

STUDY GUIDE: **EASTERTIDE AND YOU**



Joy in Christ, a Way of Life

DEAR SAINTS,

When life happens and the bottom drops, we pivot to see where God is in all of it. The pandemic hit us, the bottom dropped and most things we knew as normal changed. Serendipitously, we have an opportunity to eventually hit the reset button as followers of the risen Christ to change and become who we are called to be.

Following my April 1, 2020, pastoral letter on the Eucharist, our Diocesan Dean for Discernment, the Very Rev. Debs Duguid-May and the Rev. Melanie Duguid-May offered to write an accompanying study guide. Their intention was to help us take some deep dives into scripture, tradition, reason and our experience during this unique and historic Easter season. Thanks to their generous help along with the help of colleagues like our Diocesan Dean for Formation, the Very Rev. Billy Daniel, our Dean of the Rochester District, the Very Rev. Ruth Ferguson, and a few other friends who offered timely and valuable feedback to me, we have this resource. I hope it is of help to you and your community as you navigate this new normal.

Therefore, I humbly commend this six-week Eastertide study guide to you. It is my sincere hope that each one of us will draw closer to Jesus, to ourselves and to each other! We realize more than ever before that we share a common humanity. We are made to be one, and are intimately interdependent as global and local neighbors journeying through and beyond this pandemic!

With affection,

+Prince

WHERE TO BEGIN?

*As you gather for each of the six sessions, you are invited to begin with a time of silent meditation, signaled by the lighting of a candle. Then read the biblical text(s) to open a time of reflection, guided by the Introduction to the Bishop's Message and the study questions. You may conclude your time together with the appointed prayer (from Samuel Wells and Abigail Kocher, *Eucharistic Prayers*, Eerdmans, 2016).*



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This publication is free to use for the purposes of spiritual enrichment for all who desire to delve into the grace of Resurrection, and to come newly into contact with Jesus, the Christ.

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EASTERTIDE II: INTRODUCTION

As we live in unprecedented times of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty, I remind you of Jesus' Easter clarity: "Do not be afraid." Who could have imagined that one of our greatest acts of love and courage would be our physical isolation from one another and our parishes? I am truly grateful to each of you for heeding this difficult call to physically isolate, even as it means we must continue to forego sharing the physical sacrament of the Eucharist. On the other side of this quasi-monastic stint, we will have learned what it means to embody the sacrament of Eucharist in our

hearts and our lives. We will surely have a renewed understanding of what it means that we - Christ's Church - are the Body of Christ. I know it has not been an easy transition, and so I applaud and thank you for switching to Morning Prayer online and at-home worship. We are in this together, and we will journey together as the body of Christ. I believe that we can come through this pandemic with a stronger spiritual core.

I have received requests to engage in versions of virtual Eucharist. While each of them is creative, I wish to take the opportunity to say something about the essential aspects of the Eucharist, as I see it, especially at this historic moment. When Jesus was tempted,

he first clarified that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Because the Eucharist is spiritual food for us, the Church has come to identify it as part of the word of God which gives us life. This is not theologically amiss. But in his teaching about the word of God, Jesus was constantly referring to our transformed lives that are enlivened in our baptismal theology! In other words, Jesus was pointing us to the crux of the Word, the word that comes from God's mouth. This is the word that feeds us even as it enables us to feed others. It enables both our spiritual and our physical devotion to God, to our neighbor, and to all of creation. Every word that comes from the mouth of God is a kind of Eucharistic food for us, and we will surely need it as we undertake the journey into the uncertainty of the coming months! We will surely need this Word if we are to journey with a mindful, authentic and balanced Baptismal and Eucharistic spirituality.

"Every word that comes from the mouth of God is a kind of Eucharistic food for us..."



By the grace of God, we have been well fed with daily or weekly Eucharistic meals over the years. Have we been nurtured to live into our Baptismal identity for such a time as this? Could God be sending us forth from the table with strength and courage to live into this transformative work God has given us to do? Perhaps this is the hardest work of all, a work we would not have foreseen: foregoing this special meal together as we continue to love and serve God and the world. Can we trust that God has, in fact, fed us with the spiritual food and granted us the strength and courage to do just this? To forego our special meal until we are all able to gather safely, physically, and *together* as the One Body? What a blessed season of feasting that will be! Trusting in God in whom we live and move and have our being, and in Christ whose presence both incarnates and transcends our sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism, **I have made this decision: We will not celebrate the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist symbolically, virtually, or in person, nor will we distribute pre-consecrated communion in the diocese at this time until further notice. The only exception to this is Last Rites!**

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

"After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid;' I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him'" (Matthew 28:1-7).

QUESTIONS

- In these times of anxiety and uncertainty, how do you hear the angel's words: "Do not be afraid?" What do these words mean to you in your life?
- How is respecting the order to "stay at home" an act of love, and courage?
- How have you experienced the Body of Christ during this time when we are physically apart from one another?
- What have you learned about being the Body of Christ and about worship by experiencing these online and at home?
- How has being fed by the Eucharist in previous weeks and months and years nourished strength in you for the living of these days?
- How are you being fed in other ways than the Eucharist during these times?
- Are these other ways "eucharistic"?

PRAYER

Lord and God, intimate savior of our lives and cosmic ruler of the universe, in Jesus you are the substance of things hoped for and the knowledge of things unseen. Visit any who struggle under the shadow of doubt; minister among all who suffer beneath the claims of oppressive rule; resurrect your children, your church, and your earth. Bless those who have not seen and yet believe, and shape your wounded body the church to let the world see you through its scars. Lift every voice to sing your Easter glory, until the day when all stand before your throne, in eternal communion with one another and with you, ever one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

EASTERTIDE III:

A FAST TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF INFECTION

We traditionally fast through Lent and break our spiritual fast on Easter Day. This year, in response to a global pandemic, the Episcopal Church has moved quickly into a spiritual fast from Holy Communion (and public worship) during Lent. The secular world is often surprised when it witnesses any kind of alliance between religion and science, but the Episcopal Church listens to facts and science! That is why we must keep this fast now and extend our fast beyond Easter Day. We extend our fast also because of who we are called to be as Church. We are not following the two great commandments if we are knowingly putting others and ourselves at risk. Our spiritual filters help us to frame this fast less as an imposition and more as a motivation to act out of love of self and neighbor. Acting out of love of self and neighbor in this iteration of our fast includes the following:

- Giving up gathering together in person, maintaining physical boundaries, and staying wherever “home” is at this time.
- Taking on washing hands with soap or disinfectants frequently, and wearing masks to protect each other.
- Giving up shaking hands and hugging.
- Giving up physically gathering for worship.
- Taking on worshipping from our homes using prayer liturgies.
- Giving up Holy Communion throughout our diocese .



This is a fast, where my destiny is intricately connected to yours, using the South African wisdom of *Ubuntu*! I am because you are! We are fasting as followers of Jesus with one goal: to break the cycle of this invisible killer called COVID-19. In spiritual terms, we are working together to ring in a new creation beyond despair, death, and destruction. What other personal and social infections need our mitigation? It is inspiring to see reasonable people throughout the world playing their part to slow the spread of this virus by “giving up” on their privileges. We shall overcome all kinds of dangerous infections going forward! We are all in this together!

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:3-9).

“Is not this the fast that I choose—to unlock the shackles of wickedness, and loosen the bonds of the yoke, to set the downtrodden free—and break every yoke? Yes, to offer your bread to the hungry...” (Isaiah 58.6-7)

QUESTIONS

- What do faith and science have in common?
- How may our fasting from face-to-face meeting with one another be an act of faith?
- What might this fasting teach us about relationships and about being interconnected globally?
- How much of our connection with one another has been physically in person? Who has therefore been excluded from our gatherings for worship?
- What does “ubuntu” I am because you are – teach us about true community?
- How may a new inclusivity be born out of this fast and be incorporated into our post-virus community?
- How does this fast break the darkness of suffering and death in our human community? in the community of other species and the whole creation?
- Has this fast opened our eyes in new ways to our privilege? What can we learn from Jesus about giving up privilege?

PRAYER

Breathe your Spirit on your church . . . Inspire all who stand still, looking sad. Open the eyes of all who are kept from perceiving you. Bring your bread of life to feed all who hunger in body, mind, or spirit, until the day when we live your life abundant with the communion of saints, in the presence and companionship of your Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, ever one God. Amen.



***“I hold this to be the highest task for the bond between two people:
that each protects the solitude of the other.” ~Rainer Maria Rilke***

EASTERTIDE IV:

A FAST TO BE THE SACRAMENT

The purpose of Holy Eucharist and Holy Baptism is to bear the fruit of the sacrament, which is to live out the way of Jesus, the way of love. When we practice this kind of fast as the body of Christ, the ongoing result is intentional Eucharistic/Baptismal behavior or dynamic Eucharist/Baptism. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When these are practiced, it is like the Eucharistic/Baptismal community “infecting” the world! We are infecting negative energies of the world with the positive, good, and proactive antibodies of love. As the Baptized, we feed on Christ to become more like Christ! This is proactive work beyond breaking the cycle. During these past few weeks, we seem to have moved from doing church to being church. Much of humanity is behaving differently than we have in recent decades.

“...we feed on Christ to become more like Christ”

We are striving to respect every human being with dignity more than ever before because poor or rich, homeless or otherwise, we are all infection-prone-carriers. Yet, the burden of this crisis seems to fall heavier on the poor and under-resourced such as migrant farmworkers, and the homeless. It is also falling heavily on higher-risk jobs—healthcare workers, grocery store workers, garbage collectors, mail deliverers, etc. Less vulnerable are the privileged, who can better isolate themselves. We hope we will treat the poor and those who do “unskilled” essential jobs among us with greater respect and equity on the other side of this pandemic.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? (BCP 305)



- We are respecting creation by pausing emissions that pollute our island home, thus giving mother earth her much needed Sabbath. We hope we will be better stewards of our earth and all creation on the other side of this pandemic.
- We are showing more respect for physical and spiritual healers, scientists, poets and educators among us who have been mostly invisible because their work is so behind the scenes. Perhaps on the other side of this pandemic, we will have a deep and renewed appreciation for these sustainers of wholesome life among us.
- The priesthood is being reframed in this season of physical distancing in that we are calling all people to introspection, prayer, and becoming more of a priesthood of believers. We hope this practice of shared stewardship of care with the tremendous gifts of the laity is nurtured even more on the other side of this pandemic.
- We have never before realized on a global scale how closely interlinked, we are. We pray that our interdependence will be a lot more pronounced in our policies and practices on the other side of this pandemic.
- We have seen how obsessive greed has blinded and consumed us. How our economy, nationalism, and violence have become our idols in the ways we have justified their value over the value of human life and this earth. We pray that we will accentuate other economies like equity, unity, hospitality, kindness, and mercy on the other side of this pandemic.
- Most importantly, I pray that we do not forget this season and return to the way of life as we knew it before COVID-19!

"Hopefully, we will behave less like the Empire and more like the Body of Christ..."



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

“Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

QUESTIONS

- How is your Baptismal identity forming your Eucharistic life?
- How do you see your Baptism transforming your Eucharistic life during and beyond this pandemic?
- What would it look like for us to become “the Eucharist” as baptized children of God?
- Is anyone’s life “more valuable” in God’s eyes? Yet, who have we treated as though they were more or less valuable?
- What is this pandemic teaching us about the life and the value of all life?
- How can we be the Eucharist for the whole creation?
- How can we be the Eucharist for medical personnel and all those working in essential services?
- How is this pandemic shaping and reshaping our understanding of priesthood?
- How might you be the Eucharist to your clergy, to the Bishop, to other spiritual leaders?

PRAYER

Sustaining God, as you lead your sheep to green pastures and guide them beside still waters, so you have led us to the table where in bread and wine you restore our soul. Send down your Holy Spirit and restore your church through the abundance of this sacred meal. Amen.

Saving God, your rod and staff comfort all who look to you in faith. Search out your sheep that are lost and bring them home. When you find them in the valley of fear, gather them in your arms. When they face evil in the presence of their enemies, follow them with your goodness and mercy all the days of their life . . . Shepherd us with all your saints of every age into your glorious presence, where we shall behold your Lamb seated in Glory, Most Holy Trinity, now and always. Amen.

EASTERTIDE V:

A FAST TO BE TRANSFORMED

In discipleship terms, we are striving to become who we are. Hopefully, we will behave less like the Empire and more like the Body of Christ: interconnected and interdependent! Before COVID-19, we had the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Today, WE are sacrament! Embodied sacrament is a work in progress. The body and blood dwell in each of us, causing us to live and move and have our being as a living sacrament! The prayers we pray, the healing God emanates, and the generous love we share are all fruit of our Eucharistic formation and Baptismal enlivening as followers of Jesus. We are all in this together!



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:2-10).

QUESTIONS

- How have we been blinded by greed?
- When have we chosen economic growth over the sacredness of all human life and all life forms in God's bountiful creation?
- How have we been blinded by the pursuit of power?
- When have we privileged nationalism over the sacredness of human life and all life forms in God's bountiful creation?
- What is this pandemic teaching us about the values that actually shape our lives on a daily basis?
- Can we imagine an economy and a nation founded on equity and hospitality, compassion and kindness?
- Why is this sometimes so difficult to imagine?
- What are the teachings of Jesus about wealth and poverty, rich and poor, and life in God's reign that can transform our hearts and minds, and our lives post-pandemic?

"Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions" (Matthew 19.21-22).



PRAYER

Glorious God, you promise that those who believe in you will do greater things than these. Bestow upon your church the gifts of your Spirit, that your people may be with the hungry, do beautiful things, show grace amid hostility, witness to your story, and behold your glory. Make us living stones and build us into a spiritual house, that we may be your holy priesthood and that all creation, suffering and flourishing, faithful and fallen, may be suffused with your glory and may overflow with your praise, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, ever one God. Amen.

EASTERTIDE VI:

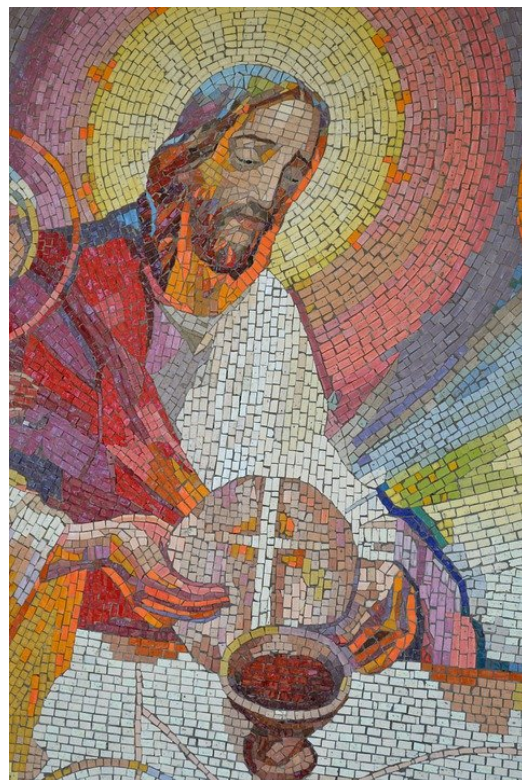
A FAST TO BE SACRAMENT

I cannot wait to have us all gather across the diocese as soon as it is safe. We will come together then, as one body of Christ, a people of the Incarnation and as bearers of God's image (imago Dei), for a grand Easter celebration. We will grieve those we have lost, but with Easter hope! We will celebrate Easter not in chronological time, but in Kairos time, a time of God's favor! We will do this as Easter people with greater meaning than we have ever before! It is worth waiting! Oh, what a glorious season that will be!!!

When we're able to gather again in person, let us make sure that all members of the body of Christ are present physically and spiritually. We will invite those who found us online and welcome them face to face! We will welcome with open arms people who had given up on church for whatever reason to learn with and from. We will welcome people who have found us online who had stayed away from the Episcopal church because we are perceived as a church only for "people of means." Members of the body who are homebound will be able to join the liturgy of the Word online more easily and then have the Eucharist brought to them wherever they are so, we can feast together. Hopefully, more folks can join us online even for the liturgy of the Word and be part of the Eucharistic Community without necessarily partaking of the Eucharist. This will be a newfound joy on the other side of this pandemic!

- Let us wait until all of us - not just some of us - can gather at the altar until we can feast at the table together at Christ's banquet.
- Let us wait for a glorious reunion face to face because disembodied Eucharist outside of the gathered community of believers is gimmicky and idolatrous!
- Let us wait until we can do this together in the "upper room" where it happens!
- Let us wait until that glorious time to feast together!

"We will celebrate Easter not in chronological time, but in Kairos time, a time of God's favor!"



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

"Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am going to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them'" (John 14:15-21).

QUESTIONS

- How do you imagine it will feel the first Sunday when we are able to gather together in person, face-to-face?
- How would you like to celebrate that first Sunday together as a diocese?
- How shall we mourn, honor and memorialize those who died during this pandemic?
- How has this pandemic exposed the inequities of our society?
- Do you imagine that our post-pandemic reunion will be like the reunion that awaits us on the other side with those we have missed so much?
- Does this anticipation of reunion deepen our understanding of Jesus' Ascension to be with his Father?
- What is the difference between seeing "virtually" and seeing "face to face"?
- How does that insight apply to our relationship with God?

PRAYER

"Unknown yet revealing God, . . . while our lives are circumscribed by the limitations of our minds and bodies, your life is beyond our reach and outside our imagining. Yet in your mercy you embodied all your promises to your people in the sending of your Son, and through his dying and rising you have brought us to your throne of grace. And so we gladly thank you, with angels and archangels, and all who with your ascended Son sit at your right hand on high, singing the hymn of your unending praise." Amen.

EASTERTIDE VII:

THEREFORE LET US KEEP THE FEAST. ALLELUIA.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11).

QUESTIONS

- How do we more fully embody God's image when we are together than when we are apart?
- How have you experienced Lent and Easter this year, as the movement of the Spirit in *Kairos* time, more than simply liturgical time?
- What does celebrating Easter in a time of grief and loss and anxiety teach us about the proclamation "Christ is Risen!"
- How will we celebrate Lent and Easter differently after this year?
- How will our lives be intentionally different after this?
- How will our ministries change from what we have learnt during this time?
- Will there be anyone we "leave behind" again?
- What would a truly resurrected community look like?



PRAYER

"Generous God, your Son told his disciples to stay in the city until they were clothed by the Spirit. Give courage to those whom you call to stay in places of danger and confusion when their hearts are full of doubt and disillusion. Your Son withdrew from the disciples when they did not know what the future would hold. Be close to all who face an uncertain future and deeply know their need of you. Your Son's disciples were continually in the temple praising you. Give your church a fresh outpouring of your Spirit and make it a blessing to all the children of your earth; until the completion of your Son's ministry becomes the completion of your whole creation, and you are all in all, one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



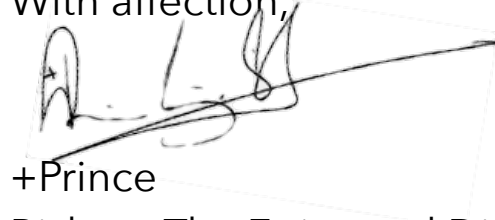
"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thessalonians 5.16-17).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."—Colossians 3:16-17. We are in this together! We will journey through this pandemic together! We will come out of this pandemic with a deeper hunger and determined will to become more of the Beloved Community God intends for us to be. God is with us to strengthen us through it all. Blessings of Holy Week!

Alleluia. Christ is Risen.

The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia.

With affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. L. S.', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

+Prince

Bishop, The Episcopal Diocese of Rochester

The Episcopal Diocese of Rochester

Our Mission & Vision

Our vision: Joy in Christ a way of life.

Our mission: To grow and develop congregations spiritually, numerically and in missional leadership.

With Christ's help, we seek to fulfill our mission and vision through:

- **Radical hospitality:** Embracing all as equal and beloved members of Christ's body.
- **Passionate spirituality:** Encouraging all members of Christ's church to be on fire with the Gospel.
- **Thoughtful engagement:** Creating safe environments for discussion and works related to justice, peace and equality.

Our Faith

We are followers of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and we believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We strive to love our neighbors as ourselves and respect the dignity of every person. We are affirming. Both men and women, including those who are married, are eligible for ordination as deacons, priests and bishops. We believe in amendment of life, the forgiveness of sin, and life everlasting. Holy Communion may be received by all baptized Christians, not only members of The Episcopal Church, during our services. We uphold the Bible and worship with the Book of Common Prayer.

Our Parishes

The Episcopal Diocese of Rochester is a collection of 46 diverse parishes spread throughout the region. Our diocese includes urban parishes in the heart of Rochester neighborhoods, country churches in the northern reaches of Appalachia, parishes in small towns and suburbs, and beautiful lakeside chapels. We have parishes in Allegany, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Schuyler, Steuben, Wayne and Yates counties - view the parish map to see parishes near you. The Episcopal Church Welcomes You.

Our Leadership

As Episcopalians, leadership roles are shared by our bishop, the Rt. Rev. Prince G. Singh, and lay and clergy committee members who are democratically elected at our annual Convention. These elected committees develop the diocesan budget, advise the bishop on matters related to ordinations, guide people through vocational discernment processes, oversee the use and disposition of property, and more. Bishop Singh has served as the VIII Episcopal Bishop in Rochester, New York, since his election in 2008. As bishop, he walks with the 46 diverse parishes that comprise this diocese.

*Christ is
Risen!*



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