



# The Episcopal Way

**VOLUME 1** in the **Church's Teachings for a Changing World** series

## Study Guide for Individuals and Groups

Developed by Eric H. F. Law, Stephanie Spellers, and Julia Khan



### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

## Mutual Invitation

Co-author Eric Law developed a process called Mutual Invitation (also on p. 53) that ensures everyone in the group will have a voice. Try this process with a group of five to twelve people, especially if you're reading the book as part of a group.

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, proceed in the following way:

- The leader or a designated person will share first.
- After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. You need not automatically invite the person next to you.
- After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.
- If you are not ready to share yet, say "I pass for now," and we will invite you to share later on.
- If you don't want to say anything, simply say "pass" and invite another person to share.

Continue in this manner until everyone has been invited.

## Discovering the Episcopal Way

- pp. 3–4: Read the opening dialogue between Susan and Mark. If you're Episcopalian, have you ever struggled to explain your faith to someone else? If you're newer to the church, have you ever struggled to understand someone's explanation of their faith? Discuss those experiences. What would have helped, in either instance?
- p. 7: Notice the definition of the word missional: "heading out to share and discover God's love, in relationship with people who are not part of church." What are your associations with the word "mission" (or its variants: missionary, missional)? Can you imagine yourself as a "missional" Christian? What would you do differently in your everyday life?
- p. 9: Consider the summary of the Episcopal Way in the sidebar. What resonates for you? What would you change or add?

**4. TRY THIS** (also on p. 10)

If you're part of an Episcopal Church, try to complete the following sentences:

- Being an Episcopalian is . . .
- Being an Episcopalian is not . . .
- Belonging to The Episcopal Church is . . .
- Belonging to The Episcopal Church is not . . .

There are, however, two conditions in completing this exercise:

- Use everyday language, with no church jargon except the word "Jesus."
- No sentence can be longer than 140 characters.

What part of this exercise did you find easy? What did you find difficult? Why?

Go to [www.facebook.com/theepiscopalway](http://www.facebook.com/theepiscopalway) and add your comments.

## What's the Story?

- pp. 12–13: Consider the summary of the Via Media. What would you say is the value of each of the legs of the three-legged stool (Scripture, Tradition, and Reason)? What is the value of holding the three together? What is difficult about holding the three together?
- p. 14: Ian Douglas and Kwok Pui Lan offer definitions of the heart of Anglican identity in their book *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*. Read the quotes from the book. What do you appreciate in what these two scholars have said? What questions do they raise for you?
- TRY THIS** (also on p. 18)  
Write or share the story of your spiritual experience. If you are an Episcopalian, incorporate your understanding of the Episcopal Way. If you are new to the church, write about your experience of the presence of God, the higher power, the divine, or holiness as an individual and in relationship with others. Share your writing with a friend or with a group.

## Digital Media and the Incarnation

1. pp. 25–26: A sacrament is a “visible, physical sign of the presence and power of Jesus, usually accessed through a ritual like baptism or communion.” Have you ever participated in a sacramental ritual and felt more connected to God? What happened?
2. p. 27: Episcopalians are known by many as “People of the Book” because of our attachment to the Bible and Prayer Book. How does the accessibility of these books shape the church, especially for those who are not clergy?
3. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 28)  
Talk to a “digital native” and ask how they experience community through social media. If you are a digital native, ask the same question of a friend who is not part of a church. And if you are not part of a faith community already, then consider how you find social media and the Internet both facilitate and detract from community.

## A Multi-Tasking World and a Liturgical Church

1. pp. 30–31: Study the infographic “How Social Media Is Ruining Our Minds.” What parts do you agree with? What do you disagree with? What would you like to know more about? How has the Internet molded what you see and how you see it?
2. p. 34: We believe “[t]he liturgy provides followers of the Episcopal Way with a stillpoint in a world that is sorely lacking in consistency and touchstones.” Is this your experience? If so, how does liturgy accomplish this feat? What is the value of understanding liturgy as a “stillpoint”? What are the limitations?
3. p. 35: Read Kirsten’s testimony, quoted from *Ancient Faith, Future Mission*. In the worship community with which you are most familiar, which of your senses does the liturgy most engage?
4. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 36)  
Open the Book of Common Prayer. (Don’t have one? Go to [www.bcponline.org](http://www.bcponline.org).) Turn to the section of prayers called “Collects.” Find one that speaks to your life or sounds like the conversation you want to have with God right now, and pray it whenever you think of it: for the day, or a week. Imagine others are praying with you—they are.

# Network Theory and a Networked Church

1. p. 38: Consider Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler's wisdom regarding social networks, in the quote from their book *Connected*. What do you see as the positive effects of social networks? What harm can they cause?
2. p. 42: In the Episcopal Church, the diocese is the basic unit of Christian community. How does this make being Episcopalian different from being in a church where the basic unit is the congregation?

**3. TRY THIS** (also on p. 43)

Especially if you are part of a book group, split up and visit several Episcopal churches on Sundays (if you're on your own, visit one or two different churches). Look closely at the worship, architecture, and community life and then take notes:

- What similarities link these churches?
- What differences separate them?
- How do they seem to understand being Episcopal? (It's good to ask!)

**4. TRY THIS** (also on p. 45)

List five people who you consider friends with whom you have regular interactions. Who is in your network? How did you meet? What do you have in common, and how are they different from you?

Now consider how each of these friends has influenced you and how you have influenced them in the last year. What gifts have you received from your friends' networks and what gifts from your own networks can you offer your friends?

Do the same exercise looking around your church, if you are a member of one:

- Who is in your church?
- How did you all get there?
- What do you have in common, and what is different?
- What have you received from this congregation?
- What could you share with this church that would make new or existing ministries flourish?

# Flattened Authority and a Democratic Church

1. pp. 48–49: Wikipedia and the Occupy movement both model flattened organizations. Where do you see collaborative or “flattened” systems of leadership at work in the communities and organizations around you? What works? What doesn’t?

2. p. 51: In the Book of Common Prayer’s Outline of the Faith, you see this exchange:

Q: Who are the ministers of the church?

A: The ministers of the church are laypersons, bishops, priests and deacons.

When have you seen a church actively recognizing the ministry of all God’s people? Is it important for lay people to see themselves as ministers? If so, what is the role of ordained ministers and leaders?

3. p. 52: Review the Baptismal Covenant in the book or in the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 304–5). Which of the promises most inspires you and why? Which one most challenges you and why?

4. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 53)

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# Globalization and an Indigenous Church

1. pp. 54–55: Notice the signs of globalization in your life. Look at your clothing, food, furnishings, reading, art, favorite TV shows and more. How are you influenced by other cultures?
2. p. 58–59: What does it mean for the Episcopal Church to be “catholic with a small c”? What does it mean for the church to be indigenous or in the vernacular? What do these words mean to you? How can Christians be hybrid, that is, balanced between both catholic and indigenous?

**3. TRY THIS** (also on p. 62)

The Chicago Quadrilateral summarizes the basics of Anglican identity this way:

- We shape our prayers after a common form.
- We live in relationship facilitated by our bishops, and connected to the Church of England.
- We return to the Holy Scriptures as the source of our wisdom and life.
- We offer the sacraments of Baptism and Communion.

Gather with a group and identify additional local expressions of Episcopal identity, especially the ones that matter most to you.

# Secularism and a Thoughtful yet Mystical Church

1. p. 64: Review these words from Putnam and Campbell's book *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*:

A growing number of Americans, especially young people, have come to disavow religion. For many, their aversion is unease with the association between religion and conservative politics. If religion equals Republican, then they have decided religion is not for them.

Does this reflect your own experience of religion, regardless of conservative or liberal ideology? Does it reflect what you know of young people today?

2. p. 66: Have you experienced times when you doubted the existence of God or other elements of Christian belief? What were/are those doubts? Have you discussed them with anyone? Can you imagine a faith that makes room for doubt?

3. p. 69: One of the first Anglican theologians is Richard Hooker, who wrote about the mystery of the Eucharist:

This heavenly food is given for the satisfying of our empty souls, not for the exercising of our curious and subtle wits. Why should any cogitation possess the mind of a faithful communicant but this: O my God, thou art true, O my soul, thou art happy?

What is Hooker saying about the relationship between faith and reason? What do you find attractive about this point of view? What is problematic?

4. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 70)

Describe an authentic spiritual or mystical experience: a moment when you tapped into a divine, transcendent reality.

- How old were you?
- Where were you?
- Do you recall sounds or images, feelings or smells?
- Who was with you?
- Why do you think it was “spiritual”?

Try this exercise with a group of friends and invite each person to share. At the end, talk about the common elements in the stories.

## Returning to Via Media

1. p. 76: What is the difference between tradition and “traditioning”? Have you experienced communities that valued tradition and/or traditioning? What was happening?
2. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 77)  
Recall a moment when you saw a faith community go through a change.
  - What was the process?
  - How did the members explore the issues?
  - How was the decision made?
  - How did the community navigate the change, especially if some members did not support it?
  - How do people feel about the change today? Is it still a sore spot or an accepted “tradition”?
3. p. 79: How do you understand the principle of “comprehensiveness”? How would you apply it in your life, your ministry, your church, your neighborhood, etc.?
4. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 80)  
When gathering with others to discuss concerns and issues, present a set of Respectful Communication Guidelines similar to the ones that follow and invite participants to uphold them.
  - R** = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others
  - E** = use EMPATHETIC listening
  - S** = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles
  - P** = PONDER on what you hear and feel before you speak
  - E** = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions
  - C** = keep CONFIDENTIALITY
  - T** = TRUST ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong

## Uniting Beauty and Justice

1. p. 82: Given what you have learned and discussed about the Episcopal Way so far, how would you respond to someone who says, “Episcopalians have good taste”?
2. pp. 84–85: What are some of the marks of Anglo-Catholic tradition? Where do you see those elements in the life of the church you attend or a church you know? What do you value about this tradition and what do you wish could be different?
3. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 87)  
The next time you participate in Episcopal worship, consciously make connections between the insights and inspiration you received with the needs and concerns you observed in your neighborhood, town, or city. How would you concretely respond to the deacon’s call, “Let us go forth to love and serve the Lord”?



# Practicing Mutuality with the Other

1. pp. 88–89: In Christian community, what part can people with plenty of resources play, and what part can people who lack the same resources play? What would a community of “rich and poor, privileged and underprivileged, who come together to share resources and participate in God’s mission” (as described on p. 94) look like?
2. p. 90: The book *The Episcopalians* coins the phrase “Episcocrats” to describe the system of privilege and influence that has been part of Episcopal life for centuries. What is your first response to this word “Episcocrat”? Give yourself a moment to think about the historic and current examples of class and educational privilege in church. Now discuss, once again, the concept of Episcopal privilege, apart from the phrase “Episcocrat.” What comes up? Is it a difficult or fruitful conversation? Why?
3. pp. 91–93: Describe one experience of giving someone something they could not have given themselves. Now describe one experience of receiving a gift you could not have given yourself. How did it feel to give? To receive? What is the blessing in both experiences?
4. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 94)

Invite a group from your church or community to take a walk around the neighborhood where you live or worship. Invite each person to observe and take notes on the signs of wellness and signs of brokenness. Talk to people in the neighborhood and ask about their experiences living or working in the area. Where are they seeing goodness? Where are they wishing a church would partner with them?

After the walk, gather as a group and invite each person to share a reflection. Then decide together who else you need to meet with and listen to in order to figure out what God is calling you to do to share or experience healing in this place.

# Falling in Love with God Again

1. p. 96: Consider this idea: “It is possible to be so confident about reason and human capacity to explain everything that we forget about a God who is quite beyond us.” What are some examples of this kind of confidence at work, either in your own life or in the world around us?
2. pp. 97–98: Different cultural groups, genders, geographic regions and generations have different ways of reasoning, or making sense and order of the world. Have you ever noticed these differences? Does one way have to be better or worse? How can differences coexist?
3. pp. 98–99: Heroes like Jonathan Daniels and Desmond Tutu clearly loved God with their whole heart, mind, body and soul. However, everyday individuals can experience those moments, too. Recall one time when you felt totally connected to God and God’s work in the world. What did you do? Who were you with? What conditions or preparation made that union possible?
4. **TRY THIS** (also on p. 99)  
Go to an Episcopal lectionary website such as [www.lectionarypage.net](http://www.lectionarypage.net). You will notice certain days have the name of a person or group on them; these are the people or groups we have identified as “saints.” Click on one of these names, and then search the internet and read again their life and work. See if you feel inspired to deepen your own commitment and love for God.
5. pp. 101–2: Read the summary of the Episcopal Way. Choose the three marks of the Episcopal Way that you find most compelling. If there’s one you don’t see, take note and share it with others.