

Bishop's Note - Why I'm Anglican #7 - Because Of Our Episcopal Polity

I know that being a Bishop and saying, "I'm Anglican because we have Bishops," sounds a bit odd, but it's the truth. In part, I am an Anglican because our polity is based on a structure that is founded upon scripture. Said another way: Anglicanism is Episcopal.

What does that mean? It means being organized in a structure that joins multiple congregations together under a single spiritual leader known as a Bishop. The Greek term for Bishop is *episkopos* (*επίσκοπος*), or "overseer." Not overseer in the terms of a mean ruler, but rather one who oversees the ministry of congregations in a specific geographic area known as a diocese.

The ministry of a bishop is to be the Chief Shepherd of the Diocese and the Pastor to the Pastors. That means the bishop is to be the defender of the sheep and the guide to the shepherds. The best way for the bishop to defend the sheep is to be a defender of the faith. Through the centuries, the bishops have done a tremendous job of defending the faith - sometimes defending the faith by correcting one another. As the pastor to the pastors, a bishop cares for and nurtures the individual clergy. That means giving both instruction and moral support, and, when necessary, implementing discipline.

From the 3rd century onwards, bishops, as the Chief Shepherds, have presided over the sacraments of Confirmation and Ordination as the holders and transmitters of apostolic succession - without which no priest or deacon may function. Apostolic succession is an important aspect of Episcopal Polity, meaning that the bishops are the successors to the apostles, and thus serve as a living connection not only to the early church, but to the very Head of the Church herself - Jesus the Christ. Thus, the bishop forms a bridge to the past, but also, through the diocesan structure, as a bridge to one another.

Because of our Episcopal Polity, we are not congregational - each congregation on its own with clergy and laity accountable to no one. We, on the other hand, live by Holy Orders, meaning that we practice mutual accountability: The Archbishop to the College of Bishops; the Bishops to the Archbishop; the Clergy to the Bishop; and the Laity to the Clergy and the Vestry or Bishop's Committee. Living in mutual submission is practical, biblical, and a holy way to live.

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees