



What to Expect When You Visit

About the Episcopal Church

"Our church exists to restore people to unity with God and each other in Christ. We carry out this mission through the ministry of all our members as we pray, worship, proclaim the Gospel, and promote justice, peace and love.'

What does the name 'Episcopal Church' mean?

"The Episcopal Church' is one branch of the world-wide Anglican Communion number 60 million members in over 100 countries.

It is often described as the 'bridge church" because it includes both the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. It preserves the ancient Catholic faith and sacraments and the historic ministry with Bishops as its chief pastors. ("Episcopal" comes from the Greek word for "bishop.") It is, at the same time, Protestant, focusing on the basic authority of Holy Scripture and the proclamation of the Word of God.

What is the nature of the doctrine and discipline of the Episcopal Church?

The Episcopal Church offers a thoughtful approach to religion. It believes faith involves a measure of reason as well as emotion. Its doctrine is designed to point out, not dictate, the response to God's continuing revelation. The focus is on God's love and the invitation to respond in mature freedom, in thanksgiving, and in loving devotion. Basic beliefs are expressed in the Book of Common Prayer and especially in the Catechism (page 845).

The Episcopal Church teaches that morality is positive, rather than negative. It is rooted in Jesus' summary of the law: 'to love God with heart, mind and soul and to love ones neighbor as oneself." The focus of Christian morality is not on laws and restrictions but on free and mature response to God's love and in responsibility to our neighbors.

What are the basic beliefs of the Episcopal Church?

1. Episcopalians promise to follow Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.
2. Episcopalians believe in One God,
 - the Father who creates us and things,
 - the Son who redeems us from sin and death
 - the Holy Spirit who renews us as the Children of God.
3. Episcopalians believe the Holy Scriptures to be the Word of God and to contain all things necessary for salvation. We believe God inspired human authors and continues to speak to us through the Bible.
4. Episcopalians affirm that salvation is the end of our separation from God and the beginning of a new relationship with God and one another. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are basic statements of our beliefs in God.

How do Episcopalians worship?

In worship we unite ourselves with one another to acknowledge the holiness of God, to hear God's Word, to offer prayer and praise, and to celebrate the Sacraments. The Celebration of Holy Eucharist is the central act of worship in accordance with Jesus' command to His disciples.

Three books are used:

- the Holy Bible-lessons are read from it at every service;
- the Book of Common Prayer, which the service follows, is composed of both ancient and modern prayers and forms of service and;
- the Hymnal, which includes both traditional and contemporary Church music.

Episcopal services preserve the rich worship and tradition of the historic Church. All present participate actively in this joyous response to God's love.

What are the sacraments of the Episcopal Church?

Sacraments are the "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace." Grace is God's love freely given to us for forgiveness and spiritual renewal.

The two sacraments of the Gospel instituted and ordained by Christ Himself as essential for every Christian's salvation are:

- Holy Baptism Administered once as a pledge of repentance and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is the means by which God adopts us as His Children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church.
- Holy Eucharist In it we share bread and wine for the continual remembrance of Christ's life, death, and resurrection until His coming again. Through it we receive the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our union with Christ and one another.

Does the Episcopal Church offer any other sacraments?

Yes. There are five other sacramental rites:

- Confirmation: the rite in which we express mature commitment to Christ and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a Bishop.-Holy Matrimony: the sacrament of marriage, in which a man and a woman commit their lives to one another and receive God's blessing.
- Reconciliation of a Penitent: the confession of ones sins to God in the presence of a priest and the receiving of the assurance of God's forgiveness and the grace of absolution.
- Ministration to the Sick: the anointing of the sick with oil, or the laying on of hands, by which God's grace is given for the healing of spirit, mind, and body.
- Ordination: the sacrament consecrating Christians in service to God as bishops, priests and deacons.

What is the structure and ministry of the Episcopal Church?

The Episcopal Church is a democratic church with a government much like the government of the United States with Bishops giving pastoral care and oversight. In each congregation the ministry is shared by lay people and ordained clergy - priests and deacons.

- Lay persons represent Christ and His Church and bear witness to Him wherever they may be according to the gifts given them.
- Deacons assist in the proclamation of the Gospel, in the administration of the Sacraments, and as servants to those in need.
- Priests serve as pastors, proclaim the Gospel and administer the Sacraments.
- Bishops serve as chief priests and pastors of dioceses and ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.

What is the mission of an Episcopalian?

The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. It is not simply a matter of "saving souls." Neither is it simply a matter of "feeding the hungry." Christian mission involves both the spiritual and the physical welfare of mankind, for Christ's love extends to all of life.

What does being an Episcopalian mean?

It means actively participating through Christ's Church in the work of God:

In Church services and parish programs;

Through prayer and the study of Holy Scripture;

In acts of charity and social justice;

In spreading the Good News of Christ to other people;

In learning more about God and how He shares His Love with us;
By giving of our means and talents to the greater purpose of God's work.

The above content is from St. Luke's on the Lake Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas
<http://www.stlukesonthelake.org/newcomers/episcopal.html>

About Episcopal Worship

Sunday is traditionally when Episcopalians gather to worship. In most churches now, the principal worship service is the Holy Eucharist, or as it is also known, "The Lord's Supper," "Holy Communion," or "The Mass." In most Episcopal churches, worship is accompanied by the singing of hymns, and in some churches, much of the service is also sung.

Worship Styles

There are many different styles in which Episcopalians worship, from very formal, almost Catholic styles that have lots of singing, music, fancy clothes (called vestments), and incense, to very informal spoken styles that have less music. Yet all worship in the Episcopal Church is based in the Book of Common Prayer, which gives it a familiar feel to Episcopalians, no matter where they go.

Liturgy and Ritual

Worship in the Episcopal Church is said to be "liturgical," which means that the congregation follows the same service and prays from texts that don't change very much from week to week during a season of the year. The sameness from week to week gives the worship a rhythm that becomes comforting and familiar to the worshippers.

Liturgy can be confusing, however, or difficult to follow for the first-time visitor. It often involves switching between two or more books or a service pamphlet, and there may be a lot of standing, sitting, kneeling, bowing, and sung or spoken responses. Liturgical worship can be compared with a formal dance: Once you learn its steps and movements, you learn to appreciate its rhythm and it becomes satisfying to dance, again and again, as the music changes.

The Holy Eucharist

In spite of the diversity of worship styles in the Episcopal Church, Holy Eucharist always has the same components and the same shape.

The Liturgy of the Word

We begin with the praise of God through singing and prayers, and then listen to as many as four readings from the Bible. Usually, they are one from the Old Testament, a psalm, and one from the Epistles, but there is always a reading from one of the Gospels.

There is usually then a sermon or meditation on the readings given by the priest.

The congregation recites the Nicene Creed, which was written in the Fourth Century and has been the Church's statement of what we believe ever since.

Next, the congregation prays together-for the Church, for the World, and for those in need. We pray for the sick, we thank God for all the good things of our lives, and finally, we pray for the dead.

Then usually, the congregation confesses its sin before God and before one another. This is a corporate statement of what we have done and what we have left undone, and the priest "pronounces absolution." In so doing, the priest assures the congregation that God is always ready to forgive our sins.

The congregation greets one another and wishes them "peace."

The Liturgy of the Table

Next, the priest stands at the table, which has been set with a cup of wine and a plate of bread-or thin, crispy wafers. Then he or she raises his or her hands and greets the congregation again: "The Lord be With You." Now begins the Eucharistic Prayer, in which the priest tells the story of Christianity, from the beginning of Creation, through the choosing of Israel to be God's people, through our continual turning away from God and God's calling us to return. Finally, the priest tells the story of the coming of Jesus Christ, and about the night before his death, on which he instituted the Eucharistic meal (communion) as a continual remembrance of him.

The priest blesses the bread and wine, and the congregation recites the Lord's Prayer. Finally, the priest breaks the bread and offers it to the congregation, as the "gifts of God for the People of God."

The congregation then shares the bread and the wine. Sometimes the people all come forward to receive the bread and wine; sometimes they pass the elements around in other ways.

All Are Welcome

All baptized Christians-no matter what age, and no matter of what denomination-are welcome to "receive communion," that is, eat the bread and drink the wine with the congregation, regardless of which Church they were baptized in. This invitation to other Christians who are not Episcopalians is in sharp contrast to the position of other Churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, which allows only Roman Catholics

to receive. Episcopalians invite all baptized people to receive, not because we take the Eucharist lightly, but because we take our baptism so seriously.

Visitors who are not baptized Christians are still welcome to come forward during the Communion to receive the blessing of the priest.

At the end of the Eucharist, the congregation prays once more in thanksgiving, and then is dismissed to continue the life of service to God and to the World.

The above content is from The Episcopal Church USA

http://episcopalchurch.org/17041_17059_ENG_HTM.htm?menu=menu16975