

Author: The Reverend Ashley Wright

Q: What is the polity of the Episcopal Church?

A: The word "polity" comes from the Greek language, means "city", and refers to the form of government used in a city or nation. For churches, polity refers to the way a church is organized and governed. Most Christian denominations fall into one of four types of polity. Congregational polity means governance by every member of a local, autonomous, independent congregation. Presbyterian polity depends upon governing by elected representatives of clergy and lay people. Episcopal polity governs by bishops, either chosen or elected. But Anglican polity is a combination of presbyterial and episcopal traditions, where bishops share power with clergy and laity under a constitution.

Very few people in The Episcopal Church have total power to make unilateral decisions; on the other hand, not everyone has equal authority to make communal decisions. Ideally, those who have authority will listen carefully, reflect, study and pray about every side of an issue before a decision is made. And after a decision has been made, they will openly communicate how they arrived at their decision. Of course, not everyone will agree, but it is always hoped that everyone will understand and that while not everyone will be able to totally support a decision, it is hoped that everyone can live with it.

The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church is the document which contains the polity of The Episcopal Church in the United States. First drawn up in 1789, it has been revised by General Convention over the centuries as change and understanding have necessitated. Each diocese also has a constitution and canons, which serve as an outline drafted to govern local church life. Canon Law does not dominate the existence of The Episcopal Church, and our church can be seen as loose, rather than strict in interpreting our canons. Our common life as a church may seem complicated, but we have, over time, tried to balance the tensions always evident in church life between change and continuity, diversity and unity.

Source: Archivist and Historian Mary Klein

WHERE AUTHORITY COMES FROM (based on a training from the Vital Congregations Committee in the Diocese of Michigan)

In the Episcopal Church we believe that authority is given to us through baptism. We all have equal and mutual authority through our baptism:

- * The Holy Spirit is active in everyone's life, gives us each unique and incomplete gifts, and unites us in a larger whole (I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). Every person's gift is important to the Body of Christ. We are each more significant because we are part of Christ's Body.
- * All baptized persons have a ministry (Baptismal Covenant; TEC Title III, Canon 1).
- * This is true for everyone: communicants, vestry members, deacons, priests, and bishops.

THE "FLOW" OF BAPTISMAL AUTHORITY: LOCAL CONGREGATION

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The process of sharing Baptismal authority begins with the “communicants” in the parish. At the parish annual meeting, the “adult communicants in good standing” vote to elect new members of the vestry, thereby investing some of their baptismal authority in the vestry. This means that a person who is over 16, has their baptism recorded, has received Holy Communion at least three times in the congregation, is faithful in worship, and who works, prays and gives for the spread of God’s Kingdom is a member.

When a communicant votes in the annual meeting of her parish, she invests SOME of her baptismal authority in the Vestry. The vestry members receive that authority as responsibility to make decisions on behalf of the parish. A vestry’s election of wardens and appointment of a rector are further examples of investing SOME of one’s baptismal authority in others.

THE "FLOW" OF BAPTISMAL AUTHORITY: DIOCESE

The congregation also invests baptismal authority in the three delegates it sends to the annual Diocesan Convention. Delegates have seat, voice, and vote and are charged with

- * Electing a bishop (when required);
- * Passing the diocesan budget;
- * Electing leaders of the diocese (Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, Trustees, etc.), who in turn receive the baptismal authority as responsibility to make their particular decisions on behalf of the diocese;
- * Setting policy and canon law for the diocese; and
- * Every three years, electing the Diocese of Utah deputies to General Convention.

THE "FLOW" OF BAPTISMAL AUTHORITY: THE WIDER CHURCH

When the Diocesan Bishop(s) and the Deputies attend the General Convention, they take with them the baptismal authority invested in them to make decisions for the Episcopal Church on behalf of the Diocese that sent them. They in turn elect the President of the House of Deputies (from among the deputies) and the Presiding Bishop (from among the bishops).

SHARED AUTHORITY

When we invest our baptismal authority in others through election, we “surrender” our authority to them, which they then receive as “responsibility” to exercise that authority on our behalf for the good of the whole Body (similar to a representative democracy). The method of sharing is expressed in a variety of rules and structures, all of which are incomplete and imperfect representations of the Body of Christ which we need to live into:

- * National Constitution and Canons
- * State corporate laws
- * Diocesan Constitution and Canons
- * Church Bylaws

On every level of our Church, authority is shared between lay people and ordained people.

- * Parish Level – Annual Parish Meeting -----> Vestry, Wardens, and Clergy share authority

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- * Diocesan Level – Bishop and Standing Committee, Diocesan Convention (voting in bicameral houses: clergy and lay), Diocesan Council, other Diocesan committees
- * National Level – General Convention (voting in bicameral houses: bishops and deputies), Presiding Bishop, commissions and committees

Through our Baptismal Covenant, both lay and ordained are fully responsible for the mission and operations of the Body. A body does not function and has no power (see, e.g., Matthew 18:18-20) unless the parts work together. Every part takes on significant responsibility for leading some parts of this ministry and collaborating with the other parts.

Baptismal authority belongs to all of us and is best used in a church community working together and supporting one another. If we are not generous and loving in every direction of this flow of authority, we will not thrive. Jesus proclaims the Great Commandment as the primary rule in God's Kingdom (Luke 10:27). We need always to keep that overall objective in mind.

Q: Why is there a confession in the liturgy we use each Sunday?

A: There are many different forms of confession used in Anglican churches, but they all descend from Thomas Cranmer's "Order for Communion" (1548). The original words of the confession were:

"Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word, and deed, Against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, And are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, Forgive us all that is past; And grant that we may ever hereafter Serve and please thee In newness of life, To the honour and glory of thy Name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

The confession we use at St. Luke's is from the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, Holy Eucharist Rite II and reads:

"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen."

Notice that they both follow the same pattern! For centuries, we have been confessing this way. Confession helps members recognize their need for God's grace and receive a direct assurance of forgiveness. It is a way to unburden the heart, grow spiritually, and acknowledge one's weakness

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through a communal, shared confession that speaks to our collective participation in sinful structures and ways of being.

The confession in our liturgy provides the following:

- **Corporate acknowledgment:** The entire congregation confesses wrongdoing together. This is a communal recognition that all people are in need of God's mercy.
- **Aids spiritual health:** The General Confession is intended to help individuals recognize their need for God's grace to be their "healthiest selves".
- **Part of regular worship:** It typically occurs during the Eucharist, following the prayers of the people, and precedes the Peace. It therefore prepares us to exchange the Peace with our fellow parishioners with a clean heart so that we can approach the altar in full fellowship with the Body of Christ.
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The Episcopal Church also allows for private confession, which is called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in the Book of Common Prayer. This practice is optional but available to anyone who would like it. Oftentimes I have people informally confess things on their hearts through pastoral care, and this is different. The Reconciliation of a Penitent is a formal rite. The priest dons a stole, listens, provides counsel, and proclaims an absolution. Note that an absolution is not a mystical washing away of sin performed by the priest. God has already forgiven and I, as priest, remind the confessor of this truth. God alone forgives and God has already done so. The absolution restores a sense of harmony to the person who hears it. Note also that The Episcopal Church requires priests to report any abuse (even though the State of Utah allows an exemption for clergy). I disclose this responsibility to anyone who approaches me for formal confession.

Reconciliation of a Penitent provides the following:

- **Ease of troubled consciences:** This is a voluntary, sacramental rite for those whose consciences are troubled or burdened.
- **A deeper assurance:** It provides a more personal and individual assurance of pardon and absolution from a priest, which can be a great comfort.
- **Spiritual guidance:** It offers a chance for spiritual direction and to hear God's forgiveness declared directly to the individual, helping to unburden the heart.
- **Not required:** The Episcopal Church uses the saying "all may, some should, none must" to describe private confession, emphasizing that it is a gift and not a mandatory practice.

The 1549 version of the Book of Common Prayer recognized that, while some Christians will find they need sacramental confession, others will find "their humble confession to GOD, and the generall confession to the churche" sufficient to satisfy their conscience; neither group is to judge the other, so that charity might be preeminent in all things.

Q: Why do we say the Nicene Creed during our worship service?

A: Creeds were historically used as teaching tools for catechumens (Christian converts under instruction before baptism). In cultures where the average person was not literate, creeds allowed

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groups of people to be taught using easily memorizable, understandable, and recitable chunks of information. As such, the creeds were a kind of memory-device. They summarized the long and complex story of Scripture, but they were short enough so that catechumens could remember them. As Cyril of Jerusalem emphasized, the creeds were simple enough so that new Christians “can acquire the whole doctrine of the Christian faith in a few articles and so prevent any soul from being lost by not learning the faith.”

Today, The Episcopal Church recites the Nicene Creed during worship to affirm a shared, universal Christian faith that has been established for centuries. It is a foundational statement of belief about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit that helps define what the church stands for, unites the congregation with other Christians throughout history, and is a central part of our Eucharist service.

Reasons for reciting the Nicene Creed:

- **Statement of faith:** The Creed is a comprehensive summary of core Christian beliefs, including the nature of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ.
- **Historical unity:** It connects Episcopalians to the universal Christian church across time and geography, acknowledging a shared belief with other traditions.
- **Community and tradition:** Reciting the Creed is a communal spiritual practice that reinforces commitment to the church's core convictions and traditions, especially in a modern culture that often emphasizes individualism.
- **Liturgical practice:** The Creed is part of the worship service, specifically the Eucharist (Holy Communion), and is recited to publicly declare the faith of the community.
- **Defining doctrine:** The Creed helps to define the church's theological understanding and standards of teaching.
- **Historical context:** It was originally developed by bishops in the 4th century to address theological disputes and establish right belief concerning Jesus Christ.

One thing that resonates for me, personally, is the use of the word "We." "We" reminds me that my faith journey is one that I travel with others; loved ones, my parish family, Christians throughout the world, and the historical saints. "We" is a word that demonstrates our intimate connectedness as well as a commitment to remain connected with each other. "We" suggests that we are all in this together, wherever we may each find ourselves on the path to Christ. We may all have our own, individual reasons for being at church and those reasons are diverse and unique. But, we are all in the same room together affirming our faith as one body.

The Nicene Creed also uses the word "in" instead of "that." So, for example, we do not say "We believe that..." We say, "We believe in..." This small word matters because it shows us that we are not merely assenting to a list of doctrines and dogma. We are professing, with sincere hope and thankfulness for our lives in God, in Christ, in the Holy Spirit and in the life of the Church itself. Belonging to the Episcopal Church is how I believe. Being with you at St. Luke's allows me to

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keep believing. Reciting our shared faith together affirms that place that my believing comes from. "In" is about relationship.

Lastly, many people feel confused about the statement "We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church..." Notice that the "c" in "catholic." is not capitalized. We are not speaking here of the Roman Catholic Church. The word "catholic" itself means "universal" or "all-embracing." When we say that we believe in the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, we are uniting ourselves to a universal and all-embracing fellowship of Christian believers throughout time and space. We are stating our belief *in* that universal church as an expression of faith and hope for the future.

Ben Sternke writes, "Confessing the creed participates in the life the creed speaks of. To say "We believe..." is not so much to confess individual confidence in historical facts, but to confess corporate belonging and participation in the Church of Jesus Christ, across time and space. We perform our belonging to the communion of saints throughout the world and throughout the ages who belong to Christ and participate in the life of God by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Q: What is the difference between a priest and deacon in the Episcopal Church?

A: In the Episcopal Church, priests are pastors who serve as the primary leaders of a congregation, preaching, presiding over sacraments, and guiding the community. Deacons are ministers of service, called to "bridge" the church and the world by serving those in need, interpreting the needs of the world to the church, and assisting priests and bishops in worship and sacraments.

Here are the definitions from *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*:

Deacons are members of one of three distinct orders of ordained ministry (with bishops and presbyters/priests). In the Episcopal Church a deacon exercises "a special ministry of servanthood" directly under the deacon's bishop, serving all people and especially those in need (BCP, p. 543). This definition reflects the practice of the early church, in which deacons were ordained "not to the priesthood but to the servanthood [diakonia, "ministry"] of the bishop" (Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition). In the ancient Greek-speaking world the term diakonos meant an intermediary who acted or spoke for a superior. Christian deacons were agents of the bishop, often with oversight of charity. Since ancient times the liturgical functions of deacons have suggested the activity of angels. As they proclaim the gospel, lead intercessions, wait at the eucharistic table, and direct the order of the assembly, deacons act as sacred messengers, agents, and attendants. The revival of the order of deacons in the twentieth century has emphasized social care and service. Many bishops in the Episcopal Church expect their deacons to promote care of the needy outside the church. In addition to those ordained deacon as a permanent vocation, there are also "transitional deacons" who are ordained deacon as a preliminary step toward ordination as a priest. This practice is required by the canons of the Episcopal Church,

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but its theology and usefulness has been questioned by those who favor direct ordination to the order for which one is chosen.

Derived from the Greek *presbyteros*, "elder," the term "**Priest**" is used as a synonym for presbyter. Presbyters constituted a collegiate ruling body of institutions in Judaism. The Catechism notes that "the ministry of a priest or presbyter" is "to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to proclaim the gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God" (BCP, p. 856). The term "priest" is more frequently used than "presbyter" in the Episcopal Church. The ordination service for this order of ministry is titled "The Ordination of a Priest" (BCP, p. 525). After the Reformation, the Anglican Church used the term "priest" for the second order of ministry. Some Protestant churches began to use the term "presbyter" for the minister who preaches the Word and administers the sacraments. The 1979 BCP uses both terms. Some members of the Episcopal Church have favored the use of "presbyter" because of historic association of the term "priest" with a narrow eucharistic piety or with OT sacrifice.

Here are some of the key distinctions:

Priests:

- **Pastoral Leadership:** Priests act as pastors to the people, leading the congregation in the faith. They are responsible for pastoral care.
- **Sacramental Ministry:** They are authorized to celebrate the sacraments, including the Eucharist.
- **Gospel Proclamation:** Priests proclaim the Gospel and administer sacraments in the name of God.
- **Church Leadership:** They are the senior ordained ministers in a parish, serving under the bishop.
- **Sacramental Rites:** Priests hear confessions, anoint the sick, officiate marriages, and officiate funerals.
- Works "in persona Christi capitis" (in the person of Christ the Head) and leads the community in worship and sacraments.

Deacons:

- **Service and Ministry:** Deacons are called to a life of service, focusing on those in need, such as the poor, weak, sick, and lonely.
- **Bridge Between Church and World:** They interpret the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world to the church and are often seen as being at the "intersection of world and church".
- **Assisting in Worship:** They assist bishops and priests in public worship and the administration of sacraments.
- **Proclaiming the Gospel:** Deacons have a specific role in proclaiming the Gospel, often reading it during a service.

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- **Serving the Marginalized:** Their ministry often involves working with marginalized communities, and they are seen as a "bridge leader" for these groups.
- Can baptize and be a witness to marriage, but cannot perform other sacraments.
- Assists the bishop or priest at the altar, sets the table, proclaims the gospel, and can give the dismissal.

What is the difference between a transistional deacon and a vocational deacon?

Transitional Deacon: Candidates for the priesthood are ordained first into the diaconate as Transitional Deacons, for a period of at least six months before final ordination into the priesthood. Reverend Ashley was ordained a deacon in April of 2023 and as a priest in November 2023. Our Seminarian, Anne-Marie, will be ordained a transitional deacon at the end of her formation process and prior to her being ordained a priest.

Vocational Deacon: A deacon whose final vocation and calling is to permanently serve the church and the world as a deacon. Both Reverend Deacon Pam and Reverend Deacon Sandra are vocational deacons.

Priests are ordained as deacons first because the role of a deacon is seen as a fundamental step of service that prepares them for the priesthood and enables them to work alongside deacons in the future. This "transitional deacon" period, (remember - at least six months), allows the candidate to embody the servant-like qualities of the diaconate before moving on to the priestly ministry of presiding over the sacraments.

Q: What is the difference between a Senior Warden and a Junior Warden?

A: The Wardens are both officers of a parish. *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church* states "Two wardens are typically selected to serve with members of the vestry. The wardens are generally ranked "senior" and "junior." The mode of selection and duties of the wardens are determined by state law, diocesan canon, or parish by-laws. The senior warden is usually the primary elected lay leader of the congregation, and serves as a principal liaison between the parish and the rector. The junior warden is often given responsibility for the upkeep of the parish buildings and grounds. The senior warden typically presides at vestry meetings in the absence of the rector, and the junior warden presides at vestry meetings if both the rector and the senior warden are absent. In case of clerical vacancy, the senior warden may be the ecclesiastical authority of the parish for certain purposes. In the BCP service for the Celebration of a New Ministry (p. 559), the wardens begin the institution at the beginning of the service by addressing the bishop. They express the congregation's intent to welcome the new minister and state that the new minister has been selected in a prayerful and lawful manner. If the new minister is the rector or vicar of the congregation, a warden may present the keys of the church to the new minister during the induction ceremony. In some parishes, the senior warden is known as the "priest's warden," and the junior warden is known as the "people's warden." Historically, in the Church of England, one warden was named by the priest and the other chosen by the congregation."

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In keeping with history, the priest's warden in most Episcopal churches is appointed by the rector or clergy-in-charge of a parish. At St. Luke's, I appointed Ted Clayton as the Senior Warden. Ted serves as my representative, while Lee Barber, our Junior Warden, is elected from among the vestry (which was elected by the congregation) to represent the laity's interests.

Priest's Warden (or Senior Warden)

- **Appointment:** Usually appointed by the priest or rector.
- **Role:** Acts as a liaison and assistant to the clergy, representing the priest in parish matters.
- **Focus:** Supports the clergy, oversees church officers, and maintains order.

People's Warden (or Junior Warden)

- **Appointment:** Elected by the congregation through the vestry.
- **Role:** Represents the interests of the laity and the congregation.
- **Focus:** Ensures parishioners' voices are heard, promotes financial transparency, and acts as a mediator.

Both Wardens

- **Shared responsibilities:** Wardens of both types generally work together as lay partners with the clergy to manage the parish's day-to-day operations.
- **Fiduciary duty:** The Junior Warden is a member of the vestry and has fiduciary and legal responsibility for the parish. The Senior Warden is an ex officio member of the vestry with seat and voice but no vote.
- **Historical context:** The terms "rector's warden" and "people's warden" are rooted in a time when the appointment method determined their primary focus, but today their roles often overlap, and many churches simply refer to them as senior and junior wardens.

I will often consult with my Senior Warden on matters I need assistance with. For example, I asked my warden to order vestments for one of our deacon's ordinations, or I ask them to make announcements on my behalf or to communicate news from the vestry to you. The Senior Warden helps me communicate back and forth with the parish more efficiently. Similarly, parishioners often approach the Junior Warden to offer feedback to share with me and with the vestry. The Junior Warden pays extra attention to the church campus and the needs of our parish family.

Q: Why does worship begin with a procession?

A: In the Episcopal church, our worship begins and ends with a procession of the crucifer (cross bearer), acolytes (carrying torches), choir members and clergy down the aisle to the front of the church. Starting worship with a procession is an ancient tradition. St. John's, Gloucester, has a blog that states "In the third century, a nun named Egeria journaled that everyone processed into the church behind a cross. The Venerable Bede (623-735) used the processional as a way of

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proclaiming the love of Christ in our lives. He journeyed to pagan lands in what is today Canterbury, England and processed all the way through the town so everyone could see the cross and the people.”

These early processions were ritualized. Those who lead worship by participating in the service often process from the nave to the sanctuary. The nave is where the congregation sits and the sanctuary is the raised red platform that holds our altar area. As the procession passes, some people choose to bow to the cross as a sign of respect and reverence. The cross leads our attention to the front where the Eucharist will happen and people will experience God's presence through worship. At the end of the service, the recessional leads us back out into the world. These processions indicate that Christ is with us during worship but also accompanies us as we leave St. Luke's to go out into the mission field.

I have also heard it said that the procession mirrors the Book of Exodus where a "pillar of cloud" (God) led the Israelites through the wilderness, providing a visible sign of God's presence and direction during the day.

We also have a shorter procession, called a "gospel procession" where the crucifer and acolytes lead the deacon into the aisle for a reading of the Gospel text.

So then, a procession in the Episcopal Church is a symbolic and choreographed movement that represents the Christian journey from the secular world into the sacred space of worship and then back out into the world. Our procession also symbolizes our pilgrimage toward God, bringing the liturgy's symbols like the cross and gospel book into the midst of the community to show that the church is for everyone.

Symbolic meanings of the procession:

- **Journey:** It symbolizes the pilgrimage of the Christian life, moving from our daily lives into the presence of God for worship, and then being sent back out into the world to serve.
- **Christ's presence:** The cross leading the procession signifies that Christians follow Christ, and the cross itself is central to our faith and the mission we are sent out to do.
- **Bringing the divine to the people:** A gospel procession brings the sacred text to the congregation, symbolizing how God came into human history to be with his people.
- **Transition:** It is a way to move from the secular world into a sacred space and time for worship, separating the holy from the ordinary.

Examples of processions in worship:

- **Entrance procession:** The service begins with the clergy, choir, and other servers walking in procession down the aisle, often carrying a processional cross, torches, and in some churches, banners.
- **Gospel procession:** During the service, the gospel book may be processed to the center of the congregation to be read, bringing the Good News to where the people are.

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- **Offertory procession:** Representatives may bring the offerings of bread, wine, and other gifts to the altar.
- **Other occasions:** Special processions are held for events like baptisms (to the font), weddings, and the burial of the dead (from the church).

Note that people bow to the altar as they pass it to acknowledge the sacred space where the symbols of our faith play out.

Q: How do the parish and diocese work together and why do we pay a parish assessment?

A: Parishes and dioceses work together in a structure where parishes are local congregations and the diocese is a regional collection of parishes led by a bishop. The collaboration between parishes and the diocese includes shared governance through annual conventions, where parish delegates elect diocesan leaders and approve the budget, and through the diocese providing pastoral care, administrative support, and mission-oriented programs to its parishes.

Governance and leadership:

- **Diocesan leadership:** The bishop oversees the diocese, and clergy and lay representatives from parishes help lead and manage the diocese's work, often through a council or other administrative bodies. For example, Reverend Ashley serves on the Diocesan Standing Committee and Don Wood serves on the Diocesan Council.
- **Annual conventions:** Parishes send delegates to the diocesan convention to vote on the budget, elect deputies to the national General Convention, and choose members for the Council of Advice.
- **Covenant of Ministry:** The relationship between a parish and its leader, particularly a priest-in-charge, is formalized through a covenant that outlines the responsibilities of both parties and is often facilitated by the diocese.

Support and ministry:

- **Pastoral care:** The bishop provides pastoral care and, in some cases, sacramental support, which may be delegated to another bishop when a diocese is in need or has specific circumstances, like during COVID-19.
- **Administrative support:** Dioceses offer administrative and financial education/support (such as payroll) to parishes, including guidelines for compensation and benefits.
- **Mission and outreach:** The diocese helps coordinate and support mission and outreach programs that are often carried out at the parish level.

Relationship dynamics:

- **Hierarchical structure:** Parishes are the foundational, local part of the church, while the diocese is the next level of organization, encompassing many parishes in a specific geographic area.

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- **Mutual support:** The relationship is intended to be one of mutual support, with the diocese providing resources and oversight and parishes providing the local community for worship and mission.
- **National connection:** Through the diocesan convention's election of deputies to the General Convention, the local parish helps shape the broader direction of the national Episcopal Church.

To answer the next part of the question, parishes pay an assessment to the diocese to fund shared diocesan-level services, administration, and ministries that benefit the entire region, such as clergy support (salaries, benefits, pensions), legal services, education, and outreach to the poor. This contribution is a percentage of the parish's income and allows for centralized support and coordination across all parishes in the diocese.

What the assessment pays for:

- **Central administration:** The assessment funds the day-to-day operations of the central diocesan offices, including staff and facilities.
- **Clergy support:** It helps cover costs for clergy, such as medical insurance and pension plans.
- **Education and evangelization:** Funds support diocesan-wide efforts in education, religious instruction, and outreach to various communities, including the poor, immigrants, and incarcerated.
- **Specialized ministries:** Assessments support ministries and services that a single parish might not be able to run on its own, such as a diocesan tribunal or legal counsel.
- **Shared services:** Some dioceses use assessment funds for services like an office of communications or historical archive upkeep that are provided to all parishes.

How the assessment is calculated:

- **Percentage of income:** The assessment is typically a percentage of the parish's "normal operating income," which includes most regular donations, but not bequests or other specific designated funds.
- **Varies by diocese:** The specific percentage and calculation can vary from diocese to diocese.

Our Bishop makes an annual visitation to St. Luke's. These visits further demonstrate the love and care the parish and diocese share. It is a wonderful thing to belong to a church where all use their spiritual gifts to bless one another and be Christ's hands in our community. Between the diocese and parish, we all have a role to play and work to do.

Q: What is the difference between mission churches and parish churches?

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A: Beginning as a mission church, St. Luke's worked hard to become a parish and was granted that status in 2015.

As far as every-day workings go, both parish churches and mission churches look much the same. Both have worshiping communities that work hard to support the life of their church. Many of the ministries, missions, and ways of being together look and work similarly. The differences lie at the operational level. A parish is a church that can financially support its own operation. They also have a greater degree of independence in how they operate. So, for example, a parish selects and hires its own **rector**. "Rector" is the title for the priest-in-charge of a parish. As you have already learned, parishes have elected lay officials called a Vestry. The vestry votes on financial matters concerning the church (they are the financial authority of the parish) and functions as a council of advice for the rector. In last week's newsletter you also learned that parishes contribute a portion of their budget to the diocese as a part of mutual ministry support. That money is used by the diocese to, among other things, support congregations that cannot financially support themselves. Parishes also have a greater degree of control over their property and assets.

A congregation that cannot sustain itself financially is called a mission. Missions receive financial support from the diocese to operate. Because the diocese is supporting them, the Bishop also exercises more control in selecting the priest-in-charge of the congregation. The Bishop may appoint someone or work with the mission to select and approve of a priest-in-charge. A Bishop can also veto someone suggested by the congregation; he or she has final say. A priest leading a mission is called a **vicar**. Another difference is that the group of elected lay leaders is called a Bishop's Committee. They oversee the business and financial operations of the mission but require Diocesan approval for major decisions. When a mission can financially support itself for a period of time, they can petition the diocese for parish status. *It's also possible that a parish can decline in membership, be unable to sustain itself, and may revert back to a mission status.* When this happens, the congregation may lose some control over property or assets.

In our diocese, not all missions have permanent vicars. Some missions can only support someone in a part-time role and they may share clergy with other missions or use supply priests. Supply priests celebrate the Eucharist with the congregation on Sunday(s) but are not with them throughout the week. Supply priests do not perform pastoral care or work in an administrative capacity. Some priests are bi-vocational, which means they work in another field and are also trained as priests to work part-time. Some Dioceses assign bi-vocational priests to non-stipendiary positions as priests-in-charge of missions that cannot support a fulltime vicar. Mission churches rely on robust lay leadership to keep the every-day business of the church running.

Parishes:

- * Financial status: self-supporting
- * Priest's Title: Rector
- * Lay leadership: Vestry

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- * Legal structure: often organized as a corporation
- * Independence: greater financial and operational independence
- * Typical Path: May start as a mission and grow to become a parish

Mission Churches:

- * Financial Status: Receives financial support from the diocese in the form of a grant
- * Priest's Title: Vicar
- * Lay Leadership: Bishop's Committee
- * Legal Structure: Directly under the Bishop and Diocesan Council
- * Independence: Less independent, operating under the direct care of the Bishop
- * Typical path: Often a starting point for new congregations that will grow to become a parish with time

St. Luke's has been self-sustaining ever since 2015. This is one reason we have a stewardship campaign every year; to each contribute toward a budget that will allow us to remain independent, strong, and invested in God's work in Park City. Even as a parish, we have a strong relationship with the Diocese of Utah. It is a true blessing to have a Diocese and this is one reason we pay a parish assessment - to support mission churches, through grants. Were we ever to revert to that status, we would receive the same kind of consideration and support.

Q: Why does the Episcopal Church have multiple Eucharistic prayers and what is the structure of those prayers?

A: You might notice that the Book of Common Prayer has several eucharistic prayers that the priest can choose from. There is also a supplement to worship, called "Enriching our Worship" that has additional authorized prayers to use. While these prayers appear to be very different, they all follow the same structure. Understanding that structure will allow you to better understand the prayers or perhaps even attempt to write your own as an exercise. In Seminary, I wrote a eucharistic prayer for use in an outdoor worship space and it was a good way for me to learn about all the theological components that make the prayer whole. Note: only prayers approved and authorized by the Standing Liturgical Commission in the Episcopal Church (and passed through convention) can be used at a principal Sunday Eucharist service. However, the Book of Common Prayer has a section titled "An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist" that provides a general framework for a eucharistic service in other settings. Look it up and see what you think.

The Eucharistic prayers we use in the Episcopal Church follow an ancient pattern. An Episcopal Eucharistic Prayer, or Great Thanksgiving, follows a consistent structure within the larger Holy Eucharist service, featuring: a dialogue (**Sursum Corda**), a thanksgiving for God's work (**Preface**), a hymn of praise (**Sanctus**), the Last Supper narrative (**Institution Narrative**), an appeal for the Holy Spirit (**Epiclesis**), intercessions, memorial, and concluding with a Doxology

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and "Great Amen." It moves from general praise to specific remembrance of Christ, making present the sacrifice and gifts of bread and wine.

Key Components of the Eucharistic Prayer:

1. **Dialogue (Sursum Corda):** A call-and-response between the celebrant and people ("The Lord be with you," "Lift up your hearts," "We lift them to the Lord," etc.) to prepare for prayer.
2. **Thanksgiving (Preface):** The priest gives thanks for God's salvation history, often tailored to the season (e.g., Christmas, Easter). So, for Advent, you will hear "It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, God Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. Because you sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing."
3. **Hymn of Praise (Sanctus & Benedictus):** The congregation sings or says "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might; Heaven and earth are full of your glory! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest" (Sanctus), "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest!" (Benedictus). In doing so we join the angels in praise.
4. **Institution Narrative:** The priest recounts Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper, consecrating the bread and wine.
5. **Memorial Acclamation:** A brief response by the people remembering Christ's death and resurrection. "Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith..."
6. **Epiclesis (Invocation of the Spirit):** A prayer asking the Holy Spirit to bless and make these gifts the Body and Blood of Christ.
7. **Intercessions:** Prayers for the Church, the world, the local community, and the departed. Sometimes these intercessions are part of the eucharistic prayer itself. Othertimes they are said during the Prayers of the People and are not restated during the eucharistic prayer.
8. **Doxology & Great Amen:** A final, majestic praise to God, ending with the people's affirming "Amen".

The Eucharistic Prayer is the heart of the **Liturgy of the Table**, which follows the **Liturgy of the Word** (readings, sermon, Creed) in the Holy Eucharist service. Both the Liturgy of the Table and the Liturgy of the Word together make the full Eucharist service. They flow in and out of one another and must occur together. The gospel must be listened to and preached, the creed affirmed, prayers said, confession made, and peace exchanged before one is prepared to take the bread and wine. After the eucharistic prayer, the congregation says the Lord's Prayer, breaks the bread, and shares communion.

Q: Why does an acolyte wash the hands of the priest before communion?

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A: This ceremonial washing is known as the "lavabo," derived from the Latin "I will wash." The lavabo is performed directly after the Offertory (a fancy word that means "gift-bringing," in other words, the gifts of bread and wine that are brought to the altar) and before the Great Thanksgiving (the eucharistic prayer). The lavabo is a symbolic gesture of spiritual purification, using a small bowl and pitcher, signifying readiness to handle holy things. Sometimes a prayer from Psalm 26 is said during this time, although not all priests do this.

The lavabo is not in the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, and is therefore optional. Many in the Episcopal Church find it to be a meaningful ritual because it echoes ancient traditions of priests cleansing themselves before sacred duties - See Exodus 30:17-21.

In Summary:

- **Symbolism:** Represents the priest's desire for inner purity, acknowledging unworthiness before handling the Blessed Sacrament, echoing the psalmist's plea, "I will wash my hands in innocence, O Lord, that I may go in procession round your altar" (Psalm 26:6).
- **The Act:** An acolyte or server pours water from a pitcher over the priest's hands into a small bowl (also called a lavabo bowl), while the priest prays silently or aloud.
- **Equipment:** Involves a lavabo bowl, a pitcher (flagon), and a towel.
- **Context:** Occurs after the gifts (bread and wine) are presented but before the Eucharistic Prayer (Great Thanksgiving).
- **Origin:** A practice with roots in ancient Hebrew temple rituals and early Christian practices, emphasizing purity for sacred ministry.

In essence, the lavabo is a quiet, centering moment for the priest (and sometimes servers) to focus on their spiritual state before leading the congregation in the central act of worship, symbolizing readiness and reverence.

All members of the church are eligible to train as acolytes and may assist in this important ritual.

Q: What is the “via media” in Anglican theology?

A: The *via media* (Latin for "middle way") is a phrase that describes the Anglican Church's theological identity as a balance between different religious extremes. Historically, this concept has evolved through several distinct interpretations. Let's take a look at them here:

The phrase was coined in the 16th Century during the reign of Elizabeth the I in England, emerging as part of the Elizabethan Settlement as a path between Roman Catholicism and radical Puritanism, later evolving to also represent a middle road between different Protestant traditions, particularly Lutheranism and Calvinism (Reformed Christianity). Under Queen Elizabeth I, the church retained traditional Catholic structures (like our bishops and the structure of our liturgy) while adopting Reformed theology, (such as the authority of Scripture and eliminating papal authority).

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In the 19th Century, John Henry Newman created "The Oxford Movement" and wrote a book in 1837 called *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*. Newman and the members of his movement (called "Tractarians") argued that Anglicanism was a "middle way" because it remained "Catholic" by keeping apostolic succession and the sacraments without "Roman errors" (such as the papacy), and that it is also "Protestant" without the radical reformation that some denominations were perceived to have underwent.

So how is this history relevant to us now? We use the "middle way" as a framework to integrate three primary sources of authority, often called by Episcopalians the "three-legged stool," a phrase created by theologian Richard Hooker.

The legs of the three-legged stool are:

- **Scripture:** The authority for faith and practice.
- **Reason:** The use of human intellect to interpret faith and apply it to new contexts (this also includes our experiences).
- **Tradition:** Respect for the historical practices and teachings of the early church.

It is worth remembering that a three legged stool will become unbalanced and topple if the legs are not exactly the same length. One of the above sources of authority cannot be prioritized over the other two - all are connected and must inform one another for us to remain balanced and stay within the "middle way."

The *via media* is often seen as a "Big Tent" approach that allows for a wide range of theological diversity, taken from both Catholic and Protestant sources. This diversity includes:

- **Anglo-Catholic:** High church traditions emphasizing sacraments and liturgy.
- **Evangelical:** Low church traditions emphasizing personal conversion and the Bible.
- **Liberal/Broad:** A focus on modern social issues and inclusive practice.

You will find all of these elements present in Anglicanism and each parish and diocese has it's own "flavor" or emphasis. Additionally, each parish may represent a combination of these elements. The take away is that to embrace the concept of the "middle way" means staying away from extremes and incorporating a range of diverse beliefs and experiences into the life of the church. Essentially, we have a flexible framework inside set boundaries and quite a bit of diversity in our pews. Which leads me to one final piece of information - the distinction between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy*. *Orthodoxy* refers to correct doctrines (or dogma), creeds, and theological principles. *Orthopraxy* emphasizes correct conduct, including ethical behavior, rituals, and liturgical practices. The Episcopal Church is more orthopraxic than orthodox. This means that we allow for an accept a wide range of theological understandings and interpretations but emphasize common or communal worship and living in community together in specific ways.

Give some thought to St. Luke's when you worship with us. Do you experience it as Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical, Liberal/Broad or a mixture of all three? How do we balance orthodoxy

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and orthopraxy? How can you apply the "three-legged stool" in your own life? Do you view us as more Catholic or Protestant or can you see how we are both?

Q: What does “Anglican” mean?

A: The Episcopal Church is Anglican, with Anglicanism being a theological school with its own emphases. Anglicanism is a broad Christian tradition that blends Catholic and Protestant elements, often described as the "middle way" or *via media* (see last week's rector's corner). Anglicanism is rooted in the English Reformation but maintains the historic episcopate (bishops) and sacraments. Anglicanism upholds scripture, tradition, and reason as authoritative, upholds a commitment to the Creeds, uses the Book of Common Prayer, and has a diverse, yet unified, approach to faith that welcomes evangelical catholic, and charismatic expressions. To review:

- **Scripture, Tradition, Reason:** A "three-legged stool" approach, using the Bible as primary but balanced with historical tradition and human reason.
- **Via Media (Middle Way):** A distinctive path between Roman Catholicism and more radical Protestantism, seeking unity through essential beliefs while allowing for diverse secondary doctrines.
- **Catholic Roots & Protestant Reformation:** Originated from the Church of England's break with Rome, incorporating reformed theology while retaining Catholic structures like bishops (episcopacy) and sacraments.
- **Sacraments:** Recognizes Baptism and Holy Communion (Eucharist) as central.
- **Liturgy:** Strong emphasis on structured worship through the Book of Common Prayer, emphasizing intentional, thoughtful praise.

Key Beliefs & Practices

- **Trinity:** Belief in one God in three persons: Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit.
- **Salvation:** Acknowledges sin and God's reconciling work through Jesus Christ, with salvation understood through faith and good works.
- **Ministry:** Accepts the threefold ordained ministry (bishops, priests, deacons).

Unity in Diversity

- Anglicanism fosters a diverse global family (the Anglican Communion) where different expressions of Christianity (evangelical, charismatic, traditional) can coexist under shared essential doctrines, aiming to be both catholic and evangelical.

The Episcopal Church belongs to the Anglican Communion, which is a global federation of our 40 autonomous churches (provinces) worldwide, united by shared history, traditions, and worship, stemming from the Church of England, with the Archbishop of Canterbury serving as a spiritual focus and leader. It is the third-largest Christian communion globally, with about 85 million members.

Key Characteristics of the Communion:

- **Global & Autonomous:** Composed of independent national churches (like the Episcopal Church) that govern themselves but share common heritage.
- **Spiritual Head:** The Archbishop of Canterbury is the symbolic head, but holds no formal authority over other provinces.
- **Shared Heritage:** United by loyalty and common doctrines, worship patterns (often from the Book of Common Prayer), and sacraments.
- **Blend of Traditions:** Theology incorporates both Catholic structure (bishops, sacraments) and Protestant Reformation principles (Scripture as authoritative).
- **Instruments of Communion:** Four bodies foster unity: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council.

Our own Presiding Bishop attends the Lambeth Conference in England and holds the title of "Primate." In essence, the Anglican Communion is a diverse, worldwide family of churches that finds unity in its shared origins and spiritual bonds, rather than a strict international constitution. The Episcopal Church is the U.S. province of the worldwide Anglican Communion, sharing its roots with the Church of England but operating as an autonomous, self-governing body that recognizes the Archbishop of Canterbury as a spiritual head, not a direct authority. It connects through shared theology, liturgy (like the Book of Common Prayer), sacraments, and apostolic succession, while being a distinct national church formed after the American Revolution when colonial Anglican clergy sought independence from the British Crown, leading to Scottish bishops ordaining America's first bishops.

Connections:

- **Shared Heritage:** The Episcopal Church grew from the Church of England and maintains its historical lineage, adhering to similar doctrines and traditions.
- **Autonomous Province:** It's one of many "sister churches" in the Anglican Communion, each governing its own affairs (e.g., Nippon Sei Ko Kai in Japan, Church of Nigeria).
- **Spiritual Unity:** The Anglican Communion is a voluntary association of these churches, united by shared faith, not a strict hierarchical structure.
- **Book of Common Prayer:** A central text for worship and liturgy, ensuring consistency across member churches.
- **Apostolic Succession:** Belief in the unbroken line of bishops from the Apostles, with the Episcopal Church tracing its bishops through the Scottish Episcopal Church after the American Revolution.

Important Note:

- **Independence:** While connected, the Episcopal Church (like other provinces) is not under the direct rule of the Church of England; it's a national church for the U.S., territories, and Taiwan.

Note that divisions and impaired communion sometimes occur over theological issues and can mean that some churches, while claiming Anglican identity, are not in communion with

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Canterbury or all other provinces and may not belong to the Anglican Communion. To take an example from our own history: when the consecration of the first gay bishop, Eugene Robinson, occurred in the nineties, St. Luke's parish divided theologically. Those who left the Episcopal Church over the issue formed a branch of the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA). ACNA is not a member of the Anglican Communion and is not recognized by that body, despite having the word "Anglican" in its title. To see a list of member churches, visit <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/member-churches.aspx>

Q: Why does the Episcopal Church have a Presiding Bishop?

A: The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church serves as its chief pastor (titled "primate"), leading church-wide policy and strategy, speaking on behalf of the church, overseeing national church administration, and presiding over the House of Bishops. To use an analogy, the Presiding Bishop is like the acting CEO of the organization that is the Episcopal Church, while also acting as the spiritual head for our denomination. The Presiding Bishop also consecrates bishops and visits dioceses throughout the church.

What are the responsibilities of the Presiding Bishop?

- **Leadership & Vision:** Develops and articulates church policy and strategic direction.
- **Spiritual Oversight:** Acts as chief pastor, providing spiritual guidance and care, and preaching God's Word to the world.
- **Representation:** Serves as the public face and voice of the Episcopal Church.
- **Episcopal Governance:** Leads the House of Bishops, oversees the consecration of new bishops, and provides for interim episcopal oversight during diocesan vacancies.
- **Administration:** Oversees the staff and administration of the Episcopal Church Center (located in New York).
- **Ecumenical Relations:** Represents the church in its relationships with other Christian denominations.

How is the Presiding Bishop elected and where does he/she work?

- The Presiding Bishop is elected by the General Convention for a nine-year term.
- He/she holds the title of "The Most Reverend."
- The Presiding Bishop's official seat is the Cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Washington, D.C., with his/her office located in New York City.

Does the Presiding Bishop have ultimate authority in the church?

No. The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church has *limited* authority and oversight over other bishops and acts as chief pastor and president of the House of Bishops, but their power is not absolute like an archbishop in some other Christian traditions. Instead, their role is primarily one of leadership, coordination, and representing the church, with **ultimate authority residing in the General Convention**, which sets the church's direction and can discipline bishops. The Presiding Bishop leads the church's mission and administration but must act in consistency with

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the General Convention's decisions, exercising disciplinary power rarely and for serious canonical violations, not to control doctrine.

In summary:

- **The Presiding Bishop is the President of the House of Bishops:** Presides over the bishops, but doesn't command them as a monarch or archbishop would.
- **Limited Oversight:** Has disciplinary authority for significant breaches of church canons (laws) but uses it infrequently.
- **Chief Pastor & Primate:** Provides overall leadership and speaks for the church in the public sphere.
- **Executive Role:** Oversees church administration and policy execution, reporting to General Convention.
- **Subject to General Convention:** The Presiding Bishop's authority stems from and is subordinate to the General Convention, the church's highest legislative body, which holds ultimate power over bishops.

What the Presiding Bishop does not have:

- Unlike some Anglican primates, the Episcopal Church's Presiding Bishop does not have broad administrative authority over other bishops' dioceses.
- The term "Archbishop" isn't used in the Episcopal Church because it implies greater jurisdiction than the Presiding Bishop holds.

In essence, the Presiding Bishop is a first among equals, a unifying leader and administrator, but not a supreme ruler over other bishops, who retain significant autonomy in their dioceses. If you would like to learn more about our current Presiding Bishop, his name is Sean Rowe and you can read his biography on the official website of The Episcopal Church.

Q: How do the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies work?

A: Did you know that of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, 32 were Anglicans who later became Episcopalians? That's 57.1 percent of all who signed! So, the way these men organized our nation mirrors the organization of the newly formed Episcopal Church (the American version of the Church of England, formed after English settlers gained Independence).

What is the House of Bishops?

The House of Bishops in The Episcopal Church is one of the two legislative bodies (along with the House of Deputies) at the triennial General Convention, comprising all active and retired bishops. These bishops meet to discuss church matters, elect leadership (such as the Presiding Bishop), provide guidance to one another, and act as a key governing body for the Episcopal Church.

Who's in it?

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- All bishops: diocesan, coadjutor, suffragan, and assistant bishops, plus retired bishops with voice, seat, and vote.
- A coadjutor bishop is an assistant bishop with the crucial right of succession, meaning they automatically become the new diocesan bishop when the current one retires, dies, or resigns, ensuring a seamless transition and avoiding leadership vacuums in a diocese.
- A suffragan bishop is an ordained assistant bishop elected to support the diocesan bishop in a large or complex diocese. Unlike a Bishop Coadjutor, a suffragan does not automatically succeed the diocesan bishop. They are elected by a convention, possess full episcopal orders, and serve under the direction of the diocesan bishop.

What do they do?

- **Govern:** They are a crucial part of the General Convention, which legislates for the entire church.
- **Elect:** They elect the Presiding Bishop (subject to Deputy confirmation) and other church leaders.
- **Meet between Conventions:** They hold separate meetings between General Conventions to address current church and societal issues.
- **Provide Leadership:** They offer theological reflection and guidance, fostering connection among bishops facing challenges in their dioceses.

How it works:

- During General Convention, the House of Bishops meets concurrently with the House of Deputies, and resolutions must pass both houses in identical forms to become church law.

What is the House of Deputies?

The House of Deputies is the other legislative body comprising the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. It acts as a primary governing body, consisting of elected lay and clergy representatives from every diocese who meet every three years to determine church policy, budget, and doctrine.

Interesting Details About the House of Deputies:

- **Composition:** Comprised of four lay deputies and four clergy deputies from each diocese, plus representatives from the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, Navajoland, and others.
- **Legislative Function:** Acts as the lower house, but in conjunction with the House of Bishops, it passes canons (laws), amends the Book of Common Prayer, and sets the church's mission and budget.
- **Leadership:** The House is led by the President of the House of Deputies, elected every three years, who serves as vice-chair of the Executive Council and holds a major leadership role alongside the Presiding Bishop.

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- **Role in Election:** It confirms the election of the Presiding Bishop, who is chosen by the House of Bishops.

The House of Deputies ensures democratic representation, allowing both ordained priests and laypeople (non-ordained) to vote on critical matters affecting the Episcopal Church.

So, in summary, the House of Bishops and House of Deputies constitute a bicameral General Convention, meeting every three years to govern the Episcopal Church by acting independently yet requiring mutual consent on all legislation, including budgets, canons, and prayer book changes. They share authority, with the House of Bishops focusing on episcopal oversight and the House of Deputies representing clerical and lay voices.

- **Legislative Process:** Both houses must pass identical language for a resolution to adopt it. If one house amends a resolution, it is returned to the other for concurrence.
- **Election of the Presiding Bishop:** The House of Bishops elects the Presiding Bishop, but this choice requires confirmation by the House of Deputies.
- **Joint Sessions & Committees:** While they usually meet separately, they gather for joint sessions to hear reports or the budget presentation. They also operate together on committees such as the Executive Council, which manages church affairs between conventions.
- **Leadership:** The Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies often work together to coordinate, such as on the Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Arrangements.

There are many advantages to this system, some of which are:

- **Checks and Balances:** The House of Bishops (representing the apostolic, pastoral oversight) and the House of Deputies (representing the clergy and laity of dioceses) act as a check on each other, preventing any single group from unilaterally driving policy.
- **Diverse Representation:** The House of Deputies includes four priests or deacons and four lay people from each diocese, ensuring that the voice of the laity is directly involved in, and holds equal power over, the legislative process.
- **Deliberate and Careful Action:** The requirement for both houses to agree on legislation encourages careful consideration, reducing the likelihood of hasty or impulsive decisions.
- **Broad Consensus-Building:** Because resolutions must pass both houses, the system forces collaboration between the bishops and the House of Deputies, leading to legislation that has broader support across the entire church.
- **Thematic Focus:** While the House of Bishops often focuses on pastoral care, theology, and the overall state of the church, the House of Deputies, being a larger and more varied body (approx. 750+ members), brings a more grassroots perspective to the legislative process.

Q: What is General Convention?

A: The General Convention is the triennial, bicameral governing body of The Episcopal Church, comprising the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies (clergy and lay representatives). I wrote about the House of Bishops and House of Deputies last week. General Convention acts as the church's highest legislative authority, passing resolutions to set policy, amend canons, and adopt budgets, with both houses required to pass legislation in identical form.

"An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church" reads: "The national legislative body of the Episcopal Church. It consists of a House of Bishops, which includes all active and retired bishops, and a House of Deputies, which includes four lay persons and four clergy from each diocese, each area mission, and the Convocation of the American Churches in Europe. The Convention meets every three years. The Houses meet and act separately, and both must concur to adopt legislation. The General Convention alone has authority to amend the Prayer Book and the church's Constitution, to amend the canons (laws) of the church, and to determine the program and budget of the General Convention, including the missionary, educational, and social programs it authorizes. A majority of bishops may request the Presiding Bishop to call a Special General Convention. Special General Conventions met in 1821 and in 1969. The General Convention elects twenty of the forty members of the Executive Council, which administers policy and program between the triennial meetings of the General Convention."

Key Aspects of General Convention:

- **Structure:** It consists of two separate houses that meet concurrently: the House of Bishops (all active/retired bishops) and the House of Deputies (four clergy and four lay persons from each of the 100+ dioceses).
- **Legislative Process:** Proposed resolutions regarding church doctrine, policy, or, for example, social issues are referred to committees, which hold open hearings before the houses vote.
- **Authority:** The convention has the power to amend the Book of Common Prayer, change church laws (canons), and adopt the church's budget.
- **Timing:** It meets every three years (triennially).
- **Between Sessions:** The **Executive Council** and various interim bodies, committees, and commissions handle ongoing work between conventions.

The 81st General Convention took place in June 2024 in Louisville, Kentucky.

So if General Convention is responsible for any updates to the Book of Common Prayer, you may wonder why we are still using one from 1979! The Episcopal Church is in a long-term process to revise the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, with a new, fully revised edition not expected until at least 2030. Current plans involve testing new, inclusive-language materials over several years, with initial votes on revisions potentially occurring at the 2027 General

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Convention and final approval in 2030. As you see, change is often deliberate and truly requires the denomination to be on the same page before large-scale revisions are adopted.

Key Details on the Revision Process:

- **Current Status:** The 81st General Convention in June 2024 took steps to redefine the prayer book to include a broader range of authorized, contemporary liturgical texts.
- **Trial Usage:** The church is using trial-use liturgies (such as new marriage rites) approved in 2024, which are part of a multi-year, multi-convention process.
- **Timeline:** The process is designed to be slow and thorough, with significant developments, such as a potential new edition, being considered at the 2027 and 2030 General Conventions.
- **Goal:** The aim is to create a more inclusive, modern, and representative prayer book that reflects current theological and liturgical trends.

While a new physical book is not expected for several years, the church is currently using authorized digital and trial-use resources, which can be found on sites like episcopalcommonprayer.org.

St. Luke's elects delegates to attend Diocesan convention every February at our annual meeting. It is at Diocesan convention that we elect delegates to attend General Convention.