



Convocation of American Churches in Europe

THE CONVOCATION TODAY

For over two centuries, the parishes and missions of the Convocation of American Churches in Europe have ministered to Americans and other English-speaking people in Europe and, more recently, in other languages as well.

Many people come to Europe for business, military, or academic reasons and stay for a few months or a few years. Others have found in Europe their second or permanent home. Recently, immigrants from Latin America, Africa and Asia, refugees from troubled parts of the world, and local nationals have also begun finding a home in our congregations.

The Convocation today is a multinational, multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural communion within the European Union – a mirror image of the multinational, multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural Episcopal Church in the USA. In an effort to reach all of its members, the Convocation has undertaken the task of translating selected Liturgies from the Book of Common Prayer, and have now published bilingual prayer books in French, German, Italian and Spanish.

How the Convocation came to be

The Episcopal Church was anxious to provide for the spiritual needs of its members who moved to Europe in the 19th century.

A small number of congregations were established in the great cities of Western Europe, while elsewhere Episcopalians were welcomed and became committed members of many Church of England chaplaincies.

At first, visiting bishops from the States provided Episcopal oversight to the American congregations in Europe. Late in the nineteenth century, recently retired "Bishops-in-charge" were appointed for two or three years, living in Europe for several months at a time. In 1993 that pattern changed, and a full-time, non-retired resident Bishop in Charge of the Convocation was appointed, the Right Reverend Jeffery Rowthorn. And then, in 2001, the Convocation elected its own bishop, the Right Reverend Pierre W. Whalon.

How we work today

Strictly speaking, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church has jurisdiction over the Convocation, but this responsibility is entirely delegated to the Bishop in Charge. A number of critical institutions and bodies work with the Bishop, including:

The Annual Convention. This meeting brings together representatives of all our parishes, missions, and indigenous ministries. At the Convention the budget for the coming year is presented; four clerical and four lay deputies to the General Convention are chosen; and the four clerical and four lay members of the Council of Advice are elected (see Episcopal Church canon I.15).

The Council of Advice. This group advises the bishop on all important matters of policy, is charged with preparing the annual budget, raises funds, and gives final approval to all candidates for ordination.

The Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized. With the Bishop and the Council of Advice this group oversees the training of those preparing for ordained ministry. Its committees are responsible for critical aspects of the Convocation's life: Youth and Young Adults, Clergy Continuing Education; and Clergy Mentoring. Following Convention 2008 it is expected that a separate commission for Youth Across Europe will be formed.

European Institute of Christian Studies. The education department of the Convocation that develops resources for lay and ordinand formation.

Boards of Foreign Parishes. Three boards, legally incorporated in the State of New York, administer the endowments of the Convocation and of our parishes in Florence and Rome. A representative of the Boards of Foreign Parishes serves on the Commission and its Mission Development Committee.

All of these bodies undergird and strengthen the mission of the Episcopal Church and its congregations here in Europe. Increasingly, this mission is being shared with our Anglican brothers and sisters as we address together challenges common to all four jurisdictions on the European mainland. Similarly, our relationships are growing ever closer with Christians from other parts of the Body of Christ.

To give and to receive

The Episcopal Church and the Convocation have much to learn from our Anglican and ecumenical partners. From them and from the local members of our own congregations we discover what it means to be a European raised in a particular country and shaped by a particular language, culture, and denomination. At the same time, we have a special and timely experience to share with other Christians as the European scene changes and an increasingly unified Europe comes into being.

We believe that our experience over the past two centuries as a part of The Episcopal Church in the USA – a joyful, painful, bittersweet experience within one and the same Church – can be of great value to the Church back in the United States, keeping in mind that eleven dioceses of the Church are outside that nation. And we think that we are of use to our Anglican brothers and sisters on the European mainland, as well. To give and to receive, in common commitment to a common mission, is what we look forward to on this journey in faith together.

Adapted from original material written by the Right Reverend Jeffery Rowthorn, Bishop in Charge of the American Convocation of Churches in Europe from 1994 to 2001.