

A Glossary of Episcopal Language

General Terms

Anglican

An adjective describing the worldwide communion of autonomous churches in communion with the Church of England. The Episcopal Church is part of that communion. Anglican can also be a noun, a member of the Anglican Communion.

Apostolic Succession

Episcopalians, along with other Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and some other Christian bodies, trace their bishops' spiritual heritage in an unbroken line back to the first apostles of Jesus. The importance of the historic episcopate is a major point in ecumenical discussions.

Book of Common Prayer

The primary guide for worship in the Episcopal Church. The first Anglican Book of Common Prayer was written in English in 1549 by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, drawing on material from a number of Latin books and manuals then used to conduct services. The Book of Common Prayer provides a variety of services for individual and corporate worship. The most widely used, other than the Holy Eucharist, the central act of corporate worship, are Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, both of which may be used for private devotions or public worship.

Canons

The written rules governing church policy, structure and procedure. There are national canons and each diocese has its own.

Cathedral

A diocese's cathedral is the church where the bishop makes his headquarters. The city in which the cathedral is located is the "see city." Some dioceses have no cathedral.

Catholic

This word comes from a Greek word meaning "universal" and may, therefore, be used to apply to all Christians. When it is used this way, it usually begins with a little "c". Sometimes it is used with a capital C when the writer means the Roman Catholic Church.

Diocese

A diocese is made up of several local congregations with a bishop as its chief pastor. Since only a bishop can consecrate other bishops, ordain priests and deacons and confirm, the diocese is the basic local unit of the church. Depending on the number of Episcopalians, a state may have one or several dioceses. The legislative body of the diocese is an annual convention of clergy and lay deputies from each congregation.

Episcopal

An adjective derived from the Greek word, *episkopos*, meaning overseer or bishop. Episcopalian is the noun. Episcopalians attend the Episcopal Church.

General Convention

The General Convention is the highest legislative body of the Episcopal Church. It meets every three years and is made up of a House of Bishops and a House of Deputies. Half the deputies are clergy and half lay persons.

Sacrament

According to the catechism in the Book of Common Prayer sacraments are the “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive grace.” The Episcopal Church recognizes the two sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist as both biblically grounded and essential to the church. It also recognizes five other sacramental rites: confirmation, ordination, marriage, reconciliation and anointing or unction (For more on each of these see the *Sacraments and Services* section below).

Vestry

Lay members of the vestry are elected at a parish's annual meeting. The rector presides at meetings of the vestry, which handles the parish's business matters and serves as a council of advice for the rector.

Ecclesiastical Titles

Bishop

A bishop is a chief minister (servant) or chief pastor (shepherd) in the Episcopal Church, serving a number of local churches that make up a diocese. A large diocese may have more than one bishop. In that case the chief bishop is called the diocesan. Assisting bishops are usually called suffragan bishops. An assisting bishop who will succeed the diocesan is a bishop coadjutor. All are addressed as "bishop." Our Bishop is the Rt. Rev. John Bauerschmidt.

Priest

This word comes from a Greek word, *presbyteros*, meaning elder. Usually a priest is the chief minister in a local congregation. Forms of address—father, mother, etc.—depend upon the priest's preference and local custom.

Deacon

A deacon, like a bishop or priest, is an ordained minister. Deacon comes from the Greek word, *diakonos*, meaning servant. Deacons usually serve in local congregations and have a special ministry to the poor, the sick and the troubled.

Deacons are addressed as deacon, mister, miss, mrs., etc. according to preference or local custom.

Minister

This is a Latin word, meaning servant. In the Episcopal Church lay persons as well as bishops, priests and deacons are ministers, servants of God, caring for their brothers and sisters in the church and those outside it.

Preacher

Preaching is only one function of the ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church and so preacher is not an appropriate synonym for bishop, priest or deacon.

Rector/Vicar

The priest in charge of a parish, a self-supporting church, is the rector. Our rector is The Rev. Dr. Jerry Smith. The rector is elected by the vestry. Assisting priests the rector appoints may be called curate, assistant or associate. The priest in charge of a mission, supported financially from outside, is the vicar. The vicar is appointed by the bishop.

Reverend

The Reverend is an appropriate title to precede the full name of a priest or deacon. The Right Reverend is used for a bishop. Reverend is an adjective, not a noun, and is incorrectly used with a last name only, or without the article, the, as in "Reverend Jones."

Architecture

Narthex

The entrance hall, called by some denominations the vestibule.

Nave

The pew area of the church building, where the congregation sits, stands or kneels during public worship. The nave is more than an auditorium, where people listen, because worship in the Episcopal Church involves everyone as participants.

Chancel

In classic church design, an area of pews, seats, stalls or prayer desks set apart from the nave, used by the ministers leading services and sometimes used by the choir.

Sanctuary

The area immediately surrounding the altar, often enclosed by an altar rail. In some denominations the word refers to the entire worship space.

Crossing In cruciform (cross-shaped) churches, the crossing is the junction of the four cross bars of the nave. We preaching from the crossing at St. Bs.

Sacraments and Services

Holy Baptism

Baptism is the rite of full initiation, by water and the Holy Spirit, into membership in the Christian church. In the Episcopal Church Baptisms take place in the context of the Eucharist at any Sunday or feast day of the year. Baptism may be by immersion or pouring water over the head of the baptized. In the Anglican tradition, the celebrant always makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized often anointing with the oil of chrism at the same time. The order of service for Holy Baptism is found in the Book of Common Prayer on page 299.

Holy Eucharist

The Eucharist is the principal act of Christian worship on Sundays and on other major feast days. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek word *eucharistia* meaning "thanksgiving." The Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ's resurrection and ongoing presence at work among us. The Book of Common Prayer includes three versions beginning on page 323 with Rite One.

Confirmation

Confirmation is a rite of mature commitment to Christ through prayers, the renewal of Baptism vows, the laying on of hands by a bishop. One must be baptized in order to be confirmed. Confirmation usually follows a period of prayer, study and instruction called confirmation class or inquirers class. The order of service for confirmation is found on page 413 of the Book of Common Prayer.

Daily Office

These services of prayer for morning and evening are read by individuals as daily devotions or corporately as liturgy in church. The chief purpose of the daily office is remembrance, thanksgiving and praise. The daily office may be led by lay people as well as by clergy. Orders of service for the daily office begin on page 37 in the Book of Common Prayer.

Holy Matrimony See page 422 of the Book of Common Prayer

Reconciliation of a Penitent

This is the rite by which a minister of the church absolves and offers forgiveness of sin to a penitent in the name of Christ and the church. See page 447 of the Book of Common Prayer.

Anointing

This is the rite of applying consecrated oil in Baptism, confirmation and ministrations of the sick. Traditionally it signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit and is used in services where an individual is set apart for special reasons.

Adapted from "*e-pis-co-pal lan-guage: Defining Church Terms.*" Forward Movement Publications, eighth printing and Wall, John N. *A Dictionary for Episcopalians.* Cowley Publications, 2000.