

Discussion Questions

Lesson One: The Wonderful and Sacred Mystery

1. In the Catechism on page 854 of The Book of Common Prayer, the church is described as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic." Which of these three characteristics is most important to you and why?
2. Why do you go to church?
3. How is the church different from other voluntary social organizations?

Lesson Two: Defend Your Church

1. In our church governance, we balance two opposing values: hierarchy and democracy. What are some of the gifts of this balance? What are some of the challenges?
2. What would our church be like without lay involvement?
3. How have you, at your church, experienced the ministry of your bishop?

Lesson Three: A Great Cloud of Witnesses

1. Is there a Saint who has been important to you in your life of faith? Who was that person, and why are they important?
2. Have you ever asked a Saint to pray for you? Why or why not?
3. The Saints include people who have committed nearly every sin, and yet God has worked through them to be bearers of Christ's love in the world. Do you find it empowering or discouraging to think of Saints as flawed?

Lesson Four: The Work You Give Us To Do

1. Can you see a difference between doing the things the might be immediately gratifying to you and doing the things that God calls you to do? When might these be the same and when might they be different?
2. Who are the people you know who are most clearly and abundantly living out their vocation? How can you tell they are doing what God called them to do?
3. Do you believe that you are doing what God has called you to do with your life? If so, what is that like? If not, why not?

The Takeaway

Lesson One: The Wonderful and Sacred Mystery

Church is the community of all the disciples everywhere throughout time who have followed and will follow Jesus. Anglicans believe in "one holy, catholic and apostolic church." One: Because there is one baptism, one Lord, and one faith, there's one church. We see all Christians as part of one global church. Holy: The church isn't like other organizations. It's holy because we believe that the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth; that it's a gift from God to us, and that God is imbued in the church. Catholic: universal. We practice a faith that is beyond our local church – practiced by Christians across the world; in centuries past and centuries to come. Apostolic: We trace our origins back to the apostles. Our practices were taught by the apostles – we gather for the breaking of bread and for the prayers, as they did. Anglican Christianity has a history of adapting the faith to local customs – it's been doing so since Pope Gregory sent Augustine to England in the 6th Century – and using that approach to teach the universal faith. At our best, we go around the world, meet local people, and adjust the faith – use local customs, costumes, music, traditions – but we keep our universal faith. At our worst, we have disregarded local people, customs, and traditions. Our ideal, however, has been a holy one: adaptation to spread the faith. The mission of the church is reconciliation: to reconcile us to one another and the world to God. Why go to church if God is everywhere? Churches are places set apart for us to know and experience God – thin places. But the best reason to come to church: we are meant to provoke one another to be better Christians; more devoted disciples of Jesus.

Lesson Two: Defend Your Church

How is the Episcopal Church organized? We avoid two extremes: We are not fully democratically governed. Some churches have all members vote on questions, and the clergy are there to serve those who can cast votes in that assembly. We are also not completely hierarchical. We don't have a single governing body (e.g. bishops) that makes all the decisions and hands them down to the people. We balance these opposites at all levels. Local congregations have rectors or vicars who govern the church and vestries, which govern and guide the church. Some decisions are delegated to the priest; some are delegated to the vestries. Both usually consult with others. Typically, the priest is the head of the vestry. Most Episcopal churches have annual meetings in which the people hear about what's going on with the church. Churches also elect people to represent them at the diocesan level. The diocese is a collection of congregations led by a bishop. Certain diocesan powers are delegated to the bishop and some are delegated to committees. Many dioceses hold annual conventions – clergy and lay people attend. From that group, representatives to General Convention are selected. General Convention is held every 3 years and governs the church on a national level. All the dioceses gather, and all the bishops. There's a house of bishops and a house of deputies – clergy and laypeople. All decisions at every level involve lay people. General Convention makes many important decisions that govern our worship life. The important idea to take away: as a lay person, you have a voice. You can use your voice to make important decisions. Bishops, however, protect our unity as a church and also have a voice. So the church balances a bottom-up/top-down approach.

The Takeaway (Continued)

Lesson Three: A Great Cloud of Witnesses

As Christians, we are never alone. We're with God and Jesus, the church in our community, and the communion of saints. The communion of saints means people with whom we worship. Some Saints have been set aside as particular examples of the life of faith lived out in real time. The Saints are teachers. They show us what a faithful life can look like – what it means to follow Jesus, sometimes to death. They teach us the history of the church – they have figured out how to follow Jesus in their unique places and times. Saints aren't remembered for being good or famous but because they pointed beyond themselves to Jesus Christ. They are also companions. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses – the Saints: those with us now and those who have died. We believe that when we die, life is changed, not ended. The Saints are real and present to us, even if they lived centuries ago. They are companions in our journey. Do we pray to Saints? The answer is yes and no. We don't think saints are closer to God or more heard by God. We ask them to talk to God for us the same way we might ask friends to pray for us. They are in the nearer presence of God, and they can be our prayer companions. How do people become saints? God makes Saints; the church recognizes them. We set aside certain people as Saints at General Convention. They need to have been dead at least 50 years, and their lives must be extraordinary examples of holiness.

Lesson Four: The Work You Give Us To Do

Some people are called to different ministries within the church, but most of us are called to do work outside in the world. That vocation is your vocation, and it's holy, because it's a calling from God. We know that God calls everyone to some sort of holy task – to use their passions and gift in the service of God's work in the world. It's important when discerning about vocation to think and reflect, to talk about it and test it with other people – but most importantly, to listen for God's call. It's not something that can be done quickly. You may experience a change in vocation over the course of your life. Wherever God calls us, God equips us to do the work that God calls us to do.

Walk in Love 4: The Church

With Scott Gunn and Melody Shobe

Participant's Guide

Welcome!

What makes Episcopalians unique among other Christians?

The basics may be similar, scripture, tradition, practice, etc., but there are certain nuances that make Anglican Christians different. Episcopal priests Scott Gunn and Melody Shobe unpack them in these four insightful video presentations that make up Part 4 - The Church:

- That Wonderful and Sacred Mystery (The Church)
- Defend Your Church (Structure and Governance)
- A Great Cloud of Witnesses (The Communion of Saints)
- The Work You Give Us to Do (Vocation)

This course is ideal for those who are new to the Episcopal faith as well as veterans looking to brush up on their knowledge.

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