

Advent, 2009

Dear Friends,

I write this letter as a companion to the Updated Customary for Visitations that is also in this email. Following the last diocesan CERT training for Eucharistic Visitors, there were some questions about the diocesan canon that states that vestry members and convention delegates must be communicants in good standing. When we made the revisions to our diocesan canons we made the change (and it was at my suggestion) to say, locally, that it is a requirement. You will note that in canon 1.7.1 (c), the language is, "it is expected", which might be interpreted as not being mandatory.

Pertinent national canons are:

Canon I.17.1(a) Must have baptism recorded in TEC to be **member**

Canon I.17.1(c) It is expected that **members** are confirmed or received

Canon I.17.2(a) - Communicant - a **member** of this church who has received holy communion at least three times in past year.

Canon I.17.3 Communicant in good standing - additional requirements of faithfulness in corporate worship, giving, etc.

Canon I.14.1 Members of vestry chosen, terms, qualifications of voters according to state and diocesan law

Canon III.4.1 - Eucharistic ministers and other ministry leaders must be confirmed communicants in good standing (and thus members in order to be communicants).

ECR Canon 19.2 and 19.3.1 - Vestry members and delegates must be adult confirmed communicants in good standing.

So vestry members, delegates, Pastoral Leaders, Worship Leaders, Preachers, Eucharistic Ministers, Eucharistic Visitors, or Catechists all must have been baptized somewhere, but had that baptism recorded in TEC, typically done at the time of the "adult commitment" and must be confirmed or received in TEC.

While I am not on a witch hunt here, my reason for requesting that vestry members and convention delegates be confirmed communicants in good standing are in order to assure that people who are serving in key roles, especially with fiduciary and legal responsibility, understand the organization of which they are a member, and that they are clear in their loyalty to The Episcopal Church. This understanding will greatly help in their fulfilling their responsibilities as leaders in an Episcopal parish. In addition, the current climate in our church has seen a variety of legal maneuvers – executed by people - to remove property and assets from TEC. It is my responsibility to assure that we do whatever we can to prevent this from happening, and it seems to me that committed and well-informed leaders help to reduce our risk. Having spent most of 2009 dealing with departing leaders from TEC, I can assure you that the rights, privileges

and responsibilities of vestry members had to be reviewed thoroughly in all cases, with some not understanding their legal responsibilities.

Another question arose regarding my requirement that a Eucharist Visitor serve on the altar of their local parish before going into a private home for communion. This is directed for the purposes of the pastoral relationship being well-established with the rector or vicar before one parishioner goes into the home of another, as well as giving the Eucharistic Visitor the opportunity to explore the spiritually intimate nature of giving someone communion. There is an encounter, as I am sure you know, “at the rail” that can be quite startling at first, and it seems to me that it is within the gathered congregation that this experience is “tried on”, if you will, before doing it in an isolated situation in a person’s home where the context could be quite variable, unpredictable and vulnerable.

I welcome further comments or questions about these matters or any others that may arise for you, and it is my hope that as we continue to grow physically and spiritually as a diocese, we do so with a deep sense of our identity in Christ – and in The Episcopal Church – a wondrous gift to Christendom!

Blessings be upon you this Advent and into the welcome season of Christmas!

+Mary