### BEING BEING EPISCOPALIAN

St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral

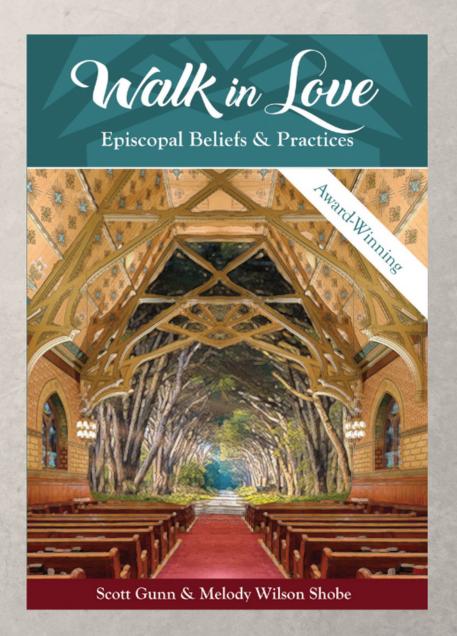
### BEING EPISCOPALIAN

A CLASS FOR
INQUIRERS AND NEWCOMERS
FOR THOSE WHO DESIRE TO LEARN ABOUT
EPISCOPAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES,
BECOME A MEMBER, OR GET CONFIRMED

LED BY DEAN CHURCHWELL

SUNDAYS AT 3:30 PM STARTING 09/24 IN THE MAKING MEDICINE ROOM (DEAN BACK BUILDING)

CONFIRMATION WITH BISHOP POULSON ON ALL SAINTS DAY, 11/05 @9AM



9/24 ANGLICANISM: THE MIDDLE WAY

Homework: Chapters 1-8

10/01 THE SACRAMENTS AND SACRAMENTAL RITES

Homework: Chapters 9-12

10/08 PRAYER & LITURGICAL SEASONS

Homework: 13-16

10/15 BASIC BELIEFS

Homework: Chapters 17-20

10/22 THE CHURCH & GOVERNANCE

Homework: Chapters 21-26

10/29 INSTRUCTED EUCHARIST & WORSHIP

Homework: None

11/05 CONFIRMATION SERVICE

9:00 a.m. with Bishop Poulson Reed



CALENDAR OF CLASSES

HEAVENLY FATHER, WE THANK YOU THAT BY WATER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT YOU HAVE BESTOWED UPON THESE YOUR SERVANTS THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN, AND HAVE RAISED THEM TO THE NEW LIFE OF GRACE. SUSTAIN THEM, O LORD, IN YOUR HOLY SPIRIT. GIVE THEM AN INQUIRING AND DISCERNING HEART, THE COURAGE TO WILL AND TO PERSEVERE, A SPIRIT TO KNOW AND TO LOVE YOU, AND THE GIFT OF JOY AND WONDER IN ALL YOUR WORKS. AMEN. (308)

# BAPTISMAL BELLES

### HISTORY OF BAPTISM

- Baptism is the first sacrament.
  - It is the first one Jesus taught.
  - We might thing of it as the sacrament of birth, because so often we baptize infants. But we should look at baptism in a broader context, as the sacrament of beginning for all new Christian. Even adults who are baptized begin their new life and journey as disciples of Jesus Christ at their baptism.
- Jesus did not invent baptism. He took an existing practice and completely redefined it.
  - In the ancient world, as is the case today, many religions made use of ritual baths.
  - In Jesus' time, many Jews understood baptism to be a cleansing, a way to wash off sins.
  - Some sects even understood baptism to be part of entry rituals; baptism was required for membership.

- In the New Testament, the famous practitioner of Jewish baptism was John the Baptist (hence the name!).
  - John spent his days calling people to be transformed and to be prepared for the Messiah who was to come soon.
  - He spoke of his own practice of baptism, saying, "I baptize you with water for repentance" (Matthew 3:11a). But John added an important teaching, "one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11b).

- Jesus adopted the idea of a cleansing ritual required for entry into a community. And just as John had promised, Jesus' baptism added new dimensions, starting with Jesus' own baptism by John in the Jordan River.
  - "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him,'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.'Than he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'" (Matthew 3:13-17)
  - At his own baptism, Jesus was blessed by God's presence for all to see. This dramatically introduced the coming of the Holy Spirit in baptism, and Jesus continued to teach this as the way of beginning the new life of faith.
  - From that moment in the Jordan River, Jesus and his followers continued—to this very day—a baptism that is by water and the Holy Spirit.

- Soon after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the earliest Christians began to teach baptism as an essential part of the Christian life.
  - Saint Paul teaches: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-4)
    - o Saint Paul's words convey two important ideas.
      - First, baptism is the way to enter into the church, the body of Christ Jesus.
      - Second, in baptism, we die to our old selves and rise to new life in Christ. This aspect of baptism is perhaps more clear when the person being baptized is plunged under the water and then raised. Whether an infant or an adult, there is something bold about seeing someone symbolically drowned and raised to new life!

### **UNION WITH CHRIST**

- Our prayer book says baptism is "union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit" (858).
  - Union with Christ in his death and resurrection: This is exactly what Saint Paul talks about in Romans. We are mystically joined with Christ when we are baptized. The old, sinful self dies. A new person is raised to life, and we receive the promise that we too will be raised at the last day, at the resurrection of the dead.
  - **Birth into God's family the church**: Baptism is entry to the church, to the community of those who have committed themselves to follow Jesus. But it is more than a memebership requirement; in baptism, we are adopted into God's family.
  - Forgiveness of sins: To understand this one, we have to back up, all the way to creation. The church understands that humans were all made in God's image, and we humans were made wholly good. Then we were given our freedom, and we made poor choices resulting in the fallenness of humanity, the idea that we are ruined by sin. We have squandered the goodness and freedom that God gave us, and, left to our own devices, we will continue in this fallen, sinful way of living. Through baptism, we are cleansed from this curse of sin. We are made clean and new in baptism.
  - **New life in the Holy Spirit**.: As Jesus was leaving his friends, he promised that God the Father would send the Holy Spirit to abide with Jesus' followers, the church. The entire Book of Acts is the story of Christ's people living with the presence of the Holy Spirit, and that is our story, too!

- Baptism is the one sacrament that nearly all Christians recognize as universal.
  - When a baptized person wants to join an Episcopal church, all that is required is a record of their existing baptism.
  - As long as the baptism involved water and was done in name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is considered valid.
  - The same is true for Episcopalians who might join another denomination. Nearly every church around the world will recognize each other's baptism.
- Some Christians reserve baptism as a sacrament only for adults.
  - These Christians believe that baptism requires understanding.
  - Episcopalians have a different view of the sacrament, believing that God's grace is present in the sacrament even when we do not understand how or what is happening.
  - Therefore, we baptize people of all ages, including infants, believing that God's grace is surely and certainly present. It is then the responsibility of parents and godparents to raise the child in faith, helping them to grow into promises that have been made on his or her behalf.
- Baptismal practices may vary.
  - In most Episcopal churches, our practice of baptism symoblizes the experience with a pouring or sprinkling of water over the person's head instead of full immersion. Sometimes baptism is done in a large body of water by immersing the candidate in a pool, tub, or stream.
  - Sometimes baptism is done with a small amount of water by pouring or sprinkling water over the candidate's head. Sometimes baptisms are done inside the church, and the water is held in a special container called a "baptismal font." Sometimes baptisms are done outside, in a river, stream, or even the ocean.
  - What is important is that we use water and that we conduct the baptism in the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

- Whether the candidates are adults, children, or infants, they are always supported by sponsors.
  - We colloquially call the sponsors of younger children "godparents," but they are really sponsors, just like any other.
  - Sponsors help candidates or their parents prepare for baptism with the intention to "support them by prayer and and example in their Christian life."
  - Being a sponsor is not just an honor to bestow but rather a major commitment to a life of Christian mentoring and support.
  - Sponsors answer on behalf of infants who cannot speak for themselves in the baptismal liturgy, and they signify their role in adult and older children's baptisms by presenting the candidates to the priest.
- Most of the time, baptisms are performed by clergy in churches, in the community that represents the Body of Christ.
  - But in an emergency baptism can be performed by anyone, anywhere.
  - In these situations, all that is required is water and simple words. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Just a dab of water and those words make a person the recipient of every benefit of baptism.
  - Sometimes babies who have received emergency baptism get well, and the family later wants a public celebration in the church. We have a way of celebrating these baptisms that does not repeat baptism—because baptism is permanent and indelible—but allows the church to welcome a child into the church.

## BAPTISMAL PRACTICES

### BAPTISM: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

- Every journey begins somewhere, and every Christian's journey begins with Holy Baptism.
  - This sacrament unites us with Christ and his church.
  - Another way to explain the sacrament is to say that Holy Baptism is the gateway to all the other sacraments.
- In this session, we are going to be walking, step-by-step, through the baptismal service in *The Book of Common Prayer*. It will probably be helpful to you if you follow along in your prayer book, beginning on page 299.
- Holy Baptism is usually celebrated on Sunday mornings so the whole church community can join in the grand occasion.
- The baptismal service begins with a special set of responses:
  - Celebrant There is one Body and one Spirit;
  - People There is one hope in God's call to us;
  - Celebrant
     One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism;
  - People One God and Father of all.
  - These words come from the fourth chapter of Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians.
  - He wrote them to teach about the unity of the entire church of all people in Christ. Baptism wipes away all other distinctions sex, nationality, race, and so on.
  - By placing these words at the beginning of the service, we are reminded that the newly baptized will soon be full members of Christ's body, the Church.
- The readings and the sermon continue as at a regular Sunday service. This part of the worship service is consistent across almost all of our liturgies (Baptism, Eucharist, Burial, Marriage, and so on), as a reminder that hearing and responding to God's Word is a fundamental part of any service of worship.

### THE PRESENTATION AND EXAMINATION

- The service continues, on page 301, when the priest invites the candidate(s) for baptism to be presented.
  - If the candidate is an infant, the sponsors (godparents) and parents answer questions on the candidate's behalf. Otherwise, older children and adults answer for themselves.
  - Every priest and parent will have a bit of terror when a toddler is asked the question, "Do you desire to be baptized?" Although young children can be unpredictable, we must ask the question! We can only proceed if the answer is yes, because Christians have long taught that baptism is not to be offered coercively but only to the willing.
- Next, if the candidate is an infant or child, the celebrant asks the parents and sponsors two questions.
  - "Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life?" and
  - "Will you by your prayers and witness help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?"
  - To both questions, the answer is "I will, with God's help." We won't succeed at either goal if we don't rely on God's help.
  - The first question comes because we are baptizing infants who cannot answer for themselves.
    - We do this because others are making promises on their behalf. Sponsors and parents are agreeing to a lifetime commitment to raise the child in the Christian faith.
    - This is one reason why it is important for parents and sponsors to themselves be active, practicing followers of Jesus. Without that, there's little hope that this promise to God, made in front of a congregation, will be kept.
  - o The second question highlights a critical point: Raising the child in faith is not just about knowledge and facts; it is about transformation.
    - The promise is to "help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ"—which is also a good reminder that we're never quite done.
    - None of us will ever become exactly like Christ. But we can try to be more and more like him, offering perfect love. It is important to note that we pledge to show the child (and others!) how to be like Christ through "prayers and witness! That is, we teach, and others learn, through both our prayers and our actions.
    - We must live our lives in a way that shows others who Christ is and how to be like him, and we must be people of prayer. That is the promise we are making. It's a tall order, which is why we say, "I will, with God's help."

• In baptism, we are turning toward Christ.To turn toward one thing means to turn away from another, so next, the candidates; parents, and sponsors renounce Satan:

Question Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

**Answer** I renounce them.

**Question** Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of of God?

Answer I renounce them.

Question Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

**Answer** I renounce them.

- o It isn't fashionable to talk about Satan and the power of evil these days, but it is essential.
  - Look at the front page of any newspaper and the feeds of any social media channel. Or have honest conversations with people about their deepest struggles. Evil powers are real.
  - We Christians should not be afraid of them because we know that on Easter, Jesus utterly defeated the worst evil imaginable. We should be confident that we can defeat evil, which is why we should not be afraid to look it in the face.
  - In the baptism service, we consciously acknowledge the reality of evil and then actively turn away from it.

 Just as we turn away from Satan and evil power, we turn toward Jesus Christ and the power of love:

Question Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Answer I do.

Question Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Answer I do.

**Question** Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

Answer Ido.

- These are big promises.
  - Putting our "whole trust" in "grace and love" is easier said than done.
  - To trust in Christ's love and grace is to know that we are loved no matter what we do, that Jesus is with us in whatever we face.
  - To accept him as our Savior is to know that our salvation will not be found in power, money, prestige, or our family and friends, but only in Jesus Christ.
  - To "follow and obey" acknowledges that we don't have the answers, but that we find our direction, our compass, and our hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - The depth and radical nature of these promises will take a lifetime to understand and fully embrace.

- The celebrant addresses the next question, found on the bottom of page 303 in the prayer book, to the whole congregation.
  - "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?"
  - The answer should be,"We will."
  - This question is brief but important.We who are the church promise to support those who are baptized.We promise to help them grow into the full stature of Christ.There are no asterisks about us being on the hook only when it is convenient to support the person or when we feel like it. Indeed, we promise to support these persons for their entire lives, to do all in our power. All in our power. The service of baptism is full of big promises!
- We then join in renewing our Baptismal Covenant.
  - This is a set of eight questions and answers in which we affirm our faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and then we commit to a life of Christian faith and discipline.
  - First we are asked to restate our faith in God as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - We state our faith using the Apostles' Creed, which has been associated with baptism since the early church.
    - In the first centuries of the church, when Christians were often persecuted, unbaptized persons were dismissed from the liturgy before creeds were recited.
    - For newly baptized persons, the very first time they could hear or recite the creeds was at their baptism.
    - Because the Apostles' Creed is more ancient and associated with baptism, we use that creed here and reserve the Nicene Creed for regular Sunday celebrations of Holy Eucharist.

### The Apostles' Creed summarizes some of the basic teachings of our faith.

- We profess that God the Father has created everything.
- We profess that God the Son was born, crucified, raised to new life, and will come again as judge.
- We profess faith in God the Holy Spirit, in the communion of the saints, and in the grace of having sins forgiven.
- We profess our trust in God's promise of eternal life and our commitment to the catholic church. The word "catholic" here (and throughout our liturgies in the prayer book) means "universal"—the one, worldwide church of Jesus Christ.

- After we pray the Apostles' Creed, we ask and answer five questions.
- These are called the baptismal promises. In these promises, we make extraordinary, impossible commitments that we'll never manage to get totally right, especially on our own.
- Our hope of fulfilling these promises is possible only through God who works in us. That is why we answer, "I will, with God's help."

- We promise to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.
  - We are saying that we will participate in Christian worship, attend classes to learn about our faith, join in the celebration of Holy Eucharist, and pray daily, both as a community and as individuals.
  - To live out this promise, we need to put worshiping with a Christian community at the top of our priority list, not as a do-it-when-I-feel-likeit activity.
  - This baptismal promise comes from the book of Acts, when the earliest Christians found great joy in committing to follow Jesus in community. We too will experience great joy when we make our community of Christ-followers the priority.

### • We promise to persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.

- We are saying we will actively turn away from those things that we know to be evil, even if they are alluring. And we are promising to do what is necessary to be reconciled with God and with one another when we sin (not if, but when we sin).
- Our world is full of things that take us away from God (money, power, selfish desires). So in this promise, we acknowledge these things and say we will resist them. We also admit that we won't always succeed, and we promise that we'll try again.
- Our faith gives us as many do-overs as we need. What we promise here is to try our best.

### • We promise to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

- We are saying that we will share our faith, share the gospel, share the message of Jesus with anyone and everyone.
- We will proclaim it both with words and with the example of our lives—not one or the other.
- This promise might be the hardest for Episcopalians. As we seek to live out our baptismal promises, we are called to talk about our faith with other people...perhaps even with strangers!

### • We promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

- We say that we will look for Jesus in all we meet, even when it might be hard for us to see him.
- We will serve others, whether we feel like it or not, as though they were Christ himself.
- This is very easy to say and very hard to do.
- Christian love is not the same as "being nice," and it has nothing to do with convenience.
- We are promising that we will speak the truth in love when others need to hear it, that we will help strangers just as much as we help family, and that we will make room for the needs of others, always.

- We promise to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.
  - We are saying that we will work for justice and peace; we won't wait for other people's work to make it happen.
  - We will make our own best effort to respect every human being, whether we look like them or not, whether we agree with them or not, whether we think they deserve it or not.
  - Think of the people who are most challenging for you: very rich people, terrorists or others who wish you harm, very poor people, liberals, loud people, conservatives, introverts, or others.
  - We Christians are called to respect and to treat with dignity every single person on this planet as a beautiful person bearing God's image.
- After reminding ourselves of the very challenging Christian life we—and those who are being baptized—have signed up for, we pray.
  - The Prayers for the Candidates, found on page 305, are a special form of prayers used for baptisms.
  - These lovely prayers invite God to be known to the newly baptized and to gradually open their lives and their hearts to God's presence.

- Finally! We get to the water, the outward and visible sign of baptism.
  - Baptism usually takes place at a font, which might be an elaborately carved stone basin on a fancy stand, a wooden stand with a brass bowl, a simple table with a glass bowl, or even a built- in pool that people can wade in, or something else. Baptisms can even take place outdoors, in a stream or a lake. Whatever the container, the celebrant blesses the water using a lovely prayer.
  - This prayer is worth studying: It speaks of the sacred purpose of water from the beginning of creation and throughout salvation history. The prayer recalls the fundamental purpose of baptism, and it ends with praise to God:
- We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life. We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that those who here are cleansed from sin and born again may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior. To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen. (306)

- The candidates are presented by name to the minister who will baptize them.
  - Candidates are baptized, starting with their name, and then using the same phrase that Christians have used for hundreds of years: "N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
  - We never change these words, because baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is universally recognized. If we fail to use those words, some Christians would say that the baptism isn't valid.
  - This point is an important one, because the two invariable things about baptism are water and those words.
  - We can use any kind of water; we don't need a fancy font or special water. My liturgy professor said that in an emergency, we could even use our own spit! And those words cannot vary. We say the same words that have been said through the ages, and that are said by Christians around the world.
- After the actual baptism when water is poured over the head, we say a prayer over the newly baptized.
- Then the celebrant anoints the newly baptized with oil.
  - This oil, called chrism, has been blessed by a bishop and through this blessing, is a symbol of our connection to the universal church.
  - The minister places the oil on the baptized person's forehead and makes the sign of a cross with it, saying, "N., you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen."
  - Once we are baptized, we have been claimed by Christ forever. Nothing we do or say can take away the spiritual mantle of Christ that has been put and taken on in baptism.
- After the anointing, the entire congregation welcomes the newly baptized, and we share in the Peace of Christ. For the first time, the newly baptized person shares this sign of peace as a member of Christ's body, the Church.

- The rest of the service unfolds like a regular service of Holy Eucharist, though it is a very special time.
  - For the first time, the newly baptized person, regardless of age, will receive Holy Communion. Even infants can be communicated with a tiny drop of wine.
  - As part of Christ's body, the Church, the newly baptized, along with all of us, are nourished by Christ's presence in the sacraments.
  - When people are baptized and receive Holy Eucharist in the same service, it shows us the indissoluble connection between these two great sacraments. Baptism is how we get into the family of Christ. The sacred meal, Holy Eucharist, is what we as a family do together.

# CONFIRMATION

• We've explored Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist.

### PASTORAL OFFICES

- These are the "main" services of the church.
- They are the two sacraments of the church that are for all people, and so we use them most frequently when we gather for worship.
- But *The Book of Common Prayer* includes other important liturgies and prayers that make up our common life.
  - The section following Holy Eucharist is "Pastoral Offices."
    - This includes many of the sacramental rites instituted by the church through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
    - The pastoral offices include: Confirmation, Marriage, Reconciliation of a Penitent, Ministration to the Sick and at the time of death and burial.
  - These sacramental rites encompass times of great joy as well as those of pain and grief, a reminder that God in Christ wants to walk with us through all the moments of our lives—the beginning and the end, the highs and the lows, the every day and the once-in-a-lifetime.
    - Although these liturgies are less frequently used than the services for Holy Eucharist or Holy Baptism, they are no less important.
    - They are a means of grace, connecting us to God and to one another in the midst of some of the defining moments of our lives.

### THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION

- Holy Baptism is the great sacrament of Christian initiation.
  - But baptism is not, of course, the end of the life of faith.
  - It is the entry into Christ's body, the beginning of life in the church, a first step on the journey.
- Confirmation is our chance to "express a mature commitment to Christ and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop" (860).
  - Those baptized as adults have already made a deliberate decision to commit to Christ, so confirmation is a reaffirmation of faith and a commitment to the Episcopal Church.
  - Those baptized as infants had parents and godparents who made these important vows and promises on their behalf. Teenagers or adults are given the opportunity to decide if they want to make these important vows and promises to God for themselves.
  - This mature affirmation of faith is accompanied by the laying on of hands by a bishop.
    - In the early church bishops performed all baptisms.
    - As the church grew, this became logistically impossible, and priests were given the authority to baptize new believers.
    - But the connection of bishops to new Christians is vital; this is why bishops preside at all services of confirmation.
    - Bishops can trace their consecration back to the apostles of Jesus—something called "apostolic succession."
    - In this way, Confirmation connects us to the worldwide church through the bishop, the symbol of our unity—and to the communion of saints, past, present, and future. This reminds us of the way in which we are connected to the wider sphere of the church, beyond our local community.
- The Rite of Confirmation performs two functions:
  - It allows those who have been baptized at a young age to claim the promises of their baptism for themselves.
  - It connects all members of the church through the symbol of our unity, the bishop.

### THE SERVICE OF CONFIRMATION

- In many respects, the liturgy for Confirmation echoes the service of baptism.
  - Confirmation begins with the same opening acclamation, and the assertion of the unity of the Church: "There is one Body and one Spirit..." (413).
  - It continues in the usual manner, with the collect, scripture lessons, and the sermon.
- After the sermon, the candidates for confirmation are presented to the bishop, who asks them a series of questions that harken back to the promises of their baptism:
  - "Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil?...Do you renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?"
  - The congregation is then asked the same question that is posed in the baptismal service: "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?" (416)
    - The congregation answers, "We will," a reminder that Christian community is an important part of the life of faith, not only for infants being baptized but also for all people of all ages.
- The service continues with the congregation renewing their own baptismal promises.
- The prayers for the candidates are the same as those used at baptism. Again, this grounds the service of confirmation in baptism. We are reminded of the commitments that were made on our behalf by others, and we are reaffirming those promises for ourselves.
- Next comes the laying on of hands by the bishop. The bishop places his or her hands on each person being confirmed and says a prayer for each one, invoking the Holy Spirit and asking God to strengthen and sustain the person being confirmed.

### RECEPTION AND REAFFIRMATION

- Anyone who has made a mature commitment of faith in another Christian fellowship (such as adult baptism or confirmation in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or other Lutheran churches) is considered to be both baptized and confirmed by the Episcopal Church.
  - People in that situation who wish to make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their baptism in the presence of an Episcopal bishop can choose to be received into the Episcopal Church.
  - In this event, the bishop lays hands on each candidate for reception and says, "We recognize you as a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and we receive you into the fellowship of this Communion" (418).
- Occasionally, someone who is already confirmed or received experiences a deeper conversion to Christ and wishes to reaffirm his or her baptismal promises.
  - This might be for a person returning to the church after a period of absence or unbelief or for someone who has had a particularly transformative spiritual experience that he or she wishes to express in the context of worship with the community.
  - o The bishop lays hand on the person and says the prayer for reaffirmation: "N., may the Holy Spirit, who has begun a good work in you, direct and uphold you in the service of Christ and his kingdom. Amen" (419).
- After the bishop has laid hands on each person being confirmed, received, and reaffirmed, the bishop says a concluding prayer over all the candidates. The service then continues with the Peace and Holy Eucharist.

### CONFIRMATION: WHY OR WHY NOT?

- Nearly every priest or parent has heard the question at least once: "Do I have to be confirmed?"
  - The question is sometimes posed by a teenager challenging his or her parent's expectations, sometimes by a new member checking out what membership in the church means, or sometimes by a couple seeking to be married in an Episcopal Church.
  - The short answer is no...and yes.
- The Book of Common Prayer says that confirmation is "expected" rather than required.
- The canons (the laws governing the church) require confirmation for a few individuals:
  - Those being ordained
  - Deputies to the General Convention
  - Those appointed to many church-wide offices
- But confirmation is not "required" for most Episcopalians. In the Episcopal Church, you don't have to be confirmed in order to be married (although at least one member of the couple must be baptized), to be buried, or to receive communion.
- But confirmation is expected, because it is something that mature Christians can and should want to do.
  - Much as with marriage, a couple who loves one another very much wants to stand up and make vows and promises to one another in front of family and friends, so too a Christian, loving God very much, ought to want to stand up and make vows and promises to God in front of family and friends.
  - Confirmation is one way that we, as mature Christians, commit to a life of faith.
  - It doesn't mean that we have everything figured out, or that we will fulfill those vows and promises perfectly, any more than a couple seeking marriage has their relationship all figured out or will fulfill their vows and promises perfectly.
  - But confirmation means that we are promising to try, to strive, to commit to God, who has already, in baptism, committed to

## CONFESSION AND HEALING

### HEALING OF BODY AND SOUL

- Throughout the gospel narratives, Jesus heals those he encounters.
  - This healing is not only about bodily health: Jesus forgives sin, healing the soul; Jesus heals emotional distress; Jesus heals relationships and communities, bringing people back into reconciled life with one another and with God.
  - o Jesus' life and ministry teach us that God's desire for people is health and wholeness.
- Chapter nine of the Gospel of Matthew gives us an idea of what the healing of Jesus looks like.
  - First, Jesus forgives the sins and heals the body of a paralytic.
  - Then Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners and describes that act of community as a kind of healing, saying that "those who are well have no need of a physician."
  - Next Jesus heals a woman of a hemorrhage, brings a young girl back from the brink of death, and heals two blind men.
  - Then Jesus casts out a demon, healing the mind of a man who had been possessed and thus restoring him to speech.
- At the end of chapter nine of Matthew, Jesus asserts that the world's need for healing is vast, and he prays that his followers will be laborers in the harvest.
  - Later, Jesus will entrust his ministry of healing and reconciliation to his disciples.
  - As Christians we strive to live this ministry of healing and reconciliation by offering prayers forgiveness, and compassion to one another.
  - Two sacramental rites within the Episcopal Church—reconciliation of a penitent and unction of the sick—serve as outward signs of our participation in and experience of God's reconciliation and healing.

### RECONCILIATION OF A PENITENT

- Embedded in the rites of the church is an awareness that we will never perfectly execute our desires.
  - In baptism and confirmation, we promise to persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord (304).
  - In the marriage service, we pray for the couple that they might have "grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours" (429).
  - Notice in both instances that we promise to repent and seek forgiveness not if, but when.
  - Even in the midst of dedicating ourselves to God, we recognize that all of us are going to fail in the promises that we make.
  - And when we inevitability fail or flounder, we vow to take action, to repent and return to the Lord.
  - The Christian life is an unfolding and ongoing practice of seeking forgiveness, from one another and from God.
- Reconciliation of a Penitent is the sacramental rite whereby we seek and receive that forgiveness.
  - People often express surprise when they learn that the Episcopal Church has a service of confession, exclaiming: "I thought that was only for Roman Catholics!"
  - Others resist the idea of reconciliation by saying, "We do the confession in church every Sunday, so I'm covered; I don't have to do that."
- The Episcopal Church's approach to the rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent is that "all can, some should, none must."
  - Everyone is welcome to receive reconciliation.
  - But no one must partake in this sacrament. That is, no one is required to participate in the liturgy in order to receive Holy Eucharist or be married or buried.

- Reconciliation of a Penitent is not the only way to confess our sins and be forgiven; we can be reconciled in many ways.
  - By the way we offer and receive forgiveness between one another.
  - By the way that we offer corporate confession of sin in our worship services.
- As long as we are confessing and seeking forgiveness in other ways, we don't have to participate in the rite of reconciliation.
- But to dismiss this sacrament because it isn't required diminishes its power and importance.
  - Reconciliation of a Penitent is not a requirement that we have to check off in order to receive other sacraments or to be in right relationship with God.
  - Reconciliation is an opportunity, a chance to name before God and someone else the things for which we're sorry or ashamed of or that burden our conscience.
  - And then in return, we hear from God and from another person the truth that we are forgiven and loved and reconciled.
  - There's a difference between "have to" and "need to/should."
- Perhaps the right question to ask is not, "Why should I do the rite of reconciliation?" but instead "Why shouldn't I do the rite of reconciliation?"

### DEEPER APOLOGIES, DEEPER FORGIVENESS

- A friend once taught me a "five-finger formula for real apologies" (to help with parenting my children!)
- Instead of simply saying sorry when a wrong occurs, you stop, look the person in the face, and say:
  - I am sorry for ...
  - That was wrong because...
  - Next time I will...
  - What can I do to help? (or How can I make this right?)
  - Will you forgive me?
- It's simple but brilliant. Instead of just mumbling "I'm sorry," a real apology includes naming clearly what you did, reflecting on why it was wrong, promising to change the behavior in the future, trying to make amends, and actively asking for forgiveness.
- It's not just for kids; it's great for all ages!
- Reconciliation of a Penitent is the church's version of the "five-finger formula" for apologies.
  - Sometimes our corporate confession of sin in the liturgy, or even our own personal prayers of confession, can become rote, like the mumbled "Sorry" of a child who knows she or he is supposed to apologize but doesn't really mean it.
  - And sometimes our confessions aren't rote, but they are rushed. We don't have time to really reflect on what we've done wrong, why it was wrong, and how to amend our lives going forward.
  - The rite of reconciliation allows us to take the time to work through our apologies with God in a thoughtful and deliberate manner.

### GETTING READY FOR RECONCILIATION

- First, you need to find a confessor to offer the rite.
  - This is normally either a priest or a bishop, because they are empowered by the church to offer absolution: that is, to declare, on behalf of God, that a person's sins are forgiven.
  - But a lay person may hear confession and offer a declaration of forgiveness, provided in the rite, in lieu of absolution.
  - Some people prefer to make their confession to a priest they don't know; in that case your priest would be glad to help you find someone to hear your confession.
  - Other people are grateful to make confession in the context of an ongoing relationship; they feel that the sacred conversation is more natural when they know and have experience with their confessor.
- Your priest may have suggestions for how you can prepare for confession.
- Many people find it helpful to write out their confession before the service itself. This can give you the opportunity to take time to reflect on what you want to bring to God as well as keep you from being overwhelmed by nervousness in the moment.

### A SACRED CONVERSATION

- Many of those who have never experienced the rite of reconciliation worry about what it's like.
- Their only experience with confession is what they've seen in the movies: a mysterious rite that involves sitting in a booth with a priest hiding behind a screen.
- But in the Episcopal Church, the rite of reconciliation doesn't usually take place in a confessional booth.
  - While a few Episcopal churches have and use confessional booths, the normal practice is for the penitent (the person desiring the sacrament of reconciliation) and the confessor (the priest or bishop hearing confession) to sit together, either in the church building or a chapel, or even in an office.
  - The two people might sit on either side of the altar rail, so that there is a place to kneel when appropriate, or they might even sit face to face in chairs.
  - The point is that the rite is not simply scripted words but a sacred conversation.
- The Book of Common Prayer provides two forms for reconciliation, following a similar formula but with different wording and emphasis.
- Both forms begin with an opening prayer followed by a prayer that includes space for the penitent to name and enumerate particular sins.
- This is the heart of the rite: the chance to name aloud the things for which you are seeking God's forgiveness.
  - Saying these things out loud can be scary; we would rather avoid our sins than face them head- on.
  - But there is also great power in shining the light of truth into the dark places of our lives.
  - Shame feeds on silence and secrecy.
  - When we enumerate our sins aloud and ask specifically for forgiveness, we can set down the weight of sin and shame that we've been carrying and allow God to take away that burden.

- Next the priest offers counsel, direction, and comfort; this is also incredibly important.
  - Talking through some of the things that we have named can bring relief, and our confessor can help us think through problems and how we might face them.
  - This is where it is helpful to think of the rite as a sacred conversation.
  - In the course of this conversation, the priest may offer a "psalm, prayer, or hymn to be said, or something to be done, as a sign of penitence and act of thanksgiving" (446).
  - This is a way of acknowledging that the act of reconciliation involves more than just words; sometimes action for restoration is needed.
  - Any action that is suggested is emphatically not punishment; it's a sign of penitence and an act of thanksgiving.
  - These prayers or actions are our outward and visible sign of the inward work of forgiveness and reconciliation that is being done between us and God.
- After we have named our sins, talked about them with our confessor, and engaged in or committed to any acts of penitence and thanksgiving, the priest offers absolution, the sure and certain assurance of God's forgiveness.
  - The absolution from the rite of reconciliation is slightly different from the general absolution we receive in our Sunday worship. In this rite, the words of absolution are specific, rather than general—directed at the particular acts or failures you have named aloud, and also directed to you, personally, rather than at the gathered congregation.
  - This can help us hear the assurance of forgiveness in a new and powerful way.
  - After absolution, the rite ends with a dismissal, sending the forgiven penitent out into the world in peace.
- That dismissal is the end of the matter. Confession has been made, God's forgiveness is offered, and the penitent can depart in peace.
  - The content of a confession is "not normally a matter of subsequent discussion" (446).
  - The person who hears your confession will not hold on to it; when God offers forgiveness, forgiveness is complete, as though the slate has been wiped clean.
  - And the "secrecy of confession is morally absolute." You don't have to worry about your confessor telling other people about what you said in the rite or even speaking to you about the issue again.

### UNCTION

- The rite of reconciliation is one of the ways that we can experience healing and wholeness of the soul, feeling fully restored to right relationship with God.
- But Jesus was also frequently involved in physical healing of the body too. Out of this central part of Jesus' ministry arose the practices of prayer, anointing, and laying on of hands.
- Even in the New Testament, we hear stories of early groups of Christians engaged in these practices:
  - Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." (James 5:13-16)
- Praying, anointing, and laying hands on the sick is a practice the church has engaged from the earliest times until this day.
- The sacramental rite in which we do this is called Unction, meaning simply to anoint; anointing is the act of pouring or rubbing oil on a person.
- *The Book of Common Prayer* contains two different rites that both contain elements of unction—one for the sick and one especially at the time of death, often called "last rites."

### MINISTRATION TO THE SICK

- Our prayers are often the most fervent and faithful in times of sickness:
  - When someone we love is suffering, or when we, ourselves, are in pain.
  - In the doctor's office, getting a diagnosis, holding the hand of a loved one in a hospital bed, our prayers take on a renewed urgency and importance.
- We can, of course, offer prayers in our own words—our heartfelt cries to and conversations with God. But sometimes we cannot find the words to pray on our own, and we need the ancient prayers of a liturgy to give voice to our faith and fears.
- At other times we desperately desire companions in our prayer—we want our priest to pray with and for us, and the company of all the saints joining their prayers to ours. For times such as these and many more, the Episcopal Church offers Unction, also known as Ministration to the Sick.
- Found in *The Book of Common Prayer* on pages 453-57, Ministration to the Sick can be used both for visiting people in hospitals and homes and for regular administration at church in a formal service of healing.
  - Those at home or in the hospital who want the sacramental rite can call the church and the clergy will be glad to come, pray with you, anoint you with oil, and offer you communion.
  - If you find yourself far from home, simply call a local Episcopal church; any priest would be honored to come and offer this sacramental rite.

- Whether this rite takes place in a home, hospital, or church, ministration to the sick contains the same three parts:
  - Ministry of the word
  - Laying on of hands and anointing
  - Holy Communion
- The ministry of the word begins with readings and prayers.
- After the confession and peace, the service continues with the laying on of hands and anointing.
  - The priest lays hands upon the sick person while praying.
  - Just as a priest touches the bread and wine during eucharist or the water at baptism, a priest touches the person receiving prayers during this sacrament.
  - o A priest may also use oil that has been blessed by a bishop to anoint the sick person, making the sign of the cross.
  - The oil serves as a physical sign of the spiritual grace. "As you are outwardly anointed with this holy oil, so may our heavenly Father grant you the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit..." (456)
- After anointing, the service may continue with Holy Communion.
  - Though communion may be omitted if the rite takes place in a home or hospital, when it is used at church, it is usually in the context of Holy Eucharist: Feasting together in Christ's body and blood is the ultimate sacrament of healing.

### PERSONAL PRAYERS

- Nestled between the formal rites for the sick and those who are dying is a small "library" of prayers for times of sickness (458-461).
- These pages include beautiful prayers available for all different circumstances:
  - For before an operation
  - For sleep
  - For doctors and nurses
  - And many others.
- These prayers are not limited to use in the liturgy—they are great for use in personal prayer. They are even appropriate to be saved and shared with loved ones, to be included in a mailed card or left after a hospital visit.

### MINISTRATION AT THE TIME OF DEATH

- It may seem strange to think of death as part of a healing rite, yet that is exactly what we as Christians believe—that death is a kind of healing.
  - In death we are gathered to God and restored to fullness in body, mind, and spirit, in that place where there is no sorrow or sighing, but only life everlasting.
- So it is that *The Book of Common Prayer* includes a liturgy at the time of death as part of its healing ser vices.
- The focus of these prayers is not a last-ditch effort to save a person from death but a way to accompany a person through death. Healing in these prayers is seen not as a bodily deliverance from illness but as salvation and peace.
- The service begins on page 462 with a reminder that the church should be present, with prayers and ministry, when someone dies.
  - Every priest is grateful to pray with families, no matter where or when.
  - This is what the church is for, and you should never fail to call and ask for a priest's presence and prayers at any time of night or day.
- This sacramental rite begins with an opening prayer, then moves to a litany that is said with responses, the Lord's Prayer, and a concluding collect and commendation.
- The service concludes with a commendatory prayer that will be said again in the burial service.

- All of these prayers connect life in this world with life in the world to come, a reminder that death is not an enemy to be fought but a force that has already been vanquished by Jesus Christ, who ushers us in to eternal life.
- This rite exists as a service of healing for the community as well.
  - As family and friends pray with and for the one who is dying, they can hopefully also experience healing and receive some measure of the peace that only Christ can give.
  - These prayers are both for the one who is dying and also for the family who is left in grief.
- Taken together, these sacramental rites of the church—Reconciliation of a Penitent, Ministration to the Sick, and Ministration at the Time of Death—remind us of the many circumstance and situations that might need healing and that healing looks different for various people and in a variety of circumstances.
  - We are healed when we are forgiven of sin and brought back into relationship with God and one another.
  - We are healed when we recover from sicknesses of body, mind, and spirit.
  - And we are healed when, in our final days, we enter into life everlasting with Jesus Christ.
  - Our healing is a lifelong journey, as we seek again and again the sacraments of reconciliation and unction, asking God to be present and bless us, even in the midst of sin and sickness, and to ultimately bring us to wholeness and health.