph's son, were amazed, and probably a bit surprised as they heard him announce the ministry God has given him to do.

At baptism we are reborn, like infants, into a new family of God. As we continue in life, like Jesus, we grow in the community. Through experience and learning we gain knowledge of Christ, our call, ourselves, our community, and our call to serve others. Through practice, we exercise and strengthen our gifts for ministry.

Faith is not something once and done. Christianity is a practice in which we deepen our understanding of, and commitment to, God. As a community, we renew our baptismal promises at every baptism. We can also affirm our faith proclaimed at baptism and renew our baptismal promises as God's call to us in a sacrament called confirmation. **Confirmation** is the rite in which we make a mature commitment to Christ and receive continuing strength from the



At confirmation we receive continuing strength by the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit. During the rite of confirmation we reaffirm that we rejoice and renew our commitment to Jesus Christ. Just as at baptism, the confirmation promises to do all in their power to support the candidates if life in Christ. Then together the candidates and the congregation renew Baptismal Covenant.

Outward and Visible Sign and Inward and Spiritual Grace

After the candidates for confirmation renew the Baptismal Covenant, the bishop lays his or her hands on them, asking God to strengthen and bless the candidate and empower him or her for ministry. This follows the example of Jesus, who laid his hands on those whom he healed and blessed times throughout his ministry. This physical contact powerfully illustrates the power and protection granted to the one being blessed. The bishop prays, asking God to give the candidate strength of the Holy Spirit, power for ministry, and sustenance for continued life in Christ.

Candidates for confirmation must be baptized members of the Body of Christ. Because confirmation is a mature commitment to a life in Christ, candidates must know about the Christian faith: what Christians believe, what it means to follow Christ. Candidates must also confess their sins and be ready to proclaim Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The outward sign of confirmation is laying on of hands; the inward grace is strengthening by the Holy Spirit.

Remember that those who are baptized are *full* members of the Body of Christ. Confirmation does not complete their initiation, nor is it necessary to be confirmed to receive communion. Confirmation is an opportunity for those who are baptized to make a mature and independent affirmation of faith, and for the bishop to confirm the blessing of the Church.

Marriage

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:13-14)

All people are called to faithful relationships with others. Some are called to enter a lifelong covenantal union with another person and seek to maintain



Symbol for reconciliation created by Episcopal artist Jan Neal.

regularly in our worship together. On Sundays we confess that we have not loved God with our whole heart and have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We name the ways we have fallen short of God's desires for us and ask for forgiveness. The priest pronounces God's forgiveness. As a people reconciled to one another, we then share the peace—the same peace that Christ offered the disciples.

We may also confess our sins in the sacrament of reconciliation. **Reconciliation of a Penitent** is "the rite by which those who repent confess their sins to a priest and receive the assurances of pardon and the grace of absolution" (BCP, 861). The outward and visible sign of reconciliation is the laying on of hands. The inward and spiritual grace is restoration of a right relationship with God and the Body of Christ.

Missing the Mark

To understand the need for repentance and reconciliation, let's look at what sin is. We do not always live into God's will for us. Many times we don't even listen for what God desires of us let alone heed it. Our own desires and egos get in the way, and our choices do not conform to God's will. The Hebrew word for sin, *het*, translated literally means "miss the mark." When we sin we fail to live up to the image of God in which we were created; we miss the mark of what God wants for us.

The Catechism defines sin as "seeking our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation" (BCP, 848). The Ten Commandments explicitly state our duty to God and our neighbors. Actions contrary to these commandments distort our relationship with God and others.

Jesus gave us the two commandments upon which hang all the law and the prophets: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." These two commandments provide the basis for examining our lives and discerning when we have missed the mark. When have you not loved God? When have you not loved yourself? When have you not loved your neighbor?

Repenting: Changing Direction

God longs for our pardon and peace. God sent Jesus to reconcile us to God. And the risen Christ proclaimed God's desire to the disciples with his

greeting of "peace." God continually offers healing grace and pardon part is to examine our lives, repent of our sins, and set firm our resolve to make amends. We are called to repent as a regular part of our worship together. Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Holy Eucharist all in the opportunity for the community to confess together and provide a general absolution. For some, a general absolution does not meet their needs for repentance and reconciliation. They may need help and counsel to make amends or may have committed a grave offense for which they doubt may be pardoned. They may need the strength of the Church to accept sins and ask for forgiveness. The rite of reconciliation provides the best of absolution, the assurance of pardon, spiritual counsel, and advice, the strengthening of faith. The sacramental rite of reconciliation helps change our hearts and direct us to live according to God's will.

Preparing for Reconciliation

God's forgiving grace is offered to us always, abundantly, even *before* we have turned away from God. Pardon isn't something we earn; God pardons freely. We respond to this grace by recognizing our need to change. Grace is the source of our repentance. We prepare for the rite of reconciliation by:

1. Examining our actions and inactions for unfaithfulness.
2. Expressing our regret and sorrow.
3. Setting our resolve to conform to God's will.

In each of these, we acknowledge our complete reliance on the grace of God alone. We need God to know where we have missed the mark. It is because God wants us to be that we feel regret and sorrow. And it is with God's strength that we work to conform to God's will.

The Rite of Reconciliation

The rite of reconciliation can take place anywhere. Wherever two meet: Christ's name, Christ will be present. But generally, the penitent and the priest meet face-to-face in the priest's office or study, or in the church. The penitent begins by requesting a blessing. This shows that we need God's help to examine ourselves and confess our sins. God's blessing is the source of our desire to repent. The penitent continues by confessing to God and the Church his or her offenses, resolving to amend sinful ways, and asking for God's forgiveness. The priest serves as a witness to the confession. After the confession, the priest responds by offering counsel and advice and

then lays hands on the penitent and pronounces God's forgiveness. The penitent thanks God. The priest concludes with a dismissal and a request for prayer. This final request reminds us that the penitent and priest stand together in need of God's mercy.

The gospel tells us that the impulse to repent and the desire for forgiveness spring from God's prior longing for our reconciliation. —Martin L. Smith, S.S.J.E.⁴⁸

Role of the Priest. We confess to and receive absolution by a priest for a variety of reasons. Those serving as priests are recognized as having the gifts of wisdom and counsel necessary for wise advice. But more importantly, we are pardoned by those whom we have offended. Since sins are an offense to God, only God can pardon. God gave Jesus the authority to forgive sins, and Jesus gave that authority to the apostles. Through the laying on of hands during ordination, this authority is also given to priests. Priests therefore have the authority to proclaim God's pardon on God's behalf. A second reason we confess to a priest is that sins weaken relationships in the entire community. Because a priest is a symbol for the community of the Body of Christ, a priest is also granting pardon on behalf of the community. Through reconciliation our relationship with God, others, and creation is made right.

Confidentiality. You can expect a confession to be confidential. In most cases, a priest cannot reveal the contents of a confession to anyone. Civil law in the United States honors this confidentiality so that even a court of law cannot make a priest tell what is said in confession. This provides the penitent the security of complete silence. The sins revealed are held in God's loving embrace and the silence of the Church.

Healing of the Sick

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. (James 4:14–15)

This passage from James tells us that healing serves two purposes: to raise up the sick and to forgive their sins. **Healing of the Sick** is "the rite of

anointing the sick with oil, or the laying on of hands, by which God's is given for the healing of spirit, mind, and body" (BCP, 861).

Outward and Visible Sign

The outward and visible sign of healing is anointing with oil and/or the laying on of hands. Oil has been used for therapeutic purposes since ancient times. The Good Samaritan cared for the man who had been robbed by bandits, his wounds with oil and wine. The disciples anointed the sick by touching them with oil. Oil seeps into the pores of the skin, penetrating deep into the body. Jesus's healings highlight how important touch is to healing. Jesus rubbed spit into the eyes of a blind man and brought his sight back. A woman touched Jesus's robe and was healed. Jesus put his fingers into the ears of a deaf man and restored his hearing. Indeed, the caring touch of another can be both comforting and healing.

Inward and Spiritual Grace

Healing is a sacrament of faith that follows the healing in the ministry of Jesus. Through healing, Jesus made people and communities whole. He proclaimed that God's kingdom would be restored. The rite of healing brings the sick up to God's healing power, which brings the strength, courage, peace needed to face the realities of our broken world, including disease, and mental and physical pain. Sickness weakens the spirit. Healing seeks to strengthen it. Sickness can isolate individuals. Healing seeks to restore the sick to community, bringing a wholeness of all members. Sickness brings despair. Healing seeks to renew hope.

The outward sign of healing is laying on of hands and anointing with oil. The inward grace is healing of body, mind, and spirit.

Healing can be done privately or publicly. Many churches offer healing as part of the Sunday service. During the rite of healing, the priest lays hands on the person and prays to God for healing. If anointing is offered, the priest dips a thumb in the oil and makes the sign of the cross on the person's forehead, anointing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Healing does not necessarily mean curing. When we look for a cure, we are seeking the end of an illness or disease. Being healed could mean that the disease is gone. We hear many stories of Jesus healing people miraculously. Lepers were cured, the blind could see, and the lame were able to walk. But

48. Martin L. Smith, S.S.J.E., *Reconciliation* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1985), 2.

healing can also be receiving the strength to live with an illness or to grow spiritually as the result of living with disease. Healing can also be mending broken relationships. The laying on of hands and anointing with oil makes Christ and Christ's healing power present to us.

Ordination

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:35-38)

This passage from the Gospel according to Matthew, through the ministry of Jesus, provides a vision of church leadership dedicated to teaching, proclaiming the good news, and caring for the people. Faced with the crowds, "like sheep without a shepherd," Jesus recognizes the need for servant-laborers to serve the people. **Ordination** is a gift from God for the care and nurture of his people and for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Three Holy Orders

All baptized Christians are called to represent Christ and work toward reconciliation in the world. Some are also called to holy orders of bishop, priest, or deacon. We understand this call as originating from God and acknowledged and validated by the individual and his or her community of believers.

Ordained ministers serve as living reminders of the Church's life and mission. Bishops are a symbol of unity, catholicity, and apostolicity of the Church. A priest is a sign of the priesthood of the entire Church. A deacon is a sign of the Church as servant to the world. Bishops, priests, and deacons serve the Church so that we, the laity, can serve as the Body of Christ to the world.

The primary ministry of the **bishop** (and all ministers) is to "represent Christ and his Church." The ministry unique to the bishop is to oversee a diocese as apostle, chief priest, and pastor. As a successor to the apostles, a bishop symbolizes the unity of the priesthood throughout time and, with other bishops, symbolizes the unity of the Church. Bishops guard and teach the faith and are charged with proclaiming the word of God. Bishops alone have the authority to ordain priests and deacons, to confirm the baptized, and to bless a church.

A **priest** serves the Church primarily as pastor to the people and shares the responsibility of overseeing the Church with the bishop. In that role, priests preside at the Holy Eucharist and baptize. A priest also blesses and grants absolution of sins in the name of God. Priests are given the role of teaching and proclaiming the gospel, a ministry they share with all the baptized.

A **deacon** has the unique ministry of servant-hood. Deacons are called to be outward signs of the servant ministry of the Church to the poor, the sick, and the hungry. They represent Christ's ministry of healing to the world. Deacons are also called to support the ministry of all baptized members of the Church out in the world.

The Sacrament of Ordination

A person who is called by God and recognized by the Church to ordained ministry is ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop. A bishop is consecrated by the laying on of hands by three other bishops. The laying on of hands is the outward and visible sign of ordination. The inward and spiritual grace is the authority of the Holy Spirit, which helps those who are ordained as they minister to the Church.

The laying on of hands is the outward and visible sign of ordination. The inward and spiritual grace is the authority granted by power of the Holy Spirit to minister to the Church.

Let's explore the rite of ordination of a priest. First, a priest and a layperson present the candidate to the bishop. Both a priest and a layperson, along with others if desired present candidates because the call by God to ordination is a call that is identified by the community and the individual. Preparing for ordination is different in every diocese. Every diocese, however, requires a period of discernment. Once a person is accepted into the ordination process, a postulant for holy orders is required to undertake a program of theological training. Practical experience, personal development, and spiritual formation. After a period of formation, a postulant becomes a candidate and a date for ordination is determined. At ordination, the pre-senters state their belief that the candidate is qualified and suitable for the ordained ministry.



Bishops and priests represent Christ as a shepherd who cares for his sheep.

After the presentation, the candidate declares his or her belief that the Holy Bible is the word of God and contains all things necessary for salvation and promises to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Church. Finally, the congregation expresses its desire that the candidate be ordained and promises to uphold the priest in his or her ministry. As with all the other sacraments, ordination is celebrated in community, showing that the Church is one body in Christ.

Before consecration, when candidates are made priests, the bishop examines the candidate to determine whether the calling is true. The bishop asks the candidate to promise to pursue the disciplines necessary to fulfill the ministry. The bishop ends the examination by asking God to grant the candidate the grace and power to fulfill those promises.

At the consecration the bishop gives praise and thanksgiving to God for God's love and call to us, and the gift of Jesus, the risen Christ. Together, with other priests present, the bishop lays hands on the candidate and asks God to grant the candidate the power and grace of the Holy Spirit to make him or her a priest in the Church. The power and grace of the Holy Spirit is the inward and spiritual grace of the sacrament of ordination.

Once and Always a Deacon, Priest, or Bishop

Ordination confers a lifelong ministry. Barring renunciation of priestly vows or deposition of an ordained person from ordained ministry, regardless of whether the ordained has a paid position in the Church, a person who is ordained is ordained until death.

Life as a Sacrament

God is present throughout our lives in both visible and invisible ways. We might say that all of life is a sacrament. As people of God we live sacramental lives, receiving God's grace every day through the many signs of the Holy Spirit dwelling with us. God uses material things to reach out to us in unnumbered ways. The embrace of a friend, a gentle smile, sharing a meal, and the blessing of a mother to her child are just a few examples. Open your eyes to the world and God's actions in it. Look for the impresarios in unexpected places. Visible signs will keep you hopeful and give you the grace to live a holy life. Sacraments—outward signs of God's grace—are not just inside church buildings. They're everywhere you look. We can all draw closer to God by opening our eyes to them.

Transforming Questions

1. **Be Attentive:** Think of a time when you participated in a sacrament. What happened? Who was present? What were you thinking and feeling? Be as detailed in your description as you are able.
2. **Be Intelligent:** What did that sacrament mean to you? Did you notice an inward change?
3. **Be Reasonable:** Share your experience with a friend, and invite your friend to share an experience with you. What did that experience mean for your friend? Does your friend's experience suggest a new way for you to understand the sacrament?
4. **Be Responsible:** As a result of this reflection, what might you do differently? What might you continue doing? What support do you need for this?
5. **Be in Love Transformed:** Bring your reflection to the next sacrament you experience.