

*A history of living the questions*

When the Episcopal Church meets together as the General Convention in Columbus, Ohio, from June 13 to June 21, it will be the 75<sup>th</sup> time the church has gathered to be guided by the Holy Spirit in setting the direction of the church's mission and ministry.

The Episcopal Church's Office of Communication offers this series of eight bulletin inserts to help you learn more about the church and how it makes decisions about its mission and ministry.

To know where we are going, it helps to know where we've been, so we begin at the beginning. The Episcopal Church began because Henry VIII wanted a divorce, right? Not really. There was more going on in the 16<sup>th</sup> century than Henry's marital problems, some of it political and some of it theological.



The Episcopal Church welcomes you  
The 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention, Columbus

Through prior centuries of war and turmoil the church in Rome worked to preserve European civilization. It enforced rules of conduct, appointed rulers, and controlled the economy. A monk named Martin Luther and others protested what they saw as the church's excesses and interference with people's faith.

Henry didn't like Luther's reform movement but he wanted more control of the church in England. He, like many political leaders of his time, wanted his people's undivided loyalty, and he had other uses for the English money that supported the church in Rome. Henry broke from Rome, and England suffered as Roman Catholics and Protestants battled for control of the church and the government.

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arrangements, including the third version of The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) in 1559, that left the English church with both Roman Catholic and Protestant characteristics. Walking this middle way between the traditions makes us a sacramental church that promotes thoughtful debate about what God is calling us to do and be as followers of Christ.

While the words of the BCP were first heard in what is now the United States on San Francisco Bay in 1579 (when explorer Sir Francis Drake prayed after putting ashore), what is now the Episcopal Church grew up in colonial settlements on the East Coast. After the Revolution, its members forged a church with no formal loyalties to England.

Thus, we began with a question. Could a church change its loyalties in this world and still be loyal to Jesus? The Reformation's answer was yes. It showed that we learn more about God when we ask our questions and listen for the answers in prayer and in the words of others in our communities. We began in a disagreement and our history tells us that the church survives disagreements when it stays focused on the importance of coming together to give thanks to God and to do God's reconciling work.

“ Keep, O Lord,  
your household  
the Church in your  
steadfast faith and  
love . . . ”

*The Book of Common Prayer, p. 230*

### Read more about it:

- “A History of the Episcopal Church,” by Robert W. Prichard, Morehouse Group, © 1999
- “Welcome to the Episcopal Church: An Introduction to Its History, Faith, and Worship,” by Christopher L. Webber, Morehouse Publishing, © 1999

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