

## General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2024 Archives' Research Report

**Resolution No.:** 2024-A108  
**Title:** Proposal of Changes to Title I, Canon 17  
**Proposer:** Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church  
**Topic:** Canons, Membership

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**Directly Related:** (Attached)

2022-A156 Create a Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church  
2003-A045 Amend Canon I.17.2 [Of Regulations Respecting the Laity]

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

None

*In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1973 through 2022, 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](#).*

# A108 - Proposal of Changes to Title I, Canon 17

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**Final Status:** Not Yet Finalized

**Proposed by:** Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church

**Has Budget Implications:** No

**Cost:**

**Amends C&C or Rules of Order:** Yes

**Requests New Interim Body:** No

**Changes Mandate Of Existing Ib:** No

**Directs Dfms Staff:** No

**Directs Dioceses:** No

**Directs Executive Council:** No

**HiA:** No House Assigned

**Legislative Committee Currently Assigned:** No Committee Assigned

**Completion Status:** Incomplete

**Latest House Action:** N/A

**Supporting Documents:** No

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## Resolution Text

*Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring,

That Title I, Canon 17 be amended as follows:

**<Amended text as it would appear if adopted and concurred. Scroll below the line of asterisks (\*\*\*\*\*) to see the version showing all deleted and added text.>**

Canon 17: Of Regulations Respecting the Laity

### 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 Spirit, whether in this Church or in another Christian Church, and whose Baptisms have been duly recorded in this Church, are Members thereof.

b. Members sixteen years of age and older, or who have been confirmed or received, are to be considered Adult Members.

**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 full 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, rather than confirmed. This may be a requirement for specific leadership roles as defined by the Constitution and Canons of this Church and its constituent bodies.

**d.** Any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop at Baptism is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed; also,

Any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and at some time after the Baptism receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop in Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed; also,

Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands at Confirmation (by any Bishop in historic succession) and is received into The Episcopal Church by a Bishop of this Church is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed; and also,

Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church at Confirmation or Reception is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed.

**Sec. 2.** All Members 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. 3.** A person who is active in the life of this Church through worship, giving, and program participation, but whose official membership remains elsewhere is to be considered an Associate Member. An associate member may serve in leadership at the discretion of their local canons and bylaws.

**Sec. 4.**

**a.** A Member of this Church shall procure a Letter of Transfer to transfer their Certificate of Membership from the congregation in which their membership is recorded to another Congregation. This Letter of Transfer shall indicate that the person is recorded as a Member of this Church and whether or not such a Member:

1. is recorded as being ~~in good standing~~ a Communicant in Good Standing;
2. has been confirmed or received by a Bishop of this Church or a Bishop in full communion with this Church.

Upon acknowledgment that a Member who has received such a Letter of Transfer has been enrolled in another congregation of this or another Church, the Member of the Clergy in charge or Warden issuing the Letter of Transfer shall remove the name of the person from the parish register.

**b.** The Member of the Clergy in charge or Warden of the congregation to which such membership is surrendered shall record in the parish register the information contained on the presented Letter of Transfer, and then notify the Member of the Clergy in charge or Warden of the congregation which issued the certificate that the person has been duly recorded as a Member of the new congregation. At that time the person's removal shall be noted in the parish register of the congregation which issued the Letter of Transfer.

**c.** If a Member of this Church, not having such Letter of Transfer, desires to become a Member of a new congregation, that person shall be directed by the Member of the Clergy in charge of the said congregation to procure a Letter of Transfer from the former congregation, although on failure to produce such Letter of Transfer 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 Member of the Clergy in charge or Warden.

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

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**<Proposed amended resolution text showing exact changes being made:>**

Canon 17: Of Regulations Respecting the Laity

**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 Spirit, whether in this Church or in another Christian Church, and whose Baptisms have been duly recorded in this Church, are ~~members~~ *Members* thereof.

**b.** Members sixteen years of age and ~~over~~ *older, or who have been confirmed or received,* are to be considered ~~adult members~~ *Adult Members*.

**c.** It is expected that all ~~adult members~~ *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 full 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, rather than confirmed. *This may be a requirement for specific leadership roles as defined by the Constitution and Canons of this Church and its constituent bodies.*

d. Any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop at Baptism is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed; also,

Any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and at some time after the Baptism receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop in Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed; also,

Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands at Confirmation (by any Bishop in historic succession) and is received into The Episcopal Church by a Bishop of this Church is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed; and also,

Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church at Confirmation or Reception is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed.

## **Sec. 2.**

~~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.~~

~~Sec. 3.~~ **Sec. 2.** All ~~communicants~~ Members 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~~ *Communicants in Good Standing*.

**Sec. 3.** *A person who is active in the life of this Church through worship, giving, and program participation, but whose official membership remains elsewhere is to be considered an Associate Member. An associate member may serve in leadership at the discretion of their local canons and bylaws.*

## **Sec. 4.**

a. A ~~member~~ Member of this Church ~~removing from the congregation in which that person's membership is recorded~~ shall procure a *Letter of Transfer to transfer their*

*Certificate of Membership from the congregation in which their membership is recorded to another Congregation. ~~certificate of membership~~ This Letter of Transfer shall indicate indicating that that the person is recorded as a ~~member (or adult member)~~ Member of this Church and whether or not such a ~~member~~ Member:*

~~1. is a communicant;~~

1. ~~2.~~ is recorded as being in ~~good standing~~ a *Communicant in Good Standing*;

2. ~~3.~~ has been confirmed or received by a Bishop of this Church or a Bishop in full communion with this Church.

Upon acknowledgment that a ~~member~~ *Member* who has received such a ~~certificate~~ *Letter of Transfer* has been enrolled in another congregation of this or another Church, the Member of the Clergy in charge or Warden issuing the ~~certificate~~ *Letter of Transfer* shall remove the name of the person from the parish register.

**b.** The Member of the Clergy in charge or Warden of the congregation to which such ~~certificate-membership~~ is surrendered shall record in the parish register the information contained on the presented ~~certificate of membership~~ *Letter of Transfer*, and then notify the Member of the Clergy in charge or Warden of the congregation which issued the certificate that the person has been duly recorded as a ~~member~~ *Member* of the new congregation. ~~Whereupon~~ *At that time* the person's removal shall be noted in the parish register of the congregation which issued the ~~certificate~~ *Letter of Transfer*.

**c.** If a ~~member~~ *Member* of this Church, not having such a ~~certificate~~ *Letter of Transfer*, desires to become a ~~member~~ *Member* of a *new* congregation ~~in the place to which he or she has removed~~, that person shall be directed by the Member of the Clergy in charge of the said congregation to procure a *Letter of Transfer* ~~certificate~~ from the former congregation, although on failure to produce such *Letter of Transfer* ~~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 Member of the Clergy in charge or Warden.

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

## **Explanation**

The goal of the Task Force is to simplify the canon regarding membership in The Episcopal Church.

The Task Force proposes a new level of membership called Associate Member. This is built upon models in The Presbyterian Church (USA) and is currently used in some Episcopal parishes. Associate Member acknowledges there are people that would consider themselves members that don't fit "Member" or "Communicant in Good Standing." This proposed change would allow dioceses to have additional membership categories as needed.

The Task Force proposes amending our understanding of a Communicant in Good Standing to remove the reference to receiving Communion three times in the preceding year. We maintain in Sec 3 that being active in public worship, unless unable for reason, fulfills the intent, which is to ensure a Member is a part of the life of the parish. We recognize that some parishes struggle to find adequate clergy coverage to provide Communion on even a semi-regular basis. There are active and faithful members of those parishes for whom the “three communions a year” canon would be a hinderance.

The Task Force proposes cleaning up the language of “Certificate of Membership” to the more common “Letter of Transfer.”

The Task Force offers clarified language that the sacramental rite of Confirmation is not a requirement for membership, but may be a requirement for certain leadership positions in parishes, dioceses, and The Episcopal Church. This change also recognizes the maturity of the rite of Confirmation, and would allow for Members under the age of 16, who have made the adult commitment of Confirmation, to be considered Adult Members.

#### Implications for changing definitions of membership

These proposed changes uphold all but one of the current membership categories while recognizing the diversity of diocesan requirements for leadership and the importance of local context. The Task Force also recognizes and affirms that Confirmation as a requirement for membership remains at the discretion of each diocese. Regardless of what happens with these proposed changes, we encourage dioceses and parishes to work towards ensuring their canons and bylaws align with Canon I.17.

As the Rev. Carlos de la Torre wrote in a report for the State of the Church Committee after the 80th General Convention:

While it can be argued that the canons offer some wiggle-room for some of these situations, these situations are no longer a rare exception to the norm. Changes in church and culture, especially in a post-pandemic world, requires us to think creatively on what it means to be a present and future, active and engaged, member of The Episcopal Church. The Church should not simply change our present definitions and understandings of membership because the world around us is changing, but because the Church should be constantly evolving.



**Resolution Number:** 2022-A156  
**Title:** Create a Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Amended  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, 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, including at least one member from outside the United States of America; and be it further*

*Resolved, That the President of House Deputies is encouraged to include as an additional member one who has served on the most recent House of Deputies State of the Church Committee; and be it further*

*Resolved, That this task force work closely with the Task Force to Study Congregational Vitality Indicators (A132) and the House of Deputies State of the Church Committee; 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 task force issue a report to the 81st General Convention; 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.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Baltimore, 2022* (New York: General Convention, 2023), p. 905.





**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.