

A Primer on

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

YOU ARE WELCOME HERE! — For whatever reason you came to worship here at St. Philip's please know that you are welcome. You are our guest and our goal is to offer you whatever assistance and hospitality we can. If you are new to Brunswick County and the Southport community and are looking for a church family we hope you will consider St. Philip's. Should you desire to know more about St. Philip's and the Episcopal Church we urge you to drop by the church office, or speak with any member of our church staff or vestry for more specific information. If you are simply passing through we thank you for being a part of our worship and wish you God speed in your travels. God bless you.

THE CHURCH — The Church is the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which all baptized persons are members.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH — The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP — Membership in the Church is by Holy Baptism. Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. The Church is an organism like a human family, and not an organization like a club or a business. Once God has claimed you as a son or daughter through baptism, you become a part of the Church community, even though you may become inactive and drift away.

THE METHOD OF BAPTISM — Baptism in the Episcopal Church is by full immersion or effusion (the pouring of water on the head). Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptisms administered by another denomination/communion are recognized as valid if the criteria for administration included water and the invocation of the Holy Trinity.

THE MINISTRY — All baptized persons have the right and responsibility to a ministry in the Church. There are four orders of ministry: Laity, Bishops, Priests and Deacons. There are also a number of religious orders and communities in the Episcopal Church with nuns, monks and friars. Many orders offer associate membership to persons desiring to live according to a

Rule of Life. Bishops in the Episcopal Church are elected by individual dioceses and are consecrated into the historic apostolic succession. Since the 1970's the Episcopal Church has ordained women to the priesthood. In 1988 the Diocese of Massachusetts elected the first woman to be bishop in a Church of the Anglican Communion.

CHURCH POLITY — Government in the Episcopal Church is a parallel of the United States civil government. The same persons who framed the Constitution after the American Revolution were involved in developing the structure of The Episcopal Church. The local Rector (priest given pastoral charge of a church), Vestry and Communicants correspond to the local Mayor, City Council and Citizens. The Bishop, Council, and Diocesan Convention correspond to the Governor, Cabinet and State Legislature. The Presiding Bishop, Executive Council and General Convention correspond to the President, Cabinet and Congress. An important distinction between the Episcopal Church and many other churches is that the Episcopal Church is not congregational in form or function. The Annual Meeting of the congregation (held in December of each year) is the time when all qualified members may elect members to the Vestry and hear detailed reports on the spiritual, administrative and financial life of the church. Between Annual Meetings the Vestry is the governing body of the parish, and with the Rector makes decisions for the good and well being of the church community.

MEMBERSHIP EXPECTATIONS — Members of the Church are expected to live in accordance with the Baptismal Covenant made by them/for them at their baptism. (See pages 302-305 in The Book of Common Prayer). The Episcopal Church affirms the tithe as the Christian standard for giving. The sacrificial thank-offering of the members of the Church is the means by which the Church continues and engages in mission and ministry. Members of St. Philip's are expected to take seriously the call to Christian stewardship by making regular offerings of their time, talent and treasure to the work of the Church. Ministry contact information and offering envelopes are available through the church office. St. Philip's strives to be faithful in accounting for the funds used in pursuit of the mission of the Church. The parish follows generally accepted principles of accounting (GAAP) and submits its financial records to an annual audit of all revenues and expenditures.

EPI SCOPAL CHURCH HISTORY — The Episcopal Church in the United States is a part of the continuous catholic (but not Roman) Church, and a member of the worldwide Anglican (meaning English) Communion. The Church of England was not started by King Henry VIII, but existed from early apostolic days. The Anglican Communion is the successor of nearly two thousand years of catholic and apostolic ministry rooted in the Church of England. Present day Bishops of the Episcopal Church trace their ordination back through a continuous line of “apostolic succession”, one person to the next, to the Twelve Apostles who were ordained by Christ. (See Acts 1:1-8) As the British Empire expanded around the world, the Church of England grew as well. Colonial days are gone, and the colonial churches, once owing their allegiance to the English crown, are now autonomous. Though independent in their governance, Anglican (Episcopal) Churches are bound together by tradition, Scripture, and the inheritance they have received from the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury leads the Anglican Communion pastorally and spiritually. There are some seventy-seven million members of the Anglican Communion, making it the second largest Christian body in the world. The Episcopal Church in the United States (ECUSA), numbering just over two million members, came into existence as an independent church after the American Revolution. Jurisdiction of ECUSA, composed of over one hundred dioceses, each led by a Bishop, falls under the leadership of a triennial General Convention and the Presiding Bishop, who is elected every nine years.

CHURCH BELIEFS — “We believe in one God...” are the opening words of the Nicene Creed used at every Eucharistic celebration. “I believe in God...” are the opening words of the Apostle’s Creed, the ancient creed of Baptism, used in the Church’s daily worship to recall our Baptismal Covenant. Both creeds are summary statements of Christian theology. The Episcopal Church believes and teaches that everything necessary to salvation is taught by, or comes out of, Holy Scripture. An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism, can be found starting on page 845 in The Book of Common Prayer. The phrase, “variety is the spice of life,” is one that aptly describes the Episcopal Church. Episcopalians hold a wide range of views, convictions and beliefs. A hallmark of the Anglican/Episcopal tradition is to seek unity in the essentials, liberty in the non-essentials, and charity in all things. The Episcopal Church grants great latitude in interpretation of doctrine. It tends to stress less the confession of particular beliefs than the use of The Book of Common Prayer as the source for public worship. The Church of England has always valued the life of the mind and

dialogue with fields of secular study. The Episcopal Church maintains this tradition, requiring its clergy to meet high standards for ordination and continuing education for all those in the active ordained ministry.

THE HOLY BIBLE — The Episcopal Church is a Bible-believing and Bible-using Church. The Church of England gave the world the King James Version of the Bible; the most enduring translation of Holy Scripture ever published. Church members are strongly encouraged to read and study the Bible on a regular basis, making it part of their Rule of Life. The Lectionary (see page 888 in The Book of Common Prayer) provides a schedule of Scripture readings for every Sunday of the year on a three year cycle. It also gives suggestions for daily readings at home or at Church. The Bible is honored as God's Word. Much of The Book of Common Prayer is taken directly from the Bible. The Bible is taught and preached in light of the whole catholic faith and teaching. One verse alone (taken out of context) cannot be taken to prove or disprove a personal belief. A variety of translations are authorized for public reading in church. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is the one used most frequently here at St. Philip's.

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER — The first prayer book was published in England in 1549. Its purpose was to unify the worship experience of the people through a common lectionary and prayer format. Although the prayer book has been revised many times and has been translated into many languages, it continues to be a key source of unity for Anglicans around the world. Each constituent member of the Anglican Communion produces a prayer book unique to their religious and cultural circumstances. While there are similarities between them, each one reflects the intimate understanding the people of a given geographical area have of their relationship with God through God's Son, Jesus Christ. The Episcopal Church currently uses The Book of Common Prayer authorized by the General Convention in 1979.

THE HYMNAL — The hymnal of the Episcopal Church is eclectic and varied. It is comprised of plainsong, spirituals, folk tunes, master works, and simple poetry. The principal book used is the Hymnal 1982. Unlike the Book of Common Prayer, any hymnal previously authorized for use in the Church remains in use when a new hymnal is published. The authorization of the Hymnal is the responsibility of the General Convention. In addition to the Hymnal 1982, the Episcopal Church has authorized other hymnal

supplements such as *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, which is an African–American Hymnal, and *Wonder, Love and Praise*, which is a collection of hymns and chants from around the world.

WORSHIP STYLES — St. Philip’s is a Eucharistic community. That means that the Holy Eucharist is honored as the principal form of worship. The Holy Eucharist is also known as The Mass, The Holy Communion, The Lord’s Supper or The Divine Liturgy. Other worship forms used throughout the church year include Morning and Evening Prayer, Compline and special worship services for Healing, Burial, Marriage, Ordinations, Baptisms and Confirmations. You will also note that worship in the Episcopal Church is interactive. The people are participants, not just spectators. The whole person is involved through hearing, seeing, speaking, smelling, singing, and by sitting, standing and kneeling. The use of color, symbols, and sounds is used to draw the wholeness of human consciousness into the worship experience.

THE PLACE OF WORSHIP — Upon entering the church there should be a noticeable atmosphere of worship and reverence. No matter the architectural style, it is the baptismal font, altar and cross, which stand as the visual and symbolic icons of the worship community. Candles are placed on the altar and used in procession as a reminder that Christ is the “Light of the World” (John 8:12). Flowers adorn the sanctuary to beautify God’s house and serve as a visible reminder of Jesus’ Resurrection. A lectern/pulpit/ambo stands to the right of the altar and is used for the proclamation of the Word of God. Here the Scriptures are read, a sermon/homily is preached and the Prayers of the People are offered to God.

CHURCH CUSTOMS — There are hundreds of historical customs from which to choose, and each congregation through the leadership of its ordained clergy selects those best suited to its needs. Some Episcopalians will make the sign of the cross during prayer. Some stand to pray while others kneel. What unites the congregation is the use of the Book of Common Prayer for the ordering of public worship, and an honest attempt to follow the doctrines and disciplines of the Episcopal Church. One may sometimes hear terms like “High Church”, “Broad Church”, or “Low Church” to describe differences between Episcopal Churches. Those terms are becoming obsolete (if they are not already), because “high” churches are recovering the importance of lay ministry and practical expressions of the

faith, while many “low” churches are embracing the richness of the Eucharistic heritage of the Church. While regional differences exist, they are not as prominent as they once were. Episcopal Church services are congregational, in that the entire baptized community is expected to participate fully in the worship service. Visitors and new members often wonder when to stand, sit, or kneel. The general rule is to stand to sing the hymns, to say the Creed, and at the reading of the Gospel. We sit for the reading of the Lesson/Epistle, the Psalm, sermon and for choir anthems. Prayer is offered either standing or kneeling. The most common practice at St. Philip’s is to kneel for the confession of sin, the absolution, the Prayers of the People, and the Eucharistic Prayer. It is also the custom of some to bow to the altar on entering and leaving the church as an act of reverence to Christ. Many Episcopalians, upon entering church, kneel in prayer; finding the quiet time before a worship service to be a time for personal meditation and devotion. St. Philip’s Chapel of the Cross, across Dry Street from the church offices, is also available for those wishing to spend quiet time in prayer and spiritual reflection.

CHURCH TITLES — There are many titles for offices of responsibility in the Church. Some vary in usage by local custom (such as “Father” as a title, or the office of Archdeacon) while others are uniformly standard throughout the Church. A Vicar (in the United States) is a priest in charge of a mission congregation (one not yet financially self-supporting). The Rector is the priest in charge of a congregation/parish (financially self-supporting). A Curate is a priest who assists a rector in parish ministry. A Dean is the priest in charge of a Cathedral Church, a seminary, or an administrative grouping of congregations within a diocese. The Diocesan Bishop is the duly elected and seated bishop who has charge of a diocese (geographical area). A Coadjutor Bishop is elected with the automatic right of succession upon the retirement (or death) of the Diocesan Bishop. A Suffragan Bishop is called to assist/serve the Diocesan Bishop, but has no right of succession. Many clergy and laity use the familial term “Father” (or “Mother”) as a title of address for a priest who is the pastoral and spiritual leader of a congregation. The word “Reverend” should not be used as a title by itself. It is an adjective, not a noun. A clergy person may be addressed as The Reverend John Smith, or The Reverend Jane Smith, but should not be addressed as Reverend Smith.

THE CHURCH YEAR — The Episcopal Church follows an early church liturgical year. The twelve months are divided into the six seasons of

Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. There are special saint's days and other holy days of observance throughout the year (see pages 15–18 in The Book of Common Prayer). Each season has its own special theme, color, symbols and observance. The structure of the Church Year is an orderly way to observe the key elements of the Christian faith and the mysteries of the life of Christ.

SALVATION — The Episcopal Church teaches that salvation is the divine gift of God, and is made available to us by the merits and through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior. Salvation is also a process. A conversion experience may start the salvation journey, but it continues all through life and into life beyond this mortal life. Baptism is the Church's rite of initiation and is the first important step in beginning our new life in Christ.

SACRAMENTS — The Episcopal Church is a sacramental church. A sacrament is most easily defined as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" (See page 857 in The Book of Common Prayer). The Church has defined seven sacraments as being especially significant for Christians. The two primary sacraments are Baptism and Holy Communion. The five other sacraments defined by the Church (not necessary for everyone) are marriage, ordination, confirmation, unction of the sick (Healing), and penance (private confession).

CHURCH ACTIVITIES — There are many opportunities for spiritual growth, community service, and Christian education offered by St. Philip's as well as the Diocese of East Carolina of which we are a member. Those opportunities include, but are not limited to: St. Philip's Church Women; The Daughters of the King; Lay Eucharistic Ministers/Visitors; Lay Readers; ecumenical service with our local Inter-Church Fellowship; Pastoral Care Minister; Christian Education teachers; Altar Guild; Flower Guild; and a number of elected leadership roles.