

Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA)

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Statistics 2002
Source: *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 2005*

In the United States:
2,320,221 Members
7,305 Parishes & Missions
100 Dioceses
8 Provinces (9 worldwide)

Ministry
16,493 Priests

Financial Data
Total Contributions
\$2,070,493,919
Benevolences
\$279,394,072

Women in Ministry

The General Convention approved the ordination of women in 1976. Currently 13.8% of ordained priests are women. The first female Bishop, the Rev. Barbara C. Harris, was consecrated in 1989. There are presently nine female Bishops (2.5% of all Bishops). However, there continue to be 2 dioceses which do not recognize the priesthood of women.

Brief History

The Episcopal Church has its roots in the **Church of England** (sometimes called the Anglican Church). In 1607 colonists set up the first American Anglican church in Jamestown, Virginia. By the time of the Revolutionary War, there were over 400 Anglican churches in the colonies. While several of the signers of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 belonged to the church, many members remained loyal to the crown. Even so, after the war, when the official ties to the Church of England were severed, the church remained united. In 1789 delegates assembled at the first General Convention and created the **Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA**.

Organization

The basic unit of the Episcopal Church is the **diocese**, which is a geographical region led by a bishop. The diocese consists of **parishes** (congregations which are self-supporting) and **missions** (which are supported from the outside). Each diocese may have its own **canons**, or church laws, in addition to the national canons. The **annual convention** is the legislative body for the diocese. The **General Convention**, held every three years, is the governing body of the denomination. It has a bicameral structure with a **House of Bishops** and a **House of Deputies**, which includes both priests and lay members.

Ordination is successive and elective in the Episcopal Church. **Bishops** begin as deacons and priests. **Priests** are ordained to lead a parish or mission. A **rector** is a priest who leads a parish. The rector is selected by the **vestry**, with the approval of the bishop, which is the council of people (elected each year) who make decisions in a parish. An assisting priest in a parish may be called a **curate**. A **vicar** is a priest who leads a mission. Vicars are appointed by the bishop. **Deacons** assist a priest or bishop in parish or diocese work. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, priests and bishops in the Episcopal Church may marry and have children. The Episcopal Church also recognizes those who are called to religious orders as **monks** or **nuns**, and who take vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

1607
Members of the **Church of England (Anglican Church)** arrive in Jamestown and establish a church.

1619
Virginia legislature declares all Virginians to be members of the Church of England.

1775-1783
Revolutionary War leaves 400 existing Anglican parishes disorganized and without any Bishops to lead and ordain.

1784 Samuel Seabury consecrated as Bishop by Church of Scotland.

1787
William White and Samuel Provost consecrated as Bishops by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

1789
At the first General Convention, American Anglican churches approve new constitution to create the **Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA**.

1967
General Convention adopts "**Episcopal Church**" as an official alternative name.

Major Doctrines/Theology

The tradition, theology, and history of the Episcopal Church is a rich blend of both Protestantism and Catholicism. Like other **Catholic** churches (which include the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox churches, and other Anglican churches), the Episcopal Church maintains an historic ministry of **apostolic succession**, where ordained priests, deacons, and bishops are considered to be spiritually part of an unbroken line of succession that dates to Jesus' earliest disciples. They confess their faith with historically catholic creeds, primarily the Nicene and Apostle's Creeds. They celebrate two major **Sacraments**—Baptism and Eucharist. In addition, there are five lesser sacramental rites which may occur during worship services or on an individual basis. **Confirmation** is performed by the Bishop for those who are ready to make a mature commitment to Christ. Bishops, priests, and deacons are consecrated to service through the sacrament of **Ordination**. Women and men make a lifelong pledge before God through the sacrament of **Holy Matrimony**. **Penance** is the act of confession of sins and the giving of pardon and absolution by a priest. **Unction** is the anointing with oil or laying on of hands through which God's grace is given for healing. These elements make up the **tradition** of the Episcopal Church.

Like many Protestant churches, the Episcopal Church places strong emphasis on the **Bible** (which may include the Apocryphal books) as inspired by God and through which God still speaks. In addition to tradition and the Bible, **reason** is an important element through which God and the world are understood. For Episcopalians, faith includes mind as well as heart, and people are to use their God-given intellect both to recognize God at work in the world and to understand God's will.

Underlying all of the above is a strong belief in a Trinitarian God who creates, redeems, and sustains, and who is always at work in the world. The **catechism**, or outline of faith, sets forth and explains Episcopalian beliefs in detail.

Worship and Sacrament

Liturgy is of central importance in the Episcopal Church. However, there is a wide range of worship styles. Worship at "High" churches tends to be ritualistic and structured, and may include incense and chanting. "Low" churches worship with a simpler or a more contemporary style. During worship the scripture readings follow the **Episcopal Lectionary**, which sets forth the Biblical lessons for the day. The *Book of Common Prayer* is the official liturgy, and other worship materials must be approved by the General Convention.

The primary act of Sunday worship is the **Holy Eucharist**, also called Communion or the Lord's Supper. Some churches also offer daily prayer (Morning or Evening Prayer), and observe feasts or fasts in memory of the saints.

Baptism of infants or adults is performed by a priest or bishop during the weekly worship service. Water is always used; **Chrism**, holy oil that has been consecrated by a bishop, may also be used. The ECUSA recognizes other Christian baptisms with water in the name of the Trinitarian God.

Ecumenical Involvement

The Episcopal Church is a member of both the **World Council of Churches (WCC)** and the **National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC)**.

In addition, it is part of a worldwide **Anglican Communion** which consists of 38 self-governing church bodies in over 164 countries with approximately 76 million members. The **Archbishop of Canterbury** is the primate of honor for the Anglican Communion worldwide, but has no direct governance of the individual national Churches.

Through the Anglican Communion, the Episcopal Church has been involved in official ecumenical dialogues with the **Roman Catholic Church** for over thirty years. They are also involved in ecumenical discussions with several **Orthodox churches**.

In July 2000 the Episcopal Church entered into a relationship of **full communion** with the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)**.

Important Episcopal Resources

The Book of Common Prayer. (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation and the Seabury Press, 1979).

The Hymnal 1982. (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 1982).

The Episcopal Church Annual 2005. Kenneth Quigley, editor. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2001).