

Your Faith, Your Life



An Invitation to the
Episcopal Church

Revised Edition

JENIFER GAMBER
and Bill Lewellis



Church Publishing
NEW YORK

Part One



Welcome

PREFACE

Telling Secrets

More than thirty years ago, a committee planning a conference on “Spirituality and Mission” scheduled twelve workshops on spirituality for the morning and twelve on mission for the afternoon. Separating the workshops in this way was a logistical—not a theological—decision. Still, we needed a way to preempt the unintended message that spirituality and mission were not related and need not converge.

We discovered a story. A child wandered into a sculptor’s studio and watched a master sculptor work with hammer and chisel on a large piece of marble. Marble chips flew in all directions. Months later the child returned. The block of marble had become a majestic and powerful Aslan-like lion. “How did you know,” he asked the sculptor, “there was a lion in the marble?” “I knew,” the sculptor replied, “because before I saw the lion in the marble, I saw him in my heart. The real secret, though, is that it was the lion in my heart who recognized the lion in the marble.”

In *Clowning in Rome* Henri Nouwen told this story of the Christ within, who recognizes himself unformed in the disguises of the world, to illustrate the relationship between contemplation and action. We used it to show how clearly related spirituality and mission are.

The story also suggests to me—I have worked in church communication for nearly fifty years—that our basic ministry as Christian disciples is about God’s word becoming flesh. Incarnation continues.

When I was a Roman Catholic priest working in the bishop’s office of the Diocese of Allentown, I assisted that diocese’s founding bishop at an ordination.

Vincentian Father Bob Maloney—an insightful theologian and a friend—had a unique preaching style. He punctuated with whispers. You knew he

was about to say something he especially wanted you to hear when he leaned forward and lowered his voice. It was effective. He leaned forward to whisper; the congregation leaned forward to hear.

The late Bishop McShea didn't care for Bob's preaching style. As presider, he was seated behind the preacher, unable to hear the whispers. After the service, he quipped to me, "Bob Maloney preaches like he's telling secrets."

I heard a mission statement: *tell secrets, tell what you have seen and heard*. Whenever we talk about God, or listen for God (whenever we worship or pray), we're in the realm of mystery . . . secret . . . the realm of the hidden yet revealed . . . a presence to be encountered somehow in our relationships and in the signs and symbols of our worship.

Christian thinkers have used both a Greek and a Latin word to talk about the hidden presence of the real—the partially veiled and partially unveiled presence of God—to refer to visible signs (persons, loved ones, the Church, bread and wine) that communicate something of God's hidden presence.

From the Greek word *mysterion* we get our English word "mystery" (suggesting something secret, something hidden). It was translated into Latin as *sacramentum* (suggesting sacrament, sign, something visible).

When rightly used in religion, the word "mystery" describes not a puzzle or a problem to be solved, not even the limit of our understanding, but a visible reality that suggests the hidden presence of God.

We walk frequently along the edges of divine mystery. If we listen closely, as we live God's love, we hear secrets . . . and we tell secrets of the kingdom, of God's visitation. Our mission as Christians is, in fact, to tell secrets, to tell what we have seen and heard.

Your Faith, Your Life: An Invitation to the Episcopal Church, disguised as a reference book of information, is about transformation. It is about the lion in your heart becoming a lion in your world. It is about relationship. It is about process: being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and in Love. It is about increasing our attentiveness and transforming our consciousness through reflection on our faith and life and on being in Love. Ultimately, it is about secrets of the heart, rumors of angels, whispers of the hidden presence of the real. It is about telling secrets of God's visitation.

—Bill



While Bill Lewellis was deep into ordained ministry, I was attending the first-ever Episcopal Youth Event held at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, in the summer of 1982. I was a sixteen-year-old member of

Christ Episcopal Church in Poughkeepsie, New York. Bill and I might be divided by a generation, but we are joined together in our love for God, a commitment to spirituality and mission, and an attitude of approaching life as a journey of transformation—a journey of uncovering the dream that God has sown deep within us.

I love the story that Henry Nouwen tells of the lion waiting to be revealed within the marble. It is a story of a secret waiting to be revealed by the hands of an artist. As Bill reminds us, each of us also has a story to be revealed. God has sown within each of us a dream, an image that reflects the love of Christ.

According to Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, all children have “an innate spirituality, a great sense of wonder, spontaneity, imagination and creativity, and a connection to something larger than themselves.” Yet many children lack the language to “give expression to that sense of something deeper.”¹ Many adults, too, lack the language of faith that gives voice to their innate spirituality and desire to know the transcendent. I grew up with the language of the Episcopal Church—a language of images, actions, words, and postures layered with memories and meaning inherited through centuries of tradition. Most Episcopalians, however, didn’t grow up in the Episcopal Church. For some, the language of the Episcopal Church may seem like an untold secret—like a secret handshake of longstanding members of a private club. It is not meant to be a secret, but instead to reveal a mystery.

The language of the Episcopal Church need not be a secret. That’s why Bill and I set out to write this book. It is, however, only an introduction. Language, and indeed faith, is living. Words gain meaning through use and change with our ever-deepening personal context. Each time you celebrate Eucharist with your community, the language of worship will gain a layer of meaning. Its meaning will change and so will you. That’s what a spiritual journey is like. It transforms.

Throughout my life I have welcomed opportunities for new growth and insights. When Bill shared with me how he has integrated the transcendental imperatives of Bernard Lonergan into his faith and life, I began to learn a framework for receiving these opportunities as a process of transformation. We have adapted those imperatives—be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, be in Love, and, if necessary, change—as the framework for *Your Faith, Your Life* so that you might also journey toward ever-deepening personal transformation.

We never lose the opportunity to develop the language of spirituality, whether we are five, twenty-five, fifty-five, or one hundred and five. Planted

1. Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, interviewed by Krista Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*, American Public Media, April 3, 2008.

deep within each of us, God's dream awaits to emerge just as the image of Aslan emerged from the artist's marble. It is our hope that this book will provide language and information as well as the opportunity for reflection on your spiritual journey of revealing that dream.

—Jennifer



How to Read This Book

Your Faith, Your Life is more than an invitation to the Episcopal Church. It is an invitation to reflect on personal transformation as you consider facts about the Episcopal Church. Disguised as a reference book of information, as Bill has suggested, this book outlines a path toward authenticity and personal transformation.

Five imperatives frame this journey: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, and be in Love. We explore these in the introduction. The imperatives, however, require an essential ingredient this book cannot provide—you, the reader. You bring the text of your life—experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and very being itself—to this text.

To invite you to begin a practice of reading your life and listening to what it says, Bill offers interludes between chapters from his experiences. Embodied in his stories is an invitation for you to remember your stories. Bring his story into the chapters and read the chapters as invitations to recall your own stories.

As you read this book, you will also notice comments set off by rules from the main text to help guide your reading. Sometimes church vocabulary can be challenging. Don't let the words get in the way. The rich images, rituals, and words that express our understanding of God and the world are sometimes necessarily complex. God is ultimately a mystery, beyond knowing. Still, we use our senses—sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell—to express that mystery. Any one way falls a little bit short because God is in all things and beyond our capacity to describe. Ultimately we may agree with the thirteenth-century monk Meister Eckhart, who said, "Nothing is so like God as silence."

INTRODUCTION

Transforming Questions

At the core of human life is a search for meaning. Nothing else truly satisfies. We need to know that our lives have meaning. Among theologian Paul Tillich's contributions to religious understanding was to insist that what we mean by God is actually that which is of ultimate meaning, that our search for meaning is ultimately a search for God.

When seeking information, there are no dumb questions. When seeking meaning, however, you may have had the experience of being led along a rabbit trail by someone's un insightful questions. For in our search for meaning, even if we discover a right answer to an irrelevant question, that inappropriate question and answer will take us way off course.

"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution," Albert Einstein said, "I would spend the first fifty-five minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I knew the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes."

Einstein understood the importance of asking the right, intelligent, and insightful question. Seeking to discover the proper question has long been central to Bill's thinking, to his prayer, his faith, and his life. He was introduced to this concept—how crucial it is to ask the right question—during the 1960s by the late Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan, who cited four "transcendental imperatives" and their interrelated questions, to be asked with intentional awareness on one's path toward authenticity and integrity.

Authenticity, in the framework of this book, is the result of our disciplined attempts to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible and, therein, open to intellectual conversion of mind, moral conversion of wills, and religious conversion of heart. The journey begins where we are and seeks to get

beyond ourselves to the unique and beloved persons God has created us to be. This journey to integrity, into the mystery of God's love for us, takes courage.

Authenticity is a journey that begins where we are and seeks to get beyond ourselves to the unique and beloved persons God has created us to be.

Bill introduced the imperatives to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible to Jenifer during conversations about what truths God was calling her to. She also found them to be consonant with her way of being in the world. Bill and Jenifer come to these questions differently—Bill as a theologian, father, husband, and son, and Jenifer as an economist, wife, mother, and daughter. But both share a love for the search: to know God, to know ourselves, to know our faith, and what all of that might mean for our lives. Likewise, you come with your own experiences and ways of being.

In his introduction to *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn't*, Stephen Prothero contends that “faith without understanding is the standard [among Americans who] are both deeply religious and profoundly ignorant about religion. They are Protestants who can't name the four Gospels, Catholics who can't name the seven sacraments, and Jews who can't name the five books of Moses.” Their faith, he continues, “is almost entirely devoid of content. One of the most religious countries on earth is also a nation of religious illiterates.”²

With that in mind, *Your Faith, Your Life* contains basic information for Episcopalians who want to deepen their knowledge of the Episcopal Church and for those who are considering making the Episcopal Church their church home. Beyond basic information, this book suggests a path for those who seek understanding of their faith and their life as well as transformation—deeper conversion—as they walk with God. Thus, the emphasis on the crucial importance of asking the right questions.

As someone who has chosen to join a faith community, you are deepening your commitment to an intentional journey of discovery and transformation. This can be for you a journey of new experiences, deepening reflection, penetrating insight, and conversion. Because good questions help a journey from becoming derailed, the five imperatives—be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, and be in Love—will help you frame your questions as you read through the chapters.

2. Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn't* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 1.

Like the Episcopal understanding of conversion—being born again and again and again—personal transformation is an ongoing journey. It is a process of attentiveness (being an attentive subject), understanding (being an intelligently inquiring subject), judgment (being a rationally reflective and reasonable subject), and decision (being a responsibly deliberating subject).

Pause from reading frequently to ask transforming questions. Ask questions while you explore the imperatives that guide your journey to integrity and transformation.

The four transcendental imperatives are: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, and be responsible—transcendental because they are equally valid for *everyone, everywhere, and always*; imperatives because you continually work at them.

Be Attentive

*Guide us, gracious God. May we be attentive to our experience,
to the voices and hearts of those around us . . .*

Be attentive to your experience, to your senses, feelings, intuition, and imagination. Upon this evidence, you will form ideas, hunches that may be right or wrong. Later, what you think you understand will depend on what you have sensed or imagined, what you have paid attention to, or not. If you have been inattentive, you will be clueless. Oversights will eventually need to be corrected.

Paul Fromberg, a liturgist experienced in introducing new, and often ancient, liturgies suggests this way of being attentive: Instead of asking yourself (or your congregation after a newly experienced liturgy), “What did you think?” ask, “What did you notice?” So often we bypass the step of attending to our senses—the data of experiences—and skip to judgment. By beginning with our senses, we heighten our awareness, and open ourselves to the possibility of new riches that may have been overlooked. We open ourselves to new experiences with the intention of receiving them without judgment. By doing so, we broaden the possibility of gaining new insight.

This book will help you be attentive to your unique and particular journey of faith by introducing the language and practice of our worship, the stories of the Bible, the people and events of our Church history, the creeds, and the polity of the Episcopal Church. Knowing the words of our faith will

help you name and own your experiences, allowing you to reflect and share them with others. As you read this book, as you journey with your community, be attentive. It may help that, in this book, authenticity and integrity are synonyms, to which the continuing practices called for by the imperatives create a path.

Be Intelligent

Guide us, gracious God. May we be attentive to our experience, to the voices and hearts of those around us; insightful in our interpretation of what we have been attentive to . . .

This second imperative asks you to inquire into the meaning of your experience, the data or information you have received. What does what you have noticed mean? Experiencing something is different from understanding its meaning and implications for living. Be intelligent as you interpret what you have seen, heard, or sensed. Have you missed any crucial information? How else might your experience be understood? Are there alternative explanations?

By separating experience from understanding you become aware of how your current understanding may shape what you see and hear. How does the lens through which you see the world affect your experience? Challenge yourself to see and hear with new eyes and ears. Sometimes a new experience may not accommodate your current understanding. When this happens, re-examine both your earlier and your new experience. Did you miss something? Does this new evidence challenge you to adjust your understanding?

Be Reasonable

May we be attentive to our experience, to the voices and hearts of those around us; insightful in our interpretation of what we have been attentive to; reasonable in our judgments . . .

Insights can occur spontaneously as well as after considered reflection on one's experience, but are they correct? There may be several ways, some even contradictory ways, to understand events. Determining which meaning rings most true requires reasonable judgment. Choose the meaning to which you are drawn and live with it for a while. Does it make sense in light of other experiences you have had? Does it make sense in light of the witness of history, culture, Christian tradition, and the experiences of others?

Part Two



Be

INTERLUDE

"God Doesn't Resolve"

Donald Miller didn't like jazz because it doesn't resolve. One night he listened to a man on the street play the saxophone without opening his eyes. "Sometimes you have to watch somebody love something before you can love it yourself. It is as if they are showing you the way. I used to not like God because God didn't resolve."⁴

God remains, throughout our lives, a question rather than an answer. Some say mystery. As we pursue the mystery, however, our questions about God do resolve into more embraceable questions—questions about ourselves.

Who have I become? Can I change for the better? What is better? How does that relate to my sisters and brothers and the good Earth? Will my being persist after death? Can I even imagine that?

Stay with your questions. Along the way, remember that no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. I'm told Albert Einstein said that. By "level of consciousness," think the same thought processes, the same assumptions, mental models, or approaches to the issues.

Christian theology suggests that God is like Jesus, that God is like the Body of Christ in a Christian community that exists for the sake of the world, for the sake of those who do not belong to it. This is the theology I have absorbed over the past thirty-five years in the Episcopal Church. Some call it a theology of incarnation—that is, God continues to become flesh. That, for me, is the core of our Church's belief: God among us, seeing God in people regardless of religion, ethnicity, nationality or sexuality.

4. Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), vii.

Staying with a theology of punctuation, the United Church of Christ has used the comma as the symbol of a “God is Still Speaking” media campaign. Actor Gracie Allen (1895–1964) who said, “Never place a period where God has placed a comma,” provided the inspiration.

A comma invites conversation, imagination, and contemplation. A comma suggests that God is still speaking.

We can’t know God. Not one of us. Flee those who say they do. Shame on them. God doesn’t speak to any of us directly. Only the Son knows the Father. God’s love passes through others and God’s creation to us, and through us to others.

One of my favorite readings is from the Book of Isaiah:

Thus says the Lord who created you, who formed you [Hear this word the Lord speaks to each one of us]: Be not afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God . . . You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you. . . . Be not afraid, for I am with you . . . (43:1–5)

Hear this word of the Lord . . . hear it in your mind and heart: “You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.”

CHAPTER ONE

Beginnings

Waters of Creation

The mystery of life first began on earth long ago in what scientists call “deep time.” Nearly three billion years ago, cellular life began in shallow oceans. Two billion years later life had progressed into multicelled animals visible to the naked eye. Eventually life forms developed that could survive on land. Life originated from the water; all life continues to need water to survive.

People have long recognized the necessity of water in their stories of the beginnings of life. As Christians we share the creation story told by the Hebrews, in which God breathed over the face of the waters to call forth creation. God gathered the waters and dry land appeared. From the waters, God called swarms of living creatures into being.

Water continued to play a central part in new beginnings. God led the Hebrews to liberation through the waters of the Red Sea, out of Egypt and slavery into a new life as God’s chosen people. God provided water for their journey in the desert wilderness toward the land God had promised. Through the River Jordan God’s people crossed into that Promised Land of Canaan. We read these stories in the Jewish scriptures (also called the Old Testament).

Waters of Jesus’s Baptism

The Gospels of the Christian scriptures (also called the New Testament) tell the watery beginning of Jesus’s ministry in Palestine. In the Gospel of Luke, at Jesus’s baptism in the Jordan River the heavens parted, the Spirit came down on Jesus, and God said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you

I am well pleased” (3:23). Standing in the ripples on the river, Jesus heard God calling him, “my Son.” After his baptism, Jesus was led into the desert and tempted to deny God’s call to him. But Jesus rejected temptation and returned to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, where he claimed his calling: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good news to the poor . . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free . . .” (Luke 4:18). Jesus said, “Yes, I am your Son.” Consider the waters of your own baptism, or baptisms you have witnessed, where God claims you as God’s own (“You are . . .”). Consider the ripples on the water that speak of joy and wonder, struggle, transformation. Hear baptism as a “Yes, I am.” This is the heart of Christian moral theology that Bill speaks about in the interlude that precedes this chapter—*Be*.

Through baptism, we are made a new creation in Christ. It is in this mystery that we can begin to be transformed and become who we are.

Waters of Birth and Rebirth

Each of us was conceived in a place rich in water. For nine months we floated in a sea of water inside our mother’s womb—first as one cell, then two, then four, then eight. Soon we developed organs and limbs. Finally, one day, we broke through those waters and into the world.

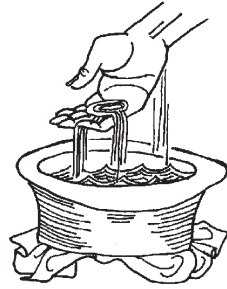
On the day of baptism, the newly baptized are born yet again, this time into the Body of Christ, the Church. Again the baptized burst forth from water as a new person. Even if you have not been baptized or do not remember your own baptism, you’ve likely seen other people being baptized.

On the day of baptism, a priest pours water over the head of the one to be baptized, or completely plunges her into a pool of water. Now, she doesn’t reenter her mother’s womb, as a man named Nicodemus wondered when he heard Jesus talking about being born again (John 3:1–10). But the newly baptized are born again. You can think of the baptismal font, the basin that holds the waters of baptism, as a womb from which a person is born again. The Holy Spirit moves in those baptismal waters, making the person new and bestowing spiritual gifts for life and ministry in the world.

The waters of baptism are powerful. They are the same waters of *creation* over which God breathed and called forth life. They are the same waters of *freedom* through which God led the Hebrews out of a life of slavery in Egypt, and the waters of *promise* through which they walked into new life. They are the

same waters in which *Jesus* was baptized and the same living water that *Jesus* offered the Samaritan woman at the well. In these powerful and living waters the baptized are reborn. By those waters they share in the waters of creation, liberation, promise, and new life in Christ. In the waters of baptism they are bathed in the living water where they will never thirst again.

Today's baptisms, unlike the baptisms in the muddy Jordan River, can be overly sentimental—babies dressed in white, receptions with cake and ice cream. Baptisms truly are a cause for celebration, but in the festivities we may not notice the profound conversion happening before our very eyes. Looking at early Christian baptismal rituals might help us better recognize baptism as the dramatic death to an old self and turn to a new life it truly is.



Water is a central symbol of baptism.

Baptism in the Early Church

For early Christians, being baptized demanded radical changes in life, changes that could jeopardize your very life. Becoming a Christian meant breaking Roman laws that required sacrifices to the Roman gods, an infraction that could result in being arrested, jailed, tortured, and even put to death. You'd lose friends and maybe your family. Some newly baptized Christians, such as those in the army, had to give up their jobs. Becoming a Christian in the early centuries after Christ literally meant turning toward a new way of living.

While baptismal practices varied among early Christian communities, one pattern described in fourth century documents is that **catechumens**, people who are studying about the Christian faith with the intention of becoming candidates for baptism, began the ritual of baptism facing west, the direction of the setting sun and the symbolic direction of darkness and evil. Standing barefooted on a rough garment woven from goat's hair (called a "hair shirt") to indicate that they desired to die to their life of sin, they renounced Satan and the works of evil three times, professing their desire to give up—virtually die to—their old way of life.

The catechumens then turned to the east, the direction of the rising of the sun and the symbolic place of new life, as they professed their faith in Christ three times. Then they stepped into a pool of water, submersing their entire bodies. This pool of water symbolized a tomb in which their old selves died and their sins were washed away. It also represented a mother's womb, out of which a new person was born. Finally, stepping out of the water, they were clothed in a white garment that symbolized their new life in Christ.

The white alb that liturgical leaders wear during Holy Eucharist and other Church services reminds us of the white garments of baptism.

While we live in a country that does not persecute Christians for their profession of faith, following Christ is still a radical choice. Christians are called to a life of discipleship, turning away from consumerism, hatred, and greed, toward life-giving relationships marked by wholeness, welcome, and justice. Like early Christians we are choosing to see the world differently than others might. We choose to see a world in which God is actively present, loving all of creation and yearning for a world in which people act in ways that show that they love God, one another, and all creation. As baptized members of the Body of Christ, we are called to participate in God's loving purpose by loving our neighbors (especially the unlovable), striving for justice, and respecting the dignity of every human being. Every time we witness a baptism, we promise to follow Christ with a particular and demanding pattern of life. Just as it was for early Christians, your baptism was, or will be, the beginning of a new life.

Baptism

Many Christians today are baptized as infants, long before they are able to speak for themselves or understand what is going on. Infant baptism isn't a new practice. In early Christianity, entire households were sometimes baptized at one time. If you have been baptized, you might want to take some time to search for your baptismal record or photographs of the day of your baptism. Your baptismal certificate will tell you the date of your baptism, the name of the priest who baptized you, and the names of your parents and godparents. If you can't find your certificate, call the church where you were baptized. They will have a record of your baptism.

At infant baptism, the parents and godparents present the candidate for baptism to God and the world and make the promises in the **Baptismal Covenant** to believe in God and follow Christ on behalf of their children. They promise to bring them up in the Christian faith. (Chapter 9 on sacraments explores the Baptismal Covenant in greater detail.) Adult candidates speak for themselves in the rite of baptism; they, too, have sponsors who present them for baptism.

Baptism is a gift from God. Faith changes how we see the world. The lens of faith in Jesus Christ lets us see the world differently. Instead of a world of random events, we see a world that is part of God's purpose. Instead of a world of unrelated individuals, we see a world of individuals called to be

in relationship with God and one another whose focus of life is God and God's son, Jesus Christ. Instead of a world with an indifferent creator, we see a Creator in love with and intimately concerned with creation. Reading this book and engaging your knowledge and experience of God within the framework of the five imperatives—be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, and be in Love—will help you live into a life in Christ.

Covenant

We've used the word "covenant" a few times in this chapter. It's a word we don't hear much today. A **covenant** is a relationship freely entered into by two or more parties, each of whom makes promises to be faithful to the others. A covenant creates new relationships. God initiates the covenant relationship and promises to transform those who respond in faith.

A covenant is different from a contract. Although people make promises in a contract and do so freely, contracts are meant to align the interests of the parties involved, not to transform anyone. Contracts are utilitarian. Covenants are transformational. An example of a contract is signing an agreement to buy a home. The sellers want to get as much for the house as possible. The buyers want to pay as little as possible. A contract arrives at a price where the buyer's and seller's interests are aligned. The contract facilitates a transaction that fulfills the interests of both parties.

The Baptismal Covenant is the basis for our relationship with God through Christ and is God's gift to us. We respond this gift with a series of promises. You can find the Baptismal Covenant on page 304 of the Book of Common Prayer.

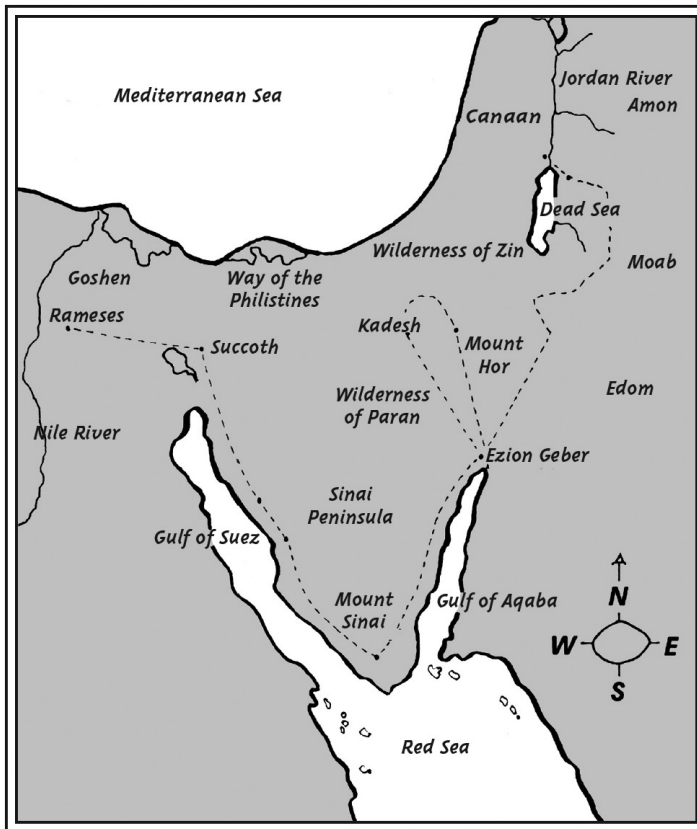
Entering into a covenant is different. It transforms those who have entered into the covenant. God offers us a covenant that we might be God's people and promises to be faithful. Accepting God's promises necessarily means we are changed into something new. We see the world through new eyes, through the lens of the covenant. Instead of seeing the world as indifferent, random, hostile, and threatening, we see life as purposeful, relational, and inviting. God's covenant shapes our every action and cannot be dissolved.

Covenant and the Jewish Scriptures

God enters into a relationship with people in the form of a covenant. We learn from the Jewish scriptures that God established a number of covenants—one

with Noah, another with Abraham, and another with Moses. In God's covenant with the Israelites, God promised them that they would be his people and he would be their God. God required them to be faithful, to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8).

As Christians we share in God's covenant and in God's saving acts told in the Jewish scriptures. The God of Israel is the same God we worship as Christians. The Israelites were real people. The God of Israel, our God, freed the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and led them to the promised land of Canaan. The map below shows one route they may have taken from northern Egypt through the Sinai Peninsula and into present-day Israel/Palestine and Jordan. God remained with them as they wandered in the wilderness and provided



The dotted line on this map of the Ancient Near East shows one way the Israelites may have traveled from slavery in Egypt (far left) to the Promised Land in Canaan (far right).

for their needs and beyond, just as God remains with us today and gives us what we need. God is faithful to the covenant and is with us always.

Covenant and the Christian Scriptures

Our God is also the One who sent God's only son, Jesus, to live and die as one of us. Through Jesus, God renewed the covenant and offered it to all people. In the Christian scriptures (New Testament) at Jesus's last Passover meal, Jesus gave us a **New Covenant**. During the Eucharist every Sunday we remember Jesus's words at the Last Supper as an imperative and promise for us now: "Drink this, all of you: This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Book of Common Prayer [BCP], 363). In this New Covenant Jesus promises to bring us into the kingdom of God. We respond to the New Covenant by loving one another as Jesus loves us.

The New Covenant is a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This New Covenant was prophesied in Jeremiah 31.

The Baptismal Covenant

The covenant given by God in the Jewish scriptures and in the Christian scriptures—and our Baptismal Covenant—all share the same basic characteristics: we freely enter, we make promises, and God transforms us. If you were baptized as an infant, you might say that you did not freely choose to be baptized. You would be right. For you, baptism was a gift, just as being born was a gift. Your parents wanted you to be part of the Christian community, the Body of Christ. So they chose for you to be baptized. They spoke on your behalf and promised to teach you about Jesus Christ and what it means to live a Christian life. They stood up in front of family and friends and made it clear that they wanted you to be Christ's own forever.

Reaffirming the Covenant

A person who is confirmed, received, or reaffirms their Baptismal Covenant is choosing to renew the covenant with God—to confirm the baptismal promises made at baptism and seek God's strength to live into that covenant. During every baptism, confirmation, or reaffirmation, the gathered members of the congregation also renew the Baptismal Covenant as a community.

The text for the service of confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation of baptismal vows, makes these commitments clear. Let's look at the service.

Presentation and Examination

After the candidates are presented, the bishop asks two questions:

- Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil?
- Do you renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

These two questions represent the three renunciations and three adhesions found in the liturgy for baptism. Responding with “I do” means expresses a desire and commitment to turn away from sin and darkness and toward life in Christ. You are saying that you are turning from the *values* of sin and death to the *values* of God and life. Instead of acting in ways that deny God and break relationships with others, you are saying your actions will honor God and nurture relationships with others.

The two questions candidates are asked at confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation mirror the six questions asked at baptism. Look on page 302 of the Book of Common Prayer to read those six questions.

Renewing the Promises

Once the candidates have expressed a commitment to follow Christ, the bishop (or priest) continues by asking:

- Do you believe in God the Father?
- Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
- Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

Those questions refer to the Apostles’ Creed. In chapter 4 of this book we explore the Apostles’ Creed carefully.

The word “creed” comes from the Latin word *credere*, which has the same root as the word “heart.” Saying “I believe” isn’t an abstract statement about whether we believe God exists. It’s a statement about where our heart is and who will guide our very particular everyday choices. When we proclaim “I believe” we are saying we are setting our hearts on God, and to set our hearts on God changes how we choose to live.

One way to think about the Apostles’ Creed is as a recitation of what God has done for us—creating heaven and earth, living among us, dying and breaking the bonds of death, and dwelling among and with us today. In the Baptismal Covenant, the questions that follow the recitation of the Apostle’s Creed prompt a response to what God has done for us in the form of **baptismal promises**:

- Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
- Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
- Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?
- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Answering, "I will, with God's help," to each of these questions is promising to take very specific actions throughout life. The candidates are promising to worship regularly, to resist evil, and to ask for forgiveness when you do not live up to your promises. They are promising to talk to others about God's love and promising to love their neighbor as themselves and to strive for justice and peace. Fulfilling these promises is what it means to live into the Baptismal Covenant.

Prayers and Blessings

After the candidates have renewed the Baptismal Covenant, the entire congregation prays to God to give them the strength to fulfill their promises. The community asks God to deliver them from sin, open their heart with grace and truth, fill them with the Spirit, keep them in faith, and teach them to love others. The people gathered ask God to send them out into the world to do the good work they have promised to do. Faith, after all, is a relationship with God that we act out in community.

The congregation is present on that day and beyond to help the candidates keep their promises, to stand with them in tough times, to celebrate with them in happy times, and to encourage them to take their faith out into the world.

After the prayers, the bishop lays her hand on the confirmands to bless them, asking God to strengthen them with the Holy Spirit, empower them for God's service, and sustain them all the days of their lives. The officiant "recognizes [those being received] as members of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church" (BCP, 310) and asks the Holy Spirit to "direct and uphold [those reaffirming their baptismal promises] in the service of Christ and his kingdom."

The bishop represents the teaching and community of the apostles from the time of Jesus all the way to today and that fellowship throughout the world today. The laying on of hands is the symbolic act that visibly connects

you to the apostles and the universal Church. Chapter 9 goes into more detail about the meaning of the laying on of hands by the bishop that is part of the rite of confirmation.

Choosing to Proclaim Your Love for God

Baptism, confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation are opportunities to publicly state your love for God and your desire to live into God's promises for you. In this liturgy, the entire congregation affirms its faith and demonstrates a commitment to Christ. If you choose to be baptized or renew your commitment to your baptismal promises, you will answer God's call to a Christian life with, "I do," "I believe," and "I will, with God's help."

Saying, "I believe in God" is our heart responding to God's love. Marjorie Thompson says it this way: "God's desire for us ignites the spark of our desire for God."⁵

God has given us the freedom to choose to respond to God's invitation to enter and live according to the covenant. Once baptized, a person is a member of the household of God at baptism and forever bears the mark of Christ. Confirmation, reaffirmation, and reception provide opportunities to renew the promises made at baptism and say, "yes" again and again.

This book will help you understand the meaning of the questions candidates are asked, guide you about how to keep those promises, and help you decide: Do I seek to turn from evil and toward Jesus? Do I believe in the Trinity? Do I promise to act in the way that follows Jesus? These promises form the backbone of our faith and our relationship with God.

Made in the Image of God and Marked as Christ's Own Forever

If you read the questions that form the baptismal promises carefully, you might wonder whether you can, in all honesty, say yes to each. Don't worry. Questioning whether you can promise such faithfulness means you're taking these questions seriously and being honest with yourself. Like all people, you will fall short of fulfilling your promises. The Bible is filled with people who fall short and struggle with God—from Jacob who wrestled with God in his

5. Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 33.

dreams and Jonah who tried to run away from God in the Jewish scriptures, to Peter, the apostle who denied Jesus three times in the Christian scriptures. God wants us to offer our whole selves—our faith and doubt, our strength and weakness, and our joy and pain. God asks for nothing less. And as theologian Bernard Lonergan reminds us, we are on a path of continual conversion toward authenticity. Life in Christ is not about arriving; it is about continuing to begin again.

We Have God

Luckily for us, we aren't alone when we are faced with choices to fulfill our baptismal promises. We have God, Christ, and one another. Look closely at the response to each question. The answer is "I will, *with God's help*." God is with you. God has been with you since the beginning and will always be with you to give you the strength to face the challenges inherent in living authentically.

God has given each of us what we need to live a whole and holy life. This shouldn't surprise us. After all, we bear the image of God. Genesis tells us that God said, "Let us make humankind in our image according to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). People often remark at the likeness of a newborn baby to its parents. "She has her father's eyes," or "He has his mother's nose." Our genetic makeup reflects the DNA of our mother and father. In the same way we bear the impression of the image of our creator, God.

Simply put, like God, we are made to love and to create. We have the abilities to heal broken relationships, to do works of justice, to provide for the physical and mental well-being of others, and even to create and sustain new life—both physically by creating new families, and spiritually by sharing our faith with others with words or actions. God has given us the ability to live into our baptismal promises.

Now, it would be unrealistic or naïve to end the conversation there. Yes, we are made to do good, but we sometimes choose to turn away from God's desires for us. We ignore God and think only of ourselves. We forget the goodness of God that is in us. We harm ourselves and others. We fall short of our promises. It's a given.

We Have Christ

Knowing that we will fall short of the mark, one of the promises we make is that whenever we fall into sin, we will repent and return to the Lord. Notice that we don't say *if* we fall into sin. Falling into sin is



*You have God, Christ,
and community.*

inevitable. But even before that happens, God forgives us and sets our hearts right again and again. What we promise to do is to ask for God's forgiveness and guidance and receive forgiveness in thanksgiving.

Out of love, God became one of us. Out of love, Jesus, God's only son, gave himself up for us on the cross. God raised him from the dead. We share in Jesus's resurrection and in new life offered through Christ. In the waters of baptism the baptized are made a new creation in Christ. Their foreheads are marked with the sign of the cross, a people sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

We Have Community

Believing in God is not a private matter. The entire congregation witnesses the promises made and they promise in turn to do all in their power to support us in our life in Christ. These are the people with whom we worship, study, pray, and serve. These are the people with whom we say the Nicene Creed each Sunday. When our belief falters, others will believe for us.

In the Episcopal Church baptism, confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation are public events. They transform the individual and the community. The community walks the journey together.

Conclusion

Being a Christian is a journey of transformation that never ends. God continually yearns to be close to us, to be in a restored relationship with all people. Whether you are planning to renew your baptismal promises, or to make them for the first time, you will be making a public affirmation of your faith and committing yourself to the specific promises in the Baptismal Covenant. During the service the entire congregation says "yes" to God—to God's yearning for us and to being a follower of Jesus.



Transforming Questions

- 1. Be Attentive:** Consider the most recent baptism that you witnessed. What did you notice about the baptism? What did you see? What did you hear? What did the one baptized, the priest, parents, godparents, and congregation say and do?
- 2. Be Intelligent:** What were you thinking and feeling at the time? What does your answer to this and the first question suggest about what baptism means?
- 3. Be Reasonable:** Read the account of Jesus's baptism in Luke 1:21–22. What do you notice about Jesus's baptism (reading the passages before and after may help)? How does Jesus's baptism as told in Luke challenge or affirm what you believe about the meaning of baptism today?
- 4. Be Responsible:** What might you do differently as a result of the insights you have gained about baptism?
- 5. Be in Love Transformed:** What does your experience with baptism suggest about how you can remain open to personal conversion?

Part Three



Seeking the True and Be Attentive

hymns in Psalms appeal more universally to human experiences such as joy, pain, sorrow, and forgiveness.

Unity of the Bible

The various origins and many kinds of literature found in the Bible might make you wonder why they are considered as one word of God. The unity of the Bible can be understood in the *Shema*, the Hebrew declaration of faith in one God:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

This is the prayer devout Jewish people say every day. It reminds them, as the many books of the Bible remind us all, that the Lord is our God. The Bible is the result of the interaction between human beings and the divine. The Bible is an important way we hear just that. The storytellers, writers, and editors were inspired to know—and to share with others—that God enters human history to care for God’s people and communicate God’s will. The Bible is one way that God speaks to us.

The Bible is a witness to the Lord our God. God is the source of all life, and creation bears God’s divine imprint. God is one who speaks first in creation and is the end of all. Jesus is the revelation of God in the flesh, mediator par excellence. The stories of the Bible narrate the events of human history toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose.

With that broad introduction, let’s take a closer look at the Bible.

Jewish Scriptures

The Jewish scriptures are divided into four major parts—the Pentateuch (Torah), the historical books, the poetical and wisdom books, and the prophetic books. The thirty-nine books of the Jewish scriptures are listed in the box on page XX.

The Pentateuch (Torah)

The first five books of the Bible are known as the Pentateuch, a word that comes from two Greek words: *penta* meaning “five” and *tekuhoi* meaning “books.” The first eleven chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, tell about the beginnings of humanity—from the creation of the world and the first people, to the fall of Adam and Eve, the Great Flood, and scattering of people into different nations with different languages (the tower of Babel).

These early stories, known as primordial history, express basic beliefs about the origin of the world and the nature of humans and explain why there were different tribes and people who worship different gods. After the story of the tower of Babel, the particular story of God's chosen people begins with the birth of Abraham, the one to whom God promised land and many descendants. The remainder of Genesis chronicles the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and concludes with the story of Jacob's son Joseph in Egypt. Genesis is grouped with four other books, and together the first five books of the Jewish scriptures are called the Torah.

Torah is the Hebrew word for law or teaching. These books contain the Law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments) and legal codes as well as the central story of God's chosen people, the nation of Israel, from the covenant established with Abraham, to the liberation of the Hebrews from

THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

Pentateuch (Torah)

Genesis	Leviticus	Deuteronomy
Exodus	Numbers	

The Historical Books

Joshua	1, 2 Samuel	Ezra
Judges	1, 2 Kings	Nehemiah
Ruth	1, 2 Chronicles	Esther

The Poetical and Wisdom Books

Job	Proverbs	Song of Solomon
Psalms	Ecclesiastes	

The Prophetic Books

Isaiah	Joel	Habakkuk
Jeremiah	Amos	Zephaniah
Lamentations	Obadiah	Haggai
Ezekiel	Jonah	Zechariah
Daniel	Micah	Malachi
Hosea	Nahum	

Note: The arrangement of these books and their divisions differ from the Jewish arrangement.

Leader Guide

Y*our Faith, Your Life: An Invitation to the Episcopal Church* is more than a guide to the Episcopal Church. It invites readers to consider how, in the context of Episcopal worship, belief, history, and a call to mission, God is working in their lives today. This book can be used in a variety of settings: for a Lenten study, a Sunday-morning or mid-week adult forum offering, or an adult class for newcomers. As you plan your study, keep the audience in mind. You may want to spend more time on the information of the Church in a newcomers' class. Even in this class, however, be sure to reserve time for sharing personal faith stories.

This leader guide offers a framework for ten gatherings that can be combined or expanded to fit your timeframe. Everyone has a different leadership style. Some prefer to lecture; others are more comfortable facilitating participant-centered conversation. Choose which you prefer and select resources accordingly. The questions found here provide an alternative set of questions to those found at the end of each chapter.

Beginnings and Endings

Consider beginning and ending each session together in prayer. Beginning with prayer grounds participants and the conversation in God and acknowledges this as a holy activity. This Leader Guide offers a prayer to begin each session. Participants can take turns offering closing prayer or you could invite the group to write a closing prayer together each week. Not only will this result in a closing that reflects your time together, it will offer participants practice composing their own prayers. When writing a prayer together consider using the form of a collect:

O God . . . (attributes of God revealed in the conversation)

We ask for . . . (petitions)

So that . . . (purpose of the petition, which may include ministry or vision of wholeness)¹

Framing Questions

It is important that your time together be a safe space to explore and ask questions. Ask open-ended questions that invite participants to share their thoughts and give permission for people to pass on sharing. If you will be inviting participants to share personal stories, you may want to establish group norms, agreed-upon ways of being together in community. Norms set the boundaries of speaking and listening and establish your time together as a safe space. Some common group norms are:

1. Be willing to participate.
2. Keep details of personal stories within the group (confidentiality).
3. Speak from your own position (use “I” language).
4. Respect and allow differences.
5. Listen to one another.

Not all groups require group norms. A lecture-style gathering, for example, may not benefit from setting norms. Be prepared for the possibility that setting a norm of confidentiality will invite participants to share very personal and emotionally charged stories.

Your First Meeting

During this first session, take time to get to know one another, sharing names and something about one’s self. We like to begin groups in which we are sharing our stories by distinguishing between the word “dialogue” and “discussion.” The word “dialogue” comes from the Greek *dia* (through) and *logos* (words). It is an exchange of words for mutual understanding. Alternatively, the word “discussion” comes from the Latin *dis* (apart) and *quartere* (to shake). A discussion is the shaking apart of an issue for the purpose of looking for answers or coming to agreement. In her book, *The Sacred Art of Listening* (Skylight Paths, 2001), Kay Lindahl tells us that while both are valid means of communicating, the difference is one of context. When we are sharing our faith stories, we are not doing so with the intention of agreement, but of mutual understanding. Invite your group to enter the conversation in the spirit of dialogue.

Introduction

About the introduction

The Introduction to this book presents a framework of five “transcendental imperatives” for deepening one’s commitment to an intentional journey of discovery and transformation based on the work of Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan (“Dialectic of Authority.” in *A Third Collection*. Paulist Press, 1985). The five imperatives:

1. **Be attentive:** Be attentive to your experiences, your senses, feelings, intuition and imagination. Notice without judgment. Just notice.
2. **Be intelligent:** What might your experience mean? Consider alternative explanations. Return to noticing the details to confirm your understanding.
3. **Be reasonable:** Judge among possible meanings. Choose one and live with it for awhile.
4. **Be responsible:** Consider what action or commitment you might take as a result of your insight about the meaning of your experience. Keep in mind your baptismal promises when making this decision.
5. **Be in Love:** Be open to transformation in God. This imperative invites us back into the world of experience with anticipation of meeting God anew.

As creatures who seek meaning, we naturally engage in this process. But being aware of it and pulling it apart into discernible parts helps us to be intentional about how we come to understand our lives and to be present to God’s unending self-revelation in our lives.

This introduction ends with five questions as a way of practicing being intentional about discerning meanings, responding to our experiences, and being present to God’s work in the world.

Opening prayer

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use us, we pray you, as you will, and always to thy glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.
(BCP, 832)

Questions for reflection and group conversation

1. What has drawn you to this church?
2. In what ways have you known God?
3. Can you identify an experience in which you knew God's love intimately? How did this experience challenge or affirm your sense of God's love?
4. How would you identify authenticity? What does authenticity have to do with God and the Christian faith?

Extended study

Your Faith, Your Life invites readers to engage their life experiences with the five imperatives: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, and be in Love. Invite participants to a practice of keeping a journal, using the questions at the end of each chapter as a framework for recalling their lives and being open to God's transforming love through personal reflection. The journal responses can be the basis of future group conversations.

Closing prayer

O God . . . (attributes of God revealed in the conversation)
 We ask for . . . (petitions)
 So that . . . (purpose of the petition, which may include ministry
 or vision of wholeness)

Chapter One**About the chapter**

Chapter 1 explores how our relationship with God is a covenant established with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and renewed by Jesus with the New Covenant. It also presents the framework of reaffirming our Baptismal Covenant at confirmation, reception, and re-affirmation.

Opening prayer

Grant, Lord God, to all who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, that, as we have put away the old life of sin, so we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP, 252)

Questions for reflection and group conversation

1. Read aloud: “You are a new creation in Christ. In Christ, you are raised. Therefore be.” What are you called to be as a new creation? How can your community support you as a new creation?
2. Find your baptismal and/or confirmation certificates and other items related to these two events (photographs, candles, garments, etc). What do you remember about these events?
3. Read Matthew 3:13–17. God declares this same love for you. How do you respond?
4. To be a disciple of Christ is necessarily countercultural, at times risky. What does that mean? Give an example.
5. What does the word “covenant” mean to you? How does it differ from other agreements?

Extended study

Read Rabbi Sacks’ address to the Lambeth Conference, 2009. (www.rabbisacks.org/address-by-the-chief-rabbi-to-the-lambeth-conference) Explore these questions together:

1. What distinction does the rabbi make between covenantal goods and market goods? How does this distinction challenge or affirm choices that you make? How you see yourself?
2. How does God’s covenant change the world in which you live? What can you or your faith community do to uphold this covenant?
3. What distinguishes a covenant of fate from a covenant of faith?
4. Which do you think you live today: that of fate or faith?

Closing prayer

O God . . . (attributes of God revealed in the conversation)

We ask for . . . (petitions)

So that . . . (purpose of the petition, which may include ministry or vision of wholeness)