

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Open Debate on Open Communion in The Episcopal Church

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Abstract

In May 2022, the Diocese of Northern California submitted resolution C028 to the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, in which they asked for a repeal of Canon 1.17.7, which limits reception of Holy Communion to the baptized. While the resolution did not make it out of committee, it touched off a church-wide debate about the practice of communion without baptism, generally referred to as ‘open communion’. This article examines the nature of the debate in the summer of 2022, and highlights some issues around discussions concerning baptism and Eucharist in The Episcopal Church. It is hoped that in doing so, this will aid further dialogues in the Church about the practice of open communion.

Keywords: baptism; Eucharist; liturgy; open communion; The Episcopal Church

In May 2022, during the lead up to the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Northern California submitted resolution C028, titled ‘All Are Welcome at the Table’. The resolution proposed that the ‘80th General Convention repeal CANON 1.17.7 of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church . . . which states: “No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church.”’ The archives for The Episcopal Church include several related resolutions from previous General Conventions. In 2015, the General Convention rejected a resolution to form a task force investigating ‘open communion’ as well as another resolution to amend the canon in question. In 2012, the Church reaffirmed baptism as ‘the ancient and normative entry point to receiving Holy Communion’. And in 1979, the General Convention adopted as part of its standards for non-Episcopalians receiving communion in The Episcopal Church the requirement that they be baptized with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹

¹General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2022 Archives’ Research Report: Resolution No. 2022-C028’, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/sites/default/files/gc_resolutions/2022-C028.pdf (accessed April 4, 2023).



Clearly, this is not a new issue in The Episcopal Church, nor is it new for many Anglicans worldwide. The resolution of 2022 did not make it out of committee, and thus was never considered by the convention at large. Nevertheless, it touched off a fairly public church-wide debate about the practice of open communion (defined here as communion of the unbaptized) and its place in The Episcopal Church. The debate could be broadly summarized as one between those focusing on the radical hospitality of Jesus, as evidenced in the eight supporting points for Resolution C028, which will be discussed more below, and those focusing on the place of baptism in the Church's life and its foundation for participation in the Eucharist.

What is at stake for each of these groups, and how does this debate highlight broader issues about Anglican sacramental theology and liturgical formation in the Church today? What I will do here is provide a kind of broad overview of the current conversation around communion of the unbaptized in The Episcopal Church, noting the major issues that are being brought to the fore by the desire to change our liturgical practice and its underlying theology, at least here in the United States, in the hopes that this will highlight possible ways forward in discussions around this topic. A lengthier treatment of the history of this debate is beyond the purview of this article, and thus it will focus on what was revealed in the summer of 2022 about the current state of affairs.² Furthermore, while this issue may not yet be pressing in other parts of the Anglican Communion, the debate raises larger questions for Anglicans worldwide about sacramental theology and liturgical formation – questions that are at the heart of the Church's witness.

The Northern California resolution of May 2022 presented eight points of explanation for their proposal:

- The Episcopal Church is known for welcoming all to attend services.
- According to the Gospels, during the Last Supper Jesus made no mention of the requirement for recipients of bread and wine, taken in remembrance of Him, to be baptized.
- It is uncomfortable to visualize Jesus turning anybody away who desires to remember Him.
- The Holy Eucharist described in the Catechism section of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979) makes no mention of baptism being a prerequisite for receiving communion (p. 859).
- Baptism is a vital part of being a Christian, but not, according to the Gospels, a prerequisite for partaking in the Holy Meal.
- The Episcopal Church has removed many barriers that were not consistent with the teachings of Jesus.

²The *Anglican Theological Review* lists a number of influential articles from 2004 to 2012 on this topic that provide a helpful entry-point into how the conversation around open communion was proceeding in the 2000s and early 2010s. Of particular note among those articles are James Farwell's 'Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus: On the Practice of "Open Communion"', *Anglican Theological Review* 86.2 (2004), pp. 215-38; as well as his response to Kathryn Tanner, 'A Brief Reflection on Kathryn Tanner's Response to "Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus"', *Anglican Theological Review* 87.2 (2005), pp. 303-10. Tanner's article is 'In Praise of Open Communion: A Rejoinder to James Farwell', *Anglican Theological Review* 86.3 (2004), pp. 473-85. The list of sources may be found at 'The Open Table', <https://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/conversations/the-open-table/> (accessed April 7, 2023).

- This removes the presumed requirement for the person delivering the Holy Meal to assure the recipient has been baptized.
- This could help grow congregations by reducing the number of visitors who do not return because they felt excluded during communion.³

In other words, The Episcopal Church is known for its hospitality, Jesus never required baptism for ‘partaking in the Holy Meal’, such a barrier is inconsistent with Scripture, and more people will join the Church if they are able to receive communion.

For those in favor of open communion, the liturgy’s underlying ecclesiology is eucharistic in nature, for which ‘inclusive eating and fellowship’ serves as a foundation.⁴ This was made even more explicit in a statement issued in June 2022, hereafter referred to as the Pentecost Statement, which sought to shore up the open communion position in response to a statement issued by 22 theologians against the resolution, hereafter referred to as the May Statement. While the authors of the Pentecost Statement asked that C028 be referred to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, they also asked for the development of an ‘invitational’ rubric to communion in the Prayer Book, as well as changing the canon in question to be positive, as opposed to negative (again, the canon currently reads ‘no unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church’).⁵ What the signers of this letter want the Church to recognize *officially* is that, while as the 2012 resolution from General Convention states, baptism may be the ‘normative’ entry-point to the Eucharist, ‘there are other entry points as well’, citing examples of when receiving the Eucharist served as someone’s entrance into the Church, and noting that ‘the Holy Spirit does not always work in linear ways or respect the “good order” of the Church’. The concern, they say, is that the tone of the current canon is one of ‘control and gate-keeping’ and that it reduces baptism to being a ‘dinner ticket to . . . Communion’, while also limiting ‘the people of God’ to the baptized.⁶ Intriguingly, this letter largely ignores the emphasis on mission you can find in the resolution itself – the idea being that we will get more people in church if we open communion to all – though one can find a hint towards it in the claim that ‘as followers of Jesus, we resist all barriers to those seeking the grace and mercy of the sacraments from whatever doors they enter’.⁷ It is also noteworthy that baptism, particularly in its relation to the Eucharist, receives a relatively negative assessment in this statement. Though the authors wish to avoid reducing baptism to a ‘dinner-ticket’ (which they claim is what the canonical requirement has the potential to do), baptism is also presumably lumped together with ‘all barriers’ they wish to resist.

In response to the initial resolution, 22 theologians signed a statement (the May Statement) arguing against it, focusing instead on the importance of a baptismal

³General Convention of The Episcopal Church’, pp. 1-2.

⁴Farwell, ‘Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus,’ 230; Robert MacSwain, ‘Touching the Third (Altar) Rail: Lessons Learned about Theological Discourse on Baptism and Eucharist in The Episcopal Church,’ *Anglican Theological Review* 105.2 (2023), pp. 194-210 (197).

⁵A Statement on Baptism and Eucharist in The Episcopal Church’, p. 2. https://www.episcopalnewservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Pentecost_LeBer_06.05.2022-3_C028.pdf (accessed April 4, 2023).

⁶A Statement on Baptism and Eucharist’, pp. 2-3.

⁷A Statement on Baptism and Eucharist’, p. 2.

ecclesiology for the Church.⁸ The May Statement begins by stating that ‘Holy Baptism is the sacramental foundation of our common life with God and one another. Freely offered to all humanity, Baptism is the fountain from which the other sacraments flow.’⁹ For this group, then, the emphasis is on baptism as the foundational sacrament for the Christian life, and the place of Eucharist as ‘a special offering of thanksgiving by those who are united by a common faith, responsive to the Word proclaimed in their midst and recalling in Eucharistic liturgy the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, their common Lord’.¹⁰ The Eucharist, then, is not a sacrament for all comers, but rather something specifically for those who are members of the body of Christ. Theologically, the May Statement notes that the Eucharist is not only a meal served at a table, but also a sacrifice that is offered on an altar. In other words, it is both ordinary *and* extraordinary. Further, the Eucharist comes with particular moral commitments. Citing The Episcopal Church’s ‘Commentary on Eucharistic Sharing’ the statement notes that baptized Christians are to ‘examine their lives, repent of their sins, and be in love and charity with all people’ before receiving. These moral commitments derive from the baptismal covenant, further emphasizing the foundational nature of baptism.

That is, in broad strokes, where the debate stood in the summer of 2022, as General Convention approached; and while the resolution itself was never considered by the convention, the debate it started speaks to larger issues within The Episcopal Church that have resonance in the Anglican Communion more generally. These include the sacramental and liturgical theology within the Church itself, the ecumenical implications of the proposed canonical changes, and issues of liturgical and theological formation in Anglicanism.

The International Anglican Liturgical Consultation’s (IALC) 1995 Dublin Statement on ‘Renewing the Anglican Eucharist’ provides a helpful and succinct statement about Anglican eucharistic theology that has the potential to guide our conversations about open communion, and yet it has been curiously absent from the discussions.¹¹ In particular, it makes explicit connections between baptism and Eucharist. As the statement notes from the very beginning, the Eucharist is ‘the great sign of our common identity as people of God, the body of Christ, and the community of the Holy Spirit’, and in the Eucharist we encounter the model of how ‘God as redeemer comes into the world in the Word made flesh’. Further, those who participate in the Eucharist ‘respond by offering themselves – broken individuals – to

⁸In the interest of full disclosure, the author of this article was one of the 22 signees.

⁹‘Episcopal Theologians Release Statement Expressing Concern about Open Communion’, <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2022/06/01/episcopal-theologians-release-statement-expressing-concern-about-open-communion/> (accessed April 5, 2023).

¹⁰‘Episcopal Theologians Release Statement’, quoting the ‘Commentary on Eucharistic Sharing’.

¹¹According to the report from the 2009 IALC meeting, ‘The International Anglican Liturgical Consultations are the official network for liturgy of the Anglican Communion, recognized by the ACC and the Primates’ Meeting, and holding first responsibility in the Communion to resource and communicate about liturgy on a communion-wide basis.’ Their statements are not binding on Communion Members, but represent a wider approach to Anglican liturgy than may often be found within individual provinces. Thus, while the 1995 Dublin Statement is not binding in any way, it is a helpful touchpoint for gaining a broader understanding of Anglican eucharistic and liturgical theology. International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, ‘Report to the 14th Meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council, May 2009’, p. 1. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/39808/ialc.pdf> (accessed July 13, 2023).

be made one body in Christ's risen life. This continual process of transformation is enacted in each celebration.¹² While one could read this as being possible for all who approach the table, baptized or not, the statement is explicit that participation in the eucharist is for all the baptized.¹³ Further, the statement notes that 'eucharistic worship reflects our status as created beings using bread and wine, fruits of God's creation, to realize our status as those redeemed, baptized in the three-fold Name and as Christ's body animated by the Holy Spirit'.¹⁴ That initial self-offering in baptism, then, leads us to continual transformation in each celebration of the Eucharist. The statement is not calling for clergy to turn the unbaptized away from the altar rail, but is unapologetic and explicit about the connections between baptism and Eucharist. This is an important treatment of modern Anglican Eucharistic and liturgical theology, and any attempts to change our canons – which bring with them a fundamental change to our sacramental theology – need to wrestle with this statement.

Furthering the connections between baptism and Eucharist is the very anamnetic nature of the eucharistic liturgy. As James Farwell explains, 'Christian liturgy is not the calming of anxiety in the present by imitation of the past, but the transfiguration of the present and future by remembrance of the past.'¹⁵ Anamnetic worship (as opposed to what Farwell terms 'mimetic') is concerned more with the community's faith and less with a 'ritual reenactment' of past events – and this faith, for Christians, is itself confirmed in baptism. The liturgy is not necessarily, then, about re-enacting the practices of the founder, as much as the supporters of C028 might look to Jesus' table practices for support for open communion. To echo Farwell, anamnesis is not simply liturgical mimesis. The 1982 Lima Statement, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* states that 'the *anamnesis* of Christ is the basis and source of all Christian prayer'.¹⁶ Presumably, then, it is not something that can or should be dispensed with in regards to the liturgy. However, we risk the anamnetic nature of the Eucharist becoming lost when those who participate have not been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection – what we remember and make present in the Eucharist is not just a statement of faith to which we assent, it is a reality to which the baptized have committed themselves with their whole being. It is a reality that demands significant commitments from us, commitments we take on in baptism. Can those who have not offered themselves to be part of Christ's Body take part in that anamnesis? Without that anamnesis, what does the ritual become? As the 2012 Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission Huron statement about communion of the unbaptized notes, 'We need to go deeper and ask whether we are drawn to the eucharist primarily because we (unlike the first disciples) have such a natural affinity for Jesus' progressive social outlook, or whether we (*like* the first disciples) have found ourselves transformed by the spectacle of his rejection and the mystery of his

¹²International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, 'Renewing the Anglican Eucharist: Findings of the Fifth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, Dublin, Eire, 1995', p. 1. <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/IALC-Dublin-Renewing-the-Anglican-Eucharist.pdf> (accessed June 15, 2023).

¹³IALC, 'Renewing the Anglican Eucharist', p. 1.

¹⁴IALC, 'Renewing the Anglican Eucharist', p. 2.

¹⁵Farwell, 'Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus', p. 219 n.7.

¹⁶World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper No. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. 10.

vindication.¹⁷ The centrality of the cross – and our implication in Christ’s crucifixion and participation in his resurrection – is fundamental to our understanding of both baptism and Eucharist, and was largely absent from the conversation last summer. It must be reckoned with in future discussions on open communion.

The nature of the body of Christ is also running throughout these debates, albeit not always explicitly. The May Statement noted that God’s people, in the context of the Eucharist, is to be understood ‘as a common body united by a common faith’. In other words, when, in the ‘Commentary on Eucharistic Sharing’ in The Episcopal Church’s *Handbook for Ecumenism* one finds Eucharist defined as ‘a sacramental event in the life of God’s people’, those people are understood to be baptized Christians.¹⁸ In the Pentecost Statement, the authors in support of open communion argued that the assertion ‘that “God’s people” are restricted only to the baptized . . . has a narrow, tribal tone . . . does not serve our church well.’¹⁹ Nevertheless, the notion that the gathered Church, for whom the Eucharist serves as an anamnetic and sacramental meal, is comprised of baptized Christians is one that is upheld by the Church’s tradition and canons, as well as by larger Anglican theological statements, such as the 1995 Dublin Statement. As noted above, the Dublin Statement makes the connection between baptism and Eucharist explicit in its very first sentence: ‘in the celebration of the eucharist, all the baptized are called to participate in the great sign of our common identity as people of God, the body of Christ, and the community of the Holy Spirit.’²⁰ Likewise, the 1979 ‘Standards of Eucharistic Sharing’, which are foundational to our ecumenical relationships, state in the opening sentence that ‘the Holy Communion must be seen in its proper context as the fellowship of committed Christians in the household of the Apostolic faith, to which we are admitted through Baptism’.²¹ This connection undergirds the points that statement goes on to make regarding non-Episcopalians receiving communion in The Episcopal Church.

What seems to have happened, at least among those arguing for open communion, is that the Church – here understood to be made up of the baptized – as the body of Christ has somehow come to be seen as negatively exclusive. In her article, ‘In Praise of Open Communion’, Kathryn Tanner notes that the post-1979 emphasis on weekly Eucharist has created ‘heavier penalties’ for non-participation in the ritual. Due to the changing nature of weekly worship after 1979, she argues that ‘the gathered community is now very clearly defined by the community gathered for the eucharist in a way that was not the case before; to be excluded from it is simply to be excluded from the church’.²² This begs the question of what defines the Church – is it those who have been baptized into Christ’s death and

¹⁷Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission, ‘The Huron Statement: Font to Table’, p. 3. <https://liturgyandmission.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/2012-huron-statement-font-to-table.pdf> (accessed April 5, 2023).

¹⁸Episcopal Theologians Release Statement’.

¹⁹‘A Statement on Baptism and Eucharist’, p. 3.

²⁰IALC, ‘Renewing the Anglican Eucharist’, p. 1.

²¹The Episcopal Church, *Handbook for Ecumenism* (New York: The Episcopal Church Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, 2013), p. 41.

²²Tanner, ‘In Praise of Open Communion’, p. 481.

resurrection? Is it anyone who enters the church doors and participates in the liturgy in any way, regardless of belief or intent? Does it involve choice or is it a passive matter of one's presence in a liturgy? Further, it puts the focus on the desires of an individual who wishes to receive, and not on the beliefs of the corporate body. Indeed, what emerges from the arguments in favor of open communion is both an important emphasis on our call to radical welcome and hospitality, accompanied by a curious individualism. While the doctrine and tradition of The Episcopal Church hold that communion is for the baptized, open communion seeks to turn away from those corporate agreements to focus on the desire of the individual who comes to the table.²³ Or, as Farwell elegantly puts it:

In baptism, our individual existence disappears as we are reborn in Christ. In eucharist, we gather at the center of the world where our own individual stories are written within the primal Christological narrative of all creation and its destiny. In liturgy, the social body rather than the individual is the basic unit of practice and reflection . . . some harm may well be done in open communion: the harm is to the social body and ultimately to the individual who perhaps approaches a very different meal than the assembly is actually celebrating.²⁴

When communion is no longer for the baptized, the needs of the person approaching the eucharistic table subvert the needs of the social body, and, one could argue, turn the liturgy on its head. What had once been an act of corporate anamnesis becomes a kind of liturgical parallel play, where each individual's interpretation and intention at the eucharistic feast take primacy of place over the needs of the social body and the traditions of the Church.

This point about the body, and who is understood as 'God's people' within the context of the Eucharist is central to not only understanding the state of the debate now, but to figuring out how to move forward and speak with, instead of past, one another. If we have an agreed-upon understanding of what Eucharist is, and it is not clear that the two sides do have such an understanding, despite a number of theological works like the 1995 IALC Statement that seek to clarify that point, then perhaps we can arrive at an agreement on who it is for. That sounds simple, and yet some of the problem in having conversations about open communion seems to be that different groups are starting the conversations in different places. For those arguing for a eucharistic ecclesiology, the starting point appears to be who the Eucharist is intended for, while those defending a baptismal ecclesiology start with what kind of meal the Eucharist is. This is not to say that either group is unconcerned with the who or what – indeed, each group is fundamentally concerned with both sides of this question. Rather, the issue is that the starting point for the conversation is not the same, and thus each group seems to talk past one another.

Another important aspect to this conversation that needs to be engaged with moving forward are the ecumenical implications of making such a drastic canonical change. While it has been mentioned above, The Episcopal Church's ecumenical

²³For an important and timely discussion about the current place of doctrine in The Episcopal Church, see MacSwain, 'Touching the Third (Altar) Rail'.

²⁴Farwell, 'Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus', p. 236.

handbook contains the 1979 ‘Guidelines for Eucharistic Sharing’ that are meant to undergird our ecumenical liturgical and theological practices. In those guidelines, Eucharist is for the baptized. To undo that would threaten to unravel many important ecumenical relationships we have, or at the very least set them back or strain them. To take one example, many Episcopalians are members of churches that are joint Episcopal and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations. The ELCA position holds that ‘admission to the Sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the Church to those who are baptized’.²⁵ To change our canons would thus have implications for existing covenant relationships we have, such as that with the ELCA.

Of further ecumenical importance are statements issued by the World Council of Churches, including *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982) and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013). *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, widely regarded as a defining document in the ecumenical movement, sought to find common ground amongst Christians worldwide in their approach to the sacraments. In describing the Eucharist as the communion of the faithful, *BEM* notes that ‘it is in the eucharist that the community of God’s people is fully manifested. Eucharistic celebrations always have to do with the whole Church, and the whole Church is involved in each local eucharistic celebration. In so far as a church claims to be a manifestation of the whole Church, it will take care to order its own life in ways which take seriously the interests and concerns of other churches.’²⁶ Yet the emphasis in the resolution brought forward in 2022, and the later Pentecost Statement in support of it, began with a statement about the hospitality of The Episcopal Church (‘The Episcopal Church is known for welcoming all to attend services’) with nary a word for the ways this major change in the Church’s eucharistic and liturgical theology would affect other Churches – both within and outside of Anglicanism. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* echoes much of what has been written of above in terms of the relationship between baptism and Eucharist, noting that ‘there is a dynamic and profound relation between baptism and Eucharist. The communion into which the newly initiated Christian enters is brought to fuller expression and nourished in the Eucharist, which reaffirms baptismal faith and gives grace for the faithful living out of the Christian calling.’²⁷ In summary, then, pivotal ecumenical statements from the World Council of Churches, of which The Episcopal Church has been a part since the WCC was founded in 1948, emphasize the relationship between baptism and Eucharist and point out the responsibility we have to take into account the effects our actions have on our siblings in Christ.

Where does this leave us? Resolution C028 did not make it out of committee, and thus was never considered by the Convention as a whole. However, this has not put an end to the discussion, nor to the need for us to have this discussion in the Church. More than anything, it seems this entire debate has laid bare the state of theological

²⁵Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament: Adopted for Guidance and Practice* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), p. 41.

²⁶World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, p. 12.

²⁷World Council of Churches, *The Church Towards a Common Vision: Faith and Order Paper No. 214* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013), p. 24.

and liturgical formation within The Episcopal Church, or rather, the lack thereof. In an article examining theological discourse in The Episcopal Church after last summer's resolution, Robert MacSwain notes the following two-fold problem:

(1) for some reason, in many circles our formal position on baptismal ecclesiology and sacramental theology, officially held ever since the publication of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and supposedly embraced by all bishops, clergy, and laity, taught in seminaries and confirmation classes and adult forums, and so on, is now either (a) consciously rejected or (b) completely unknown, and thus totally absent; and so (2) what is therefore developing are (at least) two disconnected ecclesiologies and sacramental theologies running side-by-side in the same Church.²⁸

To this I would add that there is also an issue of liturgical formation. One of the gifts and challenges of the eucharistic liturgy is that it is not something that is celebrated by the presider alone. Rather, as Lizette Larson-Miller wrote last summer, 'it is the church, with its head Jesus the Christ, which makes Eucharist. The church is formed of Christ and the baptized – the non-baptized do not "celebrate" the Eucharist. They may be present in the room, but there is not a participatory reality there.'²⁹ While noting again the connection between baptism and Eucharist, what is noteworthy when we think about formation is that it is the Church, not the individual, who makes Eucharist. What is unclear is how much the Church understands and recognizes that reality.

The IALC 2019 report on the liturgical formation of all the baptized notes several things about what we must do in forming liturgical leaders in the church. Citing the Anglican Communion Theological Education Group, the IALC report points out that:

liturgical formation can . . . be described as a fundamental part of Christian formation, which, in the Anglican Communion, is 'formed by Scripture, shaped through worship, ordered for communion and directed by God's mission . . . [it] is a growing into the full stature of Christ that comes from our participation in the liturgies of the church . . . we are therefore talking about forming the people of God *through* liturgy and *for* liturgy.'³⁰

The report then goes on to lay out some fundamental questions regarding liturgical formation for the baptized, which provide a helpful framework for thinking through what this process might look like.

This is an important document, albeit overlooked within The Episcopal Church, because of the way it highlights the centrality of liturgical formation to the work of

²⁸MacSwain, 'Touching the Third (Altar) Rail', p. 197.

²⁹Lizette Larson, 'Baptismal Ecclesiology without Baptism?' What Is the Episcopal Church Doing?, *Pray Tell: Worship, Wit & Wisdom*, <https://www.praytelltellblog.com/index.php/2022/05/12/baptismal-ecclesiology-without-baptism-what-is-the-episcopal-church-doing/> (accessed April 7, 2023).

³⁰International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, 'IALC Report on Liturgical Formation of the Baptised', p. 2. https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/493609/The-Liturgical-Formation-of-All-the-Baptised_ACC18_IALC_2301.pdf (accessed June 15, 2023).

the entire Church, and points to how those of us engaged in theological education (be it in the parish or in seminaries) go about forming liturgical leaders. What is missing from the document, though, that was possibly beyond the purview of the IALC's remit, is a discussion of liturgical formation of the laity – the largest body of ministers in the church. How do we form our fellow Anglicans in not only what the doctrine of the Church is, but why that doctrine matters? How do we help them to see that these are not esoteric topics reserved for academics and intellectuals, but rather vital aspects of everyone's faith? How do we help everyone to see that we focus on issues of social justice precisely *because* we are changed in baptism and continually nourished and challenged by our unity in the body of Christ in the Eucharist? For indeed the questions in the baptismal covenant that deal with issues of social justice are built on the foundation of a credal faith, and yet that basic reality is overlooked in most discussions of the baptismal covenant. The visceral response last summer against a group of academics and theologians, whose vocation it is to think and write about these very things, speaks not only to an underlying anti-intellectualism in The Episcopal Church today, but more positively to a real sense of ownership of the liturgy amongst the laity and clergy in The Episcopal Church.³¹ This is a good thing. However, there has not necessarily been sufficient liturgical formation accompanying that ownership.

The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* brought with it several new emphases in the life of the Church, chief among them a baptismal ecclesiology, a centrality to the liturgies of Holy Week, and an emphasis on weekly Eucharist. Of these three, the weekly Eucharist seems to have taken root the most deeply, but without an accompanying formation is how weekly Eucharist grows out of a baptismal ecclesiology.³² Thus we get, as MacSwain points out, the 'two disconnected ecclesiologies and sacramental theologies running side-by-side in the same church'.³³ Further, the lack of formation on what a baptismal ecclesiology is and what it means for the Church leads us to a place in which support for open communion also means a call to a curious kind of clericalism, in which the sacrament that absolutely requires a priest (Eucharist) takes precedence over a sacrament that can, when needed, be performed by any baptized Christian and an ecclesiology that emphasizes the ministry of all of the baptized.³⁴

The entirety of the debate about communion of the unbaptized in The Episcopal Church last summer brought to the fore the reality that the Church needs to get serious about the liturgical formation of not only the clergy, but perhaps most especially the laity. There's often an over-reliance on the liturgy to do the work of formation for us, perhaps best codified in an Episcopalian reliance on 'lex orandi, lex credendi' when asked to define our sacramental and liturgical theology. The problems inherent in that method have been apparent since the Reformation began in the sixteenth century, and perhaps this debate is just the current iteration of those

³¹MacSwain's article ('Touching the Third [Altar] Rail') provides a helpful reflection on that anti-intellectualism, particularly with regards to how it relates to doctrinal matters.

³²Farwell explores this dynamic in 'Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus', pp. 229-31.

³³MacSwain, 'Touching the Third (Altar) Rail', p. 197.

³⁴MacSwain also discusses this in 'Touching the Third (Altar) Rail' on p. 209, noting that open communion 'empowers clergy at the expense of the laity,' which itself makes an individual priest a gatekeeper to the Eucharist.

problems. But the idea that the liturgy will teach people for us, combined with current trends in anti-intellectualism and suspicion of expertise, mean that we have our work cut out for us.

One of the most striking parts of IALC's 2019 statement on formation is the following: 'for humans, individually and communally, ritual is formative, and liturgy is ritual. To form people well, liturgy should be well done and opportunities for reflection need to be provided.'³⁵ Liturgies that are done well, that praise God and call us to live into our baptismal covenant, are thankfully not a rarity in The Episcopal Church. Rather, it is the opportunity to reflect on those liturgies that is so often missing. We must ask ourselves how we can build on those reflective practices, so that we have a chance as a community not only to experience worship, but to reflect together on what has happened when we worship and what that worship means for our witness to the Gospel. Many churches are adept at forming their congregations in practices around scriptural reflection, but little work is done on liturgical reflection. Perhaps that is the real starting place for this debate, and perhaps that is the work that can turn it from a debate into a meaningful dialogue.

³⁵IALC, 'IALC Report on Liturgical Formation of the Baptised', p. 3.