

June 5, 2022
Day of Pentecost

A Statement on Baptism and Eucharist in The Episcopal Church

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

— *Matthew 9:9-13*

Dear Bishop Klusmeyer, Bishop Lee, Dr. Meyers, and Canon Simmonds Ballentine,

Greetings on this Feast of the Pentecost.

We are writing on behalf of ourselves and not our respective churches, dioceses or institutions. We are a group of church folks, lay and ordained, scholars, and seminary professors. We write out of deep concern at the vehemence of opposition to C028 ("All Are Welcome At The Table"), particularly a letter from twenty-two of our colleagues. Some of us are from the Diocese of Northern California which has sponsored this resolution.

The resolution in question proposes to repeal the Canon I.17.7, which states: "No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church."

Many of the signatories are friends whom we respect. We agree with them that baptism is the "fountain from which the other sacraments flow" and that Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist are "a gift of supernatural grace."

But on this Day of Pentecost, we are especially aware that the gifts of supernatural grace from the Holy Spirit do not always come in the neat order required by canons.

It feels as though there are two opposing camps on the topic of "open communion," choosing up sides and talking past each other.

We therefore have the following proposal for you (and others to consider):

- 1- Refer C028 to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to examine the underlying biblical, theological and liturgical issues, history and practical impact of Canon I.17.7, including whether eligibility requirements for the sacrament of Holy Communion appropriately belongs in the canons.
- 2- Ask the commission to consider developing an invitational rubric to Communion in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

- 3- Ask the commission to consider replacing the language of the canon with a positive statement affirming that the fullest meaning of our Holy Eucharist is lived out through our Baptismal Covenant.

We fully support the resolution passed in 2012 by General Convention (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.”

We believe that the 2012 resolution wisely recognized that while the “normative” entry point to Holy Communion is baptism, there are other entry points as well.

Those of us who have served in local churches are aware of instances where the unchurched have been drawn to baptism only after first receiving Holy Communion. We have experienced how the Holy Spirit does not always work in linear ways or respect the “good order” of the Church.

The crux of the present issue does not stem from a lack of respect for and belief in baptism. Rather, it stems from how the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* eliminated the requirement that a person must be confirmed to receive Communion. The 1979 prayer book remained silent about any other eligibility requirements for receiving Communion. The canon requiring baptism was adopted at a subsequent General Convention.

At worst, eliminating Canon I.17.17 brings us back to where the prayer book left us in 1979.

We are concerned that the language of the canon carries a tone of control and gatekeeping. That the canon begins with the word “No” underscores how this canon is essentially a negative rule rather than an invitation to the grace of the sacraments.

The current canon has the unintended effect of diminishing both sacraments. The canon makes it sound as if one sacrament — Baptism — is a dinner ticket to the other sacrament — Communion.

In practical terms, the canon is virtually unenforceable. No priest or bishop we know checks for baptismal certificates at the altar rail. No priest or bishop we know has been disciplined for serving Communion to an unbaptized person.

As followers of Jesus, we resist such barriers to those seeking the grace and mercy of the sacraments from whatever doors they enter.

We are also concerned that the letter writers assert that “God’s people” are restricted only to the baptized. That assertion has a narrow, tribal tone that does not serve our church well. Moreover, their assertion, perhaps unintentionally, creates a barrier to interfaith relations.

Indeed, when the presider at the Holy Eucharist raises the elements and proclaims the words “The Gifts of God for the People of God,” we hear in that an invitation to all of humanity. For as the apostle Paul wrote in the Letter to the Romans 8:14, which we hear on this Pentecost Day, “All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

Faithfully submitted, through the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Dr. Diana Butler Bass, Ph.D.
Author and historian
Diocese of Virginia

The Very Rev. Penny Bridges
Dean, St Paul’s Cathedral, San Diego
Diocese of San Diego

The Very Rev. Dr. Donald G. Brown
Dean Emeritus, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Sacramento
Diocese of California

The Rev. Dr. Linda Lee Clader
Professor of Homiletics, Emerita, Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Diocese of Northern California

The Rev. Cookie Clark
Deacon, Church of the Epiphany, Vacaville
Clergy Deputy
Diocese of Northern California

The Rev. Robin Denney
Rector, St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, Napa
Clergy Deputy
Diocese of Northern California

Jay Elmquist
Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Sacramento
Lay Deputy
Diocese of Northern California

The Very Rev. Gail Greenwell
Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, Cincinnati, retired
Diocese of Southern Ohio

The Rev. Dr. Robert Gregg
Professor and University Chaplain Emeritus,
Stanford University

The Rev. Canon Rosa Lee Harden
Executive Producer, Faith+Finance
Asheville, North Carolina

Peter Juve
Saint Mary's Church, Napa
Lay Deputy
Diocese of Northern California

The Rev. John L. Kater, Ph. D.
Professor Emeritus of Ministry Development
Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Diocese of California

The Very Rev. Nathan LeRud
Dean, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Portland
Diocese of Oregon

The Rev. Dr. Daniel DeForest London, Ph.D.
Rector, Christ Episcopal Church, Eureka
Diocese of Northern California

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Lyman,
Samuel Garrett Professor of Church History, emerita
Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Diocese of California

Canon Charles R. Mack, Chancellor Emeritus and Vice Chancellor
First Lay Alternate Deputy
Diocese of Northern California

The Very Rev. Kristi Maulden
Dean, Cathedral of St John, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande

The Very Reverend Ronald D. Pogue
Dean (interim, retired), Saint John's Cathedral, Denver Colorado and St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Jackson, Mississippi
Diocese of Texas

The Rev. Br. Simeon (Lewis) Powell, C.G.
Clergy Deputy, and Chair of the Deputation
Diocese of Northern California

The Rev. James Richardson
Former Associate Dean and Interim Dean, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Sacramento

Former Rector, St. Paul's Memorial Church, Charlottesville, Virginia
First Clergy Alternate Deputy
Diocese of Northern California

The Rev. Canon Susan Russell
All Saints, Pasadena
Diocese of Los Angeles

The Rev. Dr. Susanna Singer, Ph.D.
Professor Emerita of Ministry Development
Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Diocese of California

The Rev. Dr. P. Donald White, Jr.
Former Chair, Board of Trustees, Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Diocese of Louisiana

DonnaJo Woollen
Emmanuel Church, Grass Valley, California
Lay Deputy
Diocese of Northern California