

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

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The Ministry in The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches

St. Ignatius of Antioch (c.110 A.D.), one of the Apostolic Fathers, teaches that the New Testament model of ministers in the church are the people, bishops, presbyters (priests) and deacons.

The ministry of the people is to represent Christ and His Church; to bear witness to Him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world, and to take their place in the life, worship, and ministry of the church.

The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his church, particularly as apostle, chief priest and pastor; 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.

The ministry of a presbyter (priest) is to represent Christ and His church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.

The ministry of a deacon is to represent Christ and His church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist the bishop and priest in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

It is important to remember that all Christians are to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray and give for the spread of the Kingdom of God. All of this is to be done in the context of enabling us to continue in the apostolic tradition and historic Apostolic Succession.

The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches is Apostolic

The Church was established by the apostles on the foundation of the Person, teaching and saving deeds of Jesus Christ, who remains its head and cornerstone. The apostolicity of the church rests on its conformity to the teachings of the apostles which we know as the apostolic tradition and which is to be guarded, maintained and perpetuated by bishops in the historic apostolic succession. For this reason, an official list of the names of the bishops of each bishopric was made in order to trace the bishops in succession back to the apostles. The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches possesses such a list. (*We see a biblical example of succession to the apostolic ministry in Acts 1:15-23 where through prayer the Eleven chose a successor to Judas's place among the apostles.*)

As an apostolic branch of the Church, we believe we have been sent out to proclaim Christ to the world (an apostle is one who is sent out to preach and extend the Kingdom of God). The Church, as an apostolic institution, signifies that it has a great mission to undertake, both in its nature and responsibility to spread the Word of God and to disciple the people of all nations. We are a communion that is also apostolic in our government. The apostles were the original overseers of the Church.

Today, catholic believing Christians believe that the successors of the apostles are the bishops of the Church. We are an episcopal branch of the Church rooted in the Christian tradition that developed in the British Isles in the first two centuries of the Christian faith. The word "episcopal" literally means governed by bishops. The bishops of the Church are to safeguard her unity, doctrine, worship and discipline. It is their responsibility, or their delegates, to shepherd and administer the Church until the Lord returns. In the local church, the pastor is charged by the bishop with the role of shepherding and administering the flock of Christ entrusted to them.

The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches is also apostolic in the authority of its duly and properly ordained ministry. The apostolic Christian wholeheartedly agrees with the scriptural admonition, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over our souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing - for that would be harmful to you." Hebrews 13:17. The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches is apostolic in its adherence to the apostolic tradition, its maintenance and continuation of the historic apostolic succession and its apostolic government, nature and mission.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders in The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches

A sacrament is an action performed by the Church through its sacramental ministers in the community of the faithful. The sacraments were ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ to convey a specific gift of His grace to the recipient. To be even more precise, it is God Himself, by His Spirit, who acts through the minister of the sacrament. This means that the sacrament is effective in and of itself. It is God who not only has ordained that the gift be given, but who, in fact, gives it. The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches holds to and practices the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Since the earliest days of the Christian Church, there have been specific orders of ministers in the Church. St. Mark 3:14 says, *"And He appointed twelve, whom He also named apostles, to be with Him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message."* These orders we still know today as bishop, presbyter (priest) and deacon; and each has specific and well-defined functions within the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. God calls out certain of His followers to represent Him in this unique way in accordance with His divine will and the particular order of servant leadership with which they are gifted by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ordination into any of these orders is accomplished by the proper prayers and the laying on of hands of a bishop.

Apostolic Succession and Ordination in The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches

The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches believes that the ministry is a gift of God through Christ to His church, which He has given for the perfecting of the life and service of all its members. The Church as a whole is a priestly body, since it is the Body of Christ, the great High Priest. All its members, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, share in its priestly nature. Yet from the beginning, God has entrusted particular ministries to particular persons within it, and these have, through the Church, received the commission of Christ.

The ordained ministry of the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches consists of bishops, priests and deacons. In accepting this ministry, the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches desires to maintain continuity with the historic ministry of the Church as it has come down to us from early times through what is commonly known as the historic apostolic succession. An ordination service is the sacramental rite by which one of these ministries is conferred. It is an act of God's Spirit in His Church. The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches believes that in all ordinations and consecrations the One who truly ordains and consecrates is God, who through the words and acts of a bishop in the apostolic succession, along with other representatives, and in response to the prayers of His Church, ordains, commissions and empowers for the office and work to which they are called the persons whom it has selected. We observe human and divine interaction in ordination in Paul's admonition to Timothy: *"Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery"* (1 Tim. 4:14).

In the earliest ordination of which we have record, that described in Acts 6:1-6, the following parts appear: election by the people, prayer and the laying on of apostolic hands. This pattern describes for us the scriptural and historical authority for the essential elements in ordination services; the same three parts form the basis for every ordination in the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches:

1. The presentation of the candidates to one of the bishops, this being the last step in the process of choice of them by the church
2. Prayer for those about to be ordained or consecrated, that they may receive the grace and empowerment of the Holy Spirit for their ministry and
3. The laying on of hands of at least three bishops (in an Episcopal consecration), of the bishop and priests (in an ordination of priests), or of the bishop (in an ordination of deacons).

To these have been added an examination of the candidates concerning their beliefs and duties, proper vesting according to their order, the delivering to them of the instruments of their office, and the presentation and greeting of the newly ordained. The above three steps are the means used by the original apostles themselves and are still in use today. This is considered necessary for valid ordination, together with the correct intention on the part of the ordaining bishop. This is why the succession of bishops from the apostles down to our own day is so carefully guarded and maintained. In the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches, we have been wonderfully blessed with a rich and variegated Apostolic Succession that connects us to many branches of the Apostolic Churches, both east and west.

Cyprian or Augustine?

When we look to the writings of the Fathers, we see that they not only affirmed but deeply believed in Apostolic Succession. Several of the Fathers wrote on the subject, fathers such as Clement, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian and Augustine. Each one of them, bringing to the Church a deeper and fuller understanding of what it means to be in continuity with the church of the apostles.

As time passed, those branches of the church that considered themselves to be within the historic apostolic succession identified with one of two schools of thought in regard to apostolic succession. One school of thought is grounded in the teaching of Cyprian and is held today by the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The other understanding of apostolic succession is derived from Augustine and is held by the apostolic churches of the west. In the Western Church, based upon the teaching and influence of Augustine, a four-fold criterion was developed to determine the validity of the consecration of a bishop in the historic apostolic succession; three are exterior, the fourth is interior.

The four criteria are:

Form: The consecration must be done in the context of the Eucharistic liturgy to be valid. This is to emphasize the connection of the ordination within the community.

Matter: There must be an actual laying on of hands by a bishop during the liturgy. Prayer is not sufficient in and of itself.

Minister: The one who performs the consecration must be a validly consecrated bishop within the apostolic succession.

Intention: The intent of the laying on of hands and the prayer within the liturgy must be to ordain or consecrate the person to holy orders.

In Western Christian thinking, if these criteria are met in a consecration, a bishop is within the apostolic succession. The Roman Catholic Church, the churches of the Anglican Communion, the Old Catholic Churches united by the Union of Utrecht, the Philippine Independent Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, the United Churches of South India, North India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as other Autocephalous Catholic bodies hold to the Augustinian understanding of Apostolic Succession.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches hold to Cyprian's view of Apostolic Succession; therefore Roman Catholics and Anglicans, as well as the others mentioned above are not necessarily accepted as being in the apostolic succession, although in practice the Orthodox church has received Roman Catholic priests without requiring them to be ordained in the Orthodox Church.

The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches holds to the Augustinian view of Apostolic Succession. It meets the standard of the four criteria as developed in the Western Church and stands with the other branches of the church catholic that are in the historic apostolic succession.

The Apostolic Succession in The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches

The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches holds a succession of spiritual authority from the Apostles, perpetuated by a laying on of hands in consecrating our bishops, thus preserving and validating our sacraments and orders. This unbroken historic succession of apostolic authority and faith has been handed down through the centuries of Catholic Christianity to the present day one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, of which we are members. In the Communion we have been extremely blessed to receive a rich and variegated apostolic succession that has its roots in both the Eastern and Western branches of the Church. These lines of succession have helped root us deeply in the historic faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints of every age. We will forever be gratefully indebted to those servants from which such a priceless gift has come. The Apostolic Succession of the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches is traced through the following branches of the church:

- Anglican
- Metropolitan-Archbishops of Albania
- Armenian Catholicate-Patrarchate of Cilicia-Catholic Uniate
- Patriarchate of Moscow, Greek Melkite
- Patriarchate of Antioch-Melkite Uniate
- Catholic/Patriarchate of Assyria (The East)
- Chaldean Patriarchate of Babylon of Baghdad-Chaldean Uniate
- Syrian "Jacobite" Patriarchate of Antioch
- Order for Corporate Reunion
- Antioch Orthodox Succession - Petrine
- Roman Petrine Succession-the Catholic and Apostolic Church of Brazil
- Holy Russian Orthodox Synod
- Roman Petrine Succession-Utrecht Old Catholic Church
- Ultrajectine
- Old Roman Catholic

"Almighty God, Giver of every good gift; Look graciously on Your Church, and so guide those who shall be consecrated bishop, that the church may receive faithful pastor's, who will care for your people and equip them for their ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."