



THE DIOCESE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

FAQ

Updated October 2020

Frequently asked questions and answers regarding the life and ministry of our diocese. We invite you to taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

WHO TO CONTACT

If you have more questions after reading this FAQ document, or you would like to have a conversation about where to go from here, please contact Archdeacon Callie Walpole at cwalpole@episcopalchurchsc.org or call the Diocesan Office at 843-259-2016.

UPDATE ON THE TRANSITION

What is a 'returning congregation'?

The South Carolina Supreme Court, in a decision on August 2, 2017, identified 29 parishes that must return to The Episcopal Church. They were among the parishes that filed a lawsuit against The Episcopal Church in 2013, and since then have been operating as part of a separate organization that left the church. According to the Supreme Court decision, these parishes belong in The Episcopal Church and its local diocese, The Episcopal Church in South Carolina (TECSC), which has been legally recognized as The Diocese of South Carolina since September 2019. The goal is for every returning congregation to live into its future as a vital, mission-minded Episcopal congregation, called to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Why haven't the properties been returned yet?

The state Supreme Court's decision was "remitted" to the 1st Judicial Circuit, where the initial lawsuit was filed, meaning that the higher court's decision is final and ready to be implemented. Judge Edgar W. Dickson has been meeting and corresponding with attorneys on both sides since the case was remitted to him in November 2017. Details about this and other legal matters can be found in the legal news on our [News Blog](#). Our requests of the court are aimed at ensuring that all the properties will be returned according to a reasonable, orderly schedule.

Is any progress being made?

Yes. This transition period has offered a time of discernment for church members in the affected parishes. Episcopalians in several parishes have been using this time to prepare so they will be ready to reorganize and move forward when their church returns. At the invitation of The Diocese of South Carolina, several attended our 2018 Diocesan Convention as unofficial observers, and the Convention granted them "seat and voice" to participate. Our hope is that returning congregations will be participate in each Diocesan Convention until we can be reunited.

Additionally, in September 2019, U.S. District Court Judge Richard Gergel ruled that our diocese, briefly known as The Episcopal Church in South Carolina (TECSC), is the historic Diocese of South Carolina, the group that has stayed with the Episcopal Church since its founding in 1789.

Are there online resources to answer my questions?

Yes. In addition to this FAQ (which can be found online at episcopalchurchsc.org),

- A [historical timeline](#) on our website explains the history of the division in our diocese.
- Our [Facebook Live Open Conversation](#), lets you experience a video conversation with Bishop Skip Adams and four other panelists. It has been watched thousands of times since it first aired.
- Bishop Skip Adams and Archdeacon Calhoun Walpole have [written an article](#) summarizing the Church's stance concerning current realities and calling for the restoration of unity.
- The weekly e-newsletter of The Diocese of South Carolina ([sign up here](#)) is an excellent source of up-to-date information. Our website and Facebook page are also good places to learn more.
- Two independent online blogs are available. These have no official connection with the diocese, but the writers are knowledgeable about the history of the division in our diocese and report on ongoing developments: Ron Caldwell's episcopalschismsc.blogspot.com, and Steve Skardon's scepiscopalians.com.
- We also invite you to read "[Our Future Work Together](#)," a message about reconciliation from our Missioner for Returning Congregations.

PEOPLE AND CHURCHES

What is the vision for churches that return to The Episcopal Church?

The vision for every church is best expressed by our Diocesan [Vision Statement](#):

The Episcopal Church in South Carolina, as a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion, is:

- *Centered in Christ's Love*
- *Proclaiming Good News of God's Grace*
- *Rooted in Our Communities*
- *A Light to All*
- *Called to Sacrifice and Serve*

Will parishioners be forced to leave their churches?

No. The Episcopal Church and The Diocese of South Carolina are committed to helping congregations continue to worship and serve God in their church homes, in much the same way they have done since before the split. The main changes for a returning parish are the following: (1) congregations and liturgies would be led by clergy who are in good standing with The Episcopal Church, and (2) parish vestries and bylaws would function in accordance with Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church again, as they did before the split. The parishes affected by the split are like families and are important parts of the communities they serve. Diocesan leadership is committed to working with each congregation to help it continue and thrive.

I am a member of a church that disaffiliated. What do I have to do to return to The Episcopal Church? Do I face any kind of penalty, or do I have to go through some process?

Every person who has been baptized and/or confirmed in The Episcopal Church is an Episcopalian. Transferring your membership to another denomination is the only way that it can be changed. Parishioners who have been attending other churches are still Episcopalians, as long as they want to be. There is no penalty in returning, and no formal process or action is required. We mean it when we say "The Episcopal Church welcomes you."

What about wedding plans and funeral arrangements?

Knowing that most weddings, and some funerals, are planned months or years in advance, The Diocese of South Carolina will make every effort to honor reservations and pre-arrangements. The Bishop and the Episcopal clergy serving the congregation will respond pastorally to couples and families on a case-by-case basis. We are encouraged that clergy from The Diocese of South Carolina and the disaffiliated group have collaborated respectfully and collegially on wedding and funeral arrangements a number of times over the past six years, and we pray that will continue.

What will happen to the disaffiliated clergy of the congregations?

When the split occurred, all clergy in the diocese were offered an opportunity to remain in The Episcopal Church. Those who chose to leave the ordained ministry of The Episcopal Church in 2013 are no longer able to serve in Episcopal churches. However, The Diocese of South Carolina worked to ensure that there would be a path for clergy to be reconciled with and return to the Church, if that is their desire, and to include a clear process of discernment for the good care of all. Since 2013, three priests have been welcomed back through this process. While each situation is unique, historically this process has taken less than one year. For clergy who wish to explore this path, the first step is to contact the Diocesan Office.

Can clergy whose views are more conservative still find a place in The Episcopal Church?

They can, and they do! There exists a great deal of diversity in the viewpoints of the clergy who serve in The Episcopal Church in South Carolina, both in parishes and in diocesan and churchwide leadership roles. This unity-in-diversity as part of the Body of Christ is one of our greatest strengths. Parishes who are seeking to call clergy find a large pool of potential candidates in Episcopal ministry who represent a wide range of views and approaches.

Will my church have a priest after the transition?

Yes. The Diocese of South Carolina is working with many Episcopal priests (and even some bishops) who want to help churches through this transition time.

Will the returning congregations be able to choose their own clergy?

In the initial transition period, the Bishop will assign priests to meet the congregations' immediate needs while they reorganize according to the constitution and canons (church rules) of The Episcopal Church and The Diocese of South Carolina. When a congregation has reorganized, and its duly elected vestry is ready and able to enter into a letter of agreement with a priest, then it would do so under the Diocese's normal rules and procedures for churches seeking clergy.

Who will be making decisions about what happens in my church?

The decisions of dioceses and parishes are local. The clergy and vestries of churches make decisions in consultation with the Bishop and with the leadership of the Standing Committee, Diocesan Council and Diocesan Trustees, following the canons and constitution of The Episcopal Church. Episcopalians in eastern South Carolina elect their diocesan representatives (deputies) to General Convention every three years to vote on matters affecting the whole church. The 79th General Convention met in 2018 in Austin, Texas, and the 80th will meet in Baltimore, Maryland in 2021.

Some of our members plan to leave the parish and start a new church elsewhere. How should we respond?

Jesus prayed for his Church in his high priestly prayer found in John 17:11, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." We hope you will join your prayers with ours for the unity of the Church in this diocese. Continue to pray for all the people who have chosen to leave the church. Work to maintain an open door for conversations and relationships that, in time, can provide a path for reconciliation. Finally, continue to support the health and vitality of your own Episcopal parish, so it can carry on as a witness to our Lord long after the memories of this division have faded.

PROPERTY MATTERS

Who owns the property of my parish?

Every parish owns its own property and holds it "in trust" for the use of the Church. The South Carolina Supreme Court ruled that the 29 disaffiliated properties are held in trust for The Diocese of South Carolina (TECSC) and for The Episcopal Church. The trustees are the vestries of the parishes, and they are responsible for ensuring that the property is used for the benefit of The Episcopal Church. In June 2018, the US Supreme Court declined to review that decision, so the ruling of the state Supreme Court on this matter should be final.

Will my church be sold?

No church property can be sold without the consent of the duly elected Episcopal vestry, the Standing Committee of the diocese, and the Bishop. The Diocese of South Carolina recognizes the important role these buildings play in the history and life of the communities they serve, our state, and our diocese. We are committed to working with the faithful and committed people of each parish to help them maintain strong congregations that can sustain their property and their ministry.

Can the disaffiliated groups that are now aligned with ACNA buy or lease the properties from The Diocese of South Carolina?

No. Our focus is on working with those who want to remain in their churches and worship as Episcopalians. The Diocese of South Carolina is responsible for being good stewards of all the property and assets of our diocese, seeing that they are used for the mission of the church. We are committed to helping each congregation move through the transition process in ways that will help them grow and flourish.

What is happening with Camp St. Christopher?

Camp St. Christopher is one of the diocesan properties belonging to TECSC/The Diocese of South Carolina under the South Carolina Supreme Court decision. When the court decision is implemented, the Diocese has a transition plan ready, so St. Christopher can continue operating with minimal or no disruption. Discussions are taking place with the current leadership to ensure that reservations will be honored when the transition happens. The Diocese of South Carolina has held youth retreats at Camp St. Christopher since 2019 and planned to host a Clergy Conference there in 2020 that has been rescheduled to 2021.

The importance of this beloved camp and conference center is much larger than our recent divisions. Our prayer is that it will continue to bless generations to come and be a focal point for unity and healing in our diocese. All who are seeking a deeper relationship with God are welcome to the Camp.

EPISCOPAL AND ANGLICAN CONNECTIONS

What is The Episcopal Church in South Carolina, The Diocese of South Carolina, like today?

According to The Episcopal Church's statistics, The Diocese of South Carolina was the fastest-growing diocese in the United States, with a 3.6 percent increase in baptized members in 2017 and 14 percent growth since 2014. Today, The Diocese of South Carolina has 31 congregations and more than 7,300 members, in addition to those who are rejoining the diocese in parishes affected by the split. We have more than 90 priests and 13 deacons who are either canonically resident, or licensed to serve, in our diocese.

Our parishes and missions range from very large to very small and are located throughout the eastern/coastal half of South Carolina. Twenty-two congregations are worshipping in the buildings they were using before the schism. Another nine congregations were formed after the split and are worshipping in spaces they have bought, leased, or borrowed. You can find a list and a map at episcopalchurchsc.org.

As a diocese of The Episcopal Church, The Diocese of South Carolina is fully involved in the councils of the Church. Our Bishop and Deputies attended General Convention in 2015 and 2018, and several diocesan members hold offices on church-wide panels and committees that do the work of the Church between General Conventions. The Diocese of South Carolina has hosted Presiding Bishop Michael Curry twice since his election in 2015, and we will welcome him again in November 2020 as the keynote speaker at our 230th Diocesan Convention.

What is the relationship between The Diocese of South Carolina and the Anglican Communion?

The Anglican Communion consists of dioceses and provinces around the world that are in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Episcopal Church is the only recognized province of the Anglican Communion in the United States, and churches in The Diocese of South Carolina are all part of this Communion. There are church groups outside the Communion that use "Anglican" in their name, but they are not a recognized part of the Anglican Communion.

Is The Episcopal Church fully participating in the Anglican Communion?

Yes. The Episcopal Church is a full participant as one of the 40 provinces of the Anglican Communion. For example, Episcopal Church representatives participated in the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in May 2019 as well as in previous ACC meetings. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry attended the October 2017 meeting of Primates (leaders of the 140 provinces of the Communion). Presiding Bishop Curry also was invited to preach at the Royal Wedding in May 2018, watched on TV by millions of Anglicans worldwide. Finally, the Archbishop of Canterbury has called for a Lambeth Conference in 2020. Bishops of The Episcopal Church, including the past two provisional bishops of

The Diocese of South Carolina, are invited to this gathering. The theme is “God’s Church for God’s World: Walking, listening and witnessing together.”

THEOLOGY AND BELIEFS

I have heard that The Episcopal Church does not follow certain core beliefs of Christianity. How do I get accurate an accurate picture of what The Episcopal Church believes?

There are many ways to explore the beliefs of The Episcopal Church, but a good summary can be found in The 1979 Book of Common Prayer, which is used in worship in congregations of The Diocese of South Carolina.

Start with the historic credal statements of the Church, known as The Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed, proclaimed regularly in our worship. Along with the Creeds, The Baptismal Covenant grounds us in the manner in which we affirm Christ as Lord and seek to follow him as faithful disciples. In that context, The Episcopal Church is part of the greater Anglican tradition that respects and honors many different ways of living out the faith within the unity of the Church as the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A good resource for specific topics is found here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/what-webelieve>

We believe the best way to get an accurate picture is to visit one of the Episcopal churches in The Diocese of South Carolina. You will find the Prayer Book used, the Scriptures read, the hymns sung, the Creeds prayed and proclaimed, and the Gospel preached – every Sunday.

How do Episcopal churches worship?

A typical Sunday service in our diocese will be deeply familiar to all Anglicans and Episcopalians: Holy Eucharist from the Book of Common Prayer (1979, Rite I or Rite II). The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed, and the Nicene Creed (or Apostles’ Creed) is said. We pray the Lord’s Prayer. We sing hymns from The Hymnal 1982 and other familiar sources such as “Lift Every Voice and Sing”. We read the same Scripture readings in the lectionary shared by Anglicans and other Christian denominations around the world.

Again, the best way to know for yourself is to “taste and see” by visiting an Episcopal church. [Find one here](#). You can also...

- Watch online at [Grace Church Cathedral’s YouTube channel](#), where you’ll find weekly services both live-streamed and recorded.
- [Listen to audio](#) of Sunday services at Holy Cross Faith Memorial, Pawleys Island
- [Visit this link](#) to see a sampling of the printed bulletins (aka service leaflets, or orders of service) from Episcopal churches in your area.

What do you believe about the Bible?

We believe “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation.” Our understanding is in accordance with the words of our Lord Jesus who said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and Prophets.” - Matthew 22:37-40.

What is happening with the Book of Common Prayer?

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church continues to be the official prayer book for all the churches of our diocese, and this will also be true for returning congregations. (Find an online version of it here: <https://bcponline.org/>) The 2018 General Convention held extensive discussions about possible prayer book revision, but finally chose to “memorialize” (keep) the 1979 prayer book with which people in our diocese are familiar, while allowing for new liturgies to be explored in the future.

By contrast the churches in the disaffiliated group that identify with the “Anglican Church in North America” (ACNA), are adopting a new, heavily revised prayer book. It is currently posted on the Internet, with printed copies to be introduced in June 2019.

The Episcopal Church permits same-sex couples to marry. Will my individual beliefs about human sexuality be respected if my parish returns to The Episcopal Church?

In keeping with the living out of our Lord’s two great commandments, our Baptismal promise is to “respect the dignity of every human being.” We believe we are all part of the Body of Christ, and that unity transcends our individual differences of opinion on the controversial issues of our day. Same-sex marriage is included in the life of The Episcopal Church. No clergy person is required to officiate any marriage ceremony that goes against her or his beliefs.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

I’d like to help my parish stay together as an Episcopal parish. What should I do?

We invite you to call the Diocesan Office at 843-259-2016 to discuss options and next steps.

How do I keep up-to-date with what’s going on?

Subscribe to our email newsletter [HERE](#) to receive weekly news, as well as updates whenever major news occurs. Visit our website, episcopalchurchsc.org. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).