

Meaning of Term “Communicant Member”

Background

The consultation paper recommended that parish nominators be communicant members of the Anglican Church. In the consultation sessions it was asked what the definition was of “communicant member”.

Meaning in national church legislation

The term “communicant member” is used in Canon’s of the National Church, but is nowhere defined. Its meaning must therefore be deduced from how it is used. From such a process, 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.

The term communicant member in the National Church does not mean every person who is lawfully permitted to receive Holy Communion. Section 1 of the Admission to Holy Communion Canon 1973 has four categories of persons eligible to be admitted to Holy Communion.¹ Only paragraph (a) refers to members of the Church who have been confirmed, or are communicants of a church in full communion with this Church. Paragraph (b) refers to a communicant member of another denomination, but in the case of such a person section 2 applies. That section requires that the priest of a parish in which a person in that category who is a customary member of the congregation and regularly receives Holy Communion must bring to the notice

¹ The relevant sections are:

1. A person is eligible to be admitted to the Holy Communion
 - (a) if he is a member of this Church who has been confirmed or is ready and desires to be confirmed or if he is a communicant of a church in full communion with this Church or
 - (b) if he
 - (i) has been baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity and
 - (ii) is a communicant member of another church which professes the Apostolic faithor
 - (c) if he has been baptised and is included in a class of persons authorised by a rule of General Synod to be admitted to the Holy Communion; or
 - (d) if he has been baptised and is in immediate danger of death.
2. Where a priest ordinarily responsible for a congregation becomes aware that a person who is a customary member of the congregation and is eligible to be admitted to the Holy Communion by virtue of paragraph (b) of section 1 hereof, has regularly received the Holy Communion in this Church over a long period which appears likely to continue indefinitely, the priest shall bring to the notice of the person the ordinary requirements of this Church for persons desiring to be admitted regularly to the Holy Communion and ask him to comply with these requirements.

of the person the “ordinary requirements of the Church for persons desiring to be admitted regularly to the Holy Communion”, meaning that this is a temporary or provisional admission to Holy Communion.

Paragraph (c) covers the situation that arises under the Canon for the Admission of Children to Holy Communion 1981, which allows a child who has been baptised but who has not been confirmed, to be admitted to the Holy Communion in the circumstances set out in the Canon. One of those circumstances is that the child seeks admission while awaiting confirmation.

The Reception Canon 1981 provides the clearest guidance in relation to this question. Section 2 of that canon provides for the situation when “a person who has been baptised and who is or was a communicant member of another church which holds the apostolic faith but which is not in full communion with this Church desires to become a communicant member of this Church” —that is, when a person who may be admitted to Holy Communion under s 1(b) of the Admission to Holy Communion Canon 1973 desires to become a communicant member of the Anglican Church. This sentence would be meaningless if a person referred to in s 1(b) and s 2 of the Admission Canon was already a communicant member.

Section 3 of the Reception Canon provides,

A person received into communicant membership in accordance with this canon shall have the same status in this Church as a person who has been confirmed in accordance with the rites of this Church.

The wording of this section is premised on the understanding that the status of a person with communicant membership is the same as that of a person who has been confirmed, and again this section would be meaningless if instead of “who has been confirmed” it read “who is eligible to be admitted to Holy Communion”, because the person already has that status before being received into communicant membership under the Canon.

It should also be noted that the term “Member of this Church” is defined in s 74(1) of the Constitution: ‘ “Member of this Church” means a baptised person who attends the public worship of this Church and who declares that he is a member of this Church and of no church which is not in communion with this Church.’ Such a person can be a member of the church, even though they are not necessarily a communicant member or possibly even entitled to receive Holy Communion.

Meaning in legislation of the Diocese of Melbourne

The term “communicant member” is used in several Acts of the Diocese of Melbourne Synod. Examples of where it is used but not defined are:

- **Archbishop in Council Act 2018**, s 11(1), provision regarding eligibility to be a member (lay or clerical);
- **Melbourne Anglican Trust Corporation Act 2018**, s 3(1), in defining “eligible person” (lay or clerical);
- **Synod Act 1972**, s 6 (persons who may be elected as parish Synod representatives)².

The term is defined for the purposes of the **Parish Governance Act 2013**.

Section 3(2) of that Act provides,

For the purposes of this Act and any regulations made under this Act and the parish rules for meetings and officers of any parish, **communicant member** means a person who is on the parish electoral roll and who is eligible to be admitted to Holy Communion under the Admission to Holy Communion Canon 1973 of the General Synod of the Anglican Church.

This provision means that in the case only of the Parish Governance Act, “communicant member” covers every parishioner listed in section 1 of the Admission to Holy Communion Canon 1973.³

This definition is only for the purposes of that Act and regulations and rules made under it. It is to be assumed, that in the other Diocesan Acts in which it is used, the term has the same meaning that it has in the National Church.

Proposed meaning in relation to clergy legislation review

The recommendation in the clergy legislation review is that a parish nominator should have to be a communicant member of the church. The intention of this recommendation is that they be a communicant member in the sense used in the legislation of the National Church.

As a consequence, it might be expected that a uniform definition of the term will be adopted for all Diocesan legislation.

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² Note, however, that a Head of an Anglican School must only be a “communicant” of the Anglican Church, not a communicant *member* (s 5A(8)); and the declaration by lay representatives also requires only that they declare themselves to be communicants of the church, not communicant members (s 20).

³ “Parishioners are lay persons who are of at least eighteen years of age and who—

(a) are baptised;

(b) regularly and habitually attend public worship at a worship centre in the parish”

see Parish Governance Act s 9(3).