

Episcopalian Terminology

*Some of the terms we Episcopal people often use, and figure everybody knows.
(Please see the [disclaimer](#), below.)*

ABC

A sort of "short-hand" used by many participants in worldwide web discussion groups when referring to the [Archbishop of Canterbury](#).

Ablutions

Ceremonial washing of [communion](#) vessels and/or the ceremonial washing of the hands of the [celebrant](#).

Absolution

A declaration by a [bishop](#) or [priest](#), announcing forgiveness by God to those who have confessed their sins and repented.

Acolyte

From a Greek word meaning, "to follow." Acolytes are lay volunteers who follow the Cross in the [procession](#) and [recession](#) and assist the priest in worship. An acolyte lights and sometimes carries candles, and helps in the preparation of [communion](#).

Advent

From the Latin: *Adventus*: "Coming." Advent is the first [season](#) of the [Church](#) year. Advent begins four Sundays before [Christmas](#) and ends on Christmas day. The color of Advent is traditionally purple, marking the preparational aspects of the season. In Advent we prepare for our Lord's coming in three ways: at Christmas; for his coming into our hearts; and for his coming again at the end of time.

Advent Wreath

A wreath with four or five candles, used in most Episcopal churches and in some homes during the season of [Advent](#). Four candles are placed in a circle, and a fifth may be placed in the center. One candle is lit on the first Sunday in Advent, two on the second Sunday, three on the third and four on the fourth Sunday in Advent. On [Christmas](#) day, the fifth candle is lighted.

Agnus Dei

From two Latin words: *angus*, meaning "lamb" and *dei*, meaning "of God." The term refers to a three-part litany frequently said or sung after the [fraction](#) in the Holy Communion part of the [Eucharist](#).

Aisle

The center passage of a church building bisecting the [pews](#), extending from the [narthex](#) to the [chancel](#).
see also: [Ambulatory](#)

Alb

A white robe worn by many [priests](#) when celebrating [communion](#), generally worn over daily clothes but under other vestments. A polyester variation of the alb called the cassock-alb has become the de facto standard Eucharistic garment for many, if not most Episcopal, Lutheran and Roman Catholic [clergy](#).

All Saints' Day

November 1st - a day we commemorate all the saints of the [Church](#) and those we know who've joined the saints in worship at the heavenly banquet table. Originally known as "All Hallows Day," and followed "all hallows eve" (Halloween).

Alms

From the Greek word *e/leos*, meaning "pity." Money given by the [Church](#) to the poor. According to the [canons](#), the loose offering (cash and undesignated checks) on the first Sunday of every month is supposed to go into an Alms account.

Alms Basin

An Episcopalian "offering plate."

Altar

A table, usually in the [sanctuary](#), on which the bread and wine used in the [Communion](#) service are [consecrated](#). Also known as and referred to in the [prayer book](#) as the Holy Table.

Altar Guild

A special [lay](#) service group in a church who prepare the [altar](#) and maintain the furnishings in a church building. The altar guild usually supervises all [seasonal](#) church decorations and is usually responsible for all flower arrangements.

Ambulatory

A side [aisle](#) in a church building, between the [pews](#) and the side walls, most often used for special [processions](#).

Amen

From Hebrew, meaning, "So be it." Episcopalians say "*ah-men*," while most other communions say "*eh-men*."

Amice

A rectangular neckpiece or collar worn with an [alb](#). The amice is generally not worn by a [low church](#) person.

Anglican

A term which simply means "English." The Episcopal Church is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion -- a collection of Churches around the world that has their origins in the [Church of England](#).

Anglo-Catholic

Primarily a style of worship which is noted for its beauty, majesty and formality, but also a fundamental understanding of the nature of the [Church](#) and the sacramental way that the church relates to everyday life.

See [High Church](#).

Ante-Communion

The first part of the [Eucharist](#) service, including [The Peace](#), and ending before the [offertory](#). In the [prayer book](#), the ante-communion is also known as "The Word of God."

Anthem

A hymn or choral piece sung only by a [choir](#), without the [congregation](#).

Antiphon

From the Greek words *anti*, meaning "against," and *phone*, meaning "sound." An antiphon is literally a song sung back and forth by two choirs, or by one choir divided into two sections. In the Episcopal Church, the [Kyrie](#) and the [Sursum Corda](#) are two examples of antiphons. The familiar exchange "The Lord be with you" - "And also with you" ([Rite I](#): "*And with thy spirit*") is also an antiphon.

Apostolic Succession

The doctrine that holds that [bishops](#) are the direct successors of the original eleven apostles (excluding Judas) and are thus inheritors in an unbroken line to the ministry to which Jesus Himself ordained the Apostles. In the Episcopal Church, we believe that our bishops had hands laid upon them by bishops who had hands laid upon them by bishops who had hands laid upon them... all the way back to the original apostles.

Archbishop

The term used by most of the [Anglican Communion](#) (America being the largest exception) to define a [bishop](#) in charge of a group of [dioceses](#) in a geographical area, or a national church. His superiority over other bishops is only a matter of organizational rank. As the saying goes, "He (or conceivably she) is first among equals." In writing or speaking to an archbishop, the form of address is "The Most Reverend." The [Archbishop of Canterbury](#) has an additional title: The Most Reverend and Right Honorable Dr. George L. Carey. In speaking to him directly, you call an archbishop "Your Grace."

Archbishop of Canterbury

The equivalent of a [Presiding Bishop](#) for the [Church of England](#). Most Episcopalians (in an honorary sense) acknowledge the Archbishop of Canterbury to be the spiritual head of the worldwide [Anglican](#) Communion. Increasingly, the letters "ABC" are being used as a shorthand code for the title.

See [Canterbury](#).

Archdeacon

A priest (or increasingly, a deacon) who is part of a [bishop's](#) staff and who usually has some administrative supervision over [missions](#) for the bishop. Archdeacons are referred to as "The Venerable" [The Ven.]: The Venerable John Q. Beckwith. (The title "Reverend" is not used if Venerable is used.) Archdeacons sometimes wear purple [cassocks](#) instead of black ones, or black cassocks with purple piping.

Ash Wednesday

The Wednesday marking the beginning of the season of [Lent](#), usually observed with a period of fasting and spiritual preparation. In the Ash Wednesday liturgy, the [celebrant](#) usually smears ashes on a person's forehead as a mark of their mortality ("Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.") The ashes are often burned palms saved from the previous year's [Palm Sunday](#) celebration.

Aumbry

A box or cupboard in the wall of a church building or in a [sacristy](#) where the [Reserved Sacrament](#) is kept.

Baptism

The sacrament that celebrates a person's joining of the [Church](#). At our baptisms we are cleansed from sin, and adopted by God into His family, and made heirs of His eternal Kingdom. Since we can only be adopted once, baptism is a final, non-repeatable act. The Episcopal Church recognizes both adult and infant baptism and offers both. Also, in the Episcopal Church, one can be baptized by being immersed, by being sprinkled, or by having water poured on them. Baptism and [Holy Communion](#) are the two great [sacraments](#) of the Episcopal Church.

Bible, The

The primary source of inspiration and the single most important book for Episcopalians. Three or more Bible readings are included in a typical worship service. Over 80% of the [prayer book](#) comes directly from the Bible.

Bishop

From the Greek word *episcopos*, meaning overseer. A Bishop is a member of the highest of the [orders](#) of ministry in the Church. In the Episcopal Church, there are five kinds of Bishops - [Presiding](#), [Diocesan](#), [Assistant](#), [Coadjutor](#), and [Suffragan](#). No bishop is "higher" in rank than another. The five kinds merely define their function. Bishops are the only order allowed to wear purple shirts, and their crosses are usually gold, while priests' crosses are usually silver.

Bishop, Assistant

A bishop who assists the diocesan bishop in overseeing a [diocese](#). An assistant bishop is chosen by the diocesan bishop (not elected by the people of the diocese), and was already consecrated as a bishop by another diocese prior to serving as an assistant.

Bishop, Co-adjutor

A priest who is elected by a particular [diocese](#) and [consecrated](#) to become the next [bishop](#) of that diocese when the diocesan bishop retires. The co-adjutor serves as an assistant bishop until the retirement of the [diocesan](#), and takes over the diocesan responsibilities at that point. In South Carolina, Fitzsimons Allison was elected in 1978 to serve as Bishop Co-adjutor until Grey Temple retired as Diocesan Bishop (in 1980).

Bishop, Diocesan

The primary [bishop](#) of a diocese, elected by the people of the [diocese](#) he or she serves. Sometimes referred to as "the diocesan." The diocesan of South Carolina is The Right Reverend Edward L. Salmon, Jr., XIII Bishop of South Carolina.

Bishop, Suffragan

A bishop elected by the people in a diocese to serve as the [diocesan](#) assistant. The Suffragan does not have the right to succeed as the diocesan, but may be elected as the diocesan bishop in a new election. The Suffragan bishop in South Carolina is The Right Reverend William J. Skilton.

Book Of Common Prayer

The worship book of the [Anglican](#) Church since its inception in 1549. Commonly called the "prayer book," commonly abbreviated as the BCP, the Book of Common Prayer is a collection of classic and contemporary prayers, devotions, services and psalms designed to allow the entire [Church](#) to worship in common union. The current prayer book was last revised in the 1970's.

1928 Prayer Book - A version of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, in use from 1928 to 1976. Some services from this prayer book were modified and inserted in the current prayer book (1979) as "[Rite I](#)" services. The 1928 Book of common Prayer was the last of the American prayer books to offer nationwide unified common Sunday worship (only one form available for [Eucharist](#) and one form for [Morning Prayer](#)).

1979 Prayer Book - The single largest update of a prayer book in Episcopal Church history. Begun in the late 1960's with numerous and often controversial trial liturgies, compiled in 1976 as the Proposed Book of Common Prayer, and ratified by the 1979 [General Convention](#). The book attempted to retain traditional [Episcopal](#) liturgies while incorporating many innovative forms of worship. The Convention mandated its exclusive usage, thus alienating many traditional parishioners who, in the 2000's, still refer to the book as the "new" prayer book. The book has the distinction of being copyright free, so that its pages may be used by anyone at any time.

See [Rite I](#), [Rite II](#), [Rite III](#)

Bread

One of the two [elements](#) of [communion](#), signifying to us the Body of Christ. As Scripture reminds us, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body." (Matthew 26:26)

Broad Church

One of three popular designations to define the style of worship in a particular Episcopal church. "Broad church" worship is vaguely midway between [low](#) and [high](#), and may or may not include elaborate liturgy, incense, and/or sanctus bells. A generation ago, an irreverent saying defined the three styles of [Episcopal](#) worship as follows: "*High and crazy; broad and hazy; low and lazy.*"

See [High Church](#), [Low Church](#).

Burse

From the Greek *byrsa*, meaning, "a bag." A burse is one of the furnishings of the [altar](#) for [communion](#), and is a pocket case made from two squares of some rigid material covered in cloth. The burse sits on top of the [chalice](#), [paten](#) and [veil](#), and serves to hold a [corporal](#). Often, the burse also serves to hide an extra [purificator](#).

Canon

The term comes from the Greek word *kannon*, that means "measuring rod or ruler." In the Church we speak of [canon law](#), the canon of Scripture, and people called canons. The canon of Scripture refers to the books of the [Bible](#) that are accepted as genuine and inspired by God. When used in reference to people, a canon is the title of a priest who either serves on the staff of a [cathedral](#), or who has exhibited exemplary service to a [diocese](#).

Canon Law

The collection of laws that serve as the rules of our Episcopal Church. The canons may be (and always are) modified by each [General Convention](#). Each [diocese](#) also has canon law, but a diocese may not pass a canon that conflicts with national canons.

Canterbury

The top diocese in the Church of England, and by tradition, the entire [Anglican](#) Church. Although all the branches of the Anglican Church are autonomous, each maintains a traditional connection with England, and therefore looks to the Archbishop of Canterbury as the spiritual leader of the Church. It was at Canterbury [cathedral](#) (officially titled, the Cathedral Church of Christ) that St. Thomas Becket was assassinated by King Henry's friends in 1170. Soon after Thomas' death, pilgrimages to his Canterbury shrine began. (The shrine was destroyed by Henry VIII in 1538) It was one of these pilgrimages that served as the setting for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Carol

A festival hymn, simple in tune, sung during the [Christmas Season](#). Traditional Episcopalians do *not* sing carols before sundown on December 24th, and will sing carols right up until [Epiphany](#), at least two weeks after the rest of America has abandoned them.

Cassock

A black robe worn by [priests](#) or deacons, and are usually worn with a white over-garment called a [surplice](#). A [Canon](#) may wear a black cassock with red piping, or (with permission) may wear a purple cassock. [Deans](#) and [archdeacons](#) may wear black cassocks with red or purple piping. [Lay readers](#), [choir](#) members and [acolytes](#) can also (and often do) wear cassocks.

Catechism

An elementary instruction in the principles of Christianity, in the form of questions and answers. (See pages 845-862, [BCP](#)) In past generations, one had to memorize the entire catechism before he or she could be [confirmed](#).

Cathedra

The Greek word meaning "seat." A cathedra is special [sanctuary](#) chair only used by a [bishop](#). The chair remains empty except during bishop's visitations and serves as a visible reminder that the parish priest represents the bishop, and that the bishop is the spiritual head of the diocese.

Cathedral

The church in which the [diocesan bishop's](#) throne or [cathedra](#) is kept, and often the gathering place for many of the diocese's official functions and major worship celebrations. If the cathedral is a [parish](#) church (i.e. has a congregation of worshipers) their rector is given the title of [Dean](#) of the Cathedral.

Catholic

A word usually thought of as a reference to the Roman Catholic Church, however "catholic" literally means "universal" or "found everywhere." (from the Greek word *katholikos*, meaning "general" or "universal") In the Nicene Creed, we say we believe in the holy catholic [universal] church.

Celebrant

The person who leads the worship service. In a [Eucharist](#), the celebrant is the [bishop](#), or someone who the bishop appoints to lead the service for him or her. In a service of [Morning Prayer](#), the celebrant may be either [lay](#) or [clergy](#).

Censer

(Also called a thurible) - a vessel in which [incense](#) is burned on charcoal. A censer is usually carried in [processions](#) and [recessionals](#) by a special [acolyte](#) called a thurifer.

Chalice

From Latin, *calix*, meaning "cup." A chalice is the cup used to contain the wine used at [Communion](#).

Chalice-bearer

The person ([ordained](#) or [lay](#)) who administers the chalice during [Communion](#).

Chancel

From the Latin *cancelli*, meaning "a grating" or "lattice." Chancel is the name for the section of a church building between the [nave](#) and the [sanctuary](#); usually the place the choir sits; sometimes also called the "[choir](#)". It is also usually a few steps higher than the nave.

Chant

Not exactly singing, nor reading, chanting is a recitation midway between singing and reading. Chanting originated in the monastic orders in the early centuries of the Church.

Chapel

From Latin, *cappella*, meaning "a cape." When the kings of France went on military campaigns, they would carry the cape of St. Martin with them. The tent or other temporary structure that housed the *cappella* was called a chapel. A chapel now refers to a small building or room set apart for worship and meditation.

Chaplain

The clergy person in charge of a chapel or one who ministers to a small group of people.

Chasuble

From Latin, *casula*, meaning "little house". A chasuble is a type of [vestment](#) worn by the [celebrant](#) during [Communion](#). It is usually oval in shape, with a hole for the head to pass through. The chasuble may have been derived from an ancient Roman cloak only worn outdoors and shaped like a tent (hence the name, "*little house*"). Many [Low Church clergy](#) will tell you the that chasuble's [liturgical](#) origins were from an identically shaped garment that Hebrew priests would wear to keep blood off them as they were sacrificing animals.

Chimere

A long, sleeveless coat-like [vestment](#) worn by a [bishop](#).

Choir

From Latin, *chorus*, meaning a group of singers. A choir is group of lay people (voluntary or paid) that help lead the singing during a worship service and sometimes offer special [anthems](#) to enhance worship. The word "choir" can also used to define the [chancel](#), the part of the church building where the choir sits.

Chrism

A mixture of olive oil and balsam, and sometimes used at baptisms, confirmations, ordinations and some blessings of [altars](#) and other church fixtures. Chrism is not the same as other holy oils such as those used for the [unction](#) of the sick. No balsam is added to oil used for unction.

Christmas

Besides being December 25th and the day Christians mark as the celebration of the birth of Jesus (Christ's Mass), Christmas is also a Church [season](#), running from December 25th to [Epiphany](#) (January 6th). It is this twelve-day period that is sometimes referred to as the Twelve Days of Christmas.

Church

The English word comes from the Greek word *kurios*, meaning, "master" or "lord." A form of this word, *kuriakon*, had the meaning of "...pertaining to, or belonging to the lord." Originally, the word referred to the building used by the Lord's people. However, the French and other Romance languages get their word for church from the another Greek word - *ekklesia* (lit. "called out") - in French, *eglise*, which means an assembly of people. We use both terms when speaking of the church; we speak of the building and of the people inside the building. It is interesting to note that when the Bible speaks of the church, the word used is *ekklesia*. The Bible's authors never thought of the church as a building. When the word is capitalized, it usually refers to the universal, or [catholic](#) church.

Church of England

The official name of the original Church in England, the Anglican Church. During the reign of King Henry VIII, the Church, *in* England, broke formal ties with Rome and became the Church *OF* England. Sometimes referred to as the "C of E."

Ciborium

A cup that resembles a [chalice](#), except that it has a removable lid. A ciborium is used to hold communion [wafers](#) during the [Eucharist](#)

Clergy

The group of [ordained](#) people, [consecrated](#) for unique ministry for a particular church or denomination.

Clerical

An adjective referring to ordained people and their work.

Collect

From the Latin word *collecta*, meaning "assembly." The word is normally used to refer to the prayer near the beginning of the Eucharist that precedes the [lessons](#). The collect was supposedly designed to "collect" the thoughts of the lessons and bind the thoughts together, back in the days when only one lesson and a [Gospel](#) were read. A collect is actually any short prayer that contains an invocation, a petition, and a pleading in Christ's Name (in that order).

Colors

Color plays an important part in the designation of [seasons](#) and feasts in the [Episcopal Church](#). Each church season has a color associated with it. [Advent](#) is purple (the color of preparation and penitence) or Marian Blue (in honor of Mary), [Christmas](#) is white (the color of celebration), [Epiphany](#) is green (the color of growth; growth of the gospel message from Jew to Gentile - re: the three Wise Men), [Lent](#) is purple, [Easter](#) is white, and the season after [Pentecost](#) is green (for the growth of the church). Weddings and funerals are usually occasions for white (the color of celebration) while Pentecost Sunday and ordinations are red, to signify the presence of the Holy Spirit. Black is occasionally used one day a year -- [Good Friday](#).

Communicants

From the Latin word *communicare*, meaning "to share, or partake." Communicants are the members of a local [church](#) who do or who are eligible to receive communion.

Communion

1. The Christian sacramental meal, the Lord's Supper, commanded by our Lord ("Do this in remembrance of me."). For centuries the service used to celebrate the meal was called Holy Communion, but is now more commonly called the "[Eucharist](#)" in Episcopal churches. Also known as [Mass](#) in Roman Catholic churches.
2. The term describing a group of autonomous churches who recognize common ties and share a common faith, for example, the worldwide [Anglican](#) Communion.

Compline

A monastic evening service used to end the day, and included for the first time in the [1979 prayer book](#). It is pronounced "comp-lyn," not "comp-line."

Confirmation

From two Latin words - *firmare*, which means "to strengthen," and *com*, which adds force to the word. Literally to confirm is to "strengthen greatly." At Confirmation a person makes a mature, public confession that he or she accepts Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior, thus owning up to the vows his or her godparents made for him or her at his or her baptism. The bishop then lays his or her hands on the confirmand, and prays for the Holy Spirit to "strengthen greatly" the person in the rest of his or her life. Confirmation is considered to be one of the five sacramental acts, or minor [sacraments](#) of the Church.

Congregation

The groups of people who make up the local [church](#), or the members of a local church who are present for worship.

Congregational Meeting

A meeting usually held annually, and usually held to elect new [vestry](#) members and delegates to the [diocesan](#) convention. Unlike some other denominations, the [Episcopal Church](#) follows a representative form of government, instead of a pure democracy. The work of the church is voted upon by the *vestry*, and not by the congregation. The congregation votes to select vestry members to represent them, as the vestry does their work.

Consecration

The word literally means, "to set aside." At the [Eucharist](#), the [elements](#) are consecrated before we partake in [communion](#). Consecration services include dedications and [ordinations](#). In 1835, the Chapel of the Cross was *consecrated* for God's service on Sullivan's Island. In 1990, Bishop Edward Salmon was *consecrated* as the 13th Bishop of South Carolina.

Convention

A [diocesan](#) meeting (usually held annually) to elect officials, propose resolutions, and to pass laws to govern the diocesan body.

Cope

A [vestment](#) of dignity which may be worn by any order of the clergy, but is usually thought of as being worn by a [bishop](#), along with his [miter](#). The cope is a long and heavy semicircular cloak of rich material, generally matching other vestments in the [color](#) of the [season](#).

Cotta

From Middle English meaning "to cover." A cotta is a short, white outer garment often worn by [choir](#) members and [acolytes](#) to cover their [cassocks](#).

Corporal

From Latin: *corpus*, meaning "body." A square piece of linen laid on top of the altar cloth at [Communion](#).

Credence Table

A small table or shelf on the [epistle side](#) of the [altar](#) that holds the bread, wine and water before [consecration](#).

Crosier

The [bishop's](#) staff (a shepherd's crook) carried in a [procession](#) and held when giving the [absolution](#) or blessing.

Crossing

In church architecture, the crossing is the main intersection of aisles at the front of the church building. If viewed from above, these aisles form a large cross. In a service, "crossing" refers to a hand gesture of making a cross pattern on one's body; also a gesture made by a [priest](#) or [bishop](#) over a [congregation](#) or upon a person at death or baptism.

Crucifer

A person in a religious [procession](#) who carries a large cross (a [processional cross](#)), and leads the procession into the church and the recession out of the church.

Crucifix

From Latin, *crux*, meaning "cross." A crucifix is a cross bearing the likeness of the body of Christ on it.

Cruet

From old French, *crue*, meaning "a vial or a glass." A cruet is the vessel (glass or metal) used to hold the water and wine for the [Eucharist](#).

Curate

From Latino *curatus*, meaning "the person in charge." The term should mean the "head priest" if literally interpreted, but instead has come to refer to a [transitional deacon](#) or an assistant to the [rector](#). Usually a curate is one who recently graduated from seminary, and is in the process of "learning the ropes," or "curing."

Cursillo

A Spanish word meaning "short course." Cursillo is contemporary, popular movement of Christian renewal in the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The Cursillo experience begins with an intense, profound, and often life-changing weekend retreat, and continues with periodic small group gatherings and special devotions. The word is pronounced "cur-see-yo".

Daily Office

Another name for [Morning Prayer](#).

Dalmatic

a "[higher church](#)" vestment worn by a [deacon](#) during the celebration of [Holy Eucharist](#). It corresponds to the [chasuble](#) worn by the [Celebrant](#), but it is rectangular in shape instead of oval.

Deconsecration

A ritual or service for returning a former sacred building or site to a non-sacred status; church buildings no longer in use as churches are deconsecrated before being sold or torn down.

Deacon

The subservient rank in the three orders of the Church's ministry ([Bishop](#), [Priest](#), Deacon). There are two types of deacons - transitional deacons, who will soon be [ordained](#) to the priesthood, and permanent deacons, who chose the order as a permanent servant ministry. Priests are first ordained to the [diaconate](#) to remind them and the [Church](#) that they are, and that they always will be servants (see Matthew 20:25-28).

Dean

From Latin, *decanus*, meaning "ten." Originally the title was given to a minor official who served in some supervisory position over ten people. The title is now used to refer to the resident clergyman of a [cathedral](#), the chief academic officer of a college or seminary, or the head of a [diocesan](#) deanery. If the dean is ordained, the title "The Very Reverend" is appropriate; if the dean is a [lay person](#), this title is not used. The dean of the Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul is the Very Rev. William Mc Kechee. The dean of Trinity Episcopal School For Ministry is the Very Rev. Peter C. Moore. The dean of Charleston Deanery is the Very Rev. John B. Burwell.

Deanery

A geographical division of a [diocese](#), roughly equivalent to counties in a state, also sometimes known as a convocation or an archdeanery. In the Diocese of South Carolina there are six deaneries. Beginning at the lower part of the diocese, they are the Beaufort deanery, the Charleston deanery, the West Charleston deanery, the Orangeburg deanery, the Georgetown deanery, and the Florence deanery. (All of these names are also counties in South Carolina.)

Deputy

An official church or [diocesan](#) delegate to a meeting. A deputy may be [clergy](#) or [lay](#), but the term usually applies to the [lay people](#) chosen to attend a [convention](#).

Diaconate

The state of being a deacon; also, the life of deacon-like service in the church.

Diocesan Seals

Heraldic insignia of a diocese; diocesan seals are sometimes cut into rings or dies for impressing wax on official diocesan documents.

Diocese

A unit of church organization; the spiritual domain under a [bishop](#). A diocese may contain many [parishes](#) and [missions](#). When used as an adjective, the term is diocesan. The diocese is most often thought of as the primary and basic unit of the [Church](#). There are 74 parishes and missions in the Diocese of South Carolina. The state of South Carolina has two dioceses - the Diocese of Upper South Carolina and the Diocese of South Carolina.

Diocesan Council

A group that advises the [bishop](#) on [diocesan](#) affairs. The Diocesan Council's duties are similar to the duties that the [vestry](#) carries out at the [parish](#) level.

DFMS, or Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society

The corporation founded to carry out the work of the [Episcopal Church](#). The DFMS headquarters are at 815 Second Avenue in New York City.

Easter

The festival that commemorates the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the third day after he was crucified. It is called Easter Day in our [prayer book](#), but has come to be called (redundantly) Easter Sunday by the media, most laity, and some clergy, all of whom ought to know better. Easter is a movable [feast](#), which means it does not always fall on the same day each year. Easter is always the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox (first day of Spring). By this calculation, Easter could occur anytime from March 22, to April 25. The length of [Epiphany](#) and the Season after Pentecost, as well as the dates of [Ash Wednesday](#), Holy Week, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday are all determined by the date of Easter. Easter is also a Church [season](#), spanning the 50 days (six Sundays) after Easter, to Ascension Day.

Elements

The [bread](#) and [wine](#) of [Holy Communion](#).

Epiphany

January 6; a feast celebrating the visit of the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. Epiphany marks the end of the [twelve days of Christmas](#) (the Christmas season). Epiphany is also one of the seasons of the [Church](#), running from the end of [Christmas](#) to [Ash Wednesday](#).

Episcopal

The name of a form of church organization which means government by an overseer. From the Greek word *episcopos*, meaning overseer.

See [Bishop](#).

Episcopal Church, The

The official name for the American branch of the worldwide [Anglican Communion](#). The Episcopal Church welcomes you!

Episcopalian

1. A member of the Episcopal Church. 2. The noun form of the word. Proper grammarians would point out that "episcopal" is an adjective and "episcopalian" is a noun. The title to this online dictionary is grammatically incorrect, and intended to be so.

Epistle, The

Usually (but not always) included in a Sunday service, the epistle is a reading from one of the New Testament books other than the Gospels. The epistle and the Old Testament lessons are typically read by a [Lay reader](#).

Epistle Side

The side of the building from which the Epistle lesson is read. The side depends on whether the altar is located against a wall or free standing, meaning the priest celebrates the Eucharist from behind it. If the altar is against the wall, the Epistle side is the left side of the church building when one is facing the altar.

See [Gospel Side](#).

Eucharist

Literally means a "good gift" or "thanksgiving." The current usage in the Episcopal Church to refers to the entire Communion service. According to the [current prayer book](#), the Eucharist is intended to be the principal service on a Sunday.

Eulogy

A speech or [homily](#) in praise of a deceased person; brief remarks about the deceased at a funeral. Traditionally, a eulogy was simply *not done* in the Episcopal Church. In recent times the practice has gained favor in some circles.

Even, or Eve

The day before a [Festival](#) (Christmas *Eve*, Easter *Even*), designed to be a preparation for the [feast](#) it precedes.

Evensong

An evening worship service; evening prayer; and especially evening prayer service featuring a [choir](#).

Ewer

A pitcher most often used to water at [baptisms](#), but can also be used in place of a [cruet](#) or a [flagon](#) at [Communion](#).

Executive Committee

In many [parishes](#), the [rectors](#), [wardens](#) and the parish treasurer form an executive committee. They meet separately from the whole [vestry](#), between official vestry meetings.

Executive Council

The [Presiding Bishop's](#) version of an executive committee, consisting of appointed friends and the elected president of each [province](#).

EYC

Originally the "[Episcopal Young Churchmen](#)," now the Episcopal Young Church-people." The EYC is the designation often used to identify the local youth group.

Extreme Unction

The anointing with oil of those who are close to death. (See [Unction](#))

Fair Linen

A white linen cloth cover for the [altar](#), used during [Eucharist](#).

Father

A familiar or direct way of referring to some ordained [clergy](#). "[Low Church](#)" Episcopalians usually never use the term. The title is abbreviated as "Fr." (e.g. Fr. Alvin Kimel)

Fast Days

Special days set aside for abstinence. On these days, one typically eats less, or eats nothing at all. While any day may be observed as a fast day, [Ash Wednesday](#) and [Good Friday](#) are officially designated as fast days.

Feast Days

Days of celebration, as opposed to fast days. The primary feast day is Easter. All Sundays are miniature celebrations of Easter, and thus all Sundays are feast days. Other feast days include saint's days and all special days like Ascension, Epiphany, Holy Cross Day, etc.

Festival

From Latin, *joyful*. Another way of describing a Feast Day.

Flagon

A container that is larger than a [cruet](#) and is used instead of, or in addition to cruets at larger celebrations of [Communion](#).

Folk Mass

A 1960's term for a less formal style of [Eucharist](#) using contemporary songs as part of the worship service. In a "folk mass," guitars or other instruments are featured instead of using organ music.

Font

A basin for water to be used in church baptisms.

Fraction

The part of the [Communion liturgy](#) where the Communion [bread](#) is broken by the [celebrant](#). According to the [prayer book](#), a period of silence is to follow, and then can be said or sung, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." (prayer book pages 337 and 364)

General Convention

The national triennial meeting of the Episcopal Church. General Convention is divided into two governmental bodies: the [House of Bishops](#) and the [House of Deputies](#). Each diocese sends [deputies](#) to General Convention to enact laws to govern the Episcopal Church, and to pass resolutions stating the "mind of the church" on topical issues.

Genuflection

From the Latin words *genu*, meaning "knee," and *flectere*, meaning "to bend." A genuflection is a sort of deep curtsey where the right knee touches the ground. The appropriate times for genuflection (if you do it at all) are when passing before the [Reserved Sacrament](#), when entering or leaving your pew when the [consecrated](#) bread and wine are on the altar, and in the Nicene Creed at the words, "who for us and our salvation."

Godparents

Godfathers and godmothers, persons who sponsor an infant or young child at his or her [baptism](#). Godparents make vows that they will, by their example, help the child know what it means to be a Christian, so that later in his or her life the child can confirm that fact for himself or herself at [Confirmation](#).

GOE's

General Ordination Examination; a set of uniform tests required of most Episcopal [seminarians](#) before their graduation from [seminary](#).

Good Friday

The day in [Holy Week](#) in which we remember Christ's arrest, crucifixion, and death. It is unclear where the name "Good Friday" originated. Some have said it is a corruption of "God's Friday," in the same manner that "Commandment Thursday" became "[Maundy Thursday](#)." Others insist it is called "Good" because of the great benefits given to humanity by Christ's death and resurrection.

Gospel, The

Any reading from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. We stand for the gospel reading in the [Eucharist](#), to show reverence for Jesus, since he is speaking to us when the gospel is read.

Gospel Side

An older usage for designating the interior of a church. The gospel side is on the right-hand side of the priest, as determined by where he/she is facing when celebrating the [Holy Communion](#). The Gospel side is thus dependant on whether the [altar](#) is located against the wall or free-standing. Originally, the priest celebrated communion facing the people and thus the Gospel Side was the north side of the Church building [the left side, when facing the altar]. In medieval times the altar was pushed against the west wall, and the Gospel side then became the right side, when facing the altar.

See [Epistle Side](#).

High Church

One of three popular designation for styles of worship in an Episcopal Church. "High Church" worship emphasizes theological or liturgical formality. Parts or all of a "high" service are often sung or [chanted](#) rather than reading or speaking them. Services often include several vested assistants, [incense](#) and [sanctus bells](#).

See [Low Church](#), [Broad Church](#).

Holy Orders

A way of referring to [ordination](#) among Roman Catholics, Episcopalians and a few others: an [ordained](#) person is spoken of as "being in holy orders"--meaning that the person has made priestly vows and has been admitted by a bishop into one of the several levels of ordination.

Holy Week

The week preceding Easter -- the last week in Lent. Holy Week is the most important period of the church year, observed with many special services, beginning with [Palm Sunday](#) and concluding on Holy Saturday. Holy Week includes [Maundy Thursday](#) and [Good Friday](#).

Homily

A short [sermon](#) often on a single topic of devotion or morality. The difference between a sermon and a homily is primarily the length. Some wags are known to refer to homilies as "sermonettes."

Host

The consecrated "[bread](#)" part of the [Holy Communion](#). In most Episcopal churches a [wafer](#) is used as the host, but an increasing number of churches are using actual baked bread. The wafer the priest breaks at the [fraction](#) is called a "priest's host."

House of Bishops

All the [bishops](#) of the Episcopal church sitting as a legislative and judiciary body of the church, at [General Convention](#).

House of Deputies

The [lay](#) and [presbyter](#) delegates to a [General Convention](#) sitting as a legislative body.

Hymn

From the Greek word, *hymnos*, meaning "song of praise." A hymn is a poem or other metrical composition adapted for singing in a church service. Hymns have only been allowed in the [Anglican](#) Church since 1820.

Incense

From the Latin word, *incendere*, meaning "to burn," incense is the "smell" element in "[smells & bells](#)"; a fragrant powder burned in a small dish or pot; used during the service or in the processions. Some say incense is used to recall of one of the three gifts of the Wise Men to the Christ Child. Scripture commends its usage, particularly in Psalm 141, where prayers are asked to be like incense.

Inclusive Language

The attempt to find forms of religious expression which are not seen as biased in favor of either sex. Some churches favor an inclusive lectionary which avoid male or female pronouns such as "him" or "her." Some have altered prayers and hymns so that male images and pronouns are removed: "Our God who art in heaven..." The Episcopal church's current hymnal (1982) altered most of the classic hymns in an effort to make them more "inclusive."

Installation

A service in which a person is "installed" into his or her office. In the Episcopal Church, installation services are offered for new ministries ranging from [rectors](#) and [bishops](#) to Sunday School teachers and [vestry](#).

Junior Warden

See [Warden, Junior](#)

Kyrie

From the Greek for the actual name, *Kyrie Eleison*, which means, "Lord have mercy." The Kyrie comes after the Ten Commandments or the summary of the law in the [Rite I](#) Eucharist, to serve as a reminder to us that we cannot, by our own effort, keep the commandments. It is a plea for grace by fallen sinners. In [Rite II](#), where there is no recitation of the Ten Commandments or a summary of the law, the Kyrie seems out of place, and is, for that reason, often omitted.

Laity

From the Greek word, *laos*, meaning "people," the laity are the non-ordained members of a church, as distinguished from "the clergy". An single member of the laity would be referred to as a "[lay person](#)."

Lavabo

From Latin, meaning, "I will wash." The name originally referred to the ceremonial washing of the priests hands before he or she celebrated [Communion](#), while saying the words, "I will wash my hands in innocence." (Psalm 26:6). The name lavabo also refers to the small towel used to dry the hands and the bowl into which water is poured during the washing. Thus, to call the towel a lavabo towel, or to call the bowl a lavabo bowl would be technically redundant.

Lay minister

A person who is not ordained, but who works closely with a church or religious program. Some lay ministers are un-paid volunteers; some are paid staff members of a church.

Lay person

Any non-ordained person; in the Episcopal church today, lay person is often used instead of the older (and politically incorrect) Episcopal usage "layman".

Lay Reader

Any non-ordained person who participates in reading part of a church service. Lay readers sometimes serve as [chalice-bearers](#) at a [Eucharist](#).

Lectern

From the Latin, *lectrum*, meaning "reading desk" - A raised platform used for reading prayers or scripture; usually located at the front of the [nave](#), opposite the pulpit, on the [epistle side](#).

Lectionary

The complex series of Biblical readings used in the [Episcopal Church](#) throughout the year. The Church uses a three-year cycle of lessons for Sunday readings and a two-year cycle for daily readings.

Lent

From an Anglo-Saxon word, *lencten*, meaning, "spring," the time of the lengthening of the days. Lent is one of the six [seasons](#) of the church year and is the forty-day period beginning on [Ash Wednesday](#) and ending on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter). The period is actually 46 days, but since Sundays are [feast days](#), they are never included in the count. Lent is intended to be a period of preparation and penitence marked by fasting, meditation and sobriety. Lent is widely associated with denial -- "giving something up for Lent."

Lesson

A reading from the [Bible](#) during a worship service. Lessons are usually read by a [lay person](#) and are not taken from the Gospel or the Psalms. Lessons are usually read from the [epistle side](#) of the church building and conclude with the reader saying, "The word of the Lord" or "Here ends the reading."

Lesson and Carols

Popular name of the Festival of Lessons and Carols held during late [Advent](#) or early [Christmas](#) at [Anglican](#) Churches throughout the world.

LEM

An abbreviation for "Lay Eucharistic Minister" A LEM is an individual who has undergone special training and is authorized by the priest to take pre-[consecrated Communion](#) to a sick or shut-in member of the [parish](#) or [mission](#).

Litany

A solemn form of supplication for God's mercy, composed of short responsive prayers. The traditional [Anglican](#) Litany (page 54 in the [1928 BCP](#)) is almost recognizable in the words of The Great Litany ([BCP](#) page 148) in the [1979 Prayer Book](#).

Liturgical

From "[liturgy](#)," used to describe a particular style of worship that requires active participation (standing, sitting, kneeling, recitation, common prayer, etc.) from both the clergy and laity. Episcopal, Lutheran, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches are generally considered to be liturgical churches, while most [Protestant](#) denominations are not.

Liturgy

From a combination of two Greek words, *laos* (people) and *ergon* (work). Literally the word means "the work of the people," and is generally used to refer to the entire, complete worship service.

Living Church, The

A monthly magazine of the Episcopal Church often discussing current issues in the life of the Church in the classical [Anglican via media](#) way.

Low Church

A popular designation for a church that is, on the whole, less formal. Most low churches tend to emphasize good [sermons](#) as being more important than good [liturgy](#), and do not [chant](#) or sing their services or use [incense](#) or [sanctus bells](#). A low church might alternate [Morning Prayer](#) with the [Eucharist](#) for their primary Sunday worship. See [High Church](#), [Broad Church](#).

Low Sunday

Specifically, the term refers to the Sunday that follows the highest Sunday of the year -- [Easter](#). Some wags will insist that the name refers to the low attendance on that Sunday following Easter.

M. Div.

Master of Divinity; the basic American [theological degree](#); in earlier years, the first theological degree was the B.D. [Bachelor of Divinity], but in the late 1960's many American divinity schools began to allow their earlier graduates to exchange their B.D. degrees for the newer M.Div. degree.

Maniple

A liturgical napkin. The maniple is worn draped over the [celebrant's](#) arm.

Mass

From the Latin word, *missa*, meaning "sent," or "dismissed." Mass is the Roman Catholic name for the Christian sacramental meal but sometimes used by Episcopalians to refer to [communion](#) or [Eucharist](#). The word probably originated from the ending of the old Roman Catholic liturgy, where the [celebrant](#) proclaimed, "Ite missa est."

Maundy Thursday

Thursday in [Holy Week](#); the name is from a corruption of the Old English word for "commandment" in Christ's commandment given in John 13:34: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another." The word "command" was originally spelled "commaundment" and was shortened to "Maundy" through careless enunciation. The command is closely tied to another "commaund" given by Jesus at the same time: "Do this in remembrance of me." Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) was the day on which the first [Lord's Supper](#), the Last Supper, was celebrated with the 12 Disciples. Maundy Thursday services often include "stripping the altar" (removing all items including hangings) and in some [parishes](#), foot washing (see John 13:5).

Minister

In olden days, the word was synonymous with the clergy. While the [ordained](#) do indeed have special ministries to perform, we Episcopalians recognize that every baptized Christian has ministry to do for God's greater glory. We therefore believe that all Christians are ministers. In our [Catechism](#) we state, "The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons." (page 855, [BCP](#))

Ministry Of All The Baptized

Ecclesiastical, professional and vocational ministries derived from our Baptismal Covenant. See Page 304-305 and 855-856 of our prayer book for a description of ministry.

Missal

The altar book - The big book on the [Altar](#) or Holy Table containing the services of [Holy Eucharist](#).

Mission

A local Episcopal congregation that is not able to be financially self-supporting. The congregation's rector is the [diocesan bishop](#), and the bishop appoints a priest-in-charge as his/her representative. The priest-in-charge of a mission is commonly referred to as a [vicar](#). When a mission is able to be self-supporting, it may apply for [parish](#) status and be admitted to the diocese as a parish.

Mission Council

The equivalent of a [vestry](#) for a [mission](#).

Miter, or Mitre

The tall, pointed liturgical hat worn by a [bishop](#) during formal worship. Its shape is said to be symbolic of the tongues of fire which rested on the original bishops at the first [Pentecost](#).

Monstrance

a special container in the shape of a cross with a circular, clear glass (or crystal) receptacle in its center. A monstrance is designed to hold a consecrated [Host](#) that is exposed for adoration. The monstrance is designed to "de-monstrate" the [real presence](#) of Christ.

Morning Prayer

A daily morning worship service without [communion](#); Also known as the Daily Office and found on pages 37 ([Rite I](#)) and 75 ([Rite II](#)) in the [prayer book](#). In some churches, Morning Prayer is alternated with [Eucharist](#) as the principal Sunday service. Since Morning Prayer does not require the presence of [ordained](#) clergy, the service is sometimes used in the absence of the [rector](#) or [vicar](#).

Moveable Feast

Any [Church festival](#) that does not fall on a fixed calendar day, but varies from year to year. [Easter](#) is the most important movable feast since many other movable feasts are determined by when Easter occurs.

Narthex

In Greek, the word literally means "a large fennel" (a tall herb). In church architecture, the narthex is an enclosed space at the entry end of the [nave](#) of a building; the area in the church building inside the doors and in front of the nave. The narthex is usually enclosed (primarily to provide a buffer between the outside weather and the heating/cooling inside), and is the area where the [procession](#) gathers prior to the service.

Nave

The main part of a church building; the place where the congregation sits. Probably derived from the Latin word *navis*, meaning "ship." (As in Noah's ark) In medieval England the derogatory term "knave" (commoner) developed from nave, because the nave is the area of the building where the "common" people sit.

Nowell

From the French, *Noel*, "*Christmas*". An old English name for [Christmas](#), traditionally shouted or sung in joy, now chiefly used in *The First Nowell* Christmas carol.

Offertory

Most think of the offertory as the time in the worship service where the offering is taken up. The offering of money is part of the offertory, but the offertory also includes the offering of bread and wine that is to be [consecrated](#) during the [communion](#), and the offering of "...ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice." ([BCP](#) Page 336.) Or, as [Rite II](#) says, "Sanctify us also." ([BCP](#) page 363))

Oil Stock

A special container designed to hold holy oil used in [unction](#) and at [baptisms](#). Oil stocks are usually about as wide as a quarter, and about an inch in length. A cotton ball inside the oil stock holds the holy oil.

Ordination

From Latin, *ordo*, meaning "order." Ordination is one of the five [sacramental acts](#) (or minor sacraments) of the Episcopal Church. At an ordination, an individual is commissioned and empowered for the work of ministry. Ordination is the ritual used to make someone a [priest](#) or [deacon](#), by the laying on of hands by a [bishop](#). Bishops, in turn, are not ordained; they are [consecrated](#).
See [Holy Orders](#).

Palm Sunday

The Sunday before Easter, where Jesus' final and triumphal entry into Jerusalem is observed. In many Episcopal congregations the [passion narrative](#) read is also read. Real palm branches or crosses made from palms (or both) are usually distributed to the congregation. In some churches, Palm Sunday palms are saved and later burned to make the ashes for the next year's [Ash Wednesday](#) service.

Parish hall/house

A gathering place for a local [congregation](#) separate from the church building. The term "parish hall" also is used to refer to a large room inside the Parish Hall/House.

Parish

The group of people of a certain area who are organized into a local, self-supporting church. Sometimes the word is used to refer to the geographic region around a church. In the South, many of the present-day counties were once organized as parishes [as is still the case in Louisiana]

See [Mission](#).

Parson

From the Latin word *persona*, meaning "person." From the eleventh century English, where there term was a legal one, applying to the [parish](#) priest, because in all matters he was the designated "person" to deal with. Today, the term is not used as often as it was, and often evokes rural connotations.

Paschal Candle

From the Hebrew word *Pesach*, meaning Passover. A very large candle in a very tall holder and placed in a prominent display in the [epistle side](#) of the [sanctuary](#). The candle is lighted throughout the [Easter season](#), and during [baptisms](#), weddings, and funerals.

Passion Narrative

The name given to the [gospel reading](#) on the Sunday of the Passion - [Palm Sunday](#). The reading chronicles the final hours of Jesus' earthly ministry. The reading traditionally begins with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and continues through his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death. It is the longest lesson read in the Church year (see: [seasons](#)), and the only gospel reading with an option allowing the congregation to sit during the first part of the reading. In many parishes the narrative becomes a passion play. Specific roles (Pilate, Peter, etc.) are assigned to different persons, and the congregation plays the part of the crowd assenting to the crucifixion.

Pastor

Another name for a [clergy](#) person. In both Latin and English the word simply means "shepherd." All Lutheran clergy are called pastors, and many Episcopal and Roman Catholic clergy are comfortable enough with the term to use it to describe them.

Paten

From Greek, *patane*: a shallow vessel. The paten is the vessel used to contain the consecrated bread during a Communion.

Peace, The

Also known as "passing the peace." A part of the ritual in the Episcopal Church in which members of the congregation, including the clergy, greet one another. The priest says, "The Peace of the Lord be always with you." The congregation responds, "And also with you." (When using [Rite I](#), the response is "And with thy Spirit.") Immediately after these words people shake hands or speak or sometimes embrace in the church. Introduced as part of the [1979 prayer book](#) reform and still unpopular in a few congregations among older members.

PECUSA

The initials for the **P**rotestant **E**piscopal **C**hurch of the **U**nited **S**tates of **A**merica, which is the original name of what we commonly call the Episcopal Church.

Pension Fund

The Church Pension Fund; the retirement program for clergy and other church workers of the Episcopal Church

Pentecost

The Festival Sunday that comes fifty days after [Easter](#) in which we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the twelve Disciples after Christ's Resurrection (Acts 2). Pentecost is traditionally seen as the birthday of the church, and is also the beginning of the longest season in the church - the season after Pentecost. The season after Pentecost runs from the day of Pentecost to the first Sunday in Advent.

Prior to the [1979 prayer book](#), the day of Pentecost was known as [Whitsunday](#).

Pews

Long, single, and usually permanent seats in the [nave](#) of a church building. In the earliest times there were no chairs except for the [clergy](#), and the congregation "congregated" in the nave. Later individual seating was added particularly for older members. Pews came into existence as a way for local churches to support themselves financially, by renting or selling pews to families. After the American Revolution and the disestablishment of the state-owned [Anglican](#) church, pew rental was the sole means of income for many colonial churches. In some parishes today, the family pew still exists. Today, however, the family does not actually own the pew. They only think that they do.

Piscina

From Latin, meaning "fish pond." The piscina is the stone or porcelain basin (traditionally set in the south wall of the [Sanctuary](#)) from which a drain pipe carries to the ground the water used in the [ablutions](#). It is also the most convenient way for many [Altar Guilds](#) to dispose of the remaining [consecrated](#) wine after a service. The piscina is never, ever to be hooked up to the building's plumbing.

Prayer Book

- A shorter and the most common way of referring to the [Book of Common Prayer](#).
- Predella**
(Also sometimes called a footpace) The raised area or platform on which some [Altars](#) or Holy Tables stand. The word is Italian and literally means "a footstool."
- Presbyter**
The actual, official name for an Episcopal [priest](#). The word is a Celtic contradiction of the Greek word *presbyteros*, meaning "elder." The presbyter represents the bishop in a parish or mission, as he or she has since the earliest of Church times, when older members of a congregation were chosen to represent the bishop.
- Presiding Bishop**
The elected episcopal head of the Episcopal Church in America [[PECUSA](#)]; the chief administrator and spiritual head of the Episcopal Church. Until the 1920's, the Presiding Bishop was simply a diocesan bishop elected to preside over General Convention. In more recent history the Presiding Bishop has become the American equivalent of an Archbishop and the head of the [Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society](#). Title: The Most Reverend. The current Presiding Bishop is the Most Rev. Frank Tracy Griswold III, the 25th Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.
- Priest**
A special term for an [ordained](#) minister of a Roman Catholic or Episcopal or Orthodox church; In Roman circles, the term refers to those who recite the [Mass](#), but the Episcopal Church traces the word's origin to a Celtic corruption of the official term for Clergy - [Presbyters](#). The duty of a priest, according to the [prayer book](#), is to [baptize](#), preach the Word of God, and to celebrate the [Eucharist](#), and to pronounce [Absolution](#) and Blessing in God's Name.
- Priest-In-Charge**
Another title for the [vicar](#) of a [mission](#).
- Proanaphora**
The part of the Communion service that proceeds the [Proper Preface](#) or the [Sursam Corda](#).
- Procession**
The line of [choir](#), [clergy](#), [acolytes](#), [crucifer](#), [torchbearers](#) and others walking into a church building to begin a service.
- Processional**
Pertaining to the procession. A processional hymn is a hymn sung while the procession is entering the church building.
- Proper**
(Often referred to as "the propers") "The Proper of the Church Year includes the appointed [Collects](#); the [Proper Prefaces](#)... and the appointed Psalms and [Lessons](#)..." (page 158, [BCP](#))
- Proper Preface**
An addition to the words of the [Communion](#) part of the [Eucharist](#) which follows the [Sursam Corda](#). There are Proper Prefaces provided for all the the Church's [seasons](#), as well as for major [feasts](#) of the Church. The Prefaces are found beginning on pages 345 and 378 in the [BCP](#).
- Processional Cross**
The large cross carried by the [crucifer](#) during the procession.
- Protestant**
From the Latin *pro*, meaning "for," and *testare*, meaning "witness." Thus literally, if one was to be a protestant it would mean he or she would be a witness for something. The word was first used in 1529 as part of Martin Luther's reform movement. The Episcopal Church does not officially consider itself to be a Protestant church, but is considered to be Protestant by Roman Catholics, as well as by many [lay](#) members of the Episcopal Church.
- Province**
One of the major organizational divisions of the Episcopal Church; a group of [dioceses](#) in a particular region of the United States, usually under the direction of a [diocesan](#) bishop

who serves as president of the province. South Carolina is in Province IV of the Episcopal Church.

Pulpit

From the Latin, *pulpitum*, meaning "a platform." A raised platform or podium used for the [sermon](#) or [homily](#); generally located in the front of the [gospel side](#) of the [nave](#). In some Colonial church buildings and in many non-Episcopal churches, the pulpit is in the center, to signify the importance of the sermon.

Purificator

From Latin *purus* (pure) and *facere* (to make). A purificator is a small piece of white linen used at [Communion](#) to cleanse the [chalice](#), by wiping the rim of the chalice with the purificator.

Purple

The primary color used in the season of [Lent](#), and the most popular color used in [Advent](#). Purple signifies penitence and preparation. Purple was originally a sign of royalty, as purple dye was rare. Thus, a purple clergy shirt (or some shade of violet) usually indicates that the wearer is a [bishop](#).

Pyx

A small container used for transporting the [Host](#). Most commonly used by a [priest](#) or [LEM](#) when taking [Communion](#) to a sick person or shut-in.

Reader

Anyone who reads a [lesson](#), psalm or prayer in a service. [Lay persons](#) may read any lesson but if the service is [Eucharist](#), the [Gospel](#) reading must be read by a [deacon](#) or [priest](#).

see: [Lay Reader](#)

Real Presence

a distinctively Anglican doctrine that emphasizes the actual presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. This is in contrast to theologies that hold that the Body and Blood are present only figuratively or symbolically. The Anglican doctrine of Real Presence stops short of Transubstantiation in defining how the presence happens. (Transubstantiation says that at a specified point in the liturgy the wine and bread become actual flesh and actual blood.)

Readings

The [lessons](#) that are read during a worship service.

Recession

The procession of the [crucifer](#), [acolytes](#), [choir](#), [readers](#), [clergy](#) and other assistants out of a church building at the end of a service.

Recessional

The final hymn sung as the recession takes place.

Rector

The head priest of a [parish](#); the word, in Latin means "ruler." If a parish has more than one clergy, the others are called Assistant Rectors or Associate Rectors. A [mission](#) cannot have a rector. A mission has a priest-in-charge, who is often called a [vicar](#).

Rectory

The residence of a [rector](#); the place where an Episcopal (or Roman Catholic) [clergy](#) lives. Called a parsonage or manse in most other Christian denominations.

Requiem

A funeral service or memorial service. Sometimes the word is preceded by the word 'solemn': (*Solemn Requiem*.) Sometimes the word is preceded by 'high': *High Requiem*-- which only indicates that portions of the service will be sung or [chanted](#). A High Requiem Mass is a funeral service with [communion](#) and singing of parts of the service.

Reredos

[rear-re-doss] any decoration behind or above an [altar](#); may be in the form of statues, screens, or tapestries.

Reserved Sacrament

Consecrated bread and wine kept in the church building after a Communion service; kept primarily for distribution to the sick of the Church.

Retable

Also called a *gradine*, the retable is a narrow shelf located behind an [altar](#) that is placed against the wall. Candles and flowers are sometimes placed on the retable. The retable is also sometimes used to house a [tabernacle](#).

Reverend, The

An honorific title given to [ordained clergy](#) in most Christian churches. The correct form of address is "[The Reverend](#) John Doe," and *never* "Reverend John Doe."

Reverend Doctor

An [ordained](#) person [hence Reverend] who also holds some degree at the doctorate level [hence Doctor]--a way of referring to a [clergy](#) person who was also a professor, or to a member of the clergy who holds an honorary or earned doctorate. A [bishop](#) who held a doctorate would be referred to as the *Right Reverend* Doctor.

Reverend Father

An affectionate, devotional or pietistic way of referring to a [priest](#) who has accepted the term Father.

Right Reverend, The

A form of address for a bishop in the Episcopal Church, as in "The Right Reverend Edward L. Salmon, Jr."

Rite I

A portion of the [Book of Common Prayer](#) which contains worship services using the traditional worship language of the Church from as used from the 1600's until 1976.

Rite II

A portion of the [Book of Common Prayer](#) containing worship services which use more modern language and place importance on a different theological emphasis than traditional Episcopal worship.

Rite III

There is no Rite III service in the [prayer book](#), but the alternative forms 1 and 2 (pages 402 -405) have been euphemistically called Rite III since the introduction of the [1979 prayer book](#). These forms for [Eucharist](#) are intended for informal use, and never intended for a regular, weekly worship service.

Rochet

A bishop's full-length [vestment](#) similar to a [surplice](#) with full sleeves, and usually worn under a [chimere](#).

Rogation Days

Days that were (and still are) set apart for special prayers for God's blessing on crops, flocks, herds and other agricultural means of livelihood. From the Latin word *rogare*, meaning "to beseech." Rogation Days were observed (and still could be observed) on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Ascension Day.

Sacramentary

Another name for the altar book or [missal](#).

Sacraments

From the Latin word *sacrare*, meaning to "consecrate." According to the prayer book, sacraments are "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace." Sacraments are physical actions that point us to deeper realities than we are able to experience with our five senses. The Episcopal Church recognizes two major, or "gospel" sacraments, and five minor sacraments, or sacramental acts. The two major sacraments, [Baptism](#) and [Communion](#), and called gospel sacraments because Jesus told us (in the gospels) to do them until he comes again. The five sacramental acts (or minor sacraments) are not all necessarily required of all Christians. They are [Confirmation](#), Marriage, [Ordination](#), Reconciliation, and [Unction](#).

Sacristan

In earlier times the sacristan was the man in charge of the [sacristy](#). Some cathedrals will still designate a [priest](#) as a [Canon](#) Sacristan, but now the usage of the word has largely become interchangeable with the word "[sexton](#)."

Sacristy

A room near the [altar](#) where the [communion](#) vessels, altar hangings, candlesticks, etc. are kept and cleaned. The room is often seen as the exclusive domain of the [Altar Guild](#).

Sanctuary

From the Latin word *sanctus*, meaning "holy." The sanctuary is the part of the church building where the [altar](#) or holy table is -- the area behind the altar rail. Many [Protestant](#) denominations use the word to refer to the whole inside of the church building, but this is not the usual Episcopal usage.

Sanctuary Lamp

A lamp hanging somewhere in the [sanctuary](#). Sometimes there are three lamps, sometimes seven, but usually only one. A single, continuously burning sanctuary lamp indicates the presence of the [Reserved Sacrament](#).

Sanctus

The part of the [Holy Communion](#) service that begins with the words, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

Sanctus Bell

The actual name for the bell is a "sacring bell," but most refer to it as a "sanctus bell" because it is rung at the time of the [sanctus](#). In medieval times, when the service was said in Latin and the masses spoke English, the bell was rung at the Sanctus as a signal that it was time to pay attention.

Seasons

A way of marking time in the [Church](#). There are six seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and the season after Pentecost. The church new year begins with the season of [Advent](#), which marks the Advent (Latin: *adventus*) or coming of our Lord. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas day. [Christmas](#) is a twelve-day season that begins Christmas day and continues to January 6th. [Epiphany](#) is both a day (Jan.6) and a season, and represents the manifestation (epiphany) of the gospel into the world. [Lent](#) begins 46 days before Easter with Ash Wednesday, and is a time of preparation for [Holy Week](#) and Easter. [Easter](#) is a six week (50 day) season which ends on [Pentecost](#) Sunday. The season after Pentecost runs from Pentecost to Advent. See also: [Colors](#)

Sedilia

The seats inside the [sanctuary](#), used by [clergy](#) and [acolytes](#).

See

From the Latin word *sedes*, meaning "seats." Originally used to refer to the bishop's seat, the earliest of all symbols of authority. The seat was kept in the [cathedral](#), and the bishop's see was the town where the cathedral was located. Now the word is used (primarily by Roman Catholics) to refer to a whole [diocese](#).

Seminarian

A student enrolled in a seminary.

Seminary

A general term for a residential academic program for the study of theology. [Priests](#) in the Episcopal Church are usually (but not always) required to be seminary graduates. The academic program is generally three years, and culminates with the conferring of a masters degree called a Masters of Divinity, or [M.Div.](#)

Senior Warden

See [Warden, Senior](#)

Sermon

A verbal address given after the readings, and hopefully given to further explain the readings and to put them in a modern context. In the [Anglican Church](#) the sermon is seen as a bridge between the Biblical world and the modern world.

Server

Someone who assists the [celebrant](#) at the [altar](#), helping him or her set the table and perform [ablutions](#).

Sexton

An older English title for the person in charge of the church building [or a special portion of it] and grounds; in America the Sexton is also commonly head of maintenance and custodial services and may perform additional duties such as ringing the church bell.

Shrove Tuesday

The final day before the season of [Lent](#) begins, usually marked by pancake suppers in parish halls throughout the Episcopal church. Shrove Tuesday is also the final day of Mardi Gras, and various Carnivals throughout the world.

"Smells & Bells"

A lighthearted way of describing a "[high](#)" church, referring to the [parish](#) or [mission's](#) frequent use of [incense](#) (Smells) and [Sanctus bells](#) (Bells).

Stole

A long strip of cloth (often silk) worn around the neck of the [priest](#) and allowed to hang down the front of the clerical [vestments](#). Only [bishops](#), [priests](#) and [deacons](#) are allowed to wear stoles. The stole is usually worn at all [eucharistic](#) services, weddings and funerals, but never worn at [Morning Prayer](#) services. The stole is said to represent the yoke of obedience to Christ.

Suffragan

see [Bishop, Suffragan](#)

Surplice

A white over-garment worn over other [vestments](#) (usually a [cassock](#)); somewhat longer and fuller than a [cotta](#); The surplice and cassock are the traditional garments of the [Anglican](#) Church.

Sursum Corda

Latin for "*Lift up your hearts.*" The Sursum Corda is part of an [antiphon](#) that has been in the [Eucharist](#) since the third century.

Tabernacle

A small cabinet (sometimes a vessel) designed to contain the [Reserved Sacrament](#). The tabernacle may be found built into the altar, sitting on the [altar](#), on the [retable](#), or it may be built into another part of the [sanctuary](#). In very [Low Churches](#) the tabernacle will not be found anywhere.

Torch [Torch Bearer]

A person who carries a candle in a religious procession; often the [Crucifer](#) is followed by two "Torches" -- two persons each carrying a candle mounted on a short staff.

Trinity, The

A fundamental symbol of the Christian faith and a critically important, basic, core doctrine in Christianity. The Trinity refers to the oneness and essential unity of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Transept

The section of a cross-shaped (cruciform) church at right angles to the [nave](#). It is also the name for the [aisle](#) in front of the first [pew](#), that separates the [nave](#) from the [chancel](#).

True Presence

see [Real Presence](#)

Tunicle

A [high church](#) garment - a kind of ecclesiastical coat - worn by a [deacon](#) or [server](#) during certain celebrations.

Twelve Days of Christmas

The time from December 25th to January 6th, that is from [Christmas](#) day to [Epiphany](#). The time from the first Sunday in [Advent](#) until Christmas Eve is, properly, Advent; the time from December 25th to January 6th is the Christmas season or the "Twelve Days of Christmas."

Unction

From Latin, unguere, meaning "to anoint." Unction is the process of anointing someone with [consecrated](#) oil for religious purposes. Episcopalians use the word to refer to anointing the sick for the purpose of making them well (see James 5:14).

Veil

From Latin *vela*: a sail or curtain. In the [Church](#), the veil refers to the solid cloth that covers the [chalice](#) and [paten](#) at the Eucharist, or the loose-woven netting that is draped over crosses (and sometimes pictures) during [Lent](#) and [Holy Week](#).

Venerable, The

- A form of address for [clergy](#) who hold the office of [Archdeacon](#).
- Verger**
From the Latin word, *verga*, meaning "a rod." An older usage for someone who carries a mace or ceremonial staff in a [procession](#), and comes before some dignitary.
- Very Reverend, The**
A form of address for clergy who hold the office of [dean](#) in a [diocese](#), church or school.
- Vestments**
From the Latin word *vestis*, meaning "garment." Vestments are clothing worn by [clergy](#) or people leading a worship service. A monk or nun's clothing is usually named a "habit," and the clothing worn by choir members is usually called a "robe." The clothing worn by some pastors of [Protestant](#) denominations and by college professors is usually called a "gown."
Vestments started out as everyday clothing. In the Roman times, the clergyman wore normal street clothes -- a tunic, and perhaps a toga over it. Between the sixth and ninth century, secular fashion began to reflect the occupation of a person. It was possible to tell what one did by what he or she wore. The [Church](#) reflected this change by not changing the style of their garments. Vestments, then, came to us as a result of the clergy being "out of style" when it came to fashion.
- Vestry**
From the Latin word *vestire*, meaning to clothe, or to put on. Originally the word referred to the room where the [priest](#) would vest. In the early days the local [lay](#) leaders would gather with the priest as he vested to discuss the affairs of the parish. Later, the word came to refer to the leaders, instead of the room.
The vestry is the governing board of a local Episcopal [parish](#) consisting of the [rector](#), the [wardens](#), and [lay](#) members. In many parishes, the rectors, wardens and the treasurer form an executive committee, and will often meet separately from the whole vestry between vestry meetings.
Unlike some denominations, the Episcopal Church uses a representative form of government, instead of a pure democracy. The vestry is the group elected by the individual members to make the basic decisions about the church budget, and manage the temporal affairs of the parish.
- Via media**
A Latin phrase which means "*by the way of the middle*." Many would say that the adherence to the middle way in all matters is one of the major identifying characteristics of classical [Anglicanism](#).
- Vicar**
From the Latin word *vicarius*, meaning "a substitute." An English term referring to a [priest](#) in charge of a [mission](#). Technically, the [diocesan bishop](#) is the [rector](#) of all diocesan missions, and vicars are appointed to their mission by the local diocesan bishop to represent him or her. The term "Vicar" is still the terminology used today to describe an English priest in who is charge of a [congregation](#).
- Vigil**
Originally, a vigil was a [Fast Day](#) observed on the day before certain major [Feast Days](#). In the [1979 Prayer Book](#) a new service called the Great Vigil of Easter ([BCP](#) page 285) became a way to celebrate [Easter](#) on [Holy Saturday](#).
see [Even](#)
- Visitation**
An official appearance by a [diocesan bishop](#). According to the national [canons](#), the bishop must visit each [congregation](#) within his or her jurisdiction at least once every three years.
- Votive candle**
A devotional candle placed in a church or chapel in some "[higher](#)" Episcopal Churches. Votive candles are usually small, short candles in a special glass holder.
- Wafer**
The [bread](#) part of the [Lord's Supper](#) signifying to us the Body of Christ, and is often an unleavened, and very thin cracker-like substance. After the wafer is [consecrated](#), it is

usually called the [Host](#). Sometimes the wafer is imprinted with a cross, sometimes it is smooth. Wafers that will serve as priest's hosts are larger than the people's hosts, and can range from one inch to several inches in diameter. The people's host is usually about a half inch in size.

Warden, Junior

One of two [vestry](#) members chosen to serve his or her [parish](#) in a special capacity. Wardens (both junior and senior) can either be elected or appointed, depending on local parish or diocesan [canons](#). Junior wardens are often elected by the parish at the annual congregational meeting, and are thus referred to as "the people's warden." The tasks for a junior warden vary from parish to parish, but the majority of Junior Wardens find themselves placed in charge of the Buildings and Grounds Committee.

Warden, Senior

The other of two [vestry](#) members chosen to serve his or her [parish](#) in a special capacity. Although the duties vary widely due to local [canons](#), in most cases the Senior Warden is viewed as the "top" [lay](#) person in a parish. In many parishes the Senior Warden is chosen by the [rector](#), and serves as a liaison between the rector and the parish. Because of this function, the Senior Warden is sometimes referred to as "the rector's warden."

Wine

The beverage portion of the [Lord's Supper](#). As Scripture reminds us, "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many, for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:27-28) In the Episcopal Church, wine is used at [communion](#) (instead of grape juice) and is often a port wine.

Whitsunday

The old name for [Pentecost](#) Sunday, the day described in Acts 2. As of the [1979 Book of Common Prayer](#), the day became known as Pentecost. The term "Whitsun" is a corruption of the German "Pfungsten," which means "pentecost" or "fiftieth," which is how many days Pentecost occurs after [Easter](#). (source: [The Prayer Book Reason Why](#) - Nelson Boss, Morehouse-Gorham, 1942)

Disclaimer!

This collection is by no means intended to be exhaustive, and is a work in progress. As far as I know, this is the [only](#) hyperlinked work of its kind on the web today. The majority of the inspiration for this work (especially the etymology) came from an out-of-print book by Howard Harper, entitled the [Episcopalian's Dictionary](#) (Seabury Press, 1974).