

WHO WE ARE

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH



Welcome

Welcome to our Holy Spirit Church family. Whether you are just passing through or searching for a parish home, we would like to tell you who we are.

History of the Church

The Episcopal Church descends from the Church of England which evolved from the Roman Catholic Church. Like Martin Luther, John Calvin and other reformers in the 16th century, the Church of England protested the Pope's authority; these protestors became known as Protestants. So the Church of England, and the Episcopal Church in the United States, are both catholic (heritage going back to the earliest Christian disciples) and protestant (protesting the authority of any one bishop such as the Pope). We are often called the *via media*, or middle way.

The Episcopal Church developed in the United States at the same time as the U.S. government. Many early American patriots were Anglicans (e.g., Washington, Jefferson, Madison), having come from the Church of England. So as the American Revolution nurtured a new form of democratic government, so, too, a new church was nurtured.

The Episcopal Church has a unique place in the spectrum of Christian experience. Our worship is rooted in scripture, with vibrant expression of prayer, music, sacrament, and word. Episcopalians have long stood for service to the wider community, and we express our faith in outreach and social concern; we attempt to “walk the talk” of Jesus’ teachings. We are known for asking good questions, rather than necessarily providing pat answers for complex issues. And we are known for our inclusiveness, recognizing that Christ’s banquet is large enough to include every person.

Some words which describe Episcopalian values:

- Open-minded and willing to live with ambiguity, knowing that truth is discerned by many paths.
- Searching, questioning, and using reason to explore new insights and possibilities.
- Intuitive, affirming the metaphorical, paradoxical, and symbolic.
- Aesthetic, understanding that truth, goodness, and beauty are paths to God.
- Moderate, holding the “middle ground” between extremes.
- Naturalistic, delighting in the rhythms of life grounded in Creation.
- Historical, valuing tradition and experience in understanding the present.
- Political, appreciating civic virtues and affirmation of free, peaceful, and public debate and discourse, and the role of the church in influencing social, political and economic life.

Our Beliefs

We believe in a loving God – Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer – who created the universe, who through Jesus Christ has remedied the human condition of sin and death, and who sustains us through love and grace.

We promise to follow Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. We believe the mission of the church is the restoration of all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

The cornerstones of our faith are **scripture, tradition, reason and experience.**

Scripture

Scripture is the word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The Old Testament recounts the story of God's love for the world from Creation until the time of Jesus. The New Testament contains Jesus' teachings, the accounts of his life as told by his followers, and the beginning of the early Christian church. Scripture is the ground of our faith and is read in public worship services and daily devotions. We are not biblical "literalists." That is, we study scripture in the context of history, and seek to interpret God's word in scripture for our own day. We have a willingness to live with diverse and changing interpretations of scripture, rather than attributing scripture with infallible certainty and binding prescriptions for all time and circumstance.

Tradition

Tradition is the embodiment of our experience as Christians throughout the centuries, shaped by the Bible, historic creeds, sacraments, and the ministry carried out by Christ's disciples. Tradition is expressed with many voices, including worship styles, languages, cultures, architecture, and music. Our tradition encourages this diversity. We seek to value each person's life and story, and invite each person to share in our Christian community.

Reason

We believe that our God-given ability to think critically and take responsibility for our actions is a vital part of our Christian faith. Reason, as a complement to scripture and tradition, leads us to seek answers to our own questions. Human reason is set in the context of our relationship with God, and God's call to us to live full and healthy lives.

Experience

We experience God's love and our spiritual journey in the context of community – both within the church and in the world-at-large. Our daily living experience also shapes our questions and nurtures our quest for a closer relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

If this description of our theology is interesting, feel free to call the clergy and set up a time for a visit. Also, each year we offer a refresher course that goes into some depth about who we are and what we believe. In the meantime join us in the Lord's Supper and be welcome.

WITH THANKS TO THE DIOCESE OF OLYMPIA