

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

**Resolution No.:** 2024-D002  
**Title:** Review Canonical Requirement for Holy Communion  
**Proposer:** Richardson, The Rev. James  
**Topic:** Baptism, Canons

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### **Directly Related:** (Attached)

2015-C010 On the Topic of Inviting All to Holy Communion (Rejected)  
2015-C023 On the Topic of Amending Canon 1.17.7 [Respecting the Laity] (Rejected)  
2012-C029 Reaffirm Baptism Before Holy Communion  
2009-D089 On the Topic of Resolving Differences in the Invitation to Holy Communion (Rejected)  
2006-D084 Uphold Baptism as a Requirement of Receiving Holy Communion  
1982-A048 Amend Canon I.16 [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](#).*

# D002 - Review canonical requirement for Holy Communion

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**Final Status:** Not Yet Finalized

**Proposed by:** Richardson, The Rev. James

**Endorsed by:** Dolan, The Rev. Pamela, Juvé, Mr. Peter, Denney, The Rev. Robin

**Has Budget Implications:** No

**Cost:**

**Amends C&C or Rules of Order:** No

**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 the General Convention reaffirm previous statements “that baptism is the ancient and normative entry point to receiving Holy Communion,” while acknowledging there are pastoral exceptions to what is normative; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to review the underlying biblical, theological and liturgical issues, history and practical impact of Canon I.17.7, which reads: “No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church,” and be it further

*Resolved*, That the General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to review whether eligibility requirements for the sacrament of Holy Communion appropriately belongs in the canons or elsewhere; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to develop a generous pastoral and invitational rubric to Baptism and Communion in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and other appropriate liturgical resources; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to consider proposing a revision to the canons with a positive pastoral statement affirming that the fullest meaning of our Holy Eucharist is lived out through our Baptism and Baptismal Covenant.

## **Explanation**

The issue commonly known as “open communion” has generated strong opinions for more than a decade.[1] The issue is not going away. This resolution seeks to find a way forward by affirming Baptism as foundational to our life as Christians while acknowledging that, for some, the entry to Holy Communion does not always start with Baptism.

This resolution requests that the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music examine whether eligibility requirements for receiving Holy Communion belongs in the canons or elsewhere. Further, this resolution requests that the commission develop a canon and/or a prayer book rubric for Baptism and Communion that is positive and inviting, in both content and tone. The commission could, for example, consider the language in another proposed resolution at this General Convention that would amend the canon to read: “All baptized persons are eligible to receive Holy Communion in this church except where prohibited by the Book of Common Prayer.”

Adopting a positive canon would align us with our siblings in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which states in its principles: “Believing in the real presence of Christ, this church practices eucharistic hospitality. All baptized persons are welcomed to Communion when they are visiting in the congregations of this church.”[2]

In 2012, General Convention approved a resolution (2012-C029) stating: “That the Episcopal Church reaffirms that baptism is the ancient and normative entry point to receiving Holy Communion and that our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to go into the world and baptize all peoples.”

This resolution affirms that the 2012 resolution recognized that the “normative” entry point to Holy Communion is Baptism, but implicitly recognized there are pastoral exceptions.

In 2022, a group of seminary professors wrote a letter affirming the primacy of baptism as the “fountain from which the other sacraments flow” and that Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist are “a gift of supernatural grace.” This resolution affirms their statement.

But many of us who have served in local churches are aware that the gifts of supernatural grace from the Holy Spirit do not always come in the neat order required by canons. Many of us have experienced instances when the unchurched have been drawn to Baptism only after first receiving Holy Communion. We have witnessed how the Holy Spirit does not always work in linear ways.

The crux of the present issue does not stem from a lack of respect for and belief in baptism as foundational to our faith. Rather, it stems from how the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* eliminated the requirement that a person must be confirmed to receive Communion. No

eligibility requirement for receiving Holy Communion replaced Confirmation in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. Indeed, the prayer book remains silent on the point.

The only grounds for denying Communion mentioned in the prayer book are in the disciplinary rubrics on page 409 barring those “living a notoriously evil life,” and engaging in “hatred between members of the congregation” and “scandal.” The absence of Baptism is not mentioned in the prayer book as grounds for denying Communion.

The canon requiring Baptism was adopted by General Convention several years after the adoption of the prayer book. The language of Canon I.17.7 carries an unwelcoming tone, beginning with the word “No” — underscoring how this canon is essentially a negative rule rather than an invitation to the grace of the sacraments.

In practical terms, the canon is virtually unenforceable. No deacon, priest or bishop is known to have checked for baptismal certificates at the altar rail. No known deacon, priest or bishop has been disciplined for serving Communion to an unbaptized person. Canons that are unenforceable erode the efficacy of all canons.

We also note that other denominations with whom we are close, including the ELCA, Presbyterian Church USA and the United Methodist Church, have no such requirements for baptism before Communion.[3]

[1] Meyers, Ruth. “Who May Be Invited to the Table,” 2012, *Anglican Theological Review*, 2012:

[https://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/meyers\\_.pdf](https://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/meyers_.pdf)

[2] ELCA, “Use of the Means of Grace,” 1997: “Principle 49: Believing in the real presence of Christ, this church practices eucharistic hospitality. All baptized persons are welcomed to Communion when they are visiting in the congregations of this church. Application 37G: When an unbaptized person comes to the table seeking Christ’s presence and is inadvertently communed, neither that person nor the ministers of Communion need be ashamed. Rather, Christ’s gift of love and mercy to all is praised. That person is invited to learn the faith of the Church, be baptized, and thereafter faithfully receive Holy Communion.”

[3] PCUSA, *Book of Order* 2023-2025, W-3.0409: “The opportunity to eat and drink with Christ is not a right bestowed upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love. All who come to the table are offered the bread and cup, regardless of their age or understanding. If some of those who come have not yet been baptized, an invitation, when appropriate, to baptismal preparation and Baptism should be graciously extended.” UMC, “This Holy Mystery,” 2004: “All who respond in faith to the invitation are to be welcomed. Holy Baptism normally precedes partaking of Holy Communion. Holy Communion is a meal of the community who are in covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ.” UMC, “By Water and the Spirit,” 1996: “Unbaptized persons

who receive communion should be counseled and nurtured toward baptism as soon as possible.”

Note: this resolution and/or its explanation contains external references, such as URLs of websites, that may not be in the required languages of General Convention. Because of copyright restrictions, the General Convention cannot provide translations. However, your web browser may be able to provide a machine translation into another language. If you need assistance with this, please contact [gc.support@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:gc.support@episcopalchurch.org)



**Resolution Number:** 2015-C010  
**Title:** On the Topic of Inviting All to Holy Communion  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Rejected  
**Text of Resolution:**

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church expresses awareness of growing favor within the Episcopal Church for a practice commonly called “Open Table,” that all persons, baptized and unbaptized, may be invited to receive Holy Communion, and

Expresses awareness that some communities within the Episcopal Church have already been experimenting with the practice of Open Table on an unofficial basis, and that it has not been unknown in the history of the Church for changes in local practice occasionally to precede and inform changes in wider-Church doctrine; and

Expresses awareness of the complexity of changing the canons for authorizing the practice of Open Table on an official church-wide basis, recognizing that there are significant liturgical, theological, relational, and other factors deserving of our careful and ongoing discernment; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 78th General Convention calls for the formation of a task force, the members of which shall be jointly appointed by the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies, to study and facilitate church-wide dialogue concerning the practice of Open Table in consultation with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, the Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons, the Standing Commission on Interreligious and Ecumenical Relations, and the Theology Committee in the House of Bishops, and to report its findings and recommendations to the 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance consider a budget allocation of \$10,000 per year of the 2015-2018 triennium for the implementation of this Resolution.



**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-C029  
**Title:** Reaffirm Baptism Before Holy Communion  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Substituted and Amended  
**Final Text:**

***Resolved, That The Episcopal Church reaffirms that baptism is the ancient and normative entry point to receiving Holy Communion and that our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to go into the world and baptize all peoples.***

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, 2012* (New York: General Convention, 2012), pp. 728-729.





**Resolution Number:** 2009-D089  
**Title:** On the Topic of Resolving Differences in the Invitation to Holy Communion  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Rejected  
**Text of Resolution:**

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 76th General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons to review and provide a recommendation to resolve the conflict between Article X of the Constitution, specifically, the invitation offered in the Book of Common Prayer “The Gifts of God for the People of God” and Canon 17 - Section 7, restricting communion to only the baptized; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons consult with other appropriate Standing Commissions, as needed; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Standing Commission report back to the 77th General Convention.



**Resolution Number:** 2006-D084  
**Title:** Uphold Baptism as a Requirement of Receiving Holy Communion  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Amended  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 75th General Convention recognize the position of the Constitution and Canons (I.17.7), that only those who have been baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion; and be it further Resolved, That the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops, in deliberate consultation with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, and others they may deem appropriate, provide to the 76th General Convention a pastoral and theological understanding of the relationship between Holy Baptism and eucharistic practice.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Columbus, 2006* (New York: General Convention, 2007), p. 683.



**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.