

Type whatever questions you have about The Episcopal Church or our Christian faith. Your question could be about worship, theology, structure, St. Luke's, or anything else. **Questions in red, answers in black.**

## **Add your questions here:**

### **Previous Questions:**

#### **Why do we have bishops?**

"The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry" (*BCP*, 855).

In other words, bishops connect us to the larger Church, reminding us that it's not just about our particular congregation, but the entire Church – the Body of Christ. Bishops are seen in line with the apostles of Jesus (some people say there is a historic linkage of bishops all the way back to Jesus, others say that it is more of a symbolic succession of bishops rather than a literal one), rooting us in the historic faith of the Church. So you might also say that bishops help to conserve the tradition of the Church.

#### **How do I become a member of the church?**

To be an official member of the Episcopal Church, you must be either Baptized (and then later Confirmed, but Baptism is seen as full initiation into the Church) or Received by a Bishop if you were Baptized and Confirmed in another faith tradition. To be eligible to run for Vestry or pursue ordination, you must be a Confirmed member (not only Baptized). That being said, you can be a member for all intents and purposes (serving as a reader, usher, making a pledge, being on a committee) without being an official member of the Episcopal Church (perhaps you grew up Methodist and never officially changed your affiliation).

#### **What does it mean to be a member?**

Members are expected to be regular and faithful in worship, acts of charity, financial support, and communal involvement in the parish.

#### **Are clergy assigned to congregations?**

Yes and no. Generally, priests are not assigned but rather are "free agents." With the consent of the Bishop, Rectors (head or senior priest of a congregation) are called by the Vestry. In most cases, the search process for a Rector is like any other search in the business world (except the church takes longer). A open position is posted, priests apply for the job, some are interviewed, and one is offered the job. Other priests on staff are also hired as "free agents," though at the discretion of the Rector.

Deacons though are appointed by a Bishop. Deacons are non-stipendiary (other than mileage and business expense reimbursements) and enter into a contract with the congregation, but assignments are made by the Bishop.

### **How is the Episcopal church different than the Catholic Church?**

One clarification before the response - The Episcopal Church is "catholic," which means universal. I prefer to refer to the Church of Rome as the Roman Catholic church, which is more precise and accurate. I often and unhesitantly say that I am "catholic." However, I am not Roman (or Roman Catholic). The Roman Church does not own the market on catholicity, which is why we claim to be "catholic" in the Creed.

#### **- Sacraments**

Generally, Roman Catholics claim seven sacraments while the Episcopal Church is a bit more vague on the number. Our catechism calls Baptism and Eucharist the two "great" sacraments and lists confirmation, ordination, holy matrimony, reconciliation, and unction as "other sacramental rites." Some Episcopalians claim that we have two Sacraments while others say we have seven. There is also a difference in some of the interpretations of these rites. For example, the Eucharist is viewed differently (mostly in regards to who can receive it and why) by Romans than Episcopalians. But there are differences (some minor, some more substantial) in the interpretation and practice of the Sacraments.

#### **- Catechism**

To be honest, I don't know much about the Roman Catholic catechism, so I can't say much about how it's different than ours. For one, in briefly looking at Rome's, it appears to be much longer. Also, Rome's version opens with "This catechism aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's Tradition. Its principal sources are the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and the Church's Magisterium. This work is intended primarily for those responsible for catechesis: first of all the bishops, as teachers of the faith and pastors of the Church. It is offered to them as an instrument in fulfilling their responsibility of teaching the People of God. Through the bishops, it is addressed to redactors of catechisms, to priests, and to catechists. It will also be useful reading for all other Christian faithful."

Ours, opens with "This catechism is primarily intended for use by parish priests, deacons, and lay catechists, to give an outline for instruction. It is a commentary on the creeds, but is not meant to be a complete statement of belief and practices; rather, it is a point of departure for the teacher, and it is cast in the traditional question and answer form for ease of reference. The second use of this catechism is to provide a brief summary of the Church's teaching for an inquiring stranger who picks up a Prayer Book."

This quick comparison suggests that perhaps ours is more of a guide while Rome's is more authoritative; ours is a place from which to start, while Rome's is more of a foundational document. Again, I don't have much familiarity with how the Catechism is used in the Roman Catholic church, so my assessment may be off.

- **Book of Common Prayer**

Liturgies and resources for prayers different between the two, however the biggest difference is the role of the BCP within Anglicanism. What unites us is our prayer life, not our doctrine. Beyond the obvious Scripture and Jesus Christ, the Prayer Book is the source of our unity and authority, whereas other denominations put more emphasis on leadership structures or particular doctrines.

**Is there a difference between the COE and the Episcopal Church?**

The Episcopal Church is the American “branch” of the Church of England. We are members of the Anglican Communion (which is the 3rd largest group of Christians in the world, after Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians). The Anglican Communion is comprised of over 80 million members in 44 churches in more than 160 countries. Each member of this Communion is considered to be “in communion” with the Archbishop of Canterbury - the head of the Church of England. The Episcopal Church (which is based in the United States, but not confined to it - we have members in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Philippines, and Europe) was the colonial church of the American colonies of Great Britain. After the War of Independence, the Episcopal Church was established as an independent church because American clergy refused to swear allegiance to the British monarch. The Church of England, therefore, is our “mother church” and we are in a relationship of mutual respect and support, but the Church of England has no authority over the Episcopal Church.

**Definition of terms: Liturgy, Eucharist, etc.**

Liturgy: Comes from a Greek word meaning “work for the people.” Often, this is erroneously translated as “work of the people.” Liturgy refers to the form/style of worship. Worship is not seen as something we do, but rather a vehicle of God’s grace for us. In ancient Greek culture, liturgies were public works given by benefactor for the good of the city. Some examples are aqueducts or theaters. Our worship is the same - things given by God (through the church) for the benefit of all.

Eucharist: This is the name for the sacred meal that we take part in on Sundays. It has several names: The Great Thanksgiving, Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper, and Holy Eucharist. Eucharist comes from a Greek word which means “good thanks.”

**When and why do people make the sign of the cross?**

There is no single answer to this question, as the occasions and reasons for crossing oneself are varied. Making the sign of the Cross is a practice of personal piety and is not required. We make the sign of the Cross because the Cross is our central proclamation as Christians. If it works for you, do it; if not, try it, and if you find that it’s not helpful, then don’t do it. Here are some of the common places to cross yourself:

- At the mention of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
- When the priest blesses or absolves the congregation by making the sign of the Cross
- At the conclusion of the Creed
- Before and/or after receiving Eucharist
- At the *benedictus* in the Eucharistic prayer (“blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”)

-In the Eucharistic prayer when the priest asks for the Spirit to descend upon us

-At the conclusion of a prayer, particularly a prayer before a meal or before bed

The reasons for doing so are:

-An enacted "amen"

-Signaling your gratitude and reception of the particular blessing or forgiveness

You might also notice some people making 3 small crosses with their thumb over their forehead, mouth, and heart at the proclamation of the Gospel ("The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to...". This is a prayer for the Gospel to be received and manifest in our thoughts, words, and desires.

### **Does the church have an official stance on various social issues?**

This is the beauty, wisdom, and messiness of the Episcopal Church. We are not a "confessing" church, in that we don't issue "Confessions" (statements) on doctrine or belief. There are occasions in which we do make statements through resolutions at our General Convention or changes in the Prayer Book, but these are never presented as "you must believe this to be a member." In the Episcopal Church, we recognize that issues, and particularly hot-topic social issues, are far more complex than any single position can cover. In all issues, we strive to respect the dignity of all people, to care for Creation, to work towards reconciliation across differences, to put God at the center of our lives, and to pursue peace. Sometimes these orientations line up with the "conservative" position and sometimes the "liberal" one. But our faith transcends simplistic political labels, rather we pursue the radical grace, mercy, and love of God.

### **What services/activities are available for children?**

Children (depending on age) can be involved in Children's Choirs, as acolytes, ushers, or readers in our worship, as volunteers in mission projects, in Youth Group (programs starting with 3rd grade through high school), or in the Young Families group.

### **I'm still unclear on differences between different Protestant religions- Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and then Anglican and episcopal. I feel like a high school history book would answer some questions but the present day differences may have evolved.**

This is a somewhat basic answer, as a response could go on for hundreds of pages. Depending on who you ask, there are 2 or 3 major branches in Christianity. One is Roman Catholicism and one is Orthodox (Greek, Russian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Assyrian, etc.). Some would classify Anglicanism as a third branch, others put us under the larger umbrella of Roman Catholicism. Christianity existed on the British isles possibly as early as the 2nd century and in 597 the British church came under the control of the Pope, where it remained until 1534. So the argument could be made that the British church started as something unique, was held in custodial care by the Pope for a millennium, now now exists again as a distinct branch of the faith.

Other denominations (Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian) are the products of the Reformation, which began in 1517 in Europe when people rejected the practices of the Pope. When the

Church of England rejected the authority of the Pope, it was on the grounds of political sovereignty, not primarily theological issues. It's also worth pointing out that Methodism evolved out of Anglicanism - so you might say they are a part of the Anglican umbrella.

Also, Anglican and Episcopal are generally interchangeable words. Anglican is rooted in the word *anglo* (the root of "England"), so Anglican refers to churches related to the Church of England. After the War for Independence ended, it didn't seem prudent for the church here in the US to continue to use a word related to the people we just fought a war against - so we adopted the name "Episcopal." In Greek, Episcopal means "bishop," and since our structure is based on bishops, it became the name for the Anglican church in the newly formed United States.

**Etiquette, for lack of a better word, during service. Cross heart mouth and head before gospel reading, taking communion with left or right hand, bowing and turning to bible during gospel reading...**

See above for notes on crossing.

Generally, people place their right hand on top of their left to receive Communion (historically, the left hand was seen as evil - in Latin, "sinister" means "left"), but what matters is receiving Eucharist, not which hand you use.

It is common to bow (reverence) the Cross when it passes by in a procession. Some people also bow anytime they walk past the altar Cross - so in and out of pews. Some also bow at the mention of Jesus' name (or the Trinity) in prayer or hymns.

Again, these practices are intended to deepen your awareness of God's presence in worship - if they are helpful, use them. If you aren't sure, try them. If they get in the way of your worship, don't use them.

**Overview on church calendar. What are the time periods? 5th Sunday after Pentecost, etc. what are major feasts or holy days besides the obvious Easter and Christmas.**

**Advent:** Starts 4 Sundays before Christmas and is the the start of the liturgical year. The color is blue (or purple). Lasts 4 Sundays. Themes are preparation for Christ's coming (both remembering his birth and his coming again - which can be interpreted in many ways).

**Christmas:** December 25. The color is white. Lasts 12 days. Themes are the Incarnation (God becoming flesh) and joy.

**Epiphany:** January 6. Color is white. Theme is the manifestation of Jesus as the salvation of God to the entire world.

**Weeks after Epiphany:** Lasts from January 7 until the day before Ash Wednesday. Color is green. Is not a "true season" but rather is sometimes called Ordinary Time (in this sense, "ordinary" doesn't mean "normal" but is related to "ordinal" for counting - we are counting time until Easter, which is preceded by Lent). The first Sunday after the Epiphany is white as we always celebrate the Baptism of Jesus on that day.

**Lent:** Begins on Ash Wednesday, which is 40 days (not including Sundays) before Easter. Color is purple. Themes are fasting, repentance, and self-examination, all in preparation for Easter.

**Holy Week:** This is not technically a season, but is still a part of Lent. The color is crimson (or “oxblood”). It lasts from Palm Sunday through Holy Saturday and has themes related to the Passion of Jesus.

**Easter:** This is the foundation of the Christian year and faith and celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus. The color is white and the season lasts 50 days. Within this season, the Principal Feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost (red) are included.

**Weeks after Pentecost:** The first Sunday after Pentecost is the Principal Feast of Trinity Sunday (white). After that, we enter another period of Ordinary Time (as we do after the Epiphany). Themes in this time are about the ministry of Jesus and the growth of the Church. All Saints is a Principal Feast that falls within this time (November 1) and is white in color.

**Principal Feasts:** Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity, All Saints

**Major Fasts:** Ash Wednesday, Good Friday

### **Along with why do we have bishops, what is apostolic succession all about?**

See above for “why do we have bishops.” Our catechism states that “The Church is apostolic, because it continues in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles and is sent to carry out Christ’s mission to all people.” So one sense of apostolic succession means that we are in continuity with the teachings and traditions of the apostles who received the faith from Jesus.

Another sense is related to how bishops (and therefore priests and deacons) are ordained. It has generally been accepted for most of the Church’s history that to ordain a Bishop, you need three Bishops to do it. Some say that apostolic succession is about having an unbroken line (like a family tree) of Bishops all the way back to St. Peter (and therefore Jesus). So, for example, Jesus commissions Peter, who ordained Irenaeus, who ordained Tertullian, who ordained...., who ordained Michael Curry, who ordained Sam Rodman. This are significant historical doubts as to whether an actual unbroken line of ordinations exists over a period of 2,000 years; however, the symbolic nature of this belief remains an important one in the Church.

### **Why do we say that we believe in “one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church” when we are not Catholic?**

See above response about differences between Roman Catholics and Episcopalians. In short, the catechism says that we describe ourselves as catholic because “it proclaims the whole Faith to all people, to the end of time.”

### **Do Episcopalians believe that the bread and wine are truly the body and blood of Christ?**

Some do. Some don’t. The Thirty-Nine articles (historically defining statements of doctrines of the Church of England, which were adopted by the Episcopal Church in 1801) state that “Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture,

overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is Faith. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped." This is not a binding statement, but it is the traditional position of the church.

It really comes down to how you define term. What does "truly" mean? Does it mean "on a molecular level" or "the deepest reality"? Generally, our Anglican theology says that the Eucharist is Christ's Body and Blood, while remaining bread and wine. How is it that it is both at the same time - that's the mystery of God's grace.

### **If I become a member, why should I make a pledge rather than just put money in the offering every week?**

Even if you don't become an official member, if St. Luke's is your church home you are invited and strongly encouraged to pledge instead of just putting money in the offering plate. Simply put, pledging is a spiritual discipline that requires thought, sacrifice, and intention, whereas giving does not require those practices in the same way. The rest of this response comes from stewardship materials that I wrote when I was at a different church in 2012:

It is easy to be confused by words such as "pledging," "giving," or "tithing." A pledge is a means of giving to the Church in a way that enables both commitment on the part of the giver, and proper planning on the part of the parish. You might think of a pledge as a declaration of intent about your giving for the year.

Your pledge is not written in stone and can, of course, be adjusted should your financial situation change throughout the year. If you are unable to meet your pledge, please do not feel any guilt or remorse about it, but rather know that your church community is here to support you in those difficult times. In the same way, you may also exceed your pledge if you find that you are being called to giving at a higher level than anticipated.

The tithe is often referred to as giving 10%. But the question always comes up... "Is this pre or post taxes?" There is no answer to that question. Nor is there consensus around whether or not this 10% refers to all charitable giving or just to the church. These are decisions that you and your family will need to make on your own.

In fact, the idea of giving 10% is not even close to being "enough." The standard that Jesus taught is to give ALL of our life to God, to give all that we have for the furthering of God's Kingdom. This sort of giving is a sacrifice. We are not asking you to sacrifice your well-being or ability to have food and clothing. However, a pledge should signify a responsible and significant response to all that God has given us, remembering especially that it all belongs to God.

We remember the Biblical idea of giving the first fruits to God, trusting that with sound budgeting and planning, we, like the lilies of the field, will be taken care of by God.

Pledges greatly help the church know its anticipated income and plan accordingly. In the same way that it is helpful for you to know your annual salary in making a budget, the church needs to know what resources it will have.



### **Should I pray to God or pray to Jesus?**

The orthodox understanding of the Trinity is that Jesus is God. So either is correct.

### **Why all of the standing, sitting and kneeling and what determines when we kneel? Why not just sit to pray?**

Prayer is not a passive activity, and so we do not want to assume a passive position for the entirety of our liturgy. We pray with all of our bodies - so we sing, eat, make the sign of the cross, bow, sit, stand, kneel, shake hands/hug, etc. This note was included in the bulletin for a few weeks:

The preferred posture of prayer in Lent is kneeling; in Eastertide, it is standing. But for the remainder of the Church Year, either posture is appropriate. Kneeling for prayers of Confession is preferred in any season. St. Luke's has a tradition of kneeling for the Collect of the Day, Prayers of the People, the Eucharistic Prayer after the Sanctus, and the Post Communion Prayer. However, if you find it either physically easier or theologically preferable to stand for these prayers, please feel free to do so. Since either posture is seasonally appropriate and the Book of Common Prayer does not direct us a particular stance, you are welcome to do either. Just as we all have different voices and practices of piety (genuflecting, crossing ourselves, bowing, etc.), we can also adopt different postures in prayer. Our goal in prayer is not uniformity, but rather unity.

### **Tell me about being "saved." I've been told that if I don't stand up in front of the church and profess my faith, I am not saved. Will I go to hell?**

The grace of God is such that there is nothing that any must do in order to receive, earn, or keep God's love or salvation. This is the very definition of grace. This comes from a [sermon on Maundy Thursday about salvation](#): And the last word in that initial phrase that I'd like to point out is "salvation." Anytime that word comes up, it is helpful to ask "saved from what?" Now I don't want to get into the weeds of atonement theology, that will be Michael's task tomorrow when preaching on Good Friday. But I'd suggest that we look at the roots of the word "atonement;" break it down and you have at-one-ment. Atonement is about reconciling and uniting, and that is also what the Eucharist does. It brings heaven to earth in the bread and wine that are for us the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist makes Christ present in a very tangible and real sense. The Eucharist saves us from being alone.

### **A new person comes to church on a "high" Sunday. Tell me about all of the incense and chanting. Why do you do that?**

This is an excerpt from an [article that Fr. Robert wrote about Principal Feasts](#):

As the Principal Feasts are the "high holy days" of our faith, we celebrate them as fully and deeply as we can through our liturgy. At St. Luke's, we mark the holy days on the actual date of their observance, never moving them to the nearest Sunday (or ignoring them altogether, as sometimes happens). Given that we call them "feasts," we treat these holy days as festivals.



Psalm 96:9 exhorts us to “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” This is something we seek to do every time that we gather for worship, but especially so for the liturgies for the Principal Feasts.

### **Does St. Luke’s do anything for people in the community?**

In addition to providing liturgies and having the church open daily for prayer, we are active in our community in many ways. [Several are listed on our website.](#)

### **How do I know how I can fit in? Who can I talk to to find out what I can do to help?**

[Check out this document about ways to be involved at St. Luke’s.](#) You can speak with Fr. Robert to get more details or to get involved.

### **What is a Vestry and what is their role? Do members of the Episcopal Church vote on everything that happens? How can I be a member of the Vestry?**

The Vestry is the elected board of members who works with the Rector to lead the congregation in its ministry of service to the people of Salisbury by seeking to fulfill God’s mission of reconciliation and unity. Vestry members serve for a three-year term and are elected each December at the Annual Meeting. According to the Canons of the Episcopal Church, the Vestry has primary responsibilities for being the legal agents of the parish, managing the finances of the parish, and calling a rector, though the Vestry also works to develop and implement the vision of the parish.

All Vestry meetings are open to the anyone at St. Luke’s, so feel free to come anytime. Any adult (16+) member of St. Luke’s who has been Confirmed or Received in the Episcopal Church is eligible to stand for election. If you are interested in this ministry of leadership, speak with Father Robert or any current Vestry member (their names are listed on the back of every Sunday bulletin).

### **What if I don’t know what I believe? What if I’m not sure if I believe in God? Am I still welcome at St. Luke’s? Will people try to convert me?**

All are welcome at St. Luke’s and we recognize that people are at different places in their faith. There is no litmus test that we have to decide who is allowed to be a part of this community. No one is going to force you to believe anything here - as belief is a matter of the heart, not the mind.

To read more about this, consider reading [one of Fr. Robert’s sermons from 2015](#). Here’s a short excerpt: Faith isn’t about what you think, it’s about what you trust in. Belief isn’t about being able to say the Creed without crossing your fingers, belief is about being attuned to God’s grace, love, and mercy.

### **What’s so great about the Episcopal church?**

Being an Episcopal congregation, we are blessed with the richness of Episcopal liturgy and Anglican theology. Our identity is found in The Book of Common Prayer, which sets forth our

worship, doctrine, and organization through the way we worship. It has been said that “praying shapes believing,” and we are indeed shaped by our liturgy. We are members of the worldwide Anglican Communion, which comes out of the Church of England and has roots dating to the 200s. The theology that has shaped us is Incarnational (we are called to be disciples in the world) and grounded in Scripture, Reason, and Tradition. Our theology also places value in the *via media* (Latin for “middle way”), meaning that we place greater emphasis on living the Truth than on defining it.

### **What’s so great about St. Luke’s?**

St. Luke’s is a special community of individuals and families who come together to further the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven through proclaiming the Word and participating in Sacramental living. We strive to be the church that feeds people in body and spirit. Wherever you are in your journey of faith, and whatever your background, we welcome you.

St. Luke’s has a storied history, beginning in 1753 when the parish was established by act of the North Carolina Colonial Assembly. Our current worship space was built in 1828 and since then, St. Luke’s has been a spiritual home to many in the Salisbury and Rowan County communities. We have grown into a congregation known for its commitment to Outreach, exceptional clergy and staff, beautiful worship space, and strong leadership and energy of our members. We are poised for an exciting and wonderful future. As we combine the talents and enthusiasm of our members and our committed staff, we make ourselves ready for the future God intends. Together, we have the opportunity to accomplish that which alone we could not do, and all are welcome join us in our ministry of hope and reconciliation.

St. Luke’s Episcopal Church is a parish whose mission is to respond to the grace of God through our Anglican heritage with faithful worship, transformative discipleship, radical hospitality, and compassionate service. The love of God, made known in Jesus Christ, compels us to tell others to “come and see” the difference that Christ makes in our lives and in our world.

### **Who do I call if I need help and/or prayers?**

You can call the church off (704-633-3221) and ask to speak with Father Robert. Or you can email him directly at [rblack@stlukessalisbury.net](mailto:rblack@stlukessalisbury.net)

### **I can’t believe in the immaculate conception. Does that mean I can’t be a part of the church?**

The doctrine of the immaculate conception is not an Anglican/Episcopal doctrine, so you absolutely can be a member without believing it. There’s actually no Biblical or traditional defence for this doctrine, which wasn’t even established until 1854 by the Pope. This doctrine is build a flawed understanding of sin and sexual reproduction. The idea is that for Jesus to be sinless, he had to be conceived without sin. But this means that his earthly mother, Mary, would also have to be sinless. There was a period of time in which it was believed that the sin of Adam and Eve was passed down to children via the male seed. This doctrine was created to solve a

problem that was also the result of human fabrication. It is actually a damaging doctrine because it suggests that sin and procreation are inherently sinful actions.

**I'm a Catholic. Can I receive communion at St. Luke's?**

Absolutely. In the Episcopal Church, we recognize the validity of Baptism done in any church. Since Eucharist is open to all Baptized Christians, all Christians may receive Communion.

**Tell me about confession and how it's done at St. Luke's. I haven't seen any confessional booths at St. Luke's. Why?**

To read a bit about Confession, [check out this sermon from Ash Wednesday 2018](#). Here's an excerpt: "One theologian has spoken of this spiritual discipline of confession as acknowledging that the scaffolding of self-reliance and pride that we've been using to climb has fallen and we are stuck under the rubble. Our faith is not about ascending to God, because in Jesus, God has descended to us. We are never alone in our sin. As the Psalmist says "God will not despise a broken and contrite heart." It's not that God wants us to be broken-hearted as in a state of depression, but rather that Confession leads to our hearts being broken open so that God's mercy can find a way in. So we as get used to our justification, we work at the spiritual disciplines of Confessing our sins and receiving mercy so that we can grow in holiness and dismantle ourselves from all the things that pull us away from God."

In most Episcopal churches, you won't find a confessional booth (and they are becoming a rarer sight even in Roman Catholic churches). Typically, Confession is done by appointment (it is scheduled for "drop-ins" from 4-5pm on Wednesdays in Lent) in our Chapel. The Chapel provides a holy and private space for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). One reason for the change from confessional booths to reconciliation rooms (as they are sometimes called) is the understanding that Confession happens through the interaction between the penitent and the priest. Screens or booths, which really do not provide much anonymity, obscure the personal aspect of Confession - and it is highly personal. We do not ask people to go into a room by themselves and confess their sins and then come out to have a priest pronounce absolution - no, there is something about the act of confessing your sins to another person (in this case, a person who is representing the Church of Christ), and booths distort this aspect of Confession.

Another reason is that one of the reasons screens/booths were used was to give clergy "plausible deniability" should they be subpoenaed by the court to testify about the content of Confession. They clergy could reasonably say "I didn't get a good look, I'm not sure who confessed that particular sin." In our context, the government rarely tries to force the seal of Confession to be broken, and nearly all priests would willingly go to jail rather than break that seal. So the booth is no longer needed for that purpose.

**I'm a good person. I work hard. I do volunteer work. I help my neighbors. Is that not enough? Why do I need to go to church in order to be good in the eyes of God?**

Being a good person, working hard, volunteering, and helping neighbors are all wonderful things to do - but they have nothing to do with “being good” in the eyes of God. You are “good” in God’s eyes because you were created out of love by a loving God and have been declared “good” by the grace of God through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There isn’t a thing in the world that you have to do in order to earn this. The reason why the Church calls you to good works is that is how you most directly experience God’s love for you and the world. The reason why we come to church is to be united in faith, song, and relationship with one another. We also come to Church to hear our story (the story of being loved and redeemed by God) of being “good” in God’s eyes. Doing good and prioritizing worship are actually the most natural things in the world when you come to know and trust that God sees you as good.

### **What is considered sin in the Episcopal church? Am I going to hell if I sin?**

Sin is defined by the Catechism as “the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.” That definition of sin is rather broad, but that’s wise. Sin isn’t about a list of “do’s and don’ts,” rather it’s about relationships. The origins of the idea of sin (the New Testament word used for it) comes from the field of archery - to sin is to miss the target. Sometimes this happens on purpose - the archer intentionally fires a bad shot. Sometimes the archer is culpable but not intentions - they haven’t practiced enough and are a bit shaky. Sometimes the archer is simply caught up in something bigger than them - a wind gust comes in disrupts their aim.

As far as hell, here’s a [sermon from Advent 2017 on the topic of hell](#). A short excerpt: This is the hope of the Messiah and Advent prepares us for that hope. The darkness of hell exists around us and when presented with the light of God, some may choose to remain in the darkness where they can hide from truth. But in the end, God promises to be with us and to love us.

### **What is repentance?**

Here is a [sermon on the topic of repentance from Addvent 2017](#). A short excerpt: And so at the very beginning of Mark, before we are introduced to this light of the world, we encounter John the Baptizer. Mark tells us that he was proclaiming a baptism for the repentance of sins. To repent is to participate in God’s judgment, to acknowledge where we have gone astray, and change course. When John called people to repent, he was speaking in terms of Hebrew vocabulary and understanding, and in Hebrew to repent is a physical action, not a mental one. The word in Hebrew for repent means “to turn.” We do not need to wait for a final judgment to turn towards God’s light. The light of Christ can shine in our lives today, and this is the invitation to repent.

In the Greek that Mark writes in, repentance means to “change your mind.” This is so central to our faith and what it means to be Christian. To be a follower of Jesus is to be different, it is to see things differently. Following Jesus means that the words of the prophet Isaiah are possible, that “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.” Things can be transformed by God. Following Jesus means being different in that the meek are blessed, in that it is greater to

give than receive, in that the simple things like bread and wine can become the holiest things in Creation, in that the least will become the greatest.

### **How can we ask God for more when so many don't have enough? & How to do we know we deserve more, understanding God's abundance of love for all of us?**

This response begins with the foundational assumption that God is a God of abundance. There is no limit to God's grace, blessing, or goodness. However, human is capable of hoarding such blessings. It is not that God chooses to make some people rich and some people poor. Rather, God has given us enough to ensure that everyone has enough. So when we ask God for more, it's not that we ask God to create more money, love, or anything else, but rather that God's grace might soften and open our hearts to share God's abundance.

### **How do we break the cycle of "just having enough"?**

One way to approach this question would be better handled by a financial adviser. Certainly, avoiding debt (especially at high interest rates), having (and sticking to) a budget, and working to set up a modest "rainy day" fund are all good pieces of advice. Having a minimal lifestyle also helps - only owning what is needed. More can be read about this by Googling "minimalism." A theological response though would seek to go deeper into the notion of "just having enough" by asking who defines what enough is? God has given us abundantly more than we, as a people, could ever need, but it is often that we define "enough" in terms of "middle class wealth" so that some will always fall short. This is where Biblical repentance (which literally means "to change your mind") comes into play - we start to see abundance instead of scarcity (or "just having enough").

### **What is a healthy, Christian view of money?**

A good view of money is that it is simply a tool - and tools can be used for good or for evil. Money does tremendous good because it is how we value each other's time and labor, but it can also do evil because it purports to put value on people themselves. Money is never to be idolized, rather it is something we are to generously give away.