

History of the Episcopal Church

The beginnings of the Church of England, from which the Episcopal Church derives, date to at least the second century, when merchants and other travelers first brought Christianity to England. It is customary to regard St. Augustine of Canterbury's mission to England in 597 as marking the formal beginning of the church under papal authority, as it was to be throughout the Middle Ages.

CIVIL WAR PERIOD: When South Carolina seceded from the Union in 1860, she was followed by ten more southern states. In 1861, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America was formed. In its modern form, the church dates from the English Reformation of the 16th century, when royal supremacy was established and the authority of the papacy was repudiated. With the advent of British colonization, the Church of England was established on every continent. In time, these churches gained their independence, but retained connections with the mother church in the Anglican Communion.

SPREAD OF THE CHURCH: From the time of the Reformation, the Church of England followed explorers, traders, colonists, and missionaries into the far reaches of the known world. The colonial churches generally exercised administrative autonomy within the historical and creedal context of the mother church.

As the successor of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval English Church, it has valued and preserved much of the traditional framework of medieval Catholicism in church government, liturgy, and customs, while it also has usually held the fundamentals of Reformation faith.

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH: The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, who began invading Britain after Rome stopped governing the country in the 5th century, was undertaken by St. Augustine, a monk in Rome chosen by Pope Gregory I to lead a mission to the Anglo-Saxons. He arrived in 597, and within 90 years, all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England had gradually accepted Christianity.

In the 11th century, the Norman conquest of England (1066) united England more closely with the culture of Latin Europe. The English Church was reformed according to Roman ideas: local synods were revived, celibacy of the clergy was required, and the canon law of Western Europe was introduced into England.

The English Church shared in the religious unrest characteristic of the latter Middle Ages. John Wycliffe, the 14th century reformer and theologian, became a revolutionary critic of the papacy and is considered a major influence on the 16th century Protestant Reformation.

The break with the Roman papacy and the establishment of an independent Church of England came during the reign of Henry VIII of England (1509-47). When Pope Clement VIII refused to approve the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, the English Parliament, at Henry's insistence, passed a series of acts that separated the English Church from the Roman hierarchy, and, in 1534, made the English monarch the head of the English Church. The monasteries were suppressed, but few other changes were immediately made, since Henry intended that the English Church would remain Catholic, though separated from Rome.

After Henry's death, Protestant reforms of the Church were introduced during the six-year reign of Edward VI. In 1553, however, when Edward's half-sister, Mary, a Roman Catholic, succeeded to the throne, her repression and persecution of Protestants created sympathy for their cause.

When Elizabeth I, Henry's daughter, became queen in 1558, an independent Church of England was reestablished. The Book of Common Prayer (1549, final revision 1662) and the Thirty-Nine Articles (1571) became the standard for liturgy and doctrine.

MOVEMENTS WITHIN THE CHURCH: The Evangelical Movement in the 18th century tended to emphasize the Protestant heritage of the Church, while the Oxford Movement in the 19th century emphasized the Catholic heritage. These two attitudes have persisted in the Church, and are sometimes characterized as "Low Church" and "High Church." Since the 19th century, the Church has been active in the Ecumenical Movement.

POLITY OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND: The Church of England has maintained the episcopal form of government. It is divided into two provinces, Canterbury and York, each headed by an Archbishop, with Canterbury taking precedence over York. Provinces are divided into dioceses, each headed by a bishop and made up of several parishes.

The Church of England is identified by adherence to the threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, and by a common form of worship found in the Book of Common Prayer. The Church also is characterized by a common loyalty to Christian tradition, while seeking to accommodate a wide range of people and views. It holds in tension the authorities of tradition, reason, and the Bible, but asserts the primacy of the Bible. It thus seeks to combine Catholic, humanist, and reformed elements, historically represented by Anglo-Catholics (high church), Liberals (broad church), and Evangelicals (low church).

WORLDWIDE CHURCH POLITY: It was probably not until the first meeting of the Lambeth Conference in 1867 that there emerged among the various churches and councils a mutual consciousness of Anglicanism. Although its decisions do not bind the autonomous churches of the Anglican Communion, the Lambeth Conference has constituted the principal cohesive factor in Anglicanism. While population differences and other factors account for some variation in the basic structure among the churches, several elements do predominate. The diocese, under the leadership of a bishop, is the basic administrative unit throughout the communion. The diocese is a group of church communities (parishes) under the care of a pastor. In many of the national churches, several dioceses will be grouped together into provinces. In some, parishes may be grouped within a diocese into deaneries (rural) and archdeaneries (urban).

AMERICAN CHURCH HISTORY

EARLY PERIOD: Establishment of parishes on the North American continent began to spread steadily following the first recorded celebration of Holy Communion in New World in 1607 in Jamestown, Virginia. This conformed to the typical colonial expansion pattern of the English Church in other parts of the world at the time.

During the American Revolution, northern clergy tried to maintain ties with the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and to support England, while those in the South tended to be more sympathetic to the Revolution.

The "American Revolution left the Anglican parishes shattered, stripped of most of their financial support, weakened by the flight of many clergy and thousands of members, with a number of buildings destroyed and property lost," wrote Powell Mills Dawley in *Our Christian Heritage* (Morehouse-Gorham, 1959).

After the war, support for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was cut off, and public support of churches was withdrawn because of newly accepted principle of separation of church and state.

ESTABLISHMENT PERIOD: By 1784, most states agreed on the need to (1) draft a binding constitution for the whole church; (2) revise the English Book of Common Prayer to make it appropriate for use in the American church; and (3) obtain consecration of bishops in Apostolic Succession to give the American Church proper episcopal oversight and ministry.

However, church leaders were split on the position that organization of the American Church could proceed without bishops in Apostolic Succession.

Charles Inglis of New York left for England to seek ordination and later returned as the first Bishop of Nova Scotia. Many New England Episcopalians agreed with Inglis' approach to the argument, but southerners balked.

On March 25, 1783, ten Connecticut clergy elected Samuel Seabury as their bishop. Seabury traveled to England, but English canon law prevented the consecration of any clergyman who would not take the Oath of Allegiance to the English Crown. Seabury then sought consecration in the Scottish Episcopal Church, where he was ordained on Nov. 14, 1784 in Aberdeen. Thus, Seabury became the first bishop of the American Episcopal Church.

By 1786, English churchmen had helped change the law so the Church of England could offer episcopal consecration to those churches outside England.

On Feb. 4, 1787, the Archbishop of Canterbury and three other English bishops consecrated William White as Bishop of Pennsylvania and Samuel Provoost as Bishop of New York. Soon after, James Madison was consecrated in England as the Bishop of Virginia and President of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg.

When Seabury, White, Provoost, and Madison joined to consecrate Thomas Claggett in Trinity Church in New York in 1790, the episcopate in the American Church could declare its independence from Great Britain.

An assembly of the American Church met in Philadelphia in 1789 to unify all Episcopalians in the United States into a single national church. A constitution was adopted along with a set of canon laws. The English Book of Common Prayer was revised (principally in removing the prayer for the English monarch). This first American Book of Common Prayer was based mostly on the English Book of Common Prayer of 1662. Its consecration prayer was based on the Scottish Book of Common Prayer of 1764.

The new constitution provided for annual diocesan conventions with the bishop of the diocese as presiding officer. A national General Convention was established, composed of two legislative houses, modeled after the United States Congress. A system of checks and balances similar to that of the new federal system was incorporated into the Church's constitution.

As the United States began its westward expansion, the church followed. Missionary bishops went into the new territories to minister to the far-flung and sparsely populated western parishes and congregations.

States of America was established, in every way the same as before except for its name change and its loyalty to the Confederacy. But the northern church declined to recognize any separation. Throughout the war, churchmen on both sides maintained their old friendships and bonds of Christian union with each other, according to Dawley (*Our Christian Heritage*, Morehouse-Gorham, 1959).

Seven months after the fall of Richmond in 1865, the Confederate group quietly disbanded following the national convention, which had been held a scant month before.

AMERICAN CHURCH POLITY: Subsequent general conventions have added to, but not substantially changed a basic polity in which a democratic, lay-dominated parish structure exists in tension with an episcopally dominated central governance structure. Each self-supporting congregation (parish) elects its

lay governing board (vestry) for temporal affairs and its rector as spiritual leader. Congregations that are not self-supporting (missions) are directed by the bishop of the area. In a given area, the parishes and missions make up a diocese, headed by a bishop. All clergy and lay representation from all congregations meet annually in convention to conduct the business of the diocese. The convention elects the bishop to serve until death or retirement.

GENERAL CONVENTION: The dioceses and missionary districts in the United States meet triennially in General Convention. All bishops are members of the House of Bishops, and the House of Deputies is made up of equal numbers of clergy and laity. The Executive Council, the administrative agency of the General Convention, is headed by the Presiding Bishop (elected by the House of Bishops and confirmed by the House of Deputies). The Presiding Bishop also presides over the House of Bishops. Decisions at General Convention are made by joint-concurrence of the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops.

PROVINCES: The 109 dioceses of the Episcopal Church and three regional areas are organized into nine provinces, each governed by a synod consisting of a House of Bishops and a House of Deputies. The Episcopal Church is a part of the Anglican Communion.

MODERN PERIOD: Conventions of the 1950s and 1960s tended to ignore increasing pressure from women to demand ordination as deacons and priests in the church. The General Convention of 1970 allowed women ordination to the diaconate.

In 1974, eleven women presented themselves for ordination to the priesthood in Philadelphia. The House of Bishops declared the ordinations invalid, saying that the 11 women remained deacons.

After 1976, the eleven ordinations were regularized when the General Convention allowed women to be eligible for ordination to both the priesthood and the episcopate. Barbara Harris, the first woman bishop in the Anglican Communion, was elected as Bishop Suffragan of Massachusetts on Feb. 11, 1989.

A completely revised Book of Common Prayer was adopted in 1979, and an updated Hymnal was adopted in 1982.

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TIMELINE

1517: Martin Luther publishes 95 Theses, sparking the Protestant Reformation.

1521: Pope designates Henry VIII "Defender of the Faith." English monarchs to this day retain the title.

1529-36: Henry VIII and Parliament take over the administration of the Church in England. Destruction of monasteries ensues.

1547: Henry dies. He is succeeded by Edward VI, with Edward's uncle as Lord Protector.

1549: The first Book of Common Prayer is approved, with Thomas Cranmer as principal author.

1552: The second Book of Common Prayer is approved.

1553: Edward VI dies at age 16. Mary becomes Queen, restores Roman Catholicism, and burns Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley at the stake. She marries Philip II, the Roman Catholic monarch of Spain.

1558: Elizabeth I becomes Queen upon Mary's death and re-establishes the Church of England, with the English monarch as its highest earthly authority.

1559: The third Book of Common Prayer is approved. Puritans protest.

1563: The Thirty-Nine Articles are prepared; they are approved by Parliament in 1571.

1579: The first English-language Communion service is held in the Western Hemisphere (California) by Sir Francis Drake's chaplain.

1603: Elizabeth I dies at age 70; James I, of Scotland becomes king and authorizes a new translation of the Bible.

1607: The Church of England is established in the first permanent English-speaking settlement in the New World, Jamestown, Virginia. The Church of England is then also established in other mid-Atlantic and southern colonies.

1611: King James Version of the Bible is published.

1620: Pilgrims (Puritan religious refugees) land at Plymouth Rock.

1636: Harvard College is founded to train Congregational (Puritan) clergy.

1645: The Book of Common Prayer is outlawed by Puritan-controlled Parliament.

1649: King Charles I is executed in a revolution led by Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell, who became Lord Protector in 1653.

1658: Oliver Cromwell dies, and is succeeded by son Richard.

1660: Richard Cromwell is overthrown, and Charles II becomes king.

1662: The fourth Book of Common Prayer is approved, which is still in use by the Church of England.

1693: The College of William & Mary (Williamsburg, Virginia) is started by Church of England.

1699: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) is founded.

1701: Yale College is founded to educate Congregational clergy.

1701: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts is founded.

1607-1785: The Church of England in New World is overseen by the Bishop of London. The vestry system develops. Clergy are paid from taxes. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson serve on vestries.

1776: The Declaration of Independence is signed. Most Anglican clergy, who have sworn loyalty to the King in their ordinations, stay loyal.

1783: The Treaty of Paris ends the Revolutionary War.

1784: Samuel Seabury of Connecticut is consecrated the first overseas Anglican bishop by Scottish non-juring bishops, after being elected in Connecticut and rejected by Church of England bishops, who, legally, could not ordain him. Seabury promised to use the Scottish 1764 Communion service, based on the Eastern Orthodox service.

1785: The First General Convention of Episcopal Church is held, with clergy and lay representatives from Delaware, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia. The General Convention authorizes the preparation of an American Prayer Book and names itself the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

1786: The proposed American Book of Common Prayer is approved for use on a state-by-state basis.

1787: Samuel Provoost of New York and William White of Philadelphia are consecrated bishops by the Church of England. Seabury's Scottish consecration helped motivate Parliament and the Church of England to do this. Both continue to be rectors. The second General Convention adopts basically the present Episcopal Church structure. A revised Book of Common Prayer, prepared by White, is adopted; this version of the Book of Common Prayer is based on the 1662 Prayer Book with the exception of the 1764 Scottish Communion Service.

1804: Absalom Jones is ordained the first black priest in the Episcopal Church.

Early 1800s: Bishop Provoost of New York secures for New York a fair share of inheritance left by Queen Anne (d. 1714). Methodism gains strength in England and United States.

1817: General Convention authorizes the founding of the General Theological Seminary in New York City.

1823: The Diocese of Virginia establishes a second Episcopal seminary, Virginia Theological Seminary, in Alexandria.

1839: The Diocese of Virginia establishes the first high school in Virginia, Episcopal High School (adjacent to Virginia Theological Seminary).

1833: The Oxford Movement (Anglo-Catholic) begins in England. In the following decades, many new Religious Orders (i.e., monastic communities) were formed.

1861-65: During the American Civil War, Southern Episcopal dioceses join the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Confederate States of America, but are welcomed back after war ends. Other denominations experience long term (100+ years) splits.

1873: Evangelical, "low church"-oriented Reformed Episcopal Church is founded.

1885: The House of Bishops adopts the Chicago Quadrilateral. General Convention approves the Quadrilateral in 1886.

1888: The Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops adopts the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.

1892: Minor revisions are made to the Book of Common Prayer.

1919: The National Council (now the Executive Council) is established by General Convention. The Office of the Presiding Bishop is established to oversee national church programs.

1928: The revised Book of Common Prayer includes language updates and a new translation of Psalms. "Love, honor, and obey" is dropped from the bride's vows in the service of Holy Matrimony.

1940: A new Hymnal is approved.

1944: Henry St. George Tucker becomes the Episcopal Church's first full-time Presiding Bishop.

1961: John Hines of Texas is elected Presiding Bishop. Strong social justice commitments elicit negative reaction from conservatives.

1970: The first authorized women members join the House of Deputies.

1973: John Allin of Mississippi is elected Presiding Bishop for 12-year term.

1974: The first eleven women are ordained to priesthood in an "irregular" service in Philadelphia.

1976: General Convention approves the ordination of women, and "regularizes" 1974-75 ordinations. First reading on new Prayer Book.

1979: Second reading approves new (present) Book of Common Prayer.

1982: A new Hymnal is approved.

1985: Edmond Browning of Hawaii is elected Presiding Bishop for a 12-year term.

1989: Barbara Harris is consecrated the first woman bishop in the Anglican Communion.

1995: \$2.2-million embezzlement by the church's treasurer, Ellen Cooke, is uncovered. She is subsequently imprisoned.

1997: Frank Griswold of Chicago is elected Presiding Bishop for a 9-year term.

2000: General Convention approves "Called to Common Mission," a revised version of the Lutheran Concordat, establishing full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church, effective January 1, 2001.

2003: General Convention approves the Diocese of New Hampshire's election of the Rev. Canon Gene Robinson, an openly gay priest in a long-term committed relationship, as Bishop Coadjutor.

2006: Katharine Jefferts Schori of Nevada is elected the 26th Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church for a 9-year term. She is the first and only woman to be a churchwide leader in the Anglican Communion.

2009: General Convention charges the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to develop theological and liturgical resources for same-sex blessings and report back to the General Convention in 2012.

2011: The Episcopal Church inaugurates a full-communication relationship with the Northern and Southern provinces of the Moravian Church in North America.