

General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2022 Archives' Research Report

Resolution No.: 2022-A156
Title: Establishing a Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church
Proposer: House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church
Topic: Membership, Structure

Directly Related: (Attached)

2015-C023 On the Topic of Amending Canon 1.17.7 [Respecting the Laity] (Rejected)
2012-A010 Document Changes in the Church, Its Outreach Ministries, and Those Served
2003-A044 Amend Canon I.17.1(c) [Of Regulations Respecting the Laity]
2003-A045 Amend Canon I.17.2 [Of Regulations Respecting the Laity]
2000-A103 Request Church Membership Study
1997-D006 Amend Canon I.17.1[Lay Members of the Church]
1994-C036 Request Clarification of Membership and Confirmation Rites
1994-D060 On the Topic of Defining Baptized Members (Rejected)
1988-D131 On the Topic of the Canon on the Regulations Respecting the Laity (Rejected)
1982-A048 Amend Canon I.16 [Of Regulations Respecting the Laity]
1982-B063 On the Topic of Procedures for Membership (Rejected)

Indirectly Related: (Available in the [Acts of Convention](#) database, searchable by resolution number)

2009-A062 Gather Data on Missional and Emergent Congregations and Church Outreach
1997-D013 On the Topic of the Canon on Regulations Respecting the Laity (Rejected)
1988-A161 Produce a Demographic Study on the Church's Membership

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1973 through 2018, selecting “direct” resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. The “direct” resolutions are attached and “indirect” resolutions are available in the Acts of Convention database. Committee members who require other research assistance should contact the Archives through the [Research Request Form](#) or call 800-525-9329.

A156 Establishing a Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church

Proposer	House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church
Endorsed by	—
Supported by	—
HiA / Leg. Cttee	House of Deputies / —
Current Status	—
Version	Original (as filed)
Review Status	Not yet reviewed

RESOLUTION TEXT

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring,

That the 80th General Convention authorizes the creation of a task force to re-envision membership as defined in Canon I.17.1-4: Of Regulations Respecting the Laity and Canon 1.6.1: Of the Mode of Securing an Accurate view of the State of This Church; and be it further

Resolved, that the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies appoint the members of this task force to include at least 3 bishops, 5 clergy and 7 laypeople with appropriate representation from urban and rural congregations, congregations in which people of color are a majority, and congregations that represent the full geographic and economic diversity of the Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, that the task force be charged with developing new and relevant membership definitions that reflect the experience, practices, and needs of congregations, including membership definitions that are:

- expansive and applicable to a wide range of cultural and regional contexts
- easy to ascertain and report in yearly parochial reports
- faithful to the distinct role and sacramental understanding of the baptized in the life of the church
- new and expansive, including those who are not yet baptized or whose baptisms are not recorded in an Episcopal church; and be it further;

Resolved, that the task force be charged with examining the impact that a changed understanding of membership would have on diocesan canons and congregational bylaws; and be it further

Resolved, that the task force reevaluate the present connection between confirmation and membership; and be it further

Resolved, that the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$50,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

EXPLANATION

As the Episcopal Church faces the future, our ability to understand the state of the church and its opportunities for growth and adaptation is hindered by the outdated and unrealistic definitions and standards of church membership contained in Canon I.17. Those definitions, first developed in 1961, are detached from the current reality of many congregations on the ground and do not provide the data we need to understand the state of 21st century membership and engagement in the Episcopal Church.

The 1981 edition of *Annotated Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church* recalls the attempt, and subsequent adoption, of the 1961 General Convention to define the terms “member,” “communicant,” and “communicant in good standing” as they relate to formal membership in the Episcopal Church.

The authors of *Annotated Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church* comment: “the Journal for the 1961 Convention had not even been distributed when criticism of the various definitions began. Many of the tests [associated with formal membership] were thought by many to be unrealistic and impossible of ascertainment.” (p.391)

Sixty-one years later, the criticism continues.

But more than criticism, there is genuine confusion, not about what it means to be a baptized member of the Body of Christ or an active participant in the life of a parish, but about how to accurately assess and report parishioners within our church’s canonical membership definitions. From small to large congregations, and urban to rural congregations, the state of membership in the Episcopal Church has radically changed.

This confusion is experienced by hundreds of leaders in congregations and dioceses, regardless of size, make-up, and locale, most notably when it comes time to fill out the parochial report. Many leaders lack the necessary information to provide accurate figures. Confusion leads to frustration and doubt, which then leads to congregations reporting, unintentionally, inaccurate and outdated information. Ultimately, this distorts any possibility to obtain accurate data on the state of membership in the Episcopal Church.

Since 1961, cultural changes have lessened denominational loyalty and altered the overall religious landscape, including the state of membership in our church. For example, lifelong members of other Christian denominations have found a home in The Episcopal Church – either for a season or for the rest of their lives. However, the same spirit that has brought them to this part of the Body of Christ has also led them to remain formal members of a different church tradition while attending an Episcopal church, thereby preventing them from being counted as a baptized member under our present membership definitions.

In addition, over the last few decades, our church has seen a growing number of marriages where a spouse may not only come from a different church tradition, but from a different religious tradition or none at all. Yet, in their married life both partners have decided to actively participate in the life of an Episcopal church, while the non-Christian or non-religious spouse decides to not actively seek baptism. How are we to record this person's active participation in the life of a parish?

While these all may seem like purely speculative scenarios, data from national research centers, including the Episcopal Church's most recent national study: *Jesus in America*, shows that the cultural norms which create the ground for these scenarios are becoming more and more normative.

As a result of these cultural changes, some congregations do not evaluate membership rolls based on the three-tier membership categories found in the canons, and many struggle to make a distinction between baptized members, communicants, and communicants in good standing. A recent analysis of previously filed parochial reports found that only 65% of congregations reported different numbers for total baptized members and communicants in good standing. A third of congregations across the Episcopal Church make no distinction between baptized members and communicants in good standing when filling out the parochial report.

Further, the overall decline in membership across the Episcopal Church has led many congregations to cease keeping track of membership using the current canonical membership figures, especially in dioceses where membership does not influence a congregation's representation at diocesan convention or diocesan assessment. In dioceses where membership reporting is used to determine representation in diocesan convention or even clergy compensation, it can incentivize exaggerated numbers or simply ignoring changes in membership numbers.

In short, our present canonical membership categories do not serve us well, and maybe they have not for a while. It is time to re-examine the definition and formal standards for membership in the Episcopal Church.



Resolution Number: 2015-C023
Title: On the Topic of Amending Canon 1.17.7 [Respecting the Laity]
Legislative Action Taken: Rejected
Text of Resolution:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the following section of Title I is hereby amended to read as follows:

Canon I.17.7. No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church, *except as provided as follows:*

- (a) The unbaptized person must be receiving communion with the intent of beginning or strengthening a relationship with Christ and eventually being baptized, and the clergy in charge of the congregation in which the person is receiving shall provide counsel as needed.*
- (b) Congregations inviting the unbaptized to receive communion must do so as a part of an evangelistic plan to welcome all people to Christ's table and to strengthen them in their relationship with Christ and the Church.*



Resolution Number: 2012-A010
Title: Document Changes in the Church, Its Outreach Ministries, and Those Served
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred
Final Text:

Resolved, That the Executive Council, in collaboration with the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church, identify information to be included in the Parochial Report form based upon current changes and new realities in the Episcopal Church; and be it further Resolved, That pursuant to Canon I.6.1, the Executive Council authorize such changes in the Parochial Report form and the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church consider approval and implementation of such changes by January 1, 2014; and be it further Resolved, That the Executive Council, in collaboration with the Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism and the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church, develop a reliable method for documenting mission and outreach activity of The Episcopal Church by counting or estimating the number of people served by ministries such as schools, soup kitchens, food pantries and campus ministries.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, 2012* (New York: General Convention, 2012), p. 140.



Resolution Number: 2003-A044
Title: Amend Canon I.17.1(c) [Of Regulations Respecting the Laity]
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred
Final Text:

Resolved, That Canon I.17.1(c) be amended to read as follows:

(c) It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received *by the laying on of hands* by a Bishop of this Church or by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church. Those who have previously made a mature public commitment in another Church may be received *by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church, not rather than confirmed.*

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Minneapolis, 2003* (New York: General Convention, 2004), p. 637f.



Resolution Number: 2003-A045

Title: Amend Canon I.17.2 [Of Regulations Respecting the Laity]

Legislative Action Taken: Concurred

Final Text:

Resolved, That Canon I.17.2 be amended to read as follows:

(a) All members of this Church who have received Holy Communion in this Church at least three times during the preceding year are to be considered communicants of this Church.

(b) For the purposes of statistical consistency throughout the Church, communicants sixteen years of age and over are to be considered adult communicants.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Minneapolis, 2003* (New York: General Convention, 2004), p. 431.



Resolution Number: 2000-A103
Title: Request Church Membership Study
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Ministry Development in consultation with the House of Bishops Committee on Theology conduct during the next triennium a study of the theology of confirmation and the relationship of confirmation to evangelism, baptism, adult membership, church leadership, and eligibility for election to church office; and be it further
Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Ministry Development report on this matter to the 74th General Convention, including canonical changes deemed appropriate.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Denver, 2000* (New York: General Convention, 2001), p. 472.



Resolution Number: 1997-D006
Title: Amend Canon I.17.1[Lay Members of the Church]
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That Canon I.17.1(c) is hereby amended to read as follows:

It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by a Bishop of this Church or by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church. *Those who have previously made a mature public commitment in another Church may be received, not confirmed.*

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, 1997* (New York: General Convention, 1998), p. 797.



Resolution Number: 1994-C036
Title: Request Clarification of Membership and Confirmation Rites
Legislative Action Taken: Referred
Text of Resolution:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the appropriate standing commissions advise the 72nd General Convention on the role of the Bishop (to be required, to be customary, or to be optional) in inquirer and membership rites for baptized persons wishing to join this Church and to propose such rites; and be it further

Resolved, That the said commissions be called on to advise the 72nd General Convention concerning the status and understanding of Confirmation and more specifically, (1) the meaning of canonical equivalency to Confirmation and (2) the practices of using Confirmation as a rite of membership into this Church, a rite of lay ordination, and a rite signifying adolescent catechetical competency; and be it further

Resolved, That said commissions propose to the 72nd General Convention Canons consistent with any proposed clarifications and rite in order that the latter may be readily implemented.



Resolution Number: 1994-D060
Title: On the Topic of Defining Baptized Members
Legislative Action Taken: Rejected
Text of Resolution:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That for the purpose of reporting on the annual parochial report required by Canon I.6.1, a baptized member shall be one who meets the requirements of Canon I.7.1 and who has been present for worship with the congregation at least once during the previous year, or who is known to the person preparing the parochial report to have been prevented for good cause from attending worship during that year; and be it further
Resolved, That this standard shall be incorporated into the instructions for completing the parochial report.



Resolution Number: 1988-D131
Title: On the Topic of the Canon on the Regulations Respecting the Laity
Legislative Action Taken: Rejected
Text of Resolution:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That Canon I.17.2(a) be amended to read as follows:
All members of this Church who *for the previous year have been faithful in corporate worship,*
unless for just cause prevented, and have received Holy Communion in this Church at least more
than three times during in the preceding year, are to shall be considered communicants of this
church.



Resolution Number: 1982-A048
Title: Amend Canon I.16 [Of Regulations Respecting the Laity]
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred As Substituted and Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That Title I, Canon 16 be amended to read as follows:

Sec. 1(a). All persons who have received the sacrament of Holy Baptism with water in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost *Spirit, whether in this Church or in another Christian Church, and whose baptisms have been* are duly recorded in this Church, are members thereof.

(b). Members sixteen years of age and over are to be considered adult members.

(c). It is expected that all adult members of the Church, after appropriate instructions, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by a Bishop of this Church or by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church.

Sec. 2(a). All baptized persons members of this Church who shall for one year next preceding have fulfilled the requirements of the Canon "of the Due Celebration of Sundays," received Holy Communion in this Church at least three times during the preceding year unless for good cause prevented; are to be considered communicants of this Church members of this Church in good standing.

(b). For the purposes of statistical consistency throughout the Church, communicants sixteen years of age and older are to be considered adult communicants.

Sec. 3. All such members in good standing who have been confirmed by a Bishop of this Church or a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church, or, who have been received into this Church by a Bishop of this Church, and who shall, unless for good cause prevented, have received Holy Communion at least thrice during the next preceding year, are communicants in good standing.

All communicants of this Church who for the previous year have been faithful in corporate worship, unless for good cause prevented, and have been faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God, are to be considered communicants in good standing.

Sec. 4 (a). A communicant or baptized member of this Church in good standing, removing from one Parish or the congregation in which his or her membership is recorded, to another, shall be entitled to receive and shall procure from the Rector or Minister of the Parish or Congregation of his or her last enrollment or, if there be no Rector or Minister, from one of the Wardens, a certificate of membership addressed to the Rector or Minister of the Parish or Congregation to which removal is desired, stating indicating that he or she is duly registered or enrolled recorded as a communicant or baptized member (or adult member) in the Parish or Congregation from which he or she desires to be transferred, and recorded as a "baptized member" or "confirmed member" of this Church and whether or not such a member:

- 1. is a communicant;*
- 2. is recorded as being in good standing;*
- 3. has been confirmed or received by a Bishop of this Church or a Bishop in communion with this Church.*

~~the Rector or Minister or Warden of the Parish or Congregation to which such communicant or baptized member may remove shall enroll him or her as a communicant or baptized member when such certificate is presented, or, on failure to produce such certificate through no fault of such communicant or baptized member, sufficient in the judgment of said Rector or Minister. Notice of such enrollment in such Parish or Congregation to which such communicant or baptized member shall have removed shall be sent by the Rector or Minister thereof to the Rector of the Parish from which the communicant or baptized member is removed.~~

Upon acknowledgment that a member who has received such certificate has been enrolled in another congregation of this or another Church, the Minister or Warden issuing the certificate shall remove the name of the person from the parish register.

(b). The Minister or Warden of the congregation to which such certificate is surrendered shall record in the parish register the information contained on the presented certificate of membership, and then notify the Minister or Warden of the congregation which issued the certificate that the person has been duly recorded as a member of the new congregation.

Whereupon the person's removal shall be noted in the parish register of the congregation which issued the certificate.

(c). If a member of this Church, not having such a certificate, desires to become a member of the congregation in the place to which he or she has removed, that person shall be directed by the Minister of the said congregation to procure a certificate from the former congregation, although on failure to produce such a certificate through no fault of the person applying, appropriate entry may be made in the parish register upon the evidence of membership status sufficient in the judgment of the Minister or Warden.

(d). Any communicant of any Church in communion with this Church shall be entitled to the benefit of this section so far as the same can be made applicable.

~~Sec. 4. Every communicant or baptized member of this Church shall be entitled to equal rights and status in any Parish or Mission thereof. He shall not be excluded from the worship or Sacraments of the Church, nor from parochial membership;~~

Sec. 5. No one shall be denied rights or status in this Church because of race, color, or ethnic origin.

~~Sec. 6 When a~~ *A person to whom the sacraments of the Church shall have been refused, or who has been repelled from the Holy Communion under the rubrics, or who desires a judgment as to his or her status in the Church, shall may lodge a complaint or application with the Bishop, or Ecclesiastical Authority. No Minister of this Church shall be required to admit to the sacraments a person so refused or repelled without the written direction of the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority, it shall be the duty of the Bishop or Ecclesiastical authority unless he or it The Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority may in certain circumstances see sees fit to require the person to be admitted or restored because of the insufficiency of the cause assigned by the Minister. If it shall appear to the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority that there*

is sufficient cause to justify the refusal of Holy Communion, however, appropriate steps shall be taken to institute such an inquiry as may be directed by the Canons of the Diocese, and should no such Canon exist, the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority shall proceed according to such principles of law and equity as will insure an impartial investigation and judgment. decision; but no Minister of this Church shall be required to admit to the sacraments a person so refused or repelled without the written direction of the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority.

Sec. 7. No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church.; and be it further

Resolved, That the foregoing amendment shall take effect on the first day of January, 1986.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, New Orleans, 1982* (New York: General Convention, 1983), p. C-44.



Resolution Number: 1982-B063
Title: On the Topic of Procedures for Membership
Legislative Action Taken: Rejected
Text of Resolution:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 67th General Convention commend the following practice to all Clergy and Congregations:

1. When a Member in good standing of this Church desires to remove to a Congregation of another tradition, such removal be done in the same manner and form as is done in removal of a person to a Congregation of this Church.
2. When a Member of another tradition wishes to become a member of a Congregation of this Church, such person be received in the same manner as a person of this Church is received, with certification of membership concerning baptism with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Communicant standing, and Confirmation (including whether or not such Confirmation was by a Bishop of this Church or a Bishop in communion with this Church).