



National Association
of Episcopal Schools
Excellence Through Association

Principles of Good Practice for Chapel and Worship in Episcopal Schools

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Introduction

Episcopal schools are created to be communities that honor, celebrate, and worship God as the center of life. Episcopal school worship embodies the conviction that Christian life is lived out and practiced in community; through corporate prayer and thanksgiving we are reconciled and renewed to “go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” Therefore, regardless of school size or the constellation of students served, Episcopal schools are worshipping communities that gather regularly for prayer, reflection, and celebration. Indeed, chapel is at the heart of each school’s Episcopal identity.

Episcopal schools have been established, however, not solely as communities for Christians but as diverse ministries of educational and human formation for people of all faiths and backgrounds. Much as Jesus spoke to all present before him, both followers and non-believers, Episcopal school worship embraces the full breadth of the human family.

Thus, Episcopal schools are called to fulfill two simultaneous commitments: to provide students an authentic experience of Christian

worship that is unapologetically and identifiably Anglican; and to welcome, affirm, and support the spiritual development of students of all faiths or no faith at all.

For these reasons, Episcopal school worship is often poorly understood. School constituents of other Christian or non-Christian traditions, as well as those who subscribe to no faith at all, are often unfamiliar with the theology and practices of the Episcopal Church. Clergy and school leaders new to Episcopal schools may struggle to achieve clarity about the appropriate role and structure of chapel at their school. At the same time, church leaders and faithful Episcopalians may not readily perceive the distinctions between congregational worship and school worship.

Principles of Good Practice for Chapel and Worship in Episcopal Schools is intended to:

- affirm the commitment of Episcopal schools to chapel programs that are creative, inclusive, and draw fully upon the liturgical resources of the Episcopal Church;
- offer a broad perspective on the goals, purposes, structure, and best practices for Episcopal school chapel and worship;
- support Episcopal schools in their efforts to develop meaningful, age-appropriate worship that is aligned with each school's mission and culture and that nurtures the spiritual lives of all members of the school community;

- help Episcopal schools to engage their larger community in dialogue about the role of chapel and worship; and
- serve as a useful tool for the school's assessment of its chapel program, whether undertaken independently or as part of an accreditation process.

What is meant by “chapel” and “worship”?

Simply put, chapel is the means through which the school community comes together for worship, and worship describes what Episcopal schools do in chapel.

Episcopal school chapel takes many forms, from the full liturgy of the Holy Eucharist to celebratory gatherings steeped in school tradition and informal gatherings of song, story, and prayer. It can take place in a variety of settings, such as a church, a cathedral, a school chapel, or a secular space used for sacred purpose. It might be held outside or inside and occur daily, weekly, or monthly.

Regardless of style, structure, or frequency, however, chapel is distinguished from other school gatherings in that:

- it has a sacred purpose.
- it unfolds in an intentional and predictable pattern.
- it has a ritual beginning and ending.
- it includes prayer, song, the reading of sacred texts, and opportunity for reflection.
- it is rooted in the Anglican tradition in both structure and approach.

- It is clearly delineated from other school gatherings.
- It is scheduled on a regular and predictable basis for children of all ages.

The following principles of good practice highlight the crucial components of a comprehensive, meaningful, and age-appropriate approach to worship and chapel in Episcopal schools.

Herewith are the principles of good practice for chapel and worship in Episcopal schools.



Chapel builds and embodies community life.

Gathering for chapel is fundamental to what it means to be a student or faculty member at an Episcopal school. Chapel is a reliable and predictable part of school life, and time designated for chapel is honored in the school schedule.

The Prayer Book tradition focuses on liturgy as the work of the full assembly. Therefore, all students and faculty members attend chapel; and chaplains, heads of school, rectors, and others responsible for school worship involve students, faculty and staff, and, where appropriate, other guests in planning, preparing, and leading school worship that is lively, meaningful, and student-centered.