

## **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding The Role of a Bishop**

The responses are short answers to sometimes complicated questions and are always subject to elaboration and even dispute. They should at least provide a frame of reference for further study and thought. You are invited to submit additional questions for inclusion and comments on the responses provided.

- What is a bishop?

A bishop is a successor to one of the Twelve Apostles, who has been consecrated by other bishops. In Old English it was "biscop", which came to be pronounced "bishop" and was later spelled that way. In the Episcopal Church, there are five kinds of bishops: Presiding, Diocesan, Assistant, Coadjutor, and Suffragan. No bishop is "higher" in rank than another. The five kinds merely define their function. We will be electing a Diocesan bishop who will replace our current bishop when he retires.

*Source: <http://www.trinityparish.com/glossary.html>*

- Have we always had bishops in the Church?

The Reformation raised many questions about the role of the bishop. In the English Reformation in particular, those of Puritan and Presbyterian persuasions sought to abolish the office of bishop and to vest authority in local congregations or in councils of elders. Those of a more catholic persuasion sought to retain bishops as the authority in the Church. The English Civil War settled the question in favor of bishops, and the Church of England has since maintained the traditional threefold orders of bishop, priest, and deacon. The governance of the Church of England, however, did undergo a change in the English Reformation in that the King (or Queen) and Parliament assumed a substantial role. The bishops were no longer in total control of the Church although, in most day to day affairs of the Church, the civil authorities deferred to the bishops.

- What power does the bishop have in the Episcopal Church?

The Episcopal Church, our branch of the Anglican Communion, retains the threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, but, from its inception, the role of bishops in the Episcopal Church has differed from the role that they had in the Church of England. In particular, legislative authority in the Episcopal Church as to doctrine, discipline, and worship resides in the General Convention, which in turn is composed of two houses, the House of Deputies (laity, priests, and deacons) and the House of bishops. Both houses must approve any legislative action of the convention, thus the power of the bishops is significantly less in the Episcopal Church than in the Church of England. The bishops, as a group, can take no action without approval of the House of Deputies except to the extent that the General Convention has previously delegated authority and responsibility to the bishops. Those delegations of authority and responsibility are found in the Book of Common Prayer, the Constitution, and the Canons.

- What is the role of a bishop?

The Outline of the Faith provided by our Book of Common Prayer answers the question: “What is the ministry of a bishop?” in this way:

The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ’s name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ’s ministry.” (BCP, p. 855)

Thus, a bishop is the chief priest and pastor of a diocese, and all other clergy derive their ministry from him or her. He or she is the guardian of the faith, responsible to see that the full truth of the Gospel of God in Christ is proclaimed. He or she administers the discipline of the Church and is responsible for seeing that the official worship of the Church is regularly used in the Churches under his care.

In the Book of Common Prayer, the Preface to the Ordination Rites states that bishops are those “who carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church.” (BCP p. 510) The Ordinal, in “The Examination,” goes on to state that a bishop is “called to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church; to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments of the New Covenant; to ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining bishops; and to be in all things a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ” (BCP p. 517). Furthermore, bishops, according to the Ordinal, are to share with their fellow bishops in the leadership of the Church throughout the world.

The Book of Common Prayer restricts the administration of the rites of confirmation and ordination to bishops and also gives bishops great authority over any variations in the liturgy to be permitted within the bishop’s diocese.

- How do bishops interact with the local parish? Why is the work of the bishop important to the typical parishioner?

When the bishop presides at a baptism he or she represents the whole church, for the individual being baptized is becoming a member of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in its broadest sense. It is also in this capacity that he or she administers the Confirmation and ordains persons to the ministry.

The bishop travels throughout the diocese during the year to be present in parishes at scheduled Confirmation services and at other times as appropriate and/or as invited. In addition to sacramental and teaching roles, the bishop might play an important role when a parish is in transition, in resolving conflicts at the parish level if such conflicts require either a pastoral consultative presence or a disciplinary intervention.

*Source: Looking at the Episcopal Church, William Sydnor, p. 100)*

- Why do bishops wear all those funny clothes?

From the time of its establishment during the reign of Henry VIII, the Anglican Church has been divided into two schools with regard to the use of vestments. In general, the ministers of the high church group tend to employ many of the vestments of the Roman Catholic Church. The ministers of the low church group tend to use fewer of the Roman vestments. In general, the cassock and surplice are the vestments most in use by the Anglican clergy. The stole is worn also at certain ceremonies. Dignitaries, including chaplains, cathedral canons, and bishops, wear for choir offices the broad black scarf under a hood. The cope is used at the altar in English cathedrals; it is also worn by bishops at great state occasions, such as the coronation of a sovereign. The usual dress for an Anglican bishop in ordinary ministrations consists of a rochet with a black or scarlet chimere, a loose robe with balloon sleeves.

*Source: <http://www.history.com/encyclopedia.do?articleId=225151>*

- What are the most important gifts that a bishop should possess? What kind of person should we be looking for in our new bishop?

Given the role of a bishop, gifts of discernment, teaching, wisdom, and pastoral sensitivity, are important. A bishop should have demonstrated skills in conflict resolution and listening. He/she should also be a theologian and faithful student of Scripture. His/her life should be deeply rooted in prayer and as well he/she should be able to articulate the core doctrines of the Christian faith a belief in which should be evident in the way he/ she lives out the Great Commandment (Love God and love your neighbor, see Mk.12:28-34) and the Great Commission (Go and make disciples of all nations, see Matt. 28: 16ff).

- What Canons (Church laws) are relevant to the role of a bishop?

While the Book of Common Prayer gives the broad outlines of a bishop's powers and responsibilities, the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church fill in some of the details:

- The bishop shall not exercise authority outside of his or her diocese without specific authorization to do so. (Art. II.3)
- The bishop is required to examine any candidate for ordination and to make sure that certain requirements are met before ordination. (Art. VIII)
- The bishop has to report information about the clergy and parishes in the diocese to the national Church. (Canon I.1.6)
- The bishop, along with the Standing Committee, must approve the sale or encumbrance of any real property of a parish. (Canon I.7.3; II.6.2)
- The bishop shall have a seat in the House of Bishops of the province. (Canon I.9.5)
- The bishop may call special meetings of the Standing Committee of the Diocese to seek its advice. (Canon I.12.1)

- The bishop must consent to any request of a non-Episcopal congregation to join the Church while retaining the use of its own rites, which request must be sent to the Presiding bishop. (Canon I.16.1)
- The bishop is charged with conferring the rite of confirmation and with the reception of those previously confirmed in another tradition. (Canon I.17.1)
- The bishop hears the appeal of any parishioner who has been denied any of the sacraments by a priest. (Canon I.17.6)
- The bishop is to receive notice of any marriage to be conducted within 30 days of the signing by the bride and groom of the Declaration of Intent. (Canon I.18.3)
- The bishop must consent to the marriage if either of the parties has previously been married and the former spouse is still alive. (Canon I.19.2,3)
- The bishop must authorize the use of translations of the Bible other than the ones specified in the Canons. (Canon II.2)
- The bishop must authorize the use of language other than English in worship unless there exists an authorized edition of the Book of Common Prayer in such language. (Canon II.4)
- The bishop shall not consecrate a Church until satisfied that land is owned by the Church and subject to the canons. (Canon II.6.1)
- The bishop shall encourage the discernment of vocations and assist those in the discernment process. (Canon III.3)
- The bishop licenses lay ministers. (Canon III.4.1)
- Deacons serve directly under the authority of and are accountable to the bishop. (Canon III.7.1)
- The bishop establishes procedures to identify and select persons for ordination to the priesthood. (Canon III.8.1)
- The bishop, in consultation with the Standing Committee, acts on requests by clergy to renounce their orders. (Canon III.9.8)
- The bishop has responsibility to mediate differences between a rector and the vestry when they are in dispute, and if necessary to render a judgment on the dispute. (Canon III.9.15,16)
- The bishop is required to pursue continuing education. (Canon III.12.2)
- The bishop is required to visit each congregation at least once every three years. (Canon III.12.3.a)

- The bishop may prepare pastoral letters that are required to be read to the congregations on matters of doctrine, discipline, or worship. (Canon III.12.3.b)
- The bishop must give an annual state of the diocese report covering various topics. (Canon III.12.3.d)
- The bishop must not perform Episcopal acts or officiate by preaching, ministering the Sacraments, or holding any public service outside his or her diocese without the permission of the bishop of the diocese in which the action is to take place. (Canon III.12.3.e)
- The bishop must reside in the diocese. (Canon III.12.4)
- The bishop has extensive responsibilities in matters of ecclesiastical discipline. (Canon IV)

It is apparent from the summary of constitutions and canons above that the national and diocesan constitutions and canons grant specific powers and impose specific responsibilities on the bishop, but the gist of the role of the bishop is, as set forth in the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer, “to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor” of the diocese. The bishop accomplishes this task, not so much with de jure authority granted by the constitutions and canons, but more by the bishop’s personal power of persuasion arising from the clergy’s and laity’s belief that the bishop has been called by God to shepherd them.

It should be noted that the bishops gathered at the 2008 Lambeth Conference undertook a study of what it means to be a bishop in the Anglican Communion, including the Episcopal Church. In the reflection document published at the conclusion of the conference, the participants defined the role of a bishop as follows:

- To gather the whole community in celebration, presiding over the sacraments and ordaining new priests and deacons
- To proclaim the Word of God as an apostolic witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- To be a teacher, guardian and interpreter of the faith and the apostolic tradition
- To be active in making and nurturing disciples
- To be a shepherd (pastor) of the whole people of God, with a special concern for the clergy of the diocese
- To be a prophetic voice for the voiceless.

As bishops, we are committed to the life of the Church, to the wider communities in which we minister and to civil society. We recognize that it is in our calling to be bridge-builders, reconcilers and symbols of unity, representing the local to the universal and the universal to the local, taking

our place within a world-wide college of bishops across the Communion and within the one Church of Christ.

While this understanding of the role of the bishop is not directed to the Episcopal Church in particular and does not purport to take into account our constitutions and canons, it is an appropriate summary of what a bishop is called to do.

- What do I do if I disagree with my bishop?

Generally speaking when an individual disagrees with a bishop on some matter, it is appropriate for that person to discuss the matter with his/her local priest/rector in order to gather information and perhaps glean a perspective that may not be readily apparent. In consultation with one's rector and vestry, it may be appropriate to express differences directly with the bishop.

- Do bishops appoint clergy to local parishes?

This varies from diocese to diocese and depending on the circumstances at each parish.

In recent years in the Diocese of Kentucky, the bishop has typically served as an "advisor" to parishes who conduct their own search for clergy. Most often parishes issue a call to clergy with the knowledge and consent of the bishop.

If a parish doesn't have the resources to conduct a search process, they may request that the bishop appoint a "priest in charge."

In fulfillment of his/her vow to "guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church" the bishop may find it necessary at some time to intervene in the process to select and appoint a parish clergy person in order to facilitate observance of Church canons.

The bishop is responsible for ensuring that proper background checks and ordination credentials are in order when a parish intends to issue a call.