

The following is taken from the Rev. Anne Gavin Ritchie's description of a 1998 course on the Anglican tradition, of which the Episcopal Church is a part. It gives a succinct overview of the Episcopal Church.

## **CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION: THE ANGLICAN TRADITION**

One of the greatest joys of my ministry is introducing people from other walks of faith to the Episcopal Church. I delight in presenting Anglicanism and its unique and powerful marriage of catholic and reformed traditions. We are catholic in ecclesiastical structure; our three orders of ordained ministry (bishops, priests, and deacons) reflect the practice of the early Church. Episcopal congregations do not stand alone but are organized into and connected within dioceses, each under the authority of a bishop. Our worship life is centered around the two sacraments our Lord instituted: Holy Eucharist and Holy Baptism. We celebrate the sacramental nature of other rites that have more specific focus: confirmation; matrimony; penance; ordination; the laying on of hands for healing.

We are reformed in that there is no central authority equivalent to a pope telling us what to think and believe. The Episcopal Church, like other national churches under the umbrella of the Anglican Communion, is autonomous and has its own system of governance. Because the framers of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church were by and large the same people shaping the Constitution of the United States, our church is democratic in structure and spirit. Our bishops are not appointed but elected by lay and clergy representatives to diocesan conventions. Rectors, the chief pastors of congregations, are elected by parish vestries, subject to the approval of the bishop.

The Episcopal Church resists easy classification of liberal or conservative, traditional or innovative. People of all theological persuasions call themselves Anglicans. Our diversity and predilection for robust dialogue can at times make us seem contentious to the point of chaos. However widely our positions may diverge, we are united in our use of the Book of Common Prayer. Ceremony and style may differ from one congregation to another, but the shape of the liturgy is the same. Reading and interpreting the Scripture lie at the heart of our worship life. Anglicans tend to use the Bible as a mirror of our deepest fears and longings. We recognize that we do not interpret the Bible so much as we invite the Bible to interpret us.