

Mar 8, 2020, the Rev Tom Weller
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please!)

If you would, kindly let me have the floor
for ten or fifteen minutes, and make a
note of anything you'd like to ask or talk
about when I'm done. You have a
Confirmation booklet that I put together,
but just lay that aside for now, if you
would, please.

So as not to miss anything, I'll read my
introduction, which is printed so you may
take a copy later if you wish.

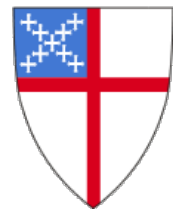
Today is the first of our three
Confirmation class meetings, as always,
united with our Adult Sunday School
Class. Today we'll talk about church
organization and history. But my first
thing is to introduce myself so you can
decide how much you trust me to lead the
class. When Bishop Russell Kendrick
comes on Mothers 'Day, he may ask
whether you had a decent class: be ready
to rip me to shreds with the bishop if you
wish.

After I tell you who I am, we'll talk about
Christianity and about the Episcopal
Church as a part of what our fascinating
Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, calls
The Jesus Movement.

Let's make sure you know the many
things we do here as Holy Nativity Parish
solely because of the love of Jesus, and
our *ministries* that we do as part of his
love.

Let's make sure you know about the
Church at large, the diocese, The

Episcopal Church, and the
Anglican Communion we're
part of. And also that we are
simply and humbly part of the
great Christian church
throughout the world.



Let's make sure you know that the main
thing about being a Christian is to honor
your Baptismal Covenant, which means
keeping your promises to God. Love God
& Love Neighbor: those promises have to
do with how you treat other people, which
is what being a Christian is all about. I do
not believe God cares in the least what
you say you believe, only what you do
because of it, which, again, is whether
your thoughts, words and deeds in your
life are loving or selfish. Your baptismal
promises are not just rattle-off liturgical
words that we stand up and say Sunday
mornings in church from time to time.
How you keep your promises defines you
as a Christian and as a human being.

Theologically, let's make sure you know
that as Episcopalians, Anglican-flavored
Christians, you discover how easy it is to
discern for yourself, Our Theology, what
we believe about God; and especially you
remember that Scripture, the Bible, is first
and foremost in everything we do and say
and sing and pray as gathering
Christians.

Let's make sure you know that you are
invited and welcome to stop me anytime
and ask for clarification, or even make us
wander off onto something totally
irrelevant, I don't mind; though maybe
you'll let me finish this introductory bit
first.

And let's make sure in each of our three meetings, including this morning, that Bible study is the main thing we do. If our doing Bible study means I miss telling you enough about Anglicanism and the Episcopal Church, it does not matter, because you have the little booklet I put together, information and links to further information. And you can arrive next time with questions for discussion. Most important, if you don't learn enough in these three sessions, remember that we meet here every Sunday morning at this hour, and everyone is always invited and welcome to bring questions; so, keep on coming to Sunday School if your curiosity is not satisfied during these three meetings.

Ok then, Me First: I am Tom Weller, I'm 84, reasonably healthy and ever hopeful. I was born and grew up in Panama City, a few blocks away, here in The Cove, went to Cove School (HNES) and Bay High (class of 1953).

Linda and I and our families were among the ten families who founded Holy Nativity in 1955. Almost 63 years ago, ours was the first wedding here in Holy Nativity. Three children (or four, depending on who's counting), five grandchildren, one great-grand. We live in St Andrews at Harbour Village in our 7th floor condo looking south across StAndrew Bay, over Shell Island, into the Gulf of Mexico. I call it 7H, 7th Heaven.

Besides "Father Tom" (if you want to call me that) I am Commander Weller, U S Navy (Retired). Retired from the Navy 42 years, half my life ago. I look back on my life as 20-year segments - the 1st 20 I was growing up. 2nd 20 I was in the

Navy. My 3rd 20 years I was *traveling businessman, adjunct college professor of political science, and seminary student (all three at once for three hectic years of it), and a parish priest for 14 years of it*. This 4th 20-Years, so far the best of all, I'm a retired Episcopal priest helping out as needed. Someone said "Oh, I see: you're the assistant" and my clear and standard answer is that I'm 84 years old and *I ain't nobody's assistant*". I'm just and simply a Helper!

At Holy Nativity, I'm responsible for adult Christian education, including Adult Sunday School, I oversee the EfM program when we have it here, and I lead the Adult Confirmation class. I preach as Father Steve schedules, usually one Sunday in 3 or 4. I fill in as supply priest for Father Steve when he's away. Pastoral care is not part of my work unless Father Steve is away or asks me to do something such as make a hospital visit when he needs help. I **do not** do pastoral counseling. I have an office in the Parish House Office Building across the street, and I work there some. I do not have office hours, but I'm happy to come in to the office and visit with folks, if you email or text. Or, best, call Madge at 747-4000.

Let me pause. Comments, questions?

Before Bible study, I want you to appreciate Holy Nativity Episcopal Church. The congregation was formed in 1955, with Fr David Damon as our priest. HNESchool (separately chartered) was started in 1959. At about 700 members, we are larger than most Episcopal congregations (average about 100 or

less), and I think by membership we're the 4th largest parish in our diocese.

<https://www.diocgc.org/green-sheet>

<https://www.diocgc.org/publication-archives>

As well as the Confirmation booklet with background information for you, there will be handouts each time we meet. Those will include a copy of the Sunday bulletin (from which we'll have our Bible study), today you get a sheet listing our outreach ministries and lay ministries here at Holy Nativity, things we do for other people and for each other. We hope you may find your own ministry in those lists. And a copy of whatever I talked about that day,

We are called the "Episcopal" Church because we are managed by bishops, from Greek ἐπίσκοπος ("overseer"), from ἐπί ("over") + σκοπός ("watcher, lookout, guardian"). The NT Greek word episkopos is translated bishop. BTW, we are Episcopalians, a noun. The word Episcopal is an adjective, we are not "Episcopals" nor is this the Episcopalian Church! We are Episcopalians in the Episcopal church. I am not an Episcopalian priest, I am an Episcopal priest! Remember, as this will be among the questions that StPeter asks you at the pearly gates!

Each parish or congregation has a Rector (means director), called by the parish with the bishop's consent (or priest-in-charge) and a Vestry elected by the congregation. Together they are responsible for managing and maintaining the local church.

Our parish is part of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. "Diocese" is a church term for a geographical area. Your Confirmation booklet has info and links about the diocese, a map, a list of all the congregations. TEC is a democracy: the local people call their Rector, a diocese is managed by an elected Bishop and elected Standing Committee. Our bishop is the Right Reverend Russell Kendrick, who will be here June 10th for Confirmation.

There's info about Confirmation in the booklet. Confirmation is the church's historic way for baptized members to be welcomed by the bishop so that you now have a personal link to our bishop, and through him to all the bishops ever ordained in the Christian church - - at least in theory all the way back to St Peter.

Next Sunday we'll talk about Worship, Book of Common Prayer & Theology, and if there's time we'll look at the service of Confirmation that we have when the bishop is here so you know what to anticipate. With our bishop, Confirmation is always a joyful time, and you will never be "put on the spot" or embarrassed by being asked questions, so be at ease about that!

Our Diocese of the CGC is part of The Episcopal Church in the United States of America, of which there are some hundred dioceses. In the booklet is a map showing every diocese. Heading TEC is a Presiding Bishop, elected for nine years. Again, each diocesan bishop was elected by clergy and lay people of that diocese and confirmed by the church at large. The

Episcopal Church is governed by General Convention, a bicameral (two-house) legislature: House of Bishops and House of Deputies (4 lay people & 4 clergy elected from each diocese). GenConv meets every three years, in various cities, for church governance decisions. Those decisions are carried out between conventions by the Executive Council headed by the Presiding Bishop Curry, and his staff.

The Episcopal Church is the USA province (geographical area) of the worldwide Anglican Communion, its spiritual head being the Archbishop of Canterbury in England. TEC came out of the Church of England, and we maintain that historic tie through the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Church of England and the Church of Scotland played major roles in helping TEC get organized and going, by ordaining bishops for us after the Revolutionary War, and they are honored in our church seal.

In some 40 national or area provinces, the Anglican Communion has self-governing churches (like TEC) throughout the world; each one with its parishes, dioceses, bishops, presiding bishop or archbishop or other senior title.

The Church of England has history in the 16th century, the Reformation, and King Henry VIII, whose struggles with the Pope over various matters, not the least his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, led him to sever the Pope's authority in England and make himself the King, Supreme Head of the Church in/of England.

Before that, we are part of Western Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church, back to the Great Schism (1054 AD), when eastern and western Christianity and bishops split over various issues (the best known being the "filioque" clause (Latin for "and the Son") that the Western Church added to the Nicene Creed without seeking concurrence of the whole church in General Council.

So that's my introduction and first lesson. Questions, comments?!