

# THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MISSOURI Episco-Polity

### INTRODUCTION

This document is recommended for any member of Episcopal congregations as a basic introduction to our Church's polity (or how we organize ourselves). It highlights the unique way authority is derived in the Episcopal Church flowing from our baptism into the Body of Christ.

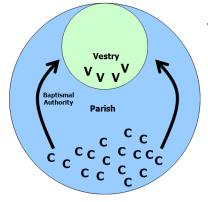
### WHERE AUTHORITY COMES FROM

In the Episcopal Church we believe that authority is given to us through baptism. We all have equal authority through our baptism:

- The Holy Spirit is active in everyone's life.
- Everyone has a voice.
- Everyone has gifts to give.
- True for everyone: Communicants, vestry members, deacons, priests, and bishops.

### THE "FLOW" OF BAPTISMAL AUTHORITY: LOCAL CONGREGATION

The process of sharing Baptismal authority begins with the "communicants" in the parish. At the parish annual meeting, the communicants in good standing of the parish vote to elect new members of the vestry, thereby investing some of their baptismal authority in the vestry.



When a communicant, "C," votes in the annual meeting of her parish, she

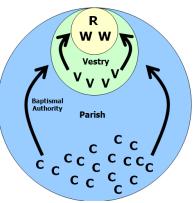
invests SOME of her baptismal authority in the Vestry. The vestry

members receive that authority as responsibility to make their appointed

decisions on behalf of the parish.

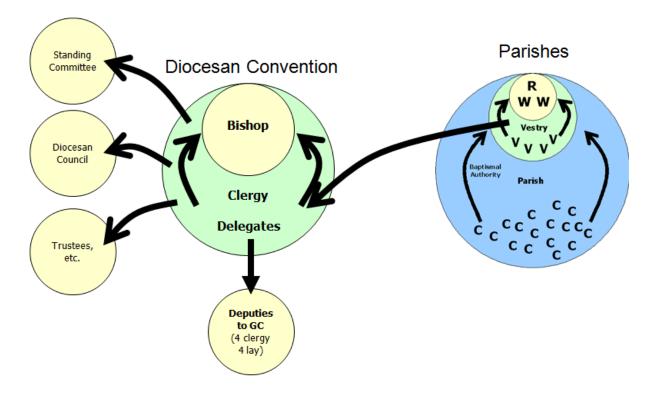
A vestry's election of wardens and

appointment of a rector are further examples of investing SOME of one's baptismal authority in others.



## THE "FLOW" OF BAPTISMAL AUTHORITY: DIOCESE

The congregation also invests baptismal authority in the delegates it sends to the annual Diocesan Convention.



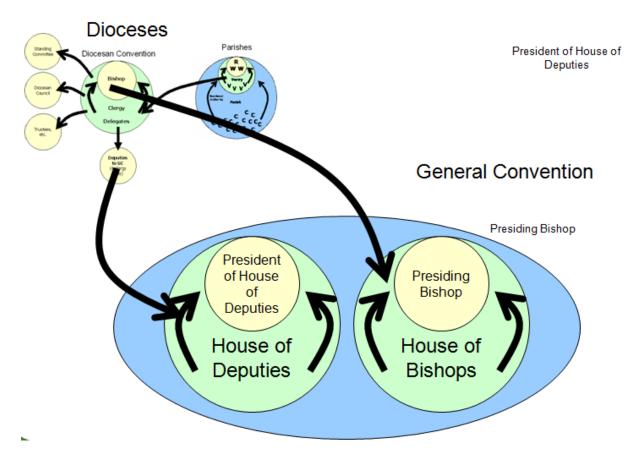
Delegates have seat, voice, and vote and are charged with

- Electing a bishop (when required)
- Passing the diocesan budget
- Electing leaders of the diocese (Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, Trustees, etc.), who in turn receive the baptismal authority as responsibility to make their particular decisions on behalf of the diocese
- Setting policy and canon law for the diocese.
- Electing the Diocese of Missouri deputies to General Convention.

## THE "FLOW" OF BAPTISMAL AUTHORITY: THE WIDER CHURCH

When the Diocesan Bishop(s) and the Deputies attend the General Convention, they take with them the baptismal authority invested in them to make decisions for the Episcopal Church on behalf of the Diocese that sent them.

They in turn elect the President of the House of Deputies (from among the deputies) and the Presiding Bishop (from among the bishops).



OUR church (The Episcopal Church), the authority is in the pews—not over us, coming down, but among us, coming up.

- When we invest our baptismal authority in others through election, we "surrender" our authority to them, which they then receive as "responsibility" to exercise that authority on our behalf.
- As in any representative democracy, we surrender our authority to others by election, so that those whom we elect can make decisions on our behalf, for the good of the whole.

On every level of our church, authority is shared between lay people and ordained people.

- Parish Level Annual Parish Meeting, Vestry, Wardens and Clergy share authority
- Diocesan Level Bishop and Standing Committee, Diocesan Convention (voting in bicameral houses: clergy and lay), Diocesan Commission, other Diocesan committees
- Church-Wide Level General Convention (voting in bicameral houses: bishops and deputies), Presiding Bishop, commissions and committees