

# Frequently asked questions about Church of the Holy Cross, Episcopal

## First Visit

**“I’ve never been to an Episcopal church. What should I expect on my first visit? If I don’t know how to participate, is there someone who will help me?”**

When you arrive, you will be met by a greeter or an usher who will welcome you with a smile, answer any questions you have, and help you find your way to the sanctuary, the nursery, and restrooms. If you like, they can also find someone to sit with you and explain anything that is unfamiliar. An usher will give you a bulletin that outlines the service. Please sit anywhere you like.

At the 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. service, we use The Book of Common Prayer, which is the red book in the pew back in front of you. Page numbers are announced. The 10:30 a.m. service is also all printed service booklet which makes it easy to follow along.

There are some Bibles in the pews. However, the lessons for the day are available in the printed bulletin at 10:30 a.m. service. We do this to make it easier for you to follow along without juggling so many books.

If you are familiar with Roman Catholic or Lutheran services, you will find our worship quite familiar. If you are from a non-liturgical church background, listen and observe, participate as you are comfortable, and ask questions. It won’t take long for you to feel right at home.

***“What should I wear?”***

Clothes and shoes. Seriously! Some people like to dress up to come to church. Some men wear suits and ties; more wear open-collar shirts and jackets. Some women wear skirts or slacks. Some people wear shorts or jeans. Gathering to praise and worship God is far more important than what you wear.

**“Will I be asked to introduce myself or do anything that might make me uncomfortable?”**

No, you will not. At the passing of the peace, people around you will greet you and may offer a handshake or a hug. They may introduce themselves then or after the service. You need not do anything that would make you uncomfortable.

**“I see people crossing themselves. What does it mean? Am I expected to do that?”**

Crossing oneself, or making the sign of the cross, is optional. There are many customs in the Episcopal Church that fall into the category of “all may, some should, none must.” This is one of them. We worship with our mind, body and spirit. Involving our body in worship may include making the sign of the cross, kneeling or standing for prayer, standing to sing, and genuflecting or bowing when leaving the pew for Communion. People who choose to make the sign of the cross generally do so when giving or receiving a blessing, at the absolution (forgiveness of sins), and at mention of the Trinity and the resurrection.

**“What do you call your clergy?”**

Most people call our priest Father Wes. Some people are more comfortable using their first names, and that is OK, you are not breaking a rule of any sort by just calling him Wes. He will jokingly say “That what Jesus calls me so your welcome to do the same”. “The Reverend” is more commonly used as a title when referring to clergy in the third person.

**“I would like to talk with one of the clergy before I visit. How do I make an appointment?”**

Call the church office (205-655-7668) between 8 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday or email [janice@holycrosstrussville.org](mailto:janice@holycrosstrussville.org). Our secretary will be happy to make an appointment with Fr. Wes.

**Episcopal 101**

**“What does ‘Episcopal’ mean?”**

“Episcopos” is the Greek word for bishop. “Episcopal” means governed by bishops.

**“What does it mean to be Episcopalian?”**

We believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and strive to love our neighbors as ourselves and respect the dignity of every person. The Episcopal Church is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion and traces its heritage to the beginnings of Christianity. Our liturgy retains ancient structure and traditions. Both men and women, including those who are married, can be ordained as deacons, priests, and bishops. Lay people (the non-ordained people at a church) have a vital role in the governance and ministry of our church. We believe in the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. We uphold the Bible and worship with *The Book of Common Prayer*. We celebrate our unity

in Christ while honoring our differences, always putting the work of love before uniformity of opinion. All are welcome to find their home at Holy Cross.

### **“What does it mean that the Episcopal Church is part of the Anglican Communion?”**

The Episcopal Church was established in America shortly after the American Revolution. Before that time, we were the Church of England. When the American colonies won their independence, most of America’s Anglican clergy refused to swear allegiance to the British monarch as was required by the Church of England. As a result, the Episcopal Church was formed, and because after a few years the Episcopal Church remained in relationship with the Church of England, the Anglican Communion came into existence. Today, the Anglican Communion has more than 80 million members in 44 regional and national member churches in more than 160 countries.

The archbishop of Canterbury is the spiritual head of the Anglican Communion and is considered “first among equals” within the Anglican Communion. The archbishop does not have the same authority within the Anglican Communion that the pope has in the Roman Catholic Church.

### **“Do you read the Bible?”**

Indeed we do. Two or more passages of scripture are read aloud at each of our Sunday services. On Sundays, we follow the order of scriptures in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), which is a three-year cycle of scriptures to use during worship. (You can see RCL online at [www.lectionarypage.net](http://www.lectionarypage.net)) We have small bible study groups, that meet regularly to study and discuss scripture and other topics throughout the week.

Some people read the Daily Office, a cycle of scripture readings that covers most of the Bible in two years. You can see that each day at <http://dailyofficelectionary.com/>

### **“What is The Book of Common Prayer?”**

*The Book of Common Prayer* (the BCP or the prayer book) is a rich resource for corporate worship and private devotion. The BCP provides orders of corporate and individual worship and prayer for clergy and the laity (the people) grounded in Holy Scripture and faithful to the early church, two comprehensive schedules of readings from the Bible (the RCL and the Daily Office), the Psalter (the entire book of Psalms in a translation that pre-dates the King James Version), many other beautiful and meaningful prayers, and the Outline of the Faith, which answers many questions about what we believe.

*The Book of Common Prayer* is not an “Anglican Bible,” though it does include many passages of scripture. We are guided by the BCP in our worship, we are aided by it in our

devotional practices, and we enjoy it. But it does not replace the Bible. (For more details, including a free PDF of the prayer book, go to [www.episcopalchurch.org/page/book-common-prayer](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/book-common-prayer)).

### **“What are the sacraments of the Episcopal Church?”**

The two sacraments of the Gospel are Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist. Five more sacramental rites are confirmation, ordination, marriage, the reconciliation of a penitent (confession), and the anointing or laying on of hands of the sick.

### **“Wait. You have confession?”**

Yes. The Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent is offered by any Episcopal priest. We do not, however, have confessionals, and we don't require private confession. Except during Easter season, most public worship services include a prayer of confession followed by an absolution.

### **“Does the Episcopal Church baptize infants?”**

Yes. Infants are baptized because we believe the grace given at baptism is covenantal in nature and is for everyone in covenant with the Lord. Baptism is a sacrament that confers membership in the Body of Christ and offers a child the opportunity to live and grow in the midst of the Christian community of the church. Parents, godparents, and the witnessing community take on the solemn responsibility for the child's religious training and commit to raising the child in the Christian faith. Baptism is just the beginning. At each baptism, each of us renews our own baptismal covenant.

### **“What does the Episcopal Church believe about divorce?”**

We affirm that committed relationships are lifelong and monogamous. Episcopalians also recognize that some relationships are unhealthy and must end. We believe there is grace after divorce, and we do not deny the sacraments to those who have been divorced.

## **Welcome**

**“Would I be really welcomed at Holy Cross? I am \_\_\_\_\_ (minority, divorced, tattooed, conservative, liberal, non-Christian ... ).”**

When we say “the Episcopal Church welcomes you,” we really mean it. We have active members who are Republicans, Democrats, and undeclared. We have active members who are young, old, white, black, native-born, immigrant, and tattooed. Our members are employed, self-employed, laid off, retired, and disabled. We are a community that

reflects the diversity of God's creation and God's love. Non-Christians also find a welcome here. Several members have spouses of other faiths who attend periodically.

**“Is there an information class for newcomers?”**

Yes, there is. About every three months, we have a Newcomers Dinner on a Saturday night. At this time, you can meet others who are fairly new to Holy Cross and meet with members of the staff and vestry to learn more about Holy Cross and ask any questions you have.

**“I have already been baptized in another church. Do I have to be baptized again?”**

The Episcopal Church recognizes all baptisms done with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We do not re-baptize. If you are unsure whether you have been baptized, we will do a conditional baptism, saying, “If you are not already baptized, then I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

**“What do I have to do to join? Do I need to attend classes? To become an Episcopalian, do I have to be confirmed?”**

In short, if you attend and are baptized and consider yourself a member we consider you a member. If you are already a member of an Episcopal Church, either attend the next Newcomers Dinner or meet with Father Wes to discuss getting involved in the life of the church. We will then request a transfer of your letter. Otherwise, to become a member at Holy Cross, you need to be baptized and participate in the next Newcomers Dinner or meet with Father Wes to discuss membership. That would make you a “baptized member” of the parish. We also have “confirmed members.” To become a confirmed member of Holy Cross, one needs to attend our Confirmation Class that happens every 18 months prior to the Bishop coming to visit. (Look for the next class date to be announced in the Holy Cross e-blast and in the bulletin.) Then, one must be confirmed or received by our bishop. Those who have made an adult affirmation of faith are received; all others are confirmed.

**“I'd really be more comfortable just attending for a while without making a commitment. Can I do that?”**

You certainly may, for as long as you like. In fact, we'd recommend you attend one or more of our services for a month or more before deciding if you want Holy Cross to be your church home. Then make an appointment with our clergy to ask any questions you may have about becoming a member or an active participant in our ministries.

**Worship**

**“How do Episcopalians worship? What is your order of service?”**

Worship in the Episcopal Church is liturgical. Liturgy means “work of the people,” and our worship seeks to engage us in body, mind, and spirit. The liturgy for Sundays has two parts. The Liturgy of the Word consists of prayers, scripture readings and a sermon, an affirmation of faith (the Nicene Creed), confession and absolution, and an exchange of peace (greeting one another in the name of Christ). The second part of the service is the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It begins with the offerings of the congregation and continues with the Eucharistic Prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, the consecration of the bread and wine, Communion, a concluding prayer of thanksgiving, a blessing, and a dismissal.

If you are familiar with Roman Catholic or Lutheran services, you will find our worship quite familiar. If you are from a non-liturgical church background, listen and observe, participate as you are comfortable, ask questions. It will not take long for the liturgy to become quite meaningful to you.

### **“What is the Holy Eucharist? Why do you do it every Sunday? Do you use real wine?”**

We do have Eucharist (Communion) every Sunday. Holy Eucharist is a practice that dates from the first century and was instituted by Jesus at supper with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. In the Eucharist, consecrated bread and wine are given as a remembrance of the Body and Blood of Christ given to God’s people and received by faith. In it, we receive forgiveness of our sins and strength in our union with Christ and one another so that we may go forth to serve the world in Christ’s name.

We do use real wine, and we drink from a common cup. If you prefer not to drink from the common cup you have the option of letting the bread be dipped in the wine (this is called intinction). If you prefer not to receive the wine, it is OK to just receive the bread. Gluten-free wafers are available if you tell the clergy before the service begins, or you may skip the bread and receive only the wine.

### **“I am a visitor. May I receive Communion?”**

All baptized Christians are welcome to receive communion. All who have not been baptized are invited to join the people at Communion and receive a blessing.

### **“How do I receive Communion?”**

We gather at the altar rail for Communion. Most kneel, but it is not required. Whether you kneel or stand, you will be offered a wafer of consecrated bread and a sip of consecrated wine. To receive the bread, hold your hands together palm up, and the priest will place it in your palm. To receive the wine, please assist the chalice bearer by grasping the base of the chalice and guiding it to your lips, or you may dip your wafer in the wine and then consume both at the same time.

If you do not wish to receive the bread and wine but would like a blessing from the priest, cross your hands over your chest.

**“I am unable to walk to the altar. Can I still receive Communion?”**

Yes. We often have people with limited mobility who receive Communion at their seats. Please tell an usher of your need and he or she will make sure the clergy know.

**“Are there any differences in your two services, or are they all the same just at different times?”**

Each of our services is unique in some respects. The 8 a.m. service uses the Rite 1 liturgy, which is older and retains some of the Elizabethan language. The 10:30 a.m. service uses a combination of our Rite 2 liturgy of the 1979 BCP and liturgies from the 1998 *Enriching Our Worship* supplemental liturgical materials, which uses more contemporary language.

**“I like traditional music.” “I like contemporary music.”**

We’ve got you covered. The music at our 10:30 a.m. service is a combination of traditional music with organ, piano, and choir and the use of the Alleluia III song book containing more contemporary music. On the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday’s in 2018 we are introducing guitars, drums, piano, and singers as a diverse option of music that allows many to use their gifts in this area. If you prefer less music in the service and the Hymnal, join us at 8 a.m. service.

**“Sit, stand, kneel .... How will I know what to do?”**

In general, we stand to sing, praise, and hear the Gospel; we sit during all other readings of scripture and for the sermon; and we may kneel for prayer and to receive Communion. Some stand and some kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer. If you are unsure what to do, you can follow the example of those around you or do what might seem natural for you. The Lord is not as concerned with the sit, stand, and kneeling as he is with our hearts as we worship. If standing or kneeling for periods of time is difficult for you, feel free to remain seated.

**Children and Youth**

**“I want my children excited about coming to church. What is available for them? How can Holy Cross help get them involved?”**

We want your children to be excited about coming to church too. At our 10:30 a.m. service we have a nursery for children through age 4. Also at this service we offer a

children's church chapel. The children are present in the main service through the New Testament reading and are then dismissed to "Kid's Church." Our children's ministry team gives a teaching on the same lessons heard in church and often has some hands-on activity to help the scriptures relate to them at their age. The children are then brought back into the service to join their family for communion.

Children in grades 2 and up are invited to be trained and participate in the service as acolytes on a regular rotation.

We have Christian formation for all ages during the school year. For fellowship, service, and other opportunities for children feel free to contact our director of children's ministry at [heather@holycrosstrussville.org](mailto:heather@holycrosstrussville.org).

### **Get Involved**

***"I'd like to get more involved at Holy Cross. Who can I contact? Is there a list of volunteer opportunities?"***

At Holy Cross there are many opportunities to connect through discipleship, worship, fellowship and mission. You can browse our website to see more about the various ministries that are active. When you attend our Newcomers Dinner you will be given a booklet with descriptions of our various ministry opportunities. Another way to find out current opportunities is to sign up for the Holy Cross e-blast, which is sent by e-mail once a week. To sign up, just send a request via email to media specialist, Philip Johnson (email is found on the staff page of the website). Watch the bulletin for sign-up sheets for specific events.