

The Diocese of Virginia

BISHOP SUFFRAGAN SEARCH

HOW ARE BISHOPS ORDAINED IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH?

From the Education Subcommittee of the Bishop Suffragan Nominating Committee

The worldwide Anglican Communion, and thus the Episcopal Church, ordains bishops by the “laying on of hands” of other bishops. This practice goes back to the New Testament church, in which the Apostles of Jesus used this practice to set aside individuals to perform specific tasks and assume authority and responsibilities in and for the whole community of Christians (Acts 6:5-6).

In the earliest church, we know that this practice was used in ordinations, and it is still used today in a wide variety of worship contexts and ceremonies, including services of Confirmation, healing and the commissioning people for specific tasks or vocations. The laying on of hands is the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the person being ordained; it reenacts the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Apostles at the first Pentecost.

The line of bishops, going back to the original Apostles is called the “historic episcopate.” In the Anglican tradition, by canon law, it takes a minimum of three bishops who have themselves been ordained by the laying on of hands to make a new bishop. This requirement ensures that the line of transmission of episcopal authority, which goes all the way back to the Apostles themselves, is preserved.



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HOW ARE BISHOPS ORDAINED IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH?

The laying on of hands is especially important in the ordination of bishops because it reinforces two significant roles that bishops play in the life of the Church:

First, that through each succeeding generation, bishops keep alive and intact the line of *leadership and authority* that goes back to Christ and his Apostles; and

Second, that bishops maintain the *doctrinal continuity* that goes back to Christ as well, by way of the Apostles and their teaching. It is the task of a bishop to both preserve and defend that teaching.

The teaching that the bishop is bound to preserve and defend, and which is definitive for the life of the Church, is to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament – the 66 books that have been set apart as Holy Scripture and have shaped the life of the Church and its mission ever since.

Produced as one in a series of bulletin inserts by the Education Subcommittee of the Bishop Suffragan Nominating Committee. Special thanks to the Education Task Group of the Bishop Coadjutor Nominating Committee, 2006.



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