

HELPFUL TIDBITS

STRUCTURE OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH WOMEN:

The Episcopal Church Women as an organization functions at four levels: National, Province, Diocese, and Parish.

National: The National Board, which meets three times per year, is comprised of the President, Vice-President of Program, Vice-President for Information, Secretary, Treasurer, Member-at Large for Social Justice, Member-at Large for Multi-Media, and one Representative from each of the nine provinces. The National Board does not exercise authority or control over provincial, diocesan, or parish ECW groups, but acts as the organizational entity which binds together the women of the church. Communication between the board members and women at all levels throughout the church helps the National Board to fulfill their stated mission – to support all women in their ministry. Specifically, the board plans the Triennial Meeting, oversees programs such as Women of Vision and Women to Women. In the 2000-2003 triennium, a *Call to Action* was issued focusing on Literacy, Leadership Training, Non-Violence and Interfaith Education. This Call to Action is continued and supported by the National Board.

Province: The Episcopal Church is comprised of 9 Provinces (see enclosed map). Although they may function differently, each Province has a President and an ECW Board.

Diocese: The Episcopal Church is comprised of 111 Dioceses. Almost all of them have an ECW or a Women's Ministries Board. Again, each is unique in its structure and function.

Parish: The number of parishes in the dioceses ranges from 28 to almost 200. Most parishes have active Episcopal Church Women or Women's Ministries groups.

WHY WOMEN ONLY:

Since you have, by obtaining this packet, expressed an interest in organizing or revitalizing women's activities in your parish, you probably understand "Why Women Only." But as women have become integrally involved in the life and work of the Church, the need for a women's group is not as readily apparent. An important 'why': women simply enjoy getting together with other women – whether it is for fellowship, Bible study, or working on a project. Another important aspect is the opportunity for women to grow into the life of the Church through women's ministries. Many of the women in leadership roles in the larger body of the Church began their involvement/ministry with the Episcopal Church Women.

Episcopal Church Women groups most importantly offer an environment for spiritual growth and opportunities for ministry. Participation in these groups also promotes an understanding of the structure and functionality of the Church.

WHY EPISCOPAL CHURCH WOMEN:

When considering the establishment of an Episcopal Church Women group, knowing our history and understanding our structure is critical. From our beginning as Women's Auxiliary, and following through many changes in purpose and activities, the Episcopal Church Women have played a significant role in the work of the Episcopal Church. Cherished memories of the contributions of resources - ranging from financial to missionary to training to spirituality - which women have made throughout our history, are a source of satisfaction and pride for all of us.

-OVER-

The old stereotype of Episcopal Church Women as 'cooks' and 'fundraisers' is fading as we move into the future with new ideas, relevant programs, and unlimited opportunities for spiritual growth and service. Support is available to you through Episcopal Church Women in your local parish, convocation or deanery, diocese, province, and nationally.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RECTOR/VICAR:

This is a very key element. It is very important to have the support of the Rector/Vicar. Schedule a meeting of the key women in the congregation with him/her. Tell him/her that you are interested in organizing the women's ministries of the church. One method of doing so is by forming an Episcopal Church Women group. Explain that you would like to have a meeting of all the women of the church to discuss plans. Include an invitation to attend that gathering. Emphasize that you understand that activities should supplement the existing mission and ministry of the congregation.

FINANCES:

This should be discussed with the rector/vicar. Some Episcopal Church Women groups maintain their own accounts, and others are supported through a line item in the parish budget. Some also function event to event by requesting contributions to participate. The size of your group and the level of activities will impact any decisions on funding.

FIRST MEETING:

In consultation with the rector/vicar, select a date for gathering the women of your congregation to talk about the formation of an Episcopal Church Women group. The date and time should be when the greatest number of women can participate. We recommend that you ask someone from outside of your congregation to facilitate this session. There are women serving on the diocesan, provincial, and national boards who can help. This creates an atmosphere of importance and openness. Promoting the gathering is critical. Use all methods of communication available such as Sunday bulletins, monthly newsletters, announcements, posters, special mailings, phone calls, and face to face invitations. In planning the agenda, include time for prayer, fellowship, ice-breakers, personal reflection, group discussion, and next step decisions. Make sure to provide child care.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:

We have included several items to assist in the development of your Episcopal Church Women group including some general information regarding women's groups and activities, generational materials that provide insight into planning, and several ideas for determining a plan for your group. There are also brochures describing the work of the National Board of Episcopal Church Women.