

Anglican Church Southern Queensland

Discussion Paper: Meaning of Elector

10 March 2023

Introduction

At the 2022 meeting of Synod, the following resolution was made:

Diverse Worship Participation

The Rev'd Canon Gary Harch moved, the Rev'd Dr Peter Catt seconding:

"That this Synod:

- 1. recognize the diverse experiences of participating in worship over the last three years, and the limits of our canonical structures;*
- 2. requests Diocesan Council (DC) to consult with all interested parties and obtain legal advice regarding the present definition of 'elector' in our Canons;*
- 3. requests DC to report back to the next Synod or sooner, if necessary with changed regulations and /or suggested canonical amendments, in response to in particular, but not limited to, the following questions:*
 - a) Given the work of the PMC and the variety of electronic services offered, is there any situation where someone who views any electronic worship service, either live or recorded, can be counted as an attendee?*
 - b) Is anyone who views worship, either live or recorded, with a real or assumed name, able to then state they are a 'communicant parishioner' i.e., a communicant 'member of this church who is at least eighteen years of age and who has been for a period of not less than three months and is an accustomed worshipper in the said Parish' and thus are able to recorded as an elector in a parish?*

The resolution requests Diocesan Council (DC) to consult with all interested parties and obtain legal advice regarding the present definition of 'Elector' in our Canons.

The Legal Committee of DC has delivered an opinion on the two key questions in paragraphs 3(a) and (b) of the resolution. In the Committee's opinion, the answers to these questions are:

3(a) No

3(b) No, without some degree of regular physical engagement with the Parish.

The purpose of this discussion paper is to consult with interested parties and obtain feedback as to whether the present definition of 'Elector' is appropriate or whether changes should be made to that or other definitions in the Canons.

There are some questions to get you started at the end of the paper. However, you are not limited to answering those questions in providing feedback.

What does it mean to be an Elector?

An Elector is qualified to vote at general meetings of the parish and is eligible to be elected or appointed to various offices, such as warden, parish nominator, synod representative, parish councilor and treasurer.

Present definitions

The *Canons Interpretation Canon* provides the following definitions:

"Member of the Church" mean a person who is a member of the Anglican Church of Australia for the purposes of and as defined from time to time by the provisions of the Constitution of the said Church;

"Elector" means a communicant Parishioner provided that no person may at any time be an Elector for more than one Parish;

"Parishioner" in relation to a Parish means a member of this Church who is at least eighteen years of age and who has been for a period of not less than three months and is an accustomed worshipper in the said Parish;

"Parish" means such portion of the Diocese as shall have been or which may hereafter be declared to be a Parish or, where the context permits, a Provisional Parish by the Archbishop-in-Council.

To determine who is an Elector, it is necessary to ascertain the meaning to be given to the definition of 'Parishioner'.

Meaning of Parishioner

A Parishioner is, in short, a person who is at least 18 years, and has for a period of not less than three months been, and is, an accustomed worshipper **in the said Parish**. (emphasis added).

The definition of 'Parish' in the *Canons Interpretation Canon* denotes something that has a geographical base. That is a portion of the Diocese which is declared to be a Parish.

To be 'accustomed' means customary, usual, or habitual. What is required is some degree of regularity. There is no other guidance on what degree of regularity is required in this context.

In the Legal Committee's view, the definitions in the *Canons Interpretation Canon* reflect the belief that worship is a calling; a gathering of God's people in praise and worship on Sundays or other days of the week; a time to gather around the table of the Lord in the Holy Communion. In short, a gathering of the people of God in a Parish, drawn together around worship, teaching, and fellowship.

What is required is worship in a Parish. That is having some physical presence in the Parish. The current definition of Parishioner does not necessarily exclude worship utilising electronic means, but what is required is some degree of physical engagement with the Parish on a regular basis.

Meaning of Elector

To be an 'Elector', a person must be a *communicant Parishioner* provided that no person may at any time be an Elector for more than one Parish.

The term "communicant Parishioner" as used in the definition of 'Elector' is not defined. However, it is clear that it means a member of this Church who has been confirmed or is a communicant

member of a church in full communion with this Church or has been received into communicant membership of this Church.

As discussed above, to be a Parishioner a person must be an accustomed worshipper in the Parish. The definition of Parish denotes something that has a geographical base. What is required therefore is some degree of regular physical engagement with the Parish. A person cannot be a communicant Parishioner without being physically present at some services for Holy Communion.

Virtual worship services

A paper from the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation and the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order, *Virtual Communion and the Covid-19 Pandemic* (which can be found [here](#)), tabled at the recent Anglican Consultative Council meeting, makes some tentative suggestions, including:

- Any kind of virtual service should be seen as less than the ideal of the Christian community gathered together in the same place (whether to share in the Eucharist or in any other form of service).
- At the same time, we acknowledge that for great numbers of people, liturgical life has depended on virtual gatherings, and that to depreciate them uncritically is to disparage the sincerity of those for whom this has been considerably better than nothing.
- That said, for the reasons outlined in this paper, online Services of the Word present fewer theological concerns than virtual celebrations of the Eucharist. Though non-sacramental in a technical sense, Services of the Word are different from, but not inferior to, celebrations of the Eucharist, and offer a means of grace by which the community encounters Christ through the proclamation of God's word and is thereby strengthened in its discipleship.
- In relation to virtual celebrations of the Eucharist, we do not believe the concept of remote consecration to be consistent with Anglican theology and practice, and therefore it should not be recommended. Indeed, we would go as far as proposing that it should be discouraged as far as possible. We also consider that the practice of the president alone receiving the consecrated elements should be discouraged.
- Where a Eucharist with an in-person congregation is live-streamed to enable those who are not able to be physically present to be included within the worshipping community, the use of bread and wine at home should not be encouraged.

Starter Questions

1. Are the definitions of Parishioner and Elector fit for purpose in today's environment, which includes the livestreaming and broadcasting via the internet of worship services?
2. Are there other circumstances where it is appropriate for someone who cannot attend a worship service in a parish church to be considered a Parishioner, e.g. recipients of communion at home?
3. Is regular physical attendance at worship services an appropriate requirement (i.e. an accustomed worshipper)?

4. Should there be guidance on what regularity is required to be an accustomed worshipper?
What guidance would you suggest?
5. Is being a *communicant* parishioner an appropriate requirement?
6. Should attendance at a virtual worship service qualify as attendance for the purpose of considering whether someone is an accustomed worshipper?
7. Is there any other feedback you would like to give?

The Diocesan Council would appreciate feedback on or before **14 APRIL 2023**. Any feedback can be sent to goffice@anglicanchurchsq.org.au .