



The Episcopal Church

Overview

The Episcopal Church welcomes all who worship Jesus Christ and comprises 108 dioceses and three mission areas in 22 countries or territories. While The Episcopal Church is headquartered in New York City, we are not a national church—we are a multinational denomination.

As the only U.S.-based member of the worldwide Anglican Communion, The Episcopal Church is part of the world's third-largest group of Christians and currently has more than 1.5 million members. We are denominational descendants of—and partners with—the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The mission of the church, as stated in the Book of Common Prayer's catechism, is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” In step with that mission, The Episcopal Church follows Jesus into loving, liberating, and life-giving relationships with God, with each other, and with the earth.

Episcopalian

A person who belongs to the Episcopal Church is called an Episcopalian. The word Episcopal means a church governed by bishops. The Episcopal Church worships in the liturgical style, which means all Episcopal churches follow a similar order of service.

Episcopal Church

Some people refer to the Anglican tradition as a “bridge” between Protestants and Catholics. The Episcopal Church is both catholic and reformed, meaning we retain the essential elements of the Catholic tradition, while also embracing some Protestant beliefs and practices. We share a liturgical, sacramental, and Apostolic tradition with the Catholic Church. The Episcopal Church's beliefs are also rooted in many Protestant traditions. As such, we embrace aspects of both the Protestant and Catholic worship styles, beliefs, and actions. This explains why so many people from different faith backgrounds find a home in the Episcopal Church today. The spiritual head of the worldwide Anglican Communion (which includes the Episcopal Church) is the Archbishop of Canterbury in England. Unlike the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, the Archbishop serves only as a leader and guide and does not make rules or laws for the Church to follow.

Using the Bible

On Sundays, in most Episcopal churches, you will hear the same lessons from the Bible read, no matter where you go. That's because the Episcopal Church follows the Revised Common Lectionary along with many other Christian denominations. Each week we hear God's Word, broken into a three-year cycle, taking a portion from the Old Testament, Psalms, New Testament, and one of the Gospels each week.



The Book of Common Prayer (“BCP”) is used each week along with the Bible for prayer, sacraments, and church teachings.

Diocese

The word diocese (pronounced DY-oh-seas) comes from the Latin and Greek words for “administration.” Each diocese is headed by a Bishop, and usually corresponds to a state or a portion of a state. An Episcopal diocese includes all the churches and missions within its borders.

Parish

Within each diocese are local churches called parishes, each of which is governed by an elected vestry (which is like a board of directors) of church members who help lead the church and make important day-to-day decisions. A Rector (clergy member) is the spiritual leader of the parish. In the Episcopal tradition, ordained spiritual leaders are clergy. There are three types of clergy: deacons, priests (or rectors), and bishops. Parishes select their priest or priests, subject to the approval of the local bishop. The priest-in-charge may work with an assistant rector, deacon, and other clergy. Priests may be any gender and may choose to marry or not – we think that’s a personal decision. Women, gender non-conforming, and LGBTQ+ people are welcome to serve as priests, deacons, lay leaders, vestry members – any role or mission in the church is open to anyone called to serve.

The Episcopal Church welcomes LGBTQ+ people

All people are welcome here, regardless of background. Many of our members come to us from other faith traditions and denominations. You’ll find a friendly community of people united by their faith in God, eagerness to serve others, and commitment to justice for people of all races, genders, and abilities. The Episcopal Church strives to answer God’s call to service in a wide variety of roles and missions. LGBTQ+ persons are warmly welcomed here, along with everyone else, in all orders of the church, lay and ordained.

Episcopalians’ Beliefs

There are three basic sources of Episcopal Church beliefs:

- Scripture (the primary source). The Old and New Testaments contain the essence of Christian doctrine. They reveal God to humankind and tell of our response to God in history. The Bible helps us to know God’s will, revealed supremely through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Scriptures are the word of God, proclaiming that Jesus – both God and human being – is Christ, the Messiah.
- Reason (gifts of the Holy Spirit). The Episcopal Church does not control interpretation of God’s word and practice of faith. Church members are encouraged to use reason to explore and comprehend God’s works; to make responsible moral decisions under the guidance of Scripture and clergy, and in response to sincere prayer.



- Tradition (wisdom of generations past). Tradition helps us interpret Scripture; lets us share experiences of early Christians and believers of every era; preserves hymns, prayers, and practices that keep our faith alive; and strengthens our faith. Through its continuity and consistency, tradition helps preserve essential truths through liturgy. For example, The Book of Common Prayer tells us that private worship, while important, is not adequate, the Christian faith is communal; and the Episcopal Church's worship is participatory. Religion is a fellowship. You relate to the whole church through your parish and your church community.