

## A Confirmation Glossary

*As human beings, language and symbols are the primary vehicles for communication. We use this complex dynamic to construct meaning. Yet, the relationship between language and meaning is never straightforward. Like any institution or organization, the Episcopal Church has language that contributes to our meaning-making. Given the significance of culture and context to imbue meaning, language in the form of words can lead to misunderstanding or even prove to be a barrier to communication when not explained. The following are words that often appear when preparing for confirmation.*

**Anointing.** Sacramental use of oil as an outward sign of God’s active presence for healing, initiation, or ordination. Anointing with oil by smearing or pouring may accompany prayers for healing (unction) and the laying on of hands in the rite for Ministration of the Sick (BCP, 453). The signing with the cross of the newly baptized may be done by anointing with the oil of chrism, which signifies that the person is “sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own for ever.” (BCP, 308).

**Apostle.** A term based on the Greek word which means “someone sent out.” It is used seventy-nine times in the New Testament. It often refers to the twelve disciples. The primary New Testament meaning seems to refer to someone who is a personal messenger of Jesus. Although Paul was not a follower or disciple of Jesus before his death and resurrection, he does refer to himself as an apostle because he had seen the risen Lord and he was sent out to preach to the Gentiles. In Hebrews 3:1, Jesus is called an apostle because he is one who was sent by God.

**Apostles’ Creed, The.** The Ancient formula of Christian belief in three sections concerning God the Father (Creator), the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit (Sanctifier). It is also known as the baptismal creed because catechumens were traditionally required to recite it before baptism. The Apostles’ Creed is the basis for the baptismal covenant in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP, 304).

**Baptism.** This is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body, the church. God establishes an indissoluble bond with each person in baptism. God adopts us, making us members of the church and inheritors of the Kingdom of God (BCP 298, 858). In baptism we are made sharers in the new life of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins. Baptism is the foundation for all future church participation and ministry. During the baptismal rite the members of the congregation promise to do all they can to support the candidates for baptism in their life in Christ. They join with the candidates in renewing the baptismal covenant. The baptismal promises are made for infants by their parents and sponsors / godparents.

**Baptismal Covenant.** The rite of Christian initiation contains a series of vows, made by all present, called the “baptismal covenant” (BCP, 304-305). Responding to a series of questions, the people affirm belief in the triune God (through the Apostles’ Creed) and promised to continue in the Christian fellowship, resist evil and repent, proclaim the gospel, serve Christ in

all persons, and strive for justice and peace. In the Episcopal Church the baptismal covenant is widely regarded as the normative statement of what it means to follow Christ.

**Bible, The.** The Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament (OT/Hebrew Scriptures) and New Testament (NT), written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, contain all things necessary to salvation. The OT reveals God's mighty acts of creation, the deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt, and the making of the old covenant (including the Ten Commandments) with the chosen people. The NT describes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, whose coming was foretold in the OT. It also tells the story of the creation of the Christian church through the gift of the Holy Spirit and presents the new covenant, based on love, which is the new relationship with God given by Jesus Christ to all who believe in him (BCP, 850-851).

**Bishop.** One of the three orders of ordained ministers in the church, bishops are charged with apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the church. Bishops represent Christ and his church, and they are called to provide Christian vision and leadership for their dioceses. Bishops are elected by clergy and lay persons in a diocese. Bishops preside at services of Confirmation.

**Book of Common Prayer, The (BCP).** Official book of worship of the Episcopal Church. The BCP provides liturgical forms, prayers, and instructions so that all members and orders (lay, deacons, priests, and bishops) may appropriately share in common worship.

**Candidate.** One who is to make a sacramental commitment. Those who are to be baptized and those who are to be confirmed, received, or reaffirmed are referred to as candidates in the BCP (301, 415). The term also refers to one who is in the final stage of the process leading to ordination as a deacon or priest.

**Canon.** The word is derived from the Greek *kanon*, a "measuring rod or rule." It has several different meanings in the church. 1) Scripture, 2) Church Law, and 3) a special title for someone who is on the staff of a cathedral or diocese. There are canons that describe what baptism and confirmation are.

**Catechism.** Outline for instruction in the Christian faith presented in a question and answer format. The Catechism appears in the BCP as "An Outline of the Faith (845-862). It provides a brief summary of the church's teaching.

**Catechumenate.** An intentional process of preparing individuals for baptism based on practices from the early church that include regular participation in communal worship, study, and service. The catechumenate is an immersive experience in Christianity that includes sponsors (mentors) and regular liturgical rites to mark an individual's deepening levels of commitment to the Way of Jesus.

**Catholic.** Derived from the Greek word meaning “general” or “universal.” The Church is catholic because it proclaims the whole Faith to all the people to the end of time. It should not be confused with the Roman Catholic Church which is a branch of the Christian Church, just as the Episcopal Church is a branch of Christianity.

**Chrism.** Consecrated oil used for anointing the newly baptized person with the sign of the cross at baptism.

**Christian Initiation.** The sacramental rites incorporating one into the life of the church. Holy Baptism is “full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church (BCP, 298). Confirmation follows a mature, public affirmation of faith and commitment to the responsibilities of baptism by the candidate (BCP, 413).

**Christmas.** A festival celebrated on December 25 commemorating the Incarnation of the Word of God in the birth of Jesus Christ. In the BCP, it is also called The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Communicant.** One who receives Holy Communion. In the BCP the term refers to those receiving communion at a particular service. Communicants are defined in the canons (*see canon*) as all members of this church who have received Holy Communion at least three times in the past year. They further define “communicants in good standing” as communicants who “... for the previous year have been faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God.”

**Confirmation.** The sacramental rite in which the candidates “express a mature commitment to Christ, and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop” (BCP, 860). Those who were baptized at an early age and those baptized as adults without laying on of hands by a bishop are expected to make a mature public affirmation of their faith, recommit themselves to the responsibilities of their baptism, and receive laying on of hands by a bishop (BCP, 412). Adults baptized with the laying on of hands by a bishop are considered to be confirmed. Confirmation is rooted in the baptismal covenant.

**Covenant.** A binding agreement that is freely entered into by two or more parties. The parties to this solemn agreement may be individuals or groups of people. A covenant with God is a relationship initiated by God for salvation and responded to in faith. The old covenant was given by God to the Hebrew people. The story of the covenant is revealed in the Old Testament (BCP, 846-847). The new covenant is the new relationship with God given by Jesus to the apostles and through them to all who believe in Jesus (BCP, 850-851). The new covenant is a life of love that we share with Christ and with each other in Christ’s name. Christian initiation takes place in terms of the baptismal covenant (BCP, 304-305), which is renewed at Confirmation (BCP, 416-417).

**Creed.** A concise and formal statement of basic beliefs about God. The term is derived from the Latin *credo*, “I believe.” The historic creeds of Christendom include the Apostles’ Creed and the Nice Creed, which are both used by the Episcopal Church in worship.

**Cross.** The instrument of Jesus’ death and the central symbol of the Christian faith. It represents Jesus’ offering and sacrifice for his life in love for us and our salvation. The cross thus symbolizes the Christian life, especially in terms of love, generosity, and sacrifice.

**Crozier.** The pastoral staff of a bishop. It was originally a walking stick and later acquired the symbolism of a shepherd’s crook.

**Crucifix.** A cross bearing the image of Christ crucified, either in agony or in triumph (Christus Rex).

**Crucifixion.** Death by nailing or binding to a wooden cross. The practice began in the ancient east and was common among the Romans as punishment inflicted on slaves and certain non-Romans. The crucifixion of Christ is recorded in all four gospels.

**Daily Office.** Use of daily prayers to mark the times of the day and to express the traditions of the praying community is traditional in Judaism and Christianity. In the Episcopal Church, the Daily Office includes daily Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer plus forms for Noonday Prayer, Order of Worship for Evening, Compline (night prayers), and Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families. All of these are found in the Book of Common Prayer.

**Deacon.** Deacons are members of one of three distinct orders of ordained ministry (with bishops and priests). In the Episcopal Church a deacon exercises “a special ministry of servanthood” under the direction of a bishop, serving all people and especially those in need (BCP, 543). This definition reflects the practice of the early church, in which deacons were ordained “not to the priesthood but to the servanthood [*diakonia*, “ministry”].

**Deanery.** A geographical section or area within a diocese. Some dioceses call these regions.

**Diocese.** The territorial jurisdiction of a diocesan bishop. The term also refers to the congregations and church members of the diocese. There are currently 111 dioceses in the Episcopal Church – 100 in the United States proper, plus eleven dioceses in other countries or outlying U.S. territories and the diocese of Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe. Each is led by a bishop.

**Disciple, Discipleship.** A follower or pupil of a great master. A disciple is a learner who follows a movement or teacher and helps spread the master’s teacher. The concept of discipleship (being a Christian disciple) continues to be an important part of the Christian life.

**Easter.** The feast of Christ's resurrection. Every Sunday is considered a "little Easter" of celebration. The Season of Easter lasts fifty days.

**Episcopalian.** A member of the Episcopal Church. This term is used as a noun, not as an adjective.

**Epistle.** Literally, a letter, the name was given to the first of the two New Testament readings in the eucharist. The majority of these passages were taken from the written letters of the early church, such as the letters of Paul to communities of Christians in various places.

**Eucharist.** The sacrament of Christ's body and blood and the principal act of Christian worship. The term is from the Greek, "thanksgiving." In the Book of Common Prayer, the whole service is entitled the Holy Eucharist. The first part of the service is designated the Word of God. The second portion is designated Holy Communion. The eucharist is also called the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, and the Great Offertory.

**Evangelism, Evangelist.** From the Greek *euangelion*, "good news." An evangelist is one who tells the story of Jesus.

**Forgiveness.** To forgive is to give up or absolve legitimate claims upon another as when a debt is forgiven. In forgiveness, a relationship is restored or renewed. Central to Christian faith is the forgiveness of sins, understood as an action of God. God is understood to be forgiving, a God of love, mercy, and grace.

**Gospel.** The English word "gospel" (from Anglo-Saxon *godspel*) or "good news." Originally in Christian usage it meant the good news of God's saving act in Jesus Christ, focused on the cross and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-11). The New Testament contains four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The gospel in the Episcopal liturgy is the final reading from Holy Scriptures. In the Eucharist it's read by the deacon, or priest if a deacon is not available.

**Grace.** God's love freely given to humanity for salvation.

**Holy Spirit.** The third person of the Trinity. It is often symbolized by flames, a dove, or the wind (*ruach*) blowing freely.

**Hymn.** A form of congregational song in praise of God. Hymns authorized for use in the Episcopal Church are collected in various hymnals: *The Hymnal 1982*; *Wonder, Love, and Praise*; *Lift Every Voice and Sing II (LEVAS)*, *El Himnario*; *Songs for Celebration*; and *Come Celebrate! A Hymnal Supplement*.

**Jesus Christ.** The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the savior and redeemer of humanity, the Word of God who was made flesh and dwelt among us in the world.

**Laity.** The people of God. The term is from the Greek *laos*, “the people.” All baptized Christians are the people of God, the church, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Its singular form is lay person.

**Lay Ministry.** The term refers to the many ways the laity of the church live out their baptismal covenant in their daily life and the world.

**Laying on of hands.** A significant ritual action in several sacramental rites. It is an external sign of the bestowal of God’s grace through the prayer or the ministry of the one laying on hands, whether for spiritual growth or ministry or forgiveness or healing. It is often used as a synonym for confirmation.

**Lectionary.** An ordered system for reading the Holy Scriptures at the eucharist and the Daily Offices.

**Liturgy.** The church’s public worship of God. The term is derived from Greek words for “people” and “work.”

**Mission.** From the Latin “to send.” The mission of the church is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” The church pursues its mission “as it prays and worships, proclaims the gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.” This mission is carried out through all members of the church (BCP, 855).

**Mitre, or Miter.** Liturgical headgear and insignia of bishops, typically worn in procession and when pronouncing episcopal (bishop) blessings. It is shield-shaped and pointed at the top. It is often said to represent the tongues of fire that rested on the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2).

**New Testament.** The collection of 27 early Christian writings accepted as canonical by all Christian confessions and denominations. These writings reveal the witness of the early church to the Christ event as the saving act of God. They include the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, 13 letters ascribed to the apostle Paul, other letters, and the Revelation of John.

**Nicene Creed.** It was first issued by the Council of Nicea in 325, but in the form used today it is frequently thought to have been perfected at the Council of Constantinople in 381. It is commonly believed to be based on the baptismal creed of Jerusalem.

**Old Testament.** The name traditionally given to the first thirty-nine books of the Christian Bible. In recent years the term “Hebrew Scriptures” has been used frequently instead. It has three divisions: 1) Pentateuch (or Torah); 2) the Prophets (or *Nebiim*); and the Writings (*Kethubim*). The word testament comes from the word covenant.

**Parish.** The term is used for a self-supporting congregation with a rector, as opposed to a mission or other congregation under a vicar or priest-in-charge. Each has a governing board, elected by the church's members called a **Vestry**.

**Pilgrim.** A pilgrim is one who goes on a pilgrimage, a journey taken with a religious or devotional intention.

**Pledge.** A commitment to give one's time, talents, and money as an expression of faith and a personal response to God's generosity.

**Prayer.** The experience of corporate or individual nearness with God, through words, acts, or silence. This nearness may take the form of addressing God, as in prayers of petition, praise, and thanksgiving; or the form of listening, as in contemplative and meditative prayer.

**Presiding Bishop.** The Chief Pastor and Primate of the Episcopal Church, who is elected every three years at General Convention (the Episcopal Church's governmental body) by the House of Bishops (representing every diocese).

Prophet, Prophecy. A prophet of the Old Testament was called a messenger to proclaim the word of the God of the covenant to the people of the covenant. Prophecy refers to the message or work of the prophet.

**Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows.** Persons who are returning to the church after a period of unbelief or those who have entered a new level of spiritual life may reaffirm their baptismal vows in the presence of a bishop, often during the rite of confirmation.

**Reception** (Christian Commitment). Baptized persons who have been members of another Christian fellowship and who wish to be affiliated with the Episcopal Church may make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their baptism in the presence of a bishop. Candidates for reception normally have made a mature commitment (confirmation) in another Christian fellowship.

**Rector.** The priest in charge of a parish who is chosen by the congregation with the approval of the diocesan bishop.

**Retreat.** A period of time, in a "place apart" from daily life and work, which normally includes silence, reflection, and may include some form of still, meditative prayer which may be combined with brief periods of activity and study.

**Rite.** A form for religious ceremony that expresses the church's relationship with God through words, actions, and symbols.

**Rubric.** A ceremonial or other direction given in the Book of Common Prayer, typically printed in italics.

**Rule of Life.** A set of guidelines and commitments directing one's life. The rule usually includes set times of daily prayer and meditation, study (such as reading the Bible), and acts of charity.

**Sacramental Rites.** The sacramental rites of the Episcopal Church include Confirmation, Ordination (becoming a deacon, priest, or bishop), Holy Matrimony (marriage), Reconciliation of a Penitent (asking for forgiveness), and Unction (anointing at time of illness or death). These rites are distinguished from the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, which were given by Christ and are understood to be necessary for the Christian life of all persons.

**Sacraments.** Outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means for receiving God's grace. Baptism and Eucharist are the two great sacraments given by Christ to his church.

**Saint.** A holy person, a faithful Christian, one who shares life in Christ.

**Salvation.** Eternal life in the fullness of God's love.

**Sanctuary.** A holy place, usually the worship space of a church.

**Sermon.** Religious address in a worship service. In the Episcopal Church, the sermon is to "break open" the Word of God and proclaim the gospel in the context of the readings from scripture, the liturgical occasion, the congregation gathered, and the pastoral needs of the situation.

**Sin.** Following our own will instead of following the will of God, thereby being centered on ourselves instead of God and distorting our relationships with God, other people, and Creation.

**Spiritual Gifts.** Also called charisms, and partially listed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, these are graces granted by the Holy Spirit to empower the faithful to perform specific acts.

**Suffragan Bishop.** An assisting bishop to a diocesan bishop who is also elected to that role.

**Theology.** The study of God.

**Trinity.** The Trinity is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (BCP, 852). The term refers to "three" and "unity."

**Vows.** Formal pledges or promises. All Christian vows are ultimately based on the promises made in the baptismal covenant (BCP, 304-305).