

Resolution To Study Amendments to the Canons of the Diocese of Colorado To Facilitate Associate Membership of Laity in More than One Congregation

The Issue. Some Colorado Episcopalians participate in more than one parish congregation, due to school attendance, second home ownership, temporary relocations to care for aging parents, and the like.

While many resort and retirement communities have the benefit of participation from part-time parishioners, the part-time attendees do not fall within the current canonical definitions of parish membership. While they are listed in the Sunday attendance records, they are not listed as members, although their regular participation is actually an indication that the parish is growing its committed parishioner group.

Further, it is reported anecdotally that the process of letters of transfer has fallen into disuse, even for parishioners who have relocated to the Diocese permanently. Many Episcopalians retain an allegiance to a parish outside of Colorado, perhaps due to long-standing family ties or an intention to return to a former parish after a period of Colorado residence.

Our canons do not make it clear the role that these dual parish Episcopalians should play in the parish where they are not registered: for example, may a dual member fulfill a fiduciary role as a member of the vestry or finance committee? Some canonical confirmation of associate status might help both parishes and parishioners to understand the roles that these parishioners may play.

Canonical Background.

The Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church in the USA define membership in TEC as available to a person aged 16 or older who has been baptized in an appropriate Christian Church. *Canon I.17.1.* Members become communicants of a parish by participating in the Eucharist at least three times per year. *Canon I.17.2.* A “communicant in good standing” is a member who is faithful in corporate worship and faithful in working, praying and giving for the Kingdom of God. *Canon I.17.3.* When a member seeks to transfer to a parish other than the member’s original parish home, the parishioner must procure a certificate attesting that the parishioner is 1) a communicant, 2) in good standing, and 3) confirmed in apostolic succession. *Canon I.17.4.* With delivery of the certificate, the parishioner is removed from the original parish register and entered into the parish register as a member of the new congregation. *Id.*

Colorado Canon 14, Section 3 states that “the members of the [parish] corporation shall be the communicants in good standing of the parish.” Vestry members shall also be “adult communicants in good standing of the parish.” Further, Canon 14 at section 5(b) requires that each parish shall hold an annual meeting with “members of the parish in attendance.” The

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parish is also required to maintain a register that includes “(iii) the names of all communicants.” Traditional interpretation has held that persons who are active in a parish as TEC members may not be included in the membership register of the parish if such persons are canonically registered in another parish (even though they may be listed as ‘communicants’) because no certificate of transfer has been obtained.

Proposal for Study.

This resolution is proposed to facilitate the appointment of a study committee to be named by the Bishop and Standing Committee to consider one or more amendments to the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Colorado that would enable and set criteria for associate lay membership in more than one parish congregation. The committee would be asked to seek stakeholder input within the Diocese, to identify how parishes are currently managing this issue, and to seek the input of canon lawyers and the staff of the national Church, along with any other avenues of consideration they may determine to be warranted.

Although this resolution is not intended to limit the options to be considered by the committee, as examples of how this issue may be addressed canonically, it might be possible simply to state expressly that a communicant may be considered a communicant in good standing in more than one parish, regardless of whether letters of transfer have been exchanged. Alternatively, Diocesan canon amendments such as the following might be considered:

Canon 14 Section 3. Every parish in this diocese shall be governed by a vestry which shall act as the board of directors of the non-profit corporation. The rector of the parish shall be an officer thereof. The members of such corporation shall be the communicants in good standing of the parish, **or may be “associate members,” defined as communicants in good standing in this parish and one¹ other Episcopal parish as determined by the Rector after consultation with the rector of the parishioner’s other parish.²** Each vestry shall consist of the rector of the parish, two (2) wardens, and no fewer than three (3) and no more than fifteen (5) members who are adult communicants in good standing of the parish. **Associate members may serve as members of the vestry, on committees of the parish, and as members for quorum and vote in the parish annual meeting. Associate members may attend the annual Diocesan convention as delegates but shall have no vote for the office of Bishop.³** The wardens and members of the vestry shall be elected by the members of the parish, **including associate members.** The senior warden may be nominated by the rector. Each vestry shall elect a treasurer and a clerk from the communicants in good standing of the parish, **who may be**

¹ It seems likely that it would not be helpful for folks to try to be active in more than two parishes.

² It seems important that the rectors of the two parishes should be in communication.

³ This provision would prevent a situation in which a TEC member might vote for the office of bishop in more than one diocese.

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members or associate members. Terms of wardens, vestry members, and the treasurer and clerk shall be as set forth in the by-laws of the parish.

Canon 14 Section 5 (g) [M]aintain a register. The register must be preserved as part of the records of the congregation, and must be freely available for examination at each Episcopal visitation and at all reasonable times be freely available for inspection by Wardens, members of the Vestry, the Bishop, or any person designated by the Bishop. The register must contain all of the following items: (i) a record of all baptisms, confirmations, receptions, marriages, and burials solemnized in the Congregation, and including a list of persons confirmed in the parish; the names and dates of birth of the person baptized together with the names of parents and sponsors or witnesses; and the names of persons married or buried, and the date of every such rite performed; ~~and~~ (ii) the names of all communicants with the date of their reception, death, or removal; **and (iii) the names of all associate members as defined in section 3 above, identifying the name of the other parish in which such member is registered as a communicant in good standing.**

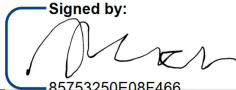
The committee might also recommend that parishes check their bylaws to ensure that remote participation in the parish annual meeting is allowed, so that annual meeting quorums may be met.

RESOLUTION FOR ADOPTION:

RESOLVED THAT THE BISHOP AND STANDING COMMITTEE SHALL (1) APPOINT A STUDY COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER ONE OR MORE CANON AMENDMENTS TO FACILITATE ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP IN DIOCESAN CONGREGATIONS, AND (2) REQUEST THE STUDY COMMITTEE TO RETURN TO THE 138th CONVENTION (2025) OF THE DIOCESE OF COLORADO WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ANY SUCH AMENDMENTS.

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Presented by the Discernment Group listed below:

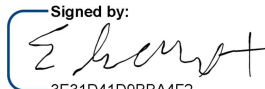
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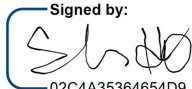
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