



# Intro to Polity, Governance and Rules of The Episcopal Church

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# The Polity of the Episcopal Church

How do we organize ourselves as the Body of Christ in The Episcopal Church?



## Three forms of Church polity

“Episcopal”—having bishops and dioceses.

“Congregational”—autonomous congregations.

“Presbyterial”—having “elders,” but no “priests” or bishops.



# “Episcopal” churches

Examples: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican.

- ❖ Authority is vested in bishops, who make decisions of doctrine.
- ❖ Bishops are the chief ministers, who then ordain other ministers (priests and deacons).
- ❖ The New Testament makes references to Deacons first, then to Bishops, and eventually, Priests.



# “Congregational” churches

Examples: United Church of Christ, some Baptist churches

- ❖ Each congregation can decide its own doctrine and positions.
- ❖ Congregations may join loose associations for mutual benefit, but not to have authority over one another.
- ❖ Congregationalism appeared after the Reformation.



# “Presbyterial” churches

Example: The Presbyterian Church (USA) and its off-shoots.

- ❖ No bishops, but congregations are organized into regional “presbyteries” and synods.
- ❖ Elected church officials, lay and ordained, make major decisions for congregations.
- ❖ Annual national “General Assembly” makes policy for the whole denomination.



# Which is the correct form?

Holy Scripture offers only hints:

- ❖ No modern Church system can be traced exclusively back to the Early Church.
- ❖ The New Testament shows elements of all three forms.
- ❖ Our “Episcopal Church” is not strictly “episcopal” in its organization or authority.



# The Episcopal Church, USA

Effectively blends “episcopal” and “presbyterial” forms.

- ❖ Shared decision making between clergy and lay leaders.
- ❖ Broadens the base for our discernment and authority.





## We all have equal authority— through Baptism

We believe that authority is given to us through baptism:

- ❖ The Holy Spirit is active in everyone's life.
- ❖ Everyone has a voice.
- ❖ Everyone has gifts to give.
- ❖ True for everyone: Communicants, vestry members, deacons, priests, and bishops.



# Authority is Defined in Rules of Church

The Authority of Church bodies and leaders are defined by the governing documents of the Church:

- ❖ Elected representatives make the rules.
- ❖ Rules are available for all to access.
- ❖ All Clergy and laity are obligated to follow the Church Rules.



# Authority also sits in the pews

The Episcopal Church is a representative democracy:

- ❖ We delegate our authority to others through election of representatives.
- ❖ They make decisions on our behalf.
- ❖ We always have the choice to continue to elect some, or elect others.
- ❖ This approach to leadership is uncommon in the Anglican Communion.



## Does this approach seem familiar?

The Episcopal Church's polity was devised the same people who wrote the United States Constitution.

- ❖ Dioceses have some independence, like States.
- ❖ General Convention has two houses, like the Congress.
- ❖ Leaders are elected.
- ❖ Authority and power are shared, to provide checks and balances.



# Authority is shared, clergy and lay

## In the Parish

- ❖ Annual parish meeting, Vestry, Wardens, and Clergy

## In the Diocese

- ❖ Bishop and Standing Committee, Convention, Commissions, Committees, and the Deputation

## In the Episcopal Church

- ❖ General Convention, Presiding Bishop, commissions, and committees



## Issues, also, rise from the pews

The difficult issues the Episcopal Church has faced have come as a result of Episcopalians asking questions:

- ❖ Why should women not be serve as clergy? Or as a warden? Or as a member of vestry?
- ❖ Why can't people of different colors worship together?
- ❖ Does our common prayer still speak to our community as well as it did fifty years ago?



## It doesn't work like this everywhere

Throughout most of the Anglican Communion:

- ❖ Bishops make decisions, and hand them down.
- ❖ No such thing as a "House of Deputies" or Standing Committee.
- ❖ No laypeople in diocesan leadership.

In Canada, New Zealand, and few others, it's more like in the United States.

We were organized this way 100 years before the idea of an "Anglican Communion" began.



# Governance

A Brief Primer





# Basic Info About The Episcopal Church

- ❖ Approximately 2 Million members
- ❖ Nearly 300 bishops
- ❖ Approximately 6,700 clergy (in U.S.)
- ❖ In 17 different Countries
- ❖ 111 Dioceses
- ❖ 7,000+ congregations



# Basic Structure – 3 Tiers

General  
Convention

Dioceses

Parishes, Missions, Institutions



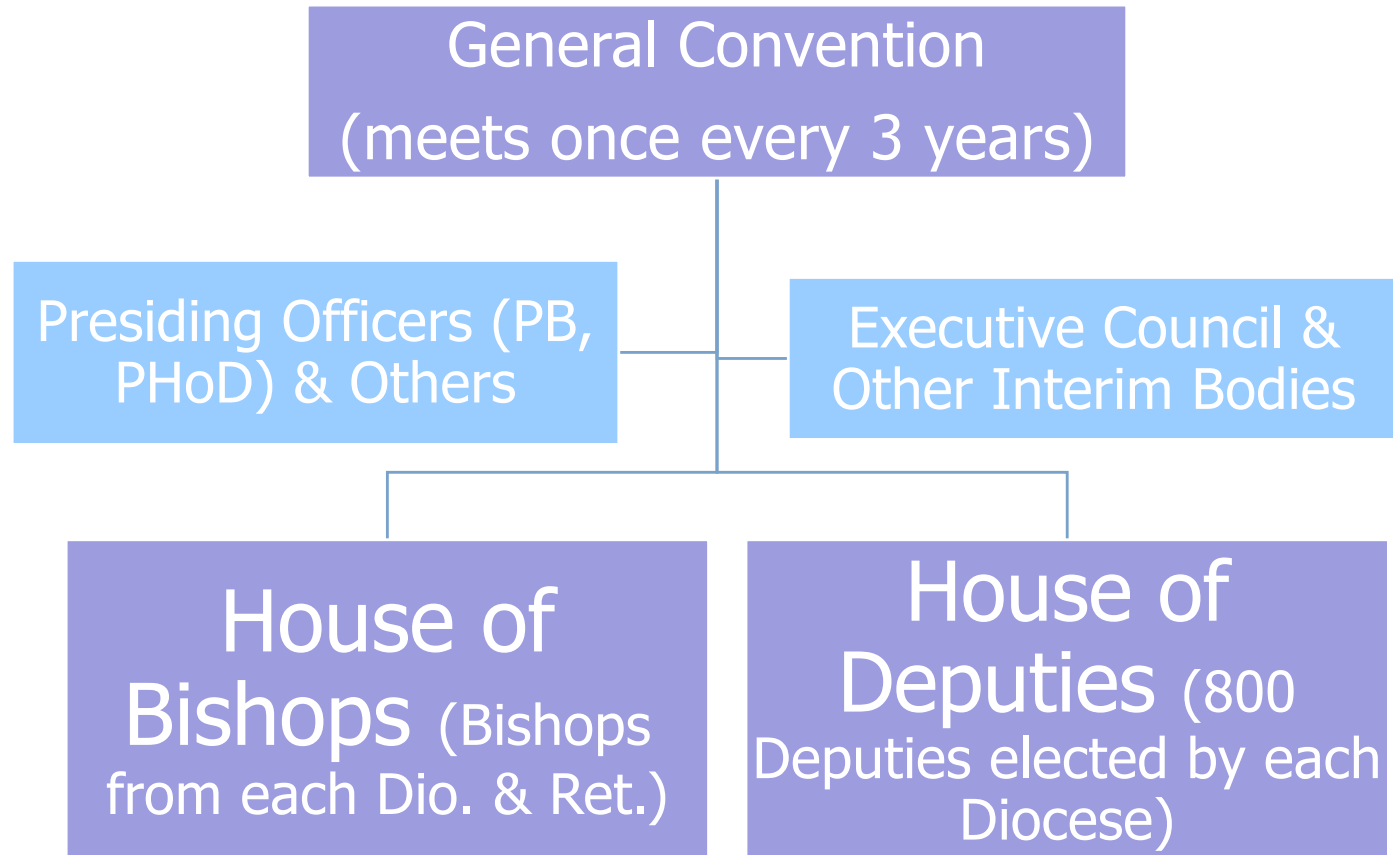
# Basic Structure – Hierarchical Structure

While “hierarchical” in character, there are some distinctive features:

- ❖ Elective processes
- ❖ Checks and balances
- ❖ Due Process

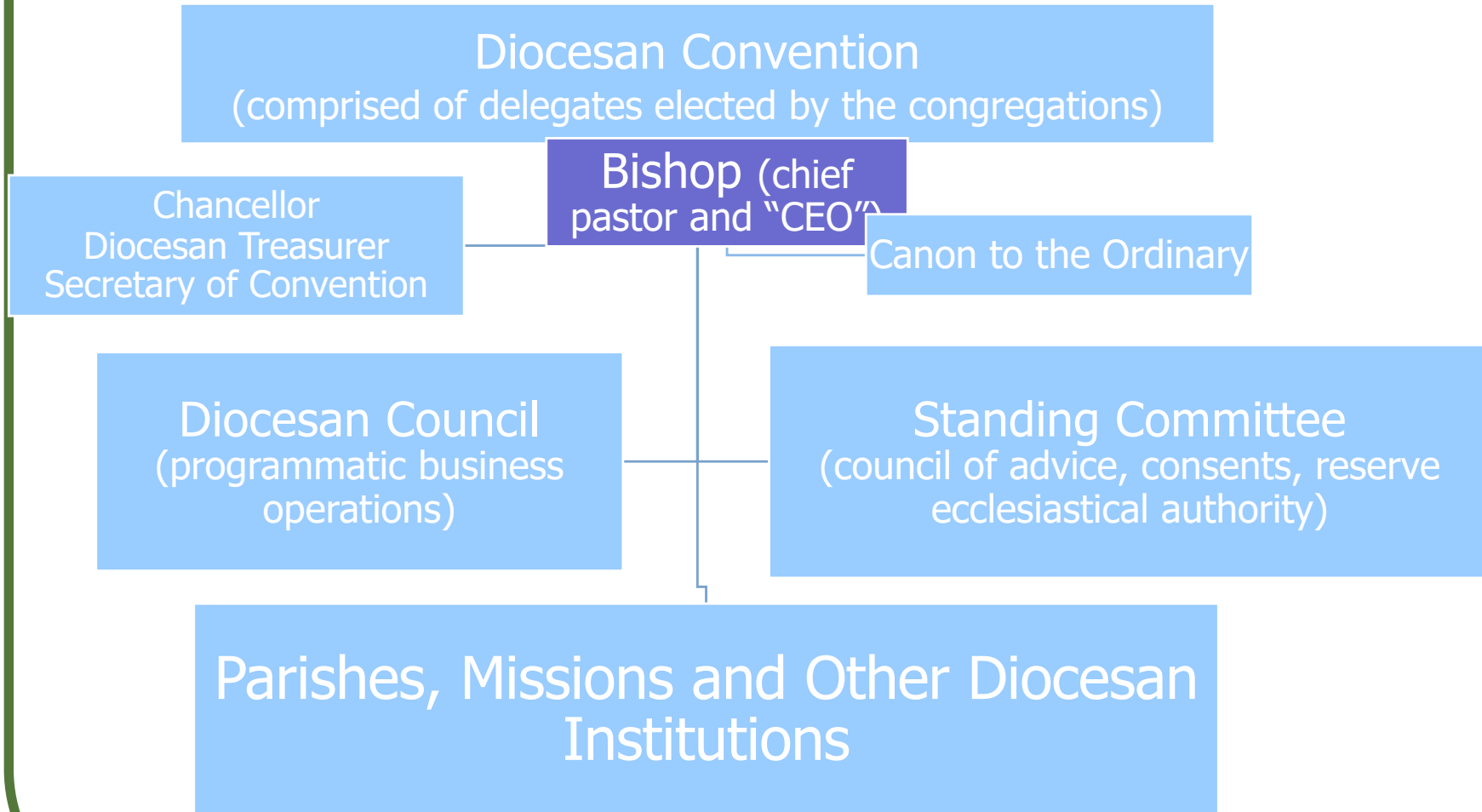


# General Convention





# Diocese





# Parish

Annual Parish Meeting  
(parish members elect vestry/BC)

Rector  
(pastor and CEO, authority over liturgy,  
education, music and church grounds)

Vestry  
(council of advice, financial/business matters,  
elects Rector w/Bishop)



# Differences Between Missions/Parishes

- ❖ Governance and Finances
  - ❖ Missions
    - ❖ Bishop has role is selecting leadership
    - ❖ Bishop appoints Clergy
    - ❖ More control over financial matters
  - ❖ Parishes
    - ❖ Parish selects lay leaders
    - ❖ Elects Clergy subject to consent and input of Bishop's office
    - ❖ More Financial independence



# The Cathedral

- ❖ Seat of the Bishop
  - ❖ Hosts Diocesan liturgies
  - ❖ Engages more actively in Diocesan initiatives
- ❖ Governed by:
  - ❖ Bishop has "general direction of services & work"
  - ❖ Dean serves at the pleasure of Bishop and is the "chief administrator"
  - ❖ Chapter that "manages the material affairs" confirmed by the Diocesan Convention
  - ❖ Governed by Canons AND special constitution





# Participation in the Councils of the Church - Laity

- ▶ Start with Catechism in BCP at 855:
- ▶ Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?
- ▶ A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons.
- ▶ Q. What is the ministry of the laity?
- ▶ A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and according the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship and governance of the Church



## Participation in the Councils of the Church - Clergy

From the Ordination Service (BCP 531):

Now you are called to work as pastor, priest, and teacher, together with your bishop and fellow presbyters, and to take your share in the **councils of the Church.**



# The Rules of The Episcopal Church

What, Who, Why, and Where are  
there Rules?



# What are the Rules?

## The Governance Documents:

- ❖ Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church
- ❖ Book of Common Prayer (including, historical documents, catechism & others)
- ❖ Resolutions of General Convention
- ❖ The Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs
- ❖ Constitution and Canons of the Diocese
- ❖ Parish Bylaws
- ❖ Robert's Rules of Order



# Who Makes the Rules?

- ❖ **General Convention:**
  - ❖ Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church
  - ❖ Book of Common Prayer
  - ❖ Resolutions of General Convention
- ❖ **Diocesan Convention:**
  - ❖ Constitution and Canons of the Diocese
  - ❖ Resolutions of Convention
    - MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church
- ❖ **Congregations:**
  - ❖ Parish bylaws MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church and the Diocese



## Who has to follow them?

**Title I, Canon 17, Section 8:** Any person accepting any office in this Church shall well and faithfully perform the duties of that office in ***accordance with the Constitution and Canons of this Church and of the Diocese*** in which the office is being exercised.



## Who has to follow them?

The Church's Constitution and Book of Common Prayer all clergy to make the following declaration:

"I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation; and I do solemnly engage **to conform to the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church.**"



# Why do we have Rules?

- ❖ To Define of roles and responsibilities of leaders and members
- ❖ To run the "business" of the Church
- ❖ To promote stewardship
- ❖ To protect the vulnerable
- ❖ To ensure the continuity and furtherance of Mission and Ministry





## Why are the Rules particularly relevant to the Diocese's experience

- ❖ Split was facilitated in part by removal of experienced leaders
- ❖ Intentional lack of educative processes
- ❖ The Rules ultimately saved the Diocese



# Where are the Rules?

## The Governance Documents:

- ❖ Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church  
[https://www.episcopalarchives.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018\\_CandC.pdf](https://www.episcopalarchives.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018_CandC.pdf)
- ❖ Book of Common Prayer (including, historical documents, catechism & others)
  - At your parish or on your nightstand
- ❖ Resolutions of General Convention
  - For 1976 – Current:  
<https://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/acts/>



# Where are the Rules?

## The Governance Documents:

- ❖ The Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs  
<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/finance-office/manual-of-business-methods/>
- ❖ Constitution and Canons of the Diocese
  - <https://diosanjoaquin.org/canons/>
- ❖ Parish Bylaws
  - Only God and the Parish Administrator know
  - IF they cannot be located the Diocesan Canons provide for the basic default rules.



## Resources for navigating the Rules:

- ❖ Chancellors
- ❖ Bishop's Office
- ❖ Vestry Papers
- ❖ Diocese's ongoing education series
- ❖ ~~GOOGLE as last resort only~~



## Upcoming Developments:

- ❖ Diocesan Constitution and Canons are undergoing comprehensive review and revision by Committee
- ❖ Review and Revision to parish governing documents



# Chancellor's Office

- ❖ Support in navigating the Governance Documents
  - ❖ Governance Issues/Disciplinary matters
  - ❖ Elections
  - ❖ Property transactions
  
- ❖ Support in navigating secular legal matters
  - ❖ Corporate governance
  - ❖ Property issues
  - ❖ Human Resource issues
  - ❖ Tax Exemption Issues
  - ❖ Capital Improvement projects



# Questions

Questions, concerns, and thoughts?

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