

THE DIOCESAN SEAL

Study Plan: You will learn what a seal is and how it is used as a symbol in our church.



Step 1: Definitions Leader's Initials: _____

What is a diocese?

A **diocese** is a geographical area that is led by a bishop. Any Episcopal parish or mission that exists or is founded within that area is part of the diocese. To understand this, consider a county. Cities or towns that are formed within the geographical area of a county are part of that county. In church language, a diocese is like a county. There are currently 110 dioceses in the United States.

The Dioceses of the Episcopal Church

A diocese is led by a bishop. It is beneficial for churches to be grouped in dioceses, because then the churches can work together and share ideas, energy, and resources. Sometimes a diocese will be divided if it is too large to function well, but this is a process which takes a long time and much thought to accomplish.

Map of the Dioceses of the Episcopal Church in the USA



Look carefully at this map and notice the names of the dioceses in the USA.

Diocese is a difficult word to read and pronounce. Ask your leader to help you say the word correctly. Other words you can practice saying are the adjective form, **diocesan**, and the plural form, **dioceses**. If you can say all these words correctly, you will sound very educated!

What is a seal?

Every diocese has its own seal. The seal is usually in a **vesica** shape, just like our GFS badges. The vesica shape is an oval with pointed ends and reminds us of the shape of the fish, which is a common Christian symbol. Since every diocese is led by a bishop, most diocesan seals contain an image of a bishop's **mitre**. A mitre is the special hat that only a bishop can wear.



bishop's mitre

What is a seal of the diocese used for?

In ancient times, if a king or an authority had an important or secret document to send, he sealed it with melted wax and imprinted the wax with the seal on his ring. When the person receiving the message saw the unbroken wax seal, he knew that the message had not been tampered with.

Bishops still use rings or separate seals that can be pressed into melted wax and leave an impression of the seal on important documents. For example, the bishop presses a wax seal on the ordination certificate of newly ordained priests and deacons.

Just as most businesses use a logo on paperwork to graphically represent the business, a diocese uses a seal to symbolically represent itself.



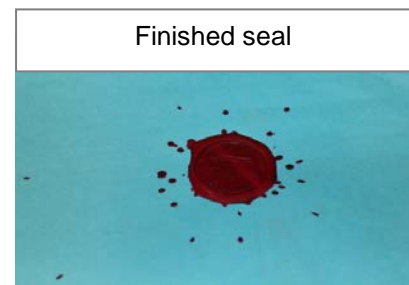
- ❖ Why are parishes and missions grouped together into a diocese?
- ❖ Do you think this is a good idea?
- ❖ What was the original purpose of seals and sealing wax?



Do at least 3:

1. Ask your priest to show you the seal on his/her certificate of ordination.
2. Look at the seals for various dioceses. The seals can be found in the Episcopal Church Annual or by visiting the websites of individual dioceses. Can you find the bishop's mitre in most of them? Print some up to share with your group.
3. Sit in the visitor's section at your diocesan convention.

4. Experiment with making wax impressions. If you cannot obtain sealing wax from a stationery store, such as Hallmark, Paper Source or Crane and Co., use a crayon to achieve a similar effect:
- Melt a crayon in a flame.
 - Drop melted crayon to form a small circle of wax.
 - Gently press a coin onto the melted crayon wax.
 - Wait until the wax is cool, then gently lift the coin from the melted crayon wax to see the impression left behind. (If the coin sticks, try spraying a little cooking oil on it.)



Step 2: What do the other symbols on the seal mean?

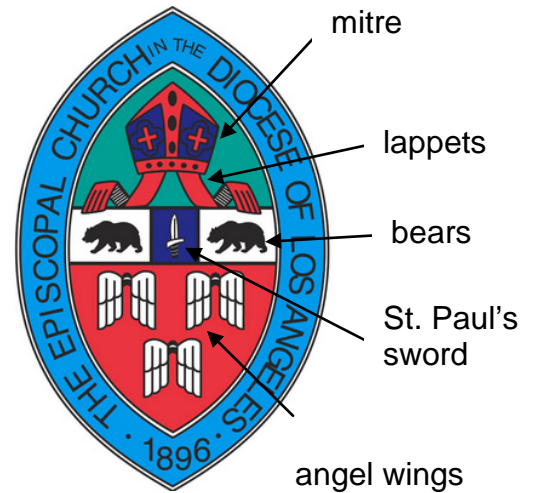
Leader's Initials _____

Usually the diocesan seal has other small illustrations on it that tell the story of the diocese. Look closely at the seal of your diocese to identify the symbols. You can use the Internet to research the symbolism of the seal for your diocese. You can also ask your rector or vicar to explain it to you.

Symbolism of the Seal for the Diocese of Los Angeles - *If you reside in a different diocese, you may omit the following section and make a study of the symbolism of the seal for your own diocese.*

The bishop's **mitre** at the top of the seal represents the bishop, who is the leader of the diocese. The ribbons below the mitre are called **lappets**. Lappets hang from the back of the mitre. Originally, they were used to tie the mitre on. The lappets are no longer used to tie on the mitre, but they do remind us of the old and new testaments. The Bishop wears the mitre on liturgical occasions, such as confirmations, ordinations, and other services in which he or she participates.

On the seal of the Diocese of Los Angeles, there is a small sword under the bishop's mitre. The **sword** represents St. Paul. We use this symbol because our cathedral center in Echo Park is named for St. Paul. On each side is a **bear**, representing the state of California. Below are **angel wings**, which represent Los Angeles, which is also called the City of Angels after the original Spanish name for the city, El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles.



- ❖ What is a mitre?
- ❖ What are lappets?
- ❖ Optional: What is the symbolism of the sword, the bear, and the angel wings on the diocesan seal for Los Angeles?
- ❖ If you were to “update” the seal for your diocese, how would you change it?
- ❖ Does your parish have its own seal? If so learn about it.



1. Draw the seal for your diocese.
2. If your parish or mission has a seal, draw it.
3. Using sidewalk chalk, draw a seal for yourself or your family on the sidewalk. Take a photo of your work!



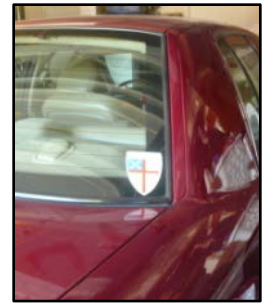
Step 3: Some final information on seals, shields and flags
Leader's Initials _____

In the green level, you learned about the Church Flag and its symbolism. Flags, shields, seals, and banners are symbolic representations of the Episcopal Church. We treasure them because they represent our heritage and our values. In

medieval times, at large church gatherings, seals were used on banners to indicate where each diocese was seated. We continue to use seals and banners to add pageantry to our celebrations. For example, processions at GFS events usually include banners of the branches and dioceses.



Sometimes you can spot an Episcopal Shield Decal on the back of a car! That decal tells you the driver is a member of the Episcopal Church!



- ❖ Do you think that seals and flags should be used to represent the Episcopal Church?
- ❖ What are the pros and cons of continuing to use these historical elements in our modern times?



Do at least one:

1. Review the material taught for the Church Flag badge in the Green Level.
2. Look at the banners and flags displayed in your church.
3. Do you have a banner which represents your GFS branch? Check its condition and determine if a new one needs to be made.