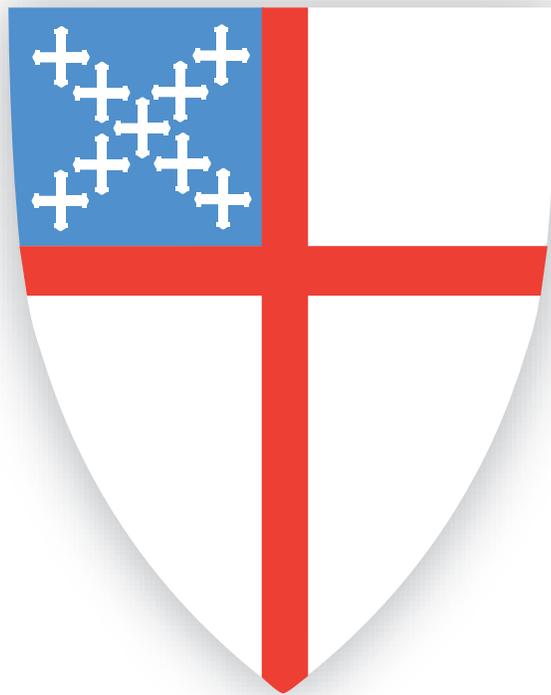


# Around *One* Table

## Exploring Episcopal Identity



ABBREVIATED VERSION

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With contributions by  
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# Around One Table: Exploring Episcopal Identity

*Abbreviated Version*<sup>1</sup>

The health and well-being of organizations and their members – as well as their capacity to engage in God’s mission – depend on clear and shared understandings of identity. Yet, an organization’s identity can be as elusive as that of an individual’s identity, because it is both dynamic and multiple. In other words, it is always changing and embodies many diverse aspects.

To explore identity more fully, *Around One Table* draws on a study called the *Episcopal Identity Project (EIP)*. The study is being conducted by researchers from the University of Cincinnati, Pennsylvania State University, and Illinois State University, and is funded in part by CREDO Institute, Inc. and the College for Bishops. **The EIP explores Episcopalians’ perceptions about the *organizational identity* of the Church – that is, the most central, enduring and distinctive features of the Episcopal Church. These qualities mark what it means to be an Episcopalian.**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This abbreviated version of *Around One Table* includes highlights from the expanded version. For a copy of the expanded version go to [www.aroundonetable.org](http://www.aroundonetable.org) or contact the CREDO Institute, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> The EIP is an extensive, multi-method study with data collected over a period from 2004-2008. EIP data from which *Around One Table* is drawn include 2,569 surveys and 75 interviews of Episcopalians from diverse categories of ministry – presiding bishops (former and current), diocesan bishops, General Convention deputies (lay and ordained), seminary deans, active and retired clergy, lay and ordained leaders representing various groups and positions, and members of congregations (see Table 1, page 2). The demographic representation within the EIP samples matches that within the Church. In addition, researchers have attended and observed several significant Church gatherings and have tracked thousands of documents and articles. Data were collected in such a way that multiple voices were heard, from those most disheartened with the Episcopal Church to those most enthusiastically supportive. Drawing from the EIP data, *Around One Table* was produced through the analysis and writing of the Rev. Dr. David T. Gortner of Virginia Theological Seminary, with contributions by the three EIP researchers: Dr. Elaine C. Hollensbe, of the University of Cincinnati; Dr. Mathew L. Sheep, of Illinois State University; and Dr. Glen E. Kreiner, of The Pennsylvania State University.

## Identity

“Who are we?” What does it mean to be an Episcopalian? What are our core values? How are we differentiated from other Christian faith traditions? What are our strengths and weaknesses? Where are our opportunities?

We cannot be leaders within our church nor in the global community if we are unsure who we are or where God is calling us to go. Criticisms that we need to be more proactive (suggesting that we have allowed outsiders

to set our agenda and dictate our identity), or that we are aggressively reactive (that is, we have been defending our polity to the extreme), both relate to our understanding and embrace of God’s kingdom and the Salvation we are offered in Jesus Christ – or to our lack of such understanding and engagement.

**From the Interim Report of the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church, 11/2007**

**Table 1. Summary of Interviews and Surveys**

Groups Surveyed	Surveys Sent	Surveys Completed	Response Rate
<b>Bishops</b>	All bishops (153)	92	60%
<b>Active clergy</b>	1000 (randomly selected)	414	41%
<b>Retired clergy</b>	All who retired between 9/03 and 12/05 (982)	385	39%
<b>GC deputies (lay/clergy)</b>	All deputies for 2003 and 2006 (1277)	674	53%
<b>Laity</b>	414 congregations from active priest sample sent letter inviting open participation	1004	NA
<b>TOTAL</b>		2569	

### People Interviewed

Bishops	22
General Convention deputies	14
Representative stakeholders <sup>a</sup>	18
Persons of interest <sup>b</sup>	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75</b>

a “Representative stakeholders” are lay and ordained leaders representing various positions and concerns.

b “Persons of interest” are people who received public attention in various media.

# Gathering Around One Table

Episcopalians believe that a fundamental way to discover one another, and themselves, is around a common Table. At table for Eucharist, they share in receiving Christ's presence, are knit together as Christ's body, and witness Christ in one another. At table in each other's homes, they share the warmth of Godly hospitality and learn of each other's lives. Gathered at one table for vestries, councils, and ministries, they discuss, argue, decide, and assess. In doing so, they bring their passions, gifts, and fallibilities to bear on the life and work of the Church.

Episcopalians see table fellowship as part of a deeper ethic, one that favors maintaining bonds of mutual affection above discord and quarrel. When a significant decision becomes controversial, it can challenge the notion that differing ideas about who they are as a Church can really fit around one table.

Currently, within the Episcopal Church, some find it extremely challenging to gather around one table, in the face of perceived extreme differences and growing uncertainty about what is shared. As a result, **members of the Episcopal Church face a fundamental question: "Who are we, collectively, as the Episcopal Church?" It is a question of identity – not individual identity, but organizational identity, the identity we share, literally, as a body (*corpus*).**

Episcopalians' sense of organizational identity is critical. They may see their Church as a spacious tent, inviting people with different ideals, concerns, and perspectives to find a home in the name of Christ. Yet, some recent decisions in the Episcopal Church have sparked controversy, and there are some Episcopalians who have found their values and concerns about who they are and hope to be together in conflict with their sense of who belongs in the tent.

# The Purpose of this Study

The *Episcopal Identity Project (EIP)* describes Episcopalians' perceptions about the organizational identity of their church. Because *Around One Table* draws on that research, it provides a powerful mirror, reflecting back to Episcopalians how they view their church. It also functions as a window, allowing non-Episcopalians to see inside the Church.

Twenty-three identity themes emerged repeatedly from the *EIP's* interviews with Episcopalians. Each theme was then measured in surveys in terms of its accuracy and importance – that is:

- how *accurate* survey respondents believed each theme to be in describing actual Episcopal identity, and
- how *important* or central to Episcopal identity survey respondents believed each theme to be (relative to the other themes).

Even amid multiple voices expressing disparate views of Episcopal identity, a clear structure of Episcopal identity emerges. Certain themes and ideas are most central to Episcopalians, across groups; other themes are more peripheral. A major purpose of *Around One Table* is to provide an analysis and interpretation of the data, to give readers ample opportunities for reflection and conversation about Episcopal identity.

From survey responses, the researchers used an analytic technique known as “cluster

analysis.” This technique grouped 23 identity themes according to: (1) how similarly people rated certain themes in relation to each other, or “clustered” together, and (2) how strongly people rated the themes in terms of how “central” they were to Episcopal identity in general. Using cluster analysis as a statistical procedure, researchers found a consistent underlying structure of Episcopal identity and how Episcopalians perceive and understand it. The 23 themes were clustered as follows into four classifications:

- *Core Episcopal identity* (most tightly related and central themes): Christ as Central, Sacramental, Book of Common Prayer, Incarnational, Scriptural, and Pastoral.
- *Secondary Episcopal identity* (somewhat related and central themes): Reason, Inclusive, Tradition, Common Liturgy, Ceremonial, Experience, and Responsiveness to Societal Change.
- *Tertiary Episcopal identity* (less related and less central themes): Middle Way, Diverse Theological Positions, Ecumenical, Diverse Spiritual Practices, Prophetic, Source of Societal Change, and Dispersed Authority.
- *Stand-Alone Episcopal identity* (themes *not* related or central): Elite, Source of Salvation, and A-confessional.

All the themes identified in the *Episcopal Identity Project* are broadly shared by those surveyed. As they were associated with each

other in peoples' minds, they cluster in relationship one to another in the survey results. No one theme is controlling, at least in any simple sense. Rather, these various themes mutually inform each other and help us to see a sense of common identity.

The summary below identifies the 23 identity themes and shows the overall order when accuracy and importance scores are combined for both ordained and lay survey groups. A more detailed comparison of accuracy and importance for each theme is shown in table format in Appendix A. The expanded version of the report provides much more detail.

The following sections provide brief discussions of all 23 identity themes, grouped according to the four clusters above. To be clear: **The aim of this report is not to produce the most**

**exhaustive, comprehensive list of words or phrases to describe every theme or facet of Episcopal identity. Instead, the aim is to construct a list of themes most frequently identified by Episcopalians themselves as central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics of their Church at this time.** These identity clusters illustrate how Episcopalians group certain themes of the Church's identity together, as well as how central the respondents believed the themes to be. Each description includes brief quotations from *EIP* interviews that illustrate the themes. Appendix B provides reflection questions, which offer an opportunity to discuss and explore each identity theme further. As you proceed through these pages, it is worth noting not only what is present in people's responses, but also what is absent. What themes of Episcopal identity were you surprised not to find among the 23 listed here?

### **Organization of *Around One Table*:**

#### **A Four-Tiered Classification of Episcopal Identity Themes<sup>3</sup>**

##### **Core Identity Themes**

Christ as Central – Sacramental – BCP – Incarnational – Scriptural – Pastoral

##### **Secondary Identity Themes**

Reason – Inclusive – Tradition – Common Liturgy – Ceremonial – Experience – Responsiveness to Social Change

##### **Tertiary Identity Themes**

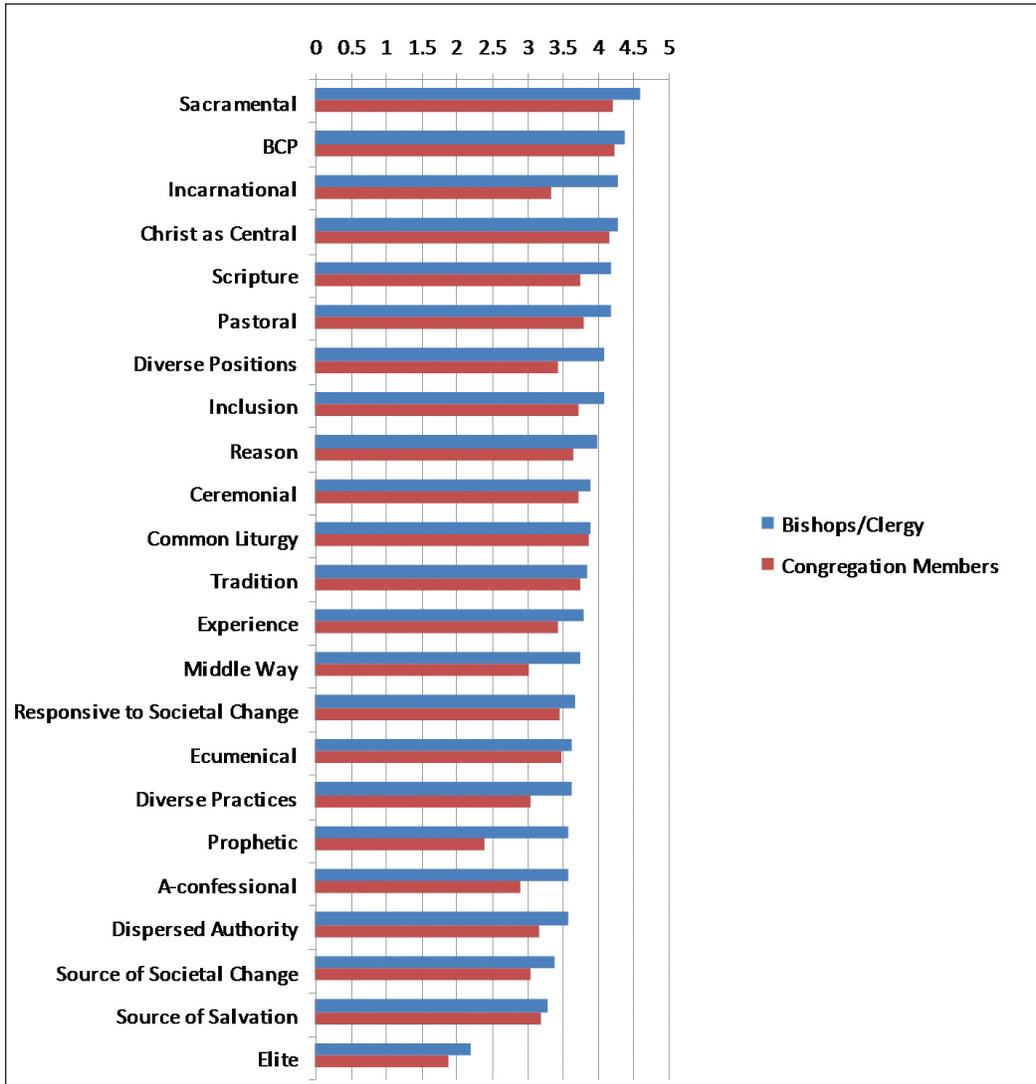
Middle Way – Diverse Theological Positions – Ecumenical – Diverse Spiritual Practices – Prophetic – Source of Societal Change – Dispersed Authority

##### **Stand-Alone Identity Themes**

Elite – Source of Salvation – A-confessional

<sup>3</sup> Identity themes are listed in order of how survey respondents rated them in terms of importance and accuracy. Please see footnote 13 and Appendices D and E in the expanded version of this report for a fuller description of data analytic methods and results.

**Figure 1. Overall Identity of the Episcopal Church:  
Accuracy and Importance Combined**



**Source** Bishops, Active Priests, Retired Priests (785-880, depending on theme); Congregation Members (892 to 1058, depending on theme)

**Note** General Convention deputies are excluded in this chart, because they only received and rated questions about accuracy.

# Core Identity Themes

Six core identity themes were most consistently and dominantly identified by persons surveyed in the *Episcopal Identity Project*. These people see the Episcopal Church as:

- Christ-centered
- Sacramental
- Formed by the *Book of Common Prayer*
- Incarnational
- Scriptural
- Pastoral

The meaning of each theme varies from individual to individual and from group to group. However, taken together, these themes inform each other, and indicate a common identity.

These six themes were consistently cited in the *EIP* as tightly related and central themes in describing the Episcopal Church, and in this sense they describe the “core identity” of Episcopalians. It is striking they are also primarily theological in character; they indicate what Christian faith means, and what it is based upon. Descriptions of themes that are central to persons across an organization do not identify the range of differences in understanding. They do however indicate some basic identity or unity in the midst of whatever differences.

## Christ as Central

*My understanding of feeling and well-being is rooted in scripture and in theology and in Jesus Christ and in God. That's our identity. It's not just an ad campaign (General Convention deputy).*

The most important theme for nearly all leaders and members of the Episcopal Church was a sense of identity rooted in and focused on Christ. The *how* of an Episcopal focus on Christ is often expressed in terms of sacrament, care for one another, prayer, and proclamation. This focus was also increasingly discussed in terms of mission, although mission still remains a concept that does not rise automatically to the surface in people’s descriptions of Episcopal identity.

While more than 62% of respondents saw “Christ-centered” as a highly *accurate* description of Episcopal identity (and Christ-centered was one of the highest-rated themes in terms of both accuracy and importance), many also saw a wide gap between how strongly the Episcopal Church *aspires* to being Christ-centered and how much it actually *is* Christ-centered.

Episcopalians describe Christ-centeredness with three distinct emphases. For some the emphasis falls upon communion; others emphasize inclusion; and still others stress

holiness of life. Those who emphasize communion speak in terms of the fellowship of sharing the Holy Eucharist, or in the sense of connection and mutual recognition shared across the Anglican Communion. Persons emphasizing inclusion view Christ-centeredness as the Church embracing the fullest range of the human family, directly reflecting Jesus' extensive reach to those who otherwise were regarded as outcasts. For a third group of persons, to be Christ-centered refers to how the Church, organizationally as well as individually, seeks to live a Godly life and make vivid and public its commitment to Christ.

These three understandings of what Christ-centeredness means may well be integrally related. But what is most striking is the broad consensus that Christ-centeredness is the key identity theme among Episcopalians.

## Sacramental

*A survey a few years ago ... said that for 98% of the people who responded to the survey, the principal tenet of Episcopal identity is the Eucharist: that Episcopal churches are places where the Eucharist is celebrated. That means that they understand that worship and that a particular kind of sacramental worship is central to the life of the Episcopal Church (Representative stakeholder).*

Episcopal leaders and members almost unanimously rated sacramental as absolutely central, distinctive, and enduring to Episcopal identity. Furthermore, they saw a sacramental orientation toward Christian faith and life as

equally important and accurate. It is one of the few aspects of Episcopal identity where *should* and *is* met and were seen as equally pre-eminent.

The language of sacrament is rich in the Episcopal Christian tradition, extending back to language regarding the two great sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Sacrament as the "sure and certain means" of grace has to do with how Episcopalians regard God's action in human life through physical means. For Episcopalians, grace is God's gift offered not merely as a matter of the heart but through physical forms of water, bread, and wine.

Some Episcopalians regard this sacramental focus as juxtaposed to a confessional faith that emphasizes correct beliefs held in common. The emphasis on encountering God in actions and physical forms, combined with a commitment to original Anglican "comprehensiveness," is experienced by some as inviting and rich and by others as fuzzy and uncertain.

## Book of Common Prayer

*One of the things at the heart of our identity is our common prayer and the Book of Common Prayer and the authorized prayer – I mean, I'm not talking about just the physical volume. There are also authorized texts beyond that, but I think we are joined by common worship, and that has been true since our inception and I think it's what marks us. In fact, when our House of Bishops met with the Lutherans and we each had a day to talk*

*about identity, we talked about the Book of Common Prayer. They talked about the Augsburg Confession. And I think that makes us unique (Bishop).*

Another identity theme nearly universally identified as both highly important and highly accurate was the *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*. The *BCP* is a central, enduring, and distinctive image of what it means to be Episcopalian. This is true for congregation members and Church leaders. Like earlier English and American prayer books and the other prayer books used in the Anglican Communion, the *BCP* is rooted in and based on scripture. For many, it embodies an Episcopal theology: Continuous but changing, unique and comprehensive.

*If you want to know what's brought us to this point in time, it's the 1979 Prayer Book. And the 1928 Prayer Book Society was absolutely right, when they said, "You know, if you institute these changes, everything in the Church will change." They were absolutely right ... even the sort of nod to italicizing the pronouns sent a very strong and clear message of inclusion; turning the priest, you know, from facing the wall to facing the people; and bringing people and welcoming everyone into the body of Christ – changed us (Representative stakeholder).*

The totality of the *BCP*, including the catechism and historical documents it contains, provides a compendium of the many dialogues, debates, and theological expressions that shape the Episcopal Church. Because the *BCP* functions as such a compendium of Episcopal theology

expressed in rites of worship, conflict is inevitable with any revision of the Prayer Book. Many recognize the changes introduced in the 1979 *BCP* as quite significant, both theologically and liturgically.

## Incarnational

*I would say that the Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Communion in broad strokes, brings to the table a high doctrine of the incarnation; that is, that God and the Holy Spirit work through enfleshed relationships – over time, sometimes mysteriously, often mysteriously, but always in concrete and real situations – to bring about movement toward the Kingdom, movement toward reconciliation (Representative stakeholder).*

Episcopalians point to a particularly strong emphasis on the incarnation of Christ. In this, Episcopalians are somewhat unique among Protestants and find closer kinship with Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox in their understanding that in Christ, God and humanity have been joined inseparably. Much of Episcopal hymnody and Eucharistic theology celebrates the incarnation of Christ as redemptive, the embracing of human flesh by God as a profound blessing and sanctifying of human nature.

More than 90% of Episcopal Church leaders regarded incarnational as highly important to Episcopal identity (that is, what the Church *aspires to*) and 76% regarded it as highly accurate (that is, what the Episcopal Church currently *is*). Among Episcopal leaders, the emphasis on an incarnational faith is one of

the highest-rated themes for both importance and accuracy, but there is also a moderately large gap between importance and accuracy. This gap may signal room for growth in how Episcopalians actually live and practice this aspect of their faith.

However, Episcopal congregation members did not regard incarnational as a core identity theme. Only 54% of congregation members regarded it as highly important to Episcopal identity, and only 42% regarded incarnational as highly accurate. They saw this theme as unrelated to almost all other themes. It is worth noting that a higher percentage of congregation members than usual did not even answer this question, suggesting that they did not have a ready understanding of the word incarnational.

## Scriptural

*We're a Church that finds its unity in the Scriptures, not in any particular confessional statement, recognizing that the Scriptures are interpreted differently, and therefore, we're a tradition that has to live with a fair amount of diversity in the midst of unity centered in Christ and the Word of God (Bishop).*

*We are all here to learn from the Scriptures and worship our King. That is what everyone should remember (Lay survey).*

Episcopalians regard scripture as highly important to their Church's identity. Episcopalians embrace the distinctive early Anglican heritage

of presenting scripture to the people, in the language of the people. Ordained Episcopal leaders pledge that they recognize scripture to contain "all things necessary for salvation," and preaching is expected to draw directly upon the biblical texts read each day in worship. Further, clergy and laity often claim that people hear more scripture every week in the worship of the Episcopal Church than in other Protestant churches. In the Anglican emphasis on scripture, reason, and tradition, Episcopalians rated scripture as most important.

In contrast to ratings of importance for scripture, reason, and tradition, Episcopalians considered scripture a less accurate description of the Church's actual identity. Episcopalians, both leaders and congregation members, acknowledged a gap between the high aspiration of the centrality of scripture and the actual demonstration of being a church grounded in scripture. Views vary regarding the understandings of scripture and to what degree it is authoritative.

*You can't just appeal to scripture because everybody claims to be scriptural. How do we read the scripture? When you use the best tools, the exegesis and devout hearts, and what do you come up with? The Anglicans have come up with the Prayer Book tradition and the articles, the creeds, the great catholic creeds (Representative stakeholder).*

## Pastoral

*The perfect institutional church does not exist, nor can we create one – a better one maybe, for a time. In the meantime, caring for people, proclaiming the gospel, preaching and teaching, caring for one another: all that's the important stuff. That's where Christ is known. That's the blood and guts of the Church. The rest of this is just clothing (Representative stakeholder).*

At its most basic, a pastoral perspective includes a deep, empathic appreciation of the full humanity of any person. It recognizes that any decisions made and counsel offered with individuals and local communities must take into account the real spiritual and physical needs, assets, and strengths of the people involved. People often invoke the word pastoral to refer to how the Church or its leaders have, or have not, responded to a deeply felt need.

The term can be fuzzy and used in widely varying ways. For instance, common uses of the term pastoral indicate qualities such as kindness, warmth, emotional availability, sympathy, and accommodation of others' perspectives. Other uses point to a set of actions associated with caring for people and offering guidance. The pastoral rites in the BCP (confirmation, marriage, reconciliation of a penitent, healing, and burial) encompass a sense of the term pastoral as related to significant transitions in life circumstances.

Nonetheless, most Episcopalians regard pastoral as an important part of Episcopal identity, and a moderately accurate descriptor of the Church as it now is. As might be expected, people tend to see some distance between what is and what we *could be*, a gap that was particularly pronounced for congregation members. Only 54% saw pastoral as a highly accurate description of Episcopal identity.

## Secondary Identity Themes

In the clusters of Episcopal identity, a second set of themes were pinpointed. Ratings of these themes were moderately high and somewhat closely inter-related – but not as strong or central as the core identity themes. Nonetheless, they were significant markers of identity. They comprise a more diverse set of themes than the core themes:

- Reason
- Inclusiveness
- Tradition
- Common liturgy
- Ceremonial
- Experience
- Responsive to societal change

These seven themes include sources that are important to the nature and understanding of Christian faith, features regarding the community of worship, and attitudes towards the world.

### Reason

*... We regard the Bible as central ... and what the Church has done, historically, is always part of our ethos because we don't pretend to invent religion today; we stand on the shoulders of the apostles. But reason, I think, is Anglicanism's peculiar contribution to the mix, because we have always been a thinking church (Representative stakeholder).*

Episcopalians hold a strong notion of their Church as a place where thinking Christians can find room for doubt, questioning, and engagement of the mind in general. Episcopalians also hold a deep regard for other sources of knowledge – the sciences, philosophy, and the arts – as God-given. Reason was accorded relatively high importance and accuracy as part of Episcopal identity, but endorsement of reason's centrality by leaders or congregation members was not unanimous. Overall, reason ranked second to scripture in importance but above tradition, although some regarded scripture, tradition, and reason as equally important.

Reason is considered essential in understanding and applying scripture and for discerning a right course of action. But what is reason? In interviews, many Episcopalians associated reason with free thinking and openness to new ways of thinking. For example, a lay congregation member described reason as "inclusion of human intelligence as a factor in evolving beliefs." Episcopalians seem attracted to new ideas and greater complexity. Some spoke of their appreciation of a church where individual thinking was welcomed rather than discouraged.

*It is, I think, and continues to be, a church that prides itself on being tolerant of questions, that doesn't think that there are simple answers; that is willing to constantly be open to new ideas, new interpretations, new understandings, new revelations, and to not be static (Lay deputy).*

## Inclusive

*I think one of the things that has been very distinctive about us ... and which is, in some sense, in jeopardy, is sort of an Anglican comprehensiveness (Representative stakeholder).*

The theme of inclusiveness engendered some of the most vigorous conversation among Episcopalians interviewed. Inclusion has been a key theme discussed in the Church's debates, conflicts, and actions related to the place of gay and lesbian people in the life of the Church. In the past, it has also been a principal concern regarding the role of women in both lay and ordained leadership. Episcopalians who placed significant emphasis on inclusion often cited two significant movements in the Church and society as evidence of how the Church can change: women's rights (and women's ordination) and the Civil Rights movement.

While the term inclusion aroused for Episcopalians a wide range of responses, most Episcopalians recognized it as an important part of Episcopal identity as well as an accurate description of the Church as it is. More than 76% of leaders and more than 70% of congregation members said inclusion was an important *aspiration* of the Church; and nearly

73% of leaders (but only 56% of congregation members) indicated that it was a highly accurate description of what the Church currently is.

For many Episcopalians, inclusion connotes the practical reality of Anglican comprehensiveness: an expansive vision of a "big tent" and an expansive representation of redeemed humanity in leadership.

*The Episcopal Church had a history of ... having a big tent with lots of different kinds of people in it. There's an old expression that there are three kinds of Episcopalians: low and lazy, broad and hazy, high and crazy. So we've all managed to get together (Representative stakeholder).*

## Tradition

*... I am glad that we are a place with an incredible richness of history and, in our best moments, value the various strands of our tradition that weave together, that create the Episcopal Church. In our best moments we really do value these things. We just get mad at each other and pretend that we don't (Bishop).*

Episcopalians recognize tradition as a moderately important aspect of Episcopal identity. The distinctly Anglican emphasis on tradition (that is, the fullness of Christian tradition) charts a course between Reformers emphasizing scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) and Roman Catholics emphasizing Church tradition as God's ongoing revelation.

Nearly 74% of Episcopal leaders rated tradition as highly important to Episcopal identity, and 70% rated tradition as a highly accurate description of Episcopal identity. Congregation members' ratings were 63% (importance) and 69% (accuracy). For most respondents, there was a high degree of coherence between how well tradition describes what the Church *is* and how well it describes what the Church *aims to be*.

For the 16th century Anglican, Richard Hooker, tradition was a critical element in the life and theology of the Church, to be evaluated along with but subordinate to scripture and reason. Hooker's ordering is echoed in this study, which rates tradition as important to Episcopal identity but somewhat less important than scripture and reason. But in contrast, Episcopalians tended to rate tradition (and reason) as somewhat more accurate descriptions of actual Episcopal identity than scripture. Also, 30% of respondents did not think tradition accurately described a central and distinctive emphasis of the Episcopal Church in its identity, purpose, and values.

## Common Liturgy

*I'm a cradle Episcopalian, and my sense of the identity of the Episcopal Church, what is central and enduring about us, is our liturgical tradition that brings together people with different interpretations, and different emphases, and different theological understandings. That has been one of our great strengths (Bishop).*

The sense of common liturgy is important to many Episcopalians. Even with the diversity of liturgical forms available in the *BCP* and the various supplements (*Enriching Our Worship*), Episcopal churches are recognizable by their particular liturgical format, language, style, and expressed theology. While the *BCP* provides a theological and historical anchor, the lived practice of Episcopal worship reflects how Episcopalians encounter and praise God.

The majority of Episcopal leaders and members (more than 70%) regarded a common liturgy as highly accurate and important for Episcopal identity, while about 30% gave it lower ratings. While many see common liturgy as quite central and distinctive to the Church's identity, others see a common liturgy as less central.

## Ceremonial

*It is very important to the "old guard" portion of our parish that we maintain the identity of "high church", sophisticated, traditional and conservatively liberal. Our rector has balanced a fine line between growth and patience to bringing our parish into a new place of growth (Lay survey).*

Along with a strong identity found in the *Book of Common Prayer* and a relatively strong focus of identity on common liturgy, the Episcopal Church also has a reputation for ceremony. This tradition is in part an Anglican inheritance, including services of Advent Lessons and Carols, the ordination of clergy and bishops, and the rich choral traditions of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.

The ceremonial quality of Episcopal worship also reflects more recent liturgical renewal movements that have highlighted some significant Anglo-Catholic contributions, although highly ceremonial services can range from “low church” congregations with elaborate processions for Morning Prayer to “high church” congregations, where incense and bells accentuate the celebration of Eucharist.

Not all Episcopalians see the emphasis on ceremonial as centrally important to the Episcopal Church, and a significant percentage recognized a bit of an imbalance between its importance and its actual emphasis. Nearly 77% of leaders and more than 75% of congregation members rated ceremonial as a highly accurate description of something central to Episcopal identity, but only 67% of leaders and 55% of congregation members regarded ceremonial as highly important. Thus, many Episcopalians see some disparity, as the actual emphasis on ceremony outpaces its importance.

## Experience

*You have a lot of different ways of going about Jesus and you have a lot of different ways of going about God, and that's good. Let's hear about what your experience has to say. I'll tell you what mine is. If we put it all together we'll have a very colorful tapestry (Representative stakeholder).*

*To me, the question is “Can you see from your experience with them as full people that they are filled with the Holy Spirit?” And if they are, get out of the way (Representative stakeholder).*

Some Episcopalians speak of experience as an important facet in theological reflection. Here again, people share a sense of the theme's importance but appear to understand its meaning in different ways. Experience in this context can refer to a person's experience of God. It can also refer to one's own experience in general or experience of the Church, others, or life as a whole.

Episcopalians were not of one mind about the significance of experience as an aspect of Episcopal identity. While more than 71% of Church leaders considered experience as something that accurately describes what the Church actually emphasizes and values, only 63% of leaders regarded experience as a highly important part of the Episcopal Church's identity. The other 37% of leaders rated experience as something less important or unimportant to the Church. For leaders there is disparity between accuracy and importance, with some Episcopalians seeing more emphasis currently given to experience than what they think should be given. Congregation members rated both importance and accuracy lower than leaders did, and with less disparity between the two.

## Societal Change

**(Two Identity Themes: Responsive to Societal Change and Source of Societal Change)**

*[The Episcopal Church is] a place that has in various ways tried to engage the realities of national culture in a non-isolated fashion ... (Clerical deputy).*

Episcopalians have thought intensely and critically about the societal engagement of the Episcopal Church. In doing so, whether praising or criticizing, they addressed two forms of societal engagement: (1) a responsive or reactive approach, and (2) an advocating or proactive approach. (These correspond to the two themes of this section: Responsive to Societal Change and Source of Societal Change. Because they are closely related, they are treated together, even though Source of Societal Change actually comes out as a tertiary theme, and therefore less related and less central to the identity of the Church.)

In *EIP* interviews, the positive elements of responsiveness to societal change included cultural sensitivity and direct care. The negative elements of responsiveness included slowness to act, capitulation to unhealthy patterns, and failures to lead or take a stand. Episcopalians regarded responsiveness to societal change as moderately important and moderately accurate, with 64% of Church leaders and 57% of congregation members rating responsiveness as highly important to what they believed the Episcopal Church

*aspires to be* and 67% of leaders and 51% of congregation members rating responsiveness as a highly accurate description of what the Episcopal Church *is*. Interestingly, 16% of leaders rated responsiveness as unimportant – something for the Church *not* to hold as primary to its identity.

In contrast, Episcopalians rated the proactive approach to societal engagement (Source of Societal Change) as moderately important, but not very accurate: 60% of leaders and 48% of congregation members rated proactive societal engagement as highly important to the Episcopal Church's aspirations, while 17% of leaders and 28% of congregation members rated it as unimportant. More significantly, only 39% of leaders and 28% of congregation members rated proactive societal engagement as a highly accurate description of the Episcopal Church as it currently *is*, while 29% of leaders and 40% of members rated it as an inaccurate description. In other words, there is a marked disparity between what Episcopalians see as the actual proactive societal engagement of the Church and how important they think it is for the Church.

## Tertiary Identity Themes

Those surveyed in the *Episcopal Identity Project* identified seven tertiary themes as characteristic of Episcopal identity:

- Middle way
- Diverse theological positions
- Ecumenical
- Diverse spiritual practices
- Prophetic
- Dispersed authority
- Source of societal change (discussed above)

The tertiary themes stand further from the center of perceived Episcopal identity. On surveys, these themes were rated lower and held less tightly together than the core and secondary themes. They would seem to be in some sense derivative from the core and secondary themes.

### Middle Way

*I would probably use the term “the via media,” the middle way. This Church has tended to stand between Protestant and Catholic traditions, attempting to create a big tent, if you will, where folks of both persuasions can live together. And in doing so, it has tended to not be rigid about its doctrinal snafus and its requirements, particular beliefs about particular things from its members (Representative stakeholder).*

Rated highest among tertiary Episcopal identity themes, the Middle Way (or *via media*) is a phrase Episcopalians often use to describe their Church. The Church uses this phrase to point to an Anglican understanding of itself as “fully catholic and fully reformed.” It also is used to indicate a particularly Anglican approach to tolerating different perspectives and finding common ground. Many interviewees referred back to historical events in the Church (the Elizabethan Settlement, the first Lambeth Conference gathering of Anglican bishops) as demonstrations of the Middle Way.

Episcopal leaders regarded the Middle Way as a moderately accurate description of the Episcopal Church and as an important aspect of Episcopal identity, but there was wide disagreement about its accuracy and importance. Congregation members were not nearly as strong in their endorsement of the Middle Way as a central, enduring, and distinctive element of Episcopal identity. While 74% of Church leaders rated the Middle Way as highly important, only 44% of congregation members did so. Only 38% of members rated it as a highly accurate description of the Episcopal Church. The disparity of responses may suggest a lack of clarity, either about what is meant by Middle Way or about what in the nature of Episcopal identity is comprehensive yet distinct from Roman Catholic and Protestant Reformed traditions.

## Diverse Theological Positions

*We have a diversity of theological views, from evangelical to charismatic to Protestant to practically high Catholic. (Anglo-Catholic is what they call it.) So we've been able to, even within a diocese, have Anglo-Catholic parishes and low-church parishes. Certainly, I think on average, it varies somewhat by region of the country and reflects the culture of the part of the country that the Church is located in (Lay deputy).*

Most Episcopalians deeply appreciate the theological diversity they believe is part of Episcopal identity. The motto “fully catholic, fully reformed” in itself expresses a wide theological range, and Episcopalians recognize their Church as including Christians with widely varying beliefs and perspectives. As the quotation above suggests, people also recognize regional variations in theologies. The appreciation of theological diversity correlates strongly with Episcopalians’ regard for scripture, reason, tradition, and the comprehensiveness of the Middle Way.

Episcopalians regard diversity of theological positions as both an accurate and an important aspect of the Episcopal Church’s identity. A high percentage of Episcopal leaders (81%) rated theological diversity as highly accurate of what the Church currently *is*, while slightly more than 70% of leaders regarded it highly important for the Church. Similarly, more Episcopal congregation members gave high accuracy ratings (58%) than high importance ratings (51%). While their overall ratings were

lower than those of leaders (as they generally are throughout this survey), congregation members rated theological diversity sixth in order of importance. As with other identity themes, there was a wide distance between *is* and *should be* for some Episcopalians, in this case reflecting their sense that the Episcopal Church’s current identity as theologically diverse was outpacing the importance of such an identity.

## Ecumenical

*It has been my hypothesis that the Episcopal Church engaged in an ecumenical endeavor that came very, very close to what you might call success. Ultimately there's no success until there is a complete spiritual union, with Jesus Himself and with the whole rest of the Church, which is in Jesus (Representative stakeholder).*

Helping to mend the fractured Body of Christ, to bring together at least some of the many disparate Christian denominations, emerges from a desire to apply Anglican comprehensiveness to a broader universe. The Episcopal Church has long been involved in ecumenical efforts, as reflected in the 1886 Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (found in the *BCP*, page 876) as well as the Church’s ongoing participation in the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, and the Churches Uniting in Christ.

In the past ten years, the Episcopal Church has embraced a full communion agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

and is moving toward full communion with United Methodist and Moravian churches. Episcopal and Anglican churches are also in full communion with other Christian denominations worldwide, including the Old Catholic Church in Germany and the Philippine Independent Church. By and large, the Episcopal impulse toward ecumenism is driven by a sense that the Christian family is larger than the Anglican Communion.

Episcopalians regarded ecumenism as moderately important to the identity of the Episcopal Church, with 64% of Church leaders and 56% of congregation members rating ecumenical as highly important. Only 55% of leaders and 50% of congregation members considered being ecumenical as a highly accurate description of what the Episcopal Church currently *is*. While important, ecumenism is not among Episcopalians' top priorities in what the Episcopal Church *aims to be*. However, for congregation members, it is linked with secondary Episcopal identity themes, and is not simply tertiary.

## Diverse Spiritual Practices

*There [are] high-church parishes, low-church parishes, more informal, more formal, more traditional music, more contemporary music. There are all kinds of variations, but I think the glue that holds us together, the commonality that holds us together, is embracing a particular vision of worship, and as mediated through the Prayer Book tradition, and while the local adaptation of that may have a thousand variations, those are still adaptations of a common life, not different lives (Bishop).*

In the same way they recognize diverse theological positions, Episcopalians recognize among their congregations and dioceses diversity in spiritual practices. This is most readily apparent in practices related to weekly worship, and is also obvious in different ways congregations conduct rites of baptism, confirmation, marriage, healing, and burial. For instance, even though weekly celebration of Holy Communion has become the norm in most dioceses and congregations, some congregations alternate between Holy Communion and Morning Prayer.

Not surprisingly, Episcopalians differ widely in how much they think the phrase “diverse spiritual practices” accurately expresses something central to the identity of the Episcopal Church. Some 33% of leaders and 30% of congregation members gave this identity theme a low accuracy rating, and only 30% of leaders and 40% of congregation members gave it a high accuracy rating. But more than 62% of leaders (versus 40% of congregation members) rated diverse spiritual practices as highly important.

It seems that Episcopal leaders want the Church to have a certain degree of diversity in spiritual practices. But they do not see the Church currently reflecting that diversity, nor do they see diversity in itself as central to Episcopal identity. Congregation members regarded diverse spiritual practices as relatively less important and not very accurate in terms of Episcopal identity.

## Prophetic

*I think there are two perceptions. [There are] those who think the Episcopal Church is prophetic and moving forward with all these very significant movements and social positions ... And there are those who see it adrift into oblivion. ... So there are certainly two different places (Representative stakeholder).*

The term prophetic, as typically used by Episcopalians, does not mean fortune-telling or prediction of future events, as its more typical contemporary use in English. The word prophetic as used by Episcopalians refers more to its English meaning as visionary and its biblical meaning as truth-telling. Episcopalians understand the ancient prophets to have spoken difficult truths to the nations and to the people of Israel, calling them to repentance, change, and new visions of bearing witness to God in the world.

Episcopalians do not sense, as a whole, that the Episcopal Church can be accurately described as prophetic – at least not as it currently is. This was especially true for congregation members, who in fact saw prophetic as a stand-alone identity theme, not linked with any other themes of Episcopal identity. Being prophetic was among the lowest rated aspects of Episcopal identity, with only 41% of leaders and 13% of congregation members rating it as a highly accurate description. Some 25% of leaders rated it as inaccurate. However, more

than 73% of leaders saw a prophetic identity as very important to the Episcopal Church. In the minds of Episcopal leaders, the disparity between what is and what the Church should aim to be is quite strong for a prophetic identity of the Episcopal Church. The disparity is not so pronounced for congregation members. Only 28% regarded being prophetic as an important part of Episcopal identity, while more than 47% regarded it as relatively unimportant.

It is possible that differing understandings of the word prophetic are at play in the disparity between congregation members and leaders.

## Dispersed Authority

*[The Episcopal Church] values an authority that's shared among all the orders, unlike a pope or unlike scripture as the ultimate authority (Representative stakeholder).*

*Things it [the Episcopal Church] has in the past claimed to be distinctive have to do with a certain kind of corporate commitment to the hearing and receiving of scripture, corporate prayer, a place in a larger catholic communion that is not governed by a centralized authority (Clerical deputy).*

In interviews, Episcopal leaders frequently mentioned dispersed authority as a unique marker of Episcopal Church identity.

Dispersed authority in this context means a system of Church authority that is neither centralized nor tightly hierarchical. There is no arch-episcopacy, and the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church is regarded as first among equals (*primus inter pares*), similar to how the various primates of the Anglican Communion have understood the position of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The dispersal of authority in the Episcopal Church has arguably increased in the 220 years since it created a bicameral legislative structure. The most dramatic shift was the adoption of a baptismal ecclesiology that took baptism as the foundation of all ministry, lay and ordained.

On surveys, Episcopal leaders considered dispersed authority as a moderately accurate (53%) and important (56%) theme of Episcopal identity, lower than most other identity themes. For congregation members, ratings were even lower, with only 50% rating dispersed authority as highly important, and only 35% rating it as highly accurate. The ratings, suggest a sense of disparity for laity between what the Church espouses and what is actually practiced.

## Stand-Alone Identity Themes

Elite, a-confessional, a source of salvation: These three themes were also mentioned by a significant number of persons interviewed in the *Episcopal Identity Project*. They are idiosyncratic themes, not viewed as related to other identity themes or as central to Episcopal identity.

### Elite

*I see The Episcopal Church as one of those institutions, American institutions, first of all, sort of an American mainline denomination, Protestant denomination in most people's minds, that has been seriously identified, regularly identified, with the establishment of government and power in this country and sort of chaplain to the structural government or power-makers (Representative stakeholder).*

*The reality is that it is a deeply upper middle class, deeply white, deeply Western, increasingly secularized denomination, that is elitist in its outlook and out of touch with not only its own grass roots but with much of the rest of the world (Representative stakeholder).*

Episcopalians, often grudgingly, recognize elitism as a part, both historically and currently, of the identity of the Episcopal Church. The classic book, *The Power of Their Glory*<sup>4</sup>, names many of the most influential, powerful, and wealthy individuals in American history as members of the Episcopal Church. It further describes how social-climbing individuals sought out membership, and how membership became a ticket into tight circles of influence for politicians and industrial leaders. While more contemporary leaders and members have talked about a shift away from that elitism, recent studies challenge that notion. By and large, the Episcopal Church still has its largest, most active, and most financially secure congregations in wealthier, predominantly white communities in the United States, most often in the wealthiest suburbs or well-heeled urban neighborhoods<sup>5</sup>.

Surveyed Episcopalians downplayed the importance of an elite identity, marking it as unimportant, and, in fact, something they do not want to be or aspire to be. Leaders acknowledged at least moderate accuracy of this description of the Church, but congregation members did not. In fact, only 19% of members regarded elite as highly accurate.

4 Kit & Frederica Konolige, 1978. *The Power of Their Glory – America's Ruling Class: The Episcopalians*. New York, NY: Wyden Books.

5 Gortner & Dreibelbis, 2005. "Episcopalians on the Trail of Social Capital." Presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion annual meeting, Boston.

It may be important to reflect on the positive ways in which the Church's social status has affected ministry and mission. Historically, the Church's elite status has meant it had the money and power to build and sustain schools and universities, hospitals, ministry centers, and beautiful churches. The Episcopal Church's charitable giving has been generous, disproportionate to its size. Yet it is also worth reflecting on how elitism might affect other identity commitments to comprehensiveness, inclusion, and a scriptural and incarnational faith centered on Christ.

## Salvation – Episcopal Church as Source?

*Many people are attracted to church, and the Episcopal Church is no exception, out of the sense of personal salvation. Something has happened in their life, and they have turned to God and to religion. They see God and religion as the source of their salvation through something that was extremely difficult and ... they credit the Church as being an important factor in the changes brought forth in their life (Lay deputy).*

*Our parish is full of "velveteen rabbits"! Very real people who have been saved by Christ!! (Lay survey).*

Episcopalians might readily agree with the quotations above. And yet salvation is not a word that came immediately to mind for Episcopalians in this study as a primary and distinctive description of the identity of the Episcopal Church. One might not expect this, looking at the Church's creeds and liturgies. Its clergy declare in their ordination vows that they believe the scriptures to contain all things necessary for salvation. The theology in the Church's Eucharistic prayers proclaims salvation and grace. The renewal of baptismal vows and the General Thanksgiving in the daily offices call Episcopalians to remember their redemption in Christ.

Nonetheless, Episcopalians in our study regarded source of personal salvation as a less important descriptor of distinct Episcopal identity. This may be because respondents made a distinction between the Church as source of salvation and Christ as the source, or because they tended to distinguish the Episcopal Church from some more evangelistic traditions. For both leaders and congregation members, there was a marked gap between ratings of accuracy (30% in the high range for leaders and 36 % for congregation members) and importance (52% in the high range for leaders and 55% for congregation members), suggesting that Episcopalians want salvation to be somewhat more central than it currently is to Episcopal identity.

## A-confessional

*Our center is worship, not dogma. We come together to worship God, and what we believe personally is interesting but not the main point (Clerical deputy).*

*I tend to understand the meaning of confessional church because of my ecumenical work. It is a fairly narrow way. That is, a church would have a certain document that sets out its understanding of the Christian faith in a comprehensive way. While we do have a confessional document of sorts (it has 39 articles), that document deals in a very summary fashion, and it deals only with issues which were controverted in England as an effect of the Continental Reformation. You don't see a systematic exposition of where the Anglican Communion stands, the way you would if you looked, for instance, at the various Lutheran confessions or catechisms as put together in the Book of Concord. There is no equivalent to the Book of Concord (Representative stakeholder).*

Episcopalians interviewed for this study described an a-confessional (or non-confessional) approach to Christian faith as a distinctive element of the Episcopal Church's identity, either as a strength or a weakness. This is not the same as agnosticism or an absence of beliefs. But for many, a strength of the Episcopal Church is its commitment to creating a Christian environment where it is not mandatory to adhere to a specific set of doctrines unique to the denomination. For others, however, the absence of a doctrinal confession invites moral and theological confusion.

On surveys, Episcopalians regarded this a-confessional approach to Christianity as one of the least important aspects of Episcopal identity, with 52% of leaders and only 34% of congregation members rating it as highly important. One explanation as to why this theme rated so low may be a lack of common understanding of the word confessional, which some might misinterpret to mean confessing one's sins. In terms of accuracy, Episcopal leaders saw the a-confessional stance as a moderately accurate aspect of what the Episcopal Church currently is, with 56% of leaders endorsing it as highly accurate and only 38% of congregation members viewing it as highly accurate.

In other words, both leaders and congregation members perceived an a-confessional faith to be a stand-alone element of Episcopal identity, neither central to identity nor connected with other identity themes.

## Summary and Discussion

From these basic analyses, some clear patterns emerge – patterns echoed in the cluster analyses that isolated core, secondary, tertiary, and stand-alone identity themes. First, the themes most frequently rated with highest importance are consistent with the tradition of Anglican theology and practice.

- Episcopalians passionately want their Church to hold Christ as central, and believe their Church attempts to do so (though not as well as they wish).
- Episcopalians see the Church both actually and ideally as a “people of the book,” whose faith is united by and expressed in their *Book of Common Prayer*.
- Episcopalians view their Church as both aspiring to hold and successfully expressing a sacramental understanding of the Christian life and relationship with God.
- Episcopalians see their Church both seeking to hold and expressing a deeply incarnational theology.
- Episcopalians want their Church to be deeply grounded in scripture, but see some gap between what is hoped and what is lived.

Second, the themes most frequently rated with the highest accuracy reflect current perceptions of the Episcopal Church both inside and outside.

- Episcopalians view the Church as committed to sacramental and incarnational

understandings, bringing this to bear on worship, prayer, and approach to Christian life.

- The Episcopal Church gathers around its *Book of Common Prayer* as one of its core unifying features and most profound expressions of faith.
- Episcopalians see their Church as holding multiple theological perspectives, both locally and broadly, and have a deep appreciation for this aspect of Episcopal life.
- Episcopalians recognize their Church as highly ceremonial, more than most Christian denominations, and wonder a bit about how important this really is to its identity.

Third, in terms of congruence and disparity between realized and aspirational identity (that is, accuracy and importance):

- Episcopalians believe that the Church is highly congruent in its emphasis and aspirations to a sacramental Christianity and the *Book of Common Prayer*.
- Episcopalians also believe the Church is congruent in its less central emphasis on common liturgy, dispersed authority, responsiveness to societal change, an a-confessional faith, tradition and experience.
- Episcopalians sense a significant deficiency in the Church measuring up to its aspirations of being Christ-centered, focused on scripture, and prophetic.

- Episcopalians would very much like to de-emphasize any notion of their Church as elite.

## Other Research Topics

*Around One Table* is based on a portion of data gathered in the *Episcopal Identity Project*. The purpose of this report is to describe 23 identity themes found in interviews and to analyze survey results in which the themes were rated by Episcopal leaders and members. There are many more stories to be told, both from the interviews and from survey data. The identity themes reported here can also be explored in relationship to many other phenomena studied in the *Episcopal Identity Project*. Other aspects of study from the *Episcopal Identity Project* data, not included in this report but which may be reported in the future, include:

- *Identification*: How Episcopal identity perceptions influence leaders' and members' self-definitions, as well as their personal connections with and investment in the Church.
- *Communication*: How Episcopal leaders, groups, and members use language to construct, debate, and deconstruct identity.
- *Emotion*: How individual and group emotions toward the Church and its decisions shape and are shaped by perceptions of Episcopal identity.

- *Leadership*: How similarities between perceptions of Episcopal identity by diocesan and/or congregational leaders and perceptions by Church members influence attitudes and actions of each group.
- *Group Differences*: How Episcopal identity perceptions vary among groups in the Church (e.g., groups defined by gender, age, tenure, race, order of ministry, and degree of identification with Episcopal identity). Also, how these variations affect beliefs and behaviors.

## Summary

The purpose of this report and the *Episcopal Identity Project* in general is neither to define nor to prescribe the character of Episcopal identity. Rather, this report draws from the *Episcopal Identity Project* to describe the perceptions of people in the Church. The authors hope all readers will find something both practical and inspirational, both affirming and challenging. Most of all, they hope their work will serve as a valuable resource to see the Episcopal Church through the eyes of its members and guide them in conversations and engagement with the findings, gathered "around one table."



# Appendix A: Identity Themes by Survey Groups

## Importance of Identity Themes by Survey Groups

Groups Surveyed				
Importance in Rank Order	Bishops	Active Priests	Retired Priests	Congregation Members
 <p>Highest</p>	Sacramental	Christ as Central*	Christ as Central*	Christ as Central*
	Incarnational	Sacramental	Sacramental	Sacramental
	Scripture	Incarnational	Incarnational	BCP
	Pastoral	BCP	Scripture	Pastoral
	BCP	Scripture	Pastoral	Scripture
	Inclusion	Pastoral	BCP	Diverse Positions
	Middle Way	Reason	Reason	Common Liturgy
	Tradition	Middle Way	Inclusion	Inclusion
	Diverse Positions	Inclusion	Prophetic	Reason
	Reason	Diverse Positions	Diverse Practices	Mission-Focused**
	Common Liturgy	Prophetic	Tradition	Tradition
	Prophetic	Tradition	Common Liturgy	Ecumenical*
	A-confessional	Common Liturgy	Experience	Ceremonial
	Source of Salvation	Experience	Middle Way	Incarnational
	Diverse Practices	Responsive*	Diverse Positions	Source of Salvation
	Dispersed Authority	Ecumenical*	Ecumenical*	Experience
	Societal Change	Societal Change	Responsive*	Responsive*
	Experience	Ceremonial	Societal Change	Dispersed Authority
	Ceremonial	Diverse Practices	Source of Salvation	Societal Change
	Elite	Dispersed Authority	Dispersed Authority	Middle Way
	Source of Salvation	Ceremonial	Diverse Practices	
	A-confessional	A-confessional	A-confessional	
	Elite	Elite	Prophetic	
Lowest			Elite	

\* Three themes were not on the original survey for bishops: Christ as Central; Responsive; and Ecumenical

\*\* Mission-Focused was an emergent theme added later in the research phase. It appeared only on the surveys of congregation members and is, therefore, not discussed as a separate theme in this document. The theme of mission, however, weaves throughout many of the other identity themes, and is often associated in the qualitative data with the theme Christ as Central.

## Accuracy of Identity Themes by Survey Groups

Groups Surveyed						
Accuracy in Rank Order	Bishops	Active Priests	Retired Priests	Deputies	Congregation Members	
	<b>Highest</b>	<b>Sacramental</b>	<b>Sacramental</b>	<b>Sacramental</b>	<b>BCP</b>	<b>BCP</b>
	<b>BCP</b>	<b>BCP</b>	<b>BCP</b>	<b>Sacramental</b>	<b>Sacramental</b>	
	<b>Pastoral</b>	Diverse Positions	Ceremonial	<b>Christ Central*</b>	Diverse Positions	
	<b>Incarnational</b>	Ceremonial	Diverse Positions	Ceremonial	Ceremonial	
	Diverse Positions	<b>Incarnational</b>	<b>Incarnational</b>	Diverse Positions	Common Liturgy	
	Ceremonial	Common Liturgy	Experience	<b>Incarnational</b>	<b>Christ Central*</b>	
	Experience	Experience	Common Liturgy	Inclusion	Tradition	
	Inclusion	Tradition	Inclusion	Common Liturgy	Inclusion	
	A-confessional	Reason	Responsive*	<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Pastoral</b>	
	Dispersed Authority	Inclusion	<b>Pastoral</b>	Reason	Reason	
	Reason	<b>Christ Central*</b>	Reason	Experience	Responsive*	
	Diverse Practices	<b>Pastoral</b>	<b>Christ Central*</b>	Tradition	<b>Scripture</b>	
	Common Liturgy	Responsive*	Diverse Practices	Responsive*	Experience	
	<b>Scripture</b>	Diverse Practices	Tradition	Diverse Practices	Ecumenical*	
	Tradition	<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Pastoral</b>	<b>Incarnational</b>	
	Middle Way	Middle Way	A-confessional	Middle Way	Diverse Practices	
	Prophetic	A-confessional	Dispersed Authority	Ecumenical*	Mission-Focused**	
	Societal Change	Ecumenical*	Ecumenical*	A-confessional	Dispersed Authority	
	Salvation	Dispersed Authority	Middle Way	Dispersed Authority	Middle Way	
	Elite	Elite	Elite	Prophetic	Source of Salvation	
	Prophetic	Prophetic	Societal Change	A-confessional		
	Societal Change	Societal Change	Salvation	Societal Change		
	Salvation	Salvation	Elite	Elite		
<b>Lowest</b>				Prophetic		

\* Three themes were not on the original survey for bishops: Christ as Central; Responsive; and Ecumenical

\*\* Mission-Focused was an emergent theme added later in the research phase. It appeared only on the surveys of congregation members and is, therefore, not discussed as a separate theme in this document. The theme of mission, however, weaves throughout many of the other identity themes, and is often associated in the qualitative data with the theme Christ as Central.

# Appendix B: Reflection Questions

## Core Identity Themes

### Christ as Central

- To what degree can we ever attain our highest hope of being centered in Christ?  
What might that mean in our lives?
- Can we fully pursue one expression of Christ-centeredness without diminishing other expressions?

### Sacramental

- How effectively do Episcopalians communicate about their sacramental Christianity, both with each other and with people outside the Church?
- In the balance of Word and Sacraments, how does a strong emphasis on one affect a congregation's presentation of the other? What is gained, and what is lost, as a result of how a community strikes that balance?

### Book of Common Prayer

- What makes the *BCP* unique among Christian traditions?
- How are the *BCP* and various supplements used in your congregation and diocese?  
What does this say about your community's theology?

### Incarnational

- What do Episcopalians mean when they say "incarnational"?
- What implications, if any, does the high importance of incarnational theology have for Episcopalians when they discuss the matters of conflict now facing the Church?

### Scriptural

- How well does the Church train people to read and listen to scripture, at all levels of involvement and leadership?
- How well-versed are Episcopal leaders in different approaches to biblical interpretation?  
What education across the Church might help in understanding the merits and limitations of approaches?

## **Pastoral**

- What do Episcopalians mean when they say “pastoral”? What are your associations with the term? What situations come to mind? What behaviors and responses do you expect, and how do you expect to feel as a result of pastoral encounter?
- To what extent is “pastoral” associated with clergy? To what extent is it associated with the local congregation and its individual members? To what extent is it associated with the Church as a whole?

## *Secondary Identity Themes*

### **Reason**

- What is reason? What are its qualities? Are reason and wisdom alike, and if so, how?
- How do you employ reason effectively in understanding scripture, tradition, and contemporary context?

### **Inclusive**

- What do Episcopalians mean by “inclusion”? What does it mean to include?
- How has your congregation or diocese practiced “assimilating inclusion?” How has it practiced “accommodating inclusion”? What have been the results?

### **Tradition**

- What parts of Christian tradition are not practiced or embraced by the Episcopal Church? Why?
- What are the written and unwritten traditions of the Episcopal churches in your diocese? What aspects of Christian tradition are emphasized equally, and what aspects are emphasized differently, from congregation to congregation?

### **Common Liturgy**

- What theology is expressed in our common liturgies? What are we saying about God, what are we saying to God, and what do we believe God is saying to us?
- To what extent is liturgy central to your congregation’s or diocese’s identity as Episcopalian? Can you recognize and participate in the liturgies of other Episcopal churches? What about those of churches in other denominations?

### **Ceremonial**

- Why is ceremony so strong in the identity of the Episcopal Church?
- How can we best use ceremony to point to the deep theological understanding embedded in it? How do we evaluate ceremony for its focus, purpose, and content?

### **Experience**

- What experiences have shaped your understanding of scripture? How has scripture shaped your understanding of certain experiences?
- How does experience of certain people shape your general attitude toward “types” of people? How does the process of developing mental “types” enter current church debates, and does it affect all sides?

### **Societal Change**

- How is societal engagement understood by Episcopalians theologically? Does societal engagement reflect a sacramental, incarnational, scriptural, Christ-centered faith?
- How do your congregation and diocese engage with society? Is the responsive or proactive approach more dominant? What strengths and drawbacks do you see in each approach?

## *Tertiary Identity Themes*

### **Middle Way**

- How do we, as Episcopalians, use “Middle Way” in our discourse? To find a “comfortable enough” consensus under a broad definition? A way of charting both inclusion and exclusion?
- To what extent does the Middle Way involve cultural adaptation? At what cost?

### **Diverse Theological Positions**

- What are examples of theologically diverse positions in your congregation or diocese? How are they expressed? How do you make space for differing Christian opinions?
- How do scripture, reason, and tradition each contribute to theological diversity? To a sense of commonality?

### **Ecumenical**

- What ecumenical efforts can the Episcopal Church offer toward unity in the Body of Christ? What that is central to Episcopal identity can contribute to ecumenism?
- How do your congregation and diocese practice ecumenical partnership with other denominations?

### **Diverse Spiritual Practices**

- What spiritual practices are essential and non-negotiable for all Christian communities?
- What are particular practices in your congregation or diocese that reflect something unique about how you are living as Christians?

### **Prophetic**

- How are we using the word, “prophetic”? What is visionary, what is truth-telling, what is challenging to injustice or neglect?
- How can the Episcopal Church address the distance between its actual and desired prophetic identity? What are the benefits and risks?

### **Dispersed Authority**

- What are continuing hierarchical practices in the Episcopal Church – conscious and unconscious? What are their benefits, and what are their costs?
- How well have people in all orders of ministry embraced their authority?  
How well have they embraced their responsibility and discipleship?

## *Stand-Alone Identity Themes*

### **Elite**

- How do we recognize and deal with negative aspects of our identity?
- In what ways – direct and indirect, obvious and hidden – do we intentionally or unintentionally maintain the elite status of the Episcopal Church?

### **Source of Salvation**

- How do you define the term “salvation”? Is it the same as “redemption,” “transformation,” and “new life”?
- Do the themes of salvation and redemption receive appropriate emphasis in the life of the Church? How would you change that?

### **A-Confessional**

- What, if any, is the difference between reciting the creeds and agreeing to a confessional statement?
- What is gained or lost by agreeing to a doctrinal confession?  
What is gained or lost by holding an a-confessional approach to Christian faith?

