

The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion

The Episcopal Church in the United States traces its roots to the early English settlers who arrived in America and formed congregations grounded in the traditions and liturgy of the Church of England. Although the Church's first bishop, Samuel Seabury, was consecrated by Scottish bishops after the Revolutionary War in 1784, the Protestant Episcopal Church was not officially organized until 1785 when the first General Convention was held in Philadelphia. The Church operated as a single house, the House of Deputies, until 1789 when Bishop William White was elected as Presiding Bishop (again in Philadelphia) and the House of Bishops was created.

Also in 1789, the Convention adopted a constitution, canons, and a *Book of Common Prayer* based on that of the Church of England.

In 1821, the Church was incorporated under the title of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. It retains that title to this day, and its name reflects the importance of the English missionary societies that were crucial to its founding and to the spread of the Church on this continent.

The Episcopal Church is one of the 28 independent, self-governing Churches that make up the Anglican Communion. With over 70 mil-

lion communicants world-wide, it represents a wide variety of races, languages, cultures, and political entities. Its strongest growth in recent years has been on the African continent.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is considered to be the focal point of unity within the Anglican Communion, although the power of the office is not one of law, but rather influence and persuasion. Every ten years, under the auspices of the Archbishop's office, diocesan bishops from all across the Communion meet in England for the Lambeth Conference. The purpose of the Conference is in part to engender a sense of collegiality among the Episcopacy through prayer, Bible study, reflection, and discussion of issues confronting the Church. Though the resolutions that emanate from the Conference are often considered influential, they are not binding on any segment of the Communion.

The heritage of the Anglican Communion is both catholic and evangelical – catholic in its retention of the ordered ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, as well as in the conviction that the proclamation of the faith is consistent with what has been proclaimed throughout the ages; and evangelical in that it proclaims the apostolic faith in the saving power of God as revealed in Holy Scripture. That faith values Christian tradition and relies on reason in discerning God's revelations.

Vestry members have a lot to do in their elected positions as the leadership of the congregation. Their focus is on just that – the congregation and its mission and ministry. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that, as Episcopalians, we are part of a much wider structure that goes from local, to regional, to national, to world-wide.

As The Zacchaeus Report pointed out, there is great vitality in local congregations, but there is often a disconnect with wider church structures. In the hope that a greater understanding of how the Church is structured may lead to a greater ability to deal with the disconnect, this issue of Vestry Papers is devoted to topics relating to how the Church operates from top to bottom.

Episcopal Identity and Vocation

Building on the findings of *The Zacchaeus Report* and Trinity Institute's Teleconference "Roots and Wings," we are pleased to offer to dioceses and congregations a curriculum series for adults which provides an opportunity to look at who we are as Episcopalians and where God is calling us to be. The series includes:

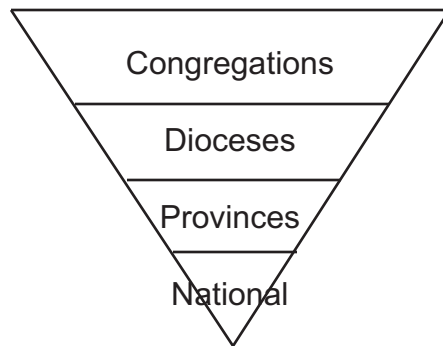
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The Episcopal Church:

From Its Grassroots Through Its Support Systems

The structure of the Episcopal Church can be likened to a pyramid. At its base are the approximate 7,500 congregations that form the grassroots. Going up the pyramid are the 109 dioceses, the geographic units of which each congregation is a part. A bit further up the pyramid are the nine provinces, the geographic units of which each diocese is a part. At the top is the national church with all of its departments and programs that offer support to all of those entities that make up the pyramid.



In many respects, it is an inverted pyramid. The congregations are really at the top and create the need for each of the structures beneath them.

This is a somewhat simplistic design for the Church's structure. In fact, there are many agencies, organizations, committees, commissions, seminaries, and more that make up The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America (DFMS), commonly known as the Episcopal Church.

Congregations

A group of Episcopalians meeting regularly for worship and ministry together constitutes a congregation. The majority of congregations hold either mission or parish status. Missions receive some form of diocesan financial support or have unretired debt, and parishes have sufficient funds to maintain a building and pay for the services of a priest. However, some dioceses have eliminated the distinction between the two.

A congregation cannot declare itself an Episcopal Church without the acceptance and approval of the Diocesan Convention in the diocese where it is located. Most congregations are initially accepted as missions. They are generally started by:

- a group of individuals who wish to

start an Episcopal Church in a community where there is not one;

- a neighboring congregation that wishes to assist in the development of another church, perhaps in a growing community; or
- the diocese or a regional group, as a part of a mission growth strategy in communities or areas where there is an identified need.

These mission churches are expected to become self-sustaining at a point in the future and may be granted parish status.

By their very nature, congregations of the Episcopal Church are in relationship with others. They have a spiritual link with the larger Episcopal Church and the world-wide Anglican Communion. Each congregation is also in a spiritual, financial, and legal relationship with its diocese and with every other congregation in the diocese.

- The real property of congregations is usually owned by the diocese.
- Congregations are assisted by the diocese in fulfilling their mission and ministry - a responsibility that is inherent in the role of the diocese.
- Congregations financially support the diocese, and through the diocese, provide financial support for the National Church and the Anglican Communion.

Apart from complying with the diocesan and national church canons (the laws which govern the Church), there are very few things that congregations are "required" to do. The culture of the Church is more that of invitation. However, the clergy and vestry of a congregation are responsible for faithfully conveying information about decisions made by the diocese and national church and for creating opportunities for the congregation to respond to those decisions by adopting them or by voicing their disagreement. Clergy are also bound, by canon, to read any communication sent by the House of Bishops at the principal worship services of the congregation.

Dioceses

The diocese, as a structure for organizing church life, became commonplace in the 4th century. It is headed by a bishop, it covers a specific geographic area, it has the authority to found congregations, and it has representation

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The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

Catechism
Book of Common Prayer
page 855

Jesus said, "Go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The Great Commission
Matthew 28: 18-20

General Convention and the Executive Council

The General Convention is the legislative body of the National Episcopal Church. It meets once every three years to create policy, authorize programs, and approve the budget to fund the work of the Episcopal Church. In keeping with its “missionary society” roots, a significant portion of that budget is devoted to the support of domestic and foreign missions.

The General Convention is composed of two legislative houses – the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. **The House of Deputies** is made up of eight representatives from each of the Church’s 109 dioceses – four lay delegates and four ordained delegates. These delegates are elected each triennium at diocesan conventions. The President of the House of Deputies, currently Dr. Pamela Chinnis of Washington, DC, presides over the senior house. **The House of Bishops** is composed of all bishops in the Episcopal Church and is presided over by the Presiding Bishop, currently Frank Tracy Griswold, III, who began serving a nine-year term as presiding bishop in 1998.

Since 1919, the Canons of the Church have provided for an Executive Council, which is charged with acting on behalf of the General Convention between its triennial meetings. The Council is composed of 38 elected members – 4 bishops, 13 clergy, and 21 lay – in addition to the Presiding Bishop, who serves as Chair, and the President of the House of Deputies, who serves as Vice-chair. Twenty are elected at the General Convention, and two are elected from each of the nine regional provinces. All serve for six-year terms, with half of the group rotating off at each General Convention. A Treasurer and Secretary are also elected by the General Convention, and each serve in their

same capacities for the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States (the National Church, or DFMS).

During each triennium, the Council works with the Presiding Bishop to implement and monitor the policies and programs authorized by the Convention. It also proposes and exercises oversight of the budget, and in its capacity as the Board of Directors of the DFMS, it directs the disposition of the moneys and other property of the Society.

Meeting three times annually during each triennium, once in each of the nine provinces, the Council is assisted by the staff of the Episcopal Church Center, commonly known as “815” (the Church offices are at 815 Second Avenue in New York City).

In addition to the work of the Council in plenary session, each member of the Council serves on one or more of the Council Standing Committees. These committees meet and work on specific projects that come to the Council’s attention throughout the triennium and bring forward recommendations to the full Council. The Standing Committees are Communications, Finance & Administration, International & National Concerns, Planning & Evaluation, and Support for Congregations in Ministry. An Agenda & Design Committee was added in 1998 to plan the Council’s meetings and to coordinate the details of each meeting with the host diocese. There are also special committees, created by either the General Convention or Executive Council, that work on projects important to the life and work of the Church. These committees report to the Executive Council.

Canon 1.4: There shall be an Executive Council of the General Convention whose duty it shall be to carry out the program and policies adopted by the General Convention. The Executive Council shall have charge of the coordination, development, and implementation of the ministry and mission of the Church . . .
Canon 1.4.2(e): The Council shall exercise the powers conferred upon it by Canon, and such further powers as may be designated by the General Convention, and between sessions of the General Convention may initiate and develop such new works as it may deem necessary . . .

Resources . . .

There are many ways to connect with the larger Episcopal Church beyond your own congregation or local community. The following are a few suggestions:

- Information contained in your diocesan newsletter.
- Most dioceses have committees and programs that address a variety of topics and concerns. Find out what programs they sponsor or information they offer. Your diocese may also have a resource library that can provide materials.
- The National Church staff works with dioceses and provinces in many areas. Many

departments offer conferences and provide resource materials. To obtain a catalogue of these materials, write Episcopal Parish Services, P.O. Box 269, Philadelphia, PA 19105. You can also call the National Church offices at 1-800-334-7626.

- Subscribe to *Episcopal Life*, 1-800-374-9510, and *The Living Church*, 1-414-276-5420, both excellent publications that provide current information and news about the Episcopal Church and the entire Anglican Communion.
- Use the National Church’s web site to access a broad array of services and information – www.ecusa.anglican.org

The Role of the Episcopacy

The Episcopal Church has adhered to its heritage by retaining the ordered ministries of bishops, priests, and deacons. Historically, the role of bishops has consisted of three pastoral functions:

- responsibility for helping the Church remain faithful to the apostolic teachings;
- pastoral care for all people in their diocese, especially through pastoral care for the priests of the diocese; and
- maintenance of an interrelatedness among churches within the diocese, between dioceses, and throughout the Anglican Communion.

Much of what bishops do relates to one of these functions. They fulfill these roles through parish visitations, by overseeing the preparation, deployment, and ongoing education of clergy, by providing resources to the congregations and opportunities for ministry, and by

(Continued from page 2 – Grassroots)

at the General Convention. However, governance of the diocese is placed firmly with its congregations through the election of lay representatives who attend the Diocesan Convention. Each diocese also has an elected Standing Commission, some form of diocesan or executive council, and other elected or appointed leaders.

The Diocesan Convention is the primary legislative body of the diocese. It has the authority to adopt canons, establish policies and programs, adopt a budget, elect diocesan leaders, and elect a bishop when there is a vacancy. In addition to the elected lay representatives from each congregation, all diocesan clergy who are “canonically resident” and active in the diocese are also delegates to diocesan conventions.

The Standing Committee serves as the Bishop’s Council of Advice and, in the absence of a bishop, as the Ecclesiastical Authority of the diocese. It also recommends persons for ordination, advises the Bishop of the purchase, sale, or encumbrance on any property held by the diocese or by a congregation, and gives consent, when requested, for all bishops elected in the Episcopal Church. Membership on the Standing Committee is half clerical, half lay.

Provinces

The dioceses of the Episcopal Church are organized into nine provinces. The strength of each of these provinces varies greatly, as does

participating in the governance of the diocese and the House of Bishops.

Each diocese has a primary bishop – called the Diocesan Bishop. The leadership team of the diocese, in addition to the Bishop, consists of staff and all the elected and appointed leaders. Together they are responsible for helping the diocese identify a common vision and mission, developing and implementing plans to bring that vision to life, and inspiring and supporting congregations in becoming places where people will encounter the Risen Christ, and carry out the ministry entrusted to them by Christ.

Diocesan bishops may appoint assistant bishops to help with these duties if the size of the diocese warrants additional help. Or the diocese may elect a suffragan bishop to assist. A bishop coadjutor is someone who is elected to succeed the Diocesan Bishop.

their size. Some are highly organized with many task groups and paid staff members. Others have joint programs, especially in the areas of education, youth, camps, and conferences. Others meet only annually for a day or two.

Provinces I through VIII include all of the United States. Province IX includes the Central American countries of Columbia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Litoral, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. Venezuela and Puerto Rico are considered as “extra-provincial” dioceses of Province IX. In addition, there is another extra-provincial territory, which is composed of the American congregations of Europe, the Armed Forces, Haiti, Micronesia, Taiwan, and the Virgin Islands.

The National Church

The executive offices of the National Church are at the Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Avenue in New York City. In addition to the administrative functions that are necessarily associated with any national organization, the offices for all the mission and ministry functions of the Church are also housed there. These include Congregational Ministries, Ministries with Young People, Anglican and Global Relations, Migration Ministries, Peace and Justice Ministries, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Ministry Development, The Presiding Bishop’s Fund for World Relief, and Theological Education. These departments all exist to support the work of the congregations, dioceses, and provinces throughout the Church.

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