



**DIOCESE OF KOOTENAY**  
*The Anglican Church of Canada*

Bishop's Policy 2.1.3  
2011 Open Table

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The Most. Rev. John E. Privett, *Archbishop*

PENTECOST 2011

*Pastoral Letter to the Clergy  
of the Diocese of Kootenay*

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

As we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, we are deeply conscious of our call to continually renew our understanding of the Mission of God to which we have been called.

In April of this year the House of Bishops meeting in Niagara Falls issued a statement to the Church in which we said,

*We have been made aware through media articles and pastoral visits by bishops that in some parts of Canada a practice of 'open table' has begun. This involves admitting people to Holy Communion before baptism. We recognize that this practice arises out of a deep concern to express Christian hospitality. However we unanimously reaffirm our understanding that the Eucharist is the sacrament for the baptised. We do not see this as changing for the foreseeable future. At our next meeting, the bishops will discuss and offer guidance to the church on Christian hospitality and mission and how these relate to the Table of Christ.*

As I mentioned at the meeting of the Greater Clericus after our retreat I would send you a Pastoral Letter addressing this matter. It is clear that many parishes have moved to a practice of inviting any "who are drawn to God in Christ" to share in the bread and wine of the Eucharist and there are many reasons that this has evolved in recent years. When the question of the open table was brought to the House of Bishops it was done so with respect for various viewpoints and an awareness of the missional challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. What was also clear was that our teaching with respect to baptism is a matter of "Core Doctrine" to use the phrase from the St. Michael's report and so not a matter to be determined on a parish by parish or even diocese by diocese basis or even by the House of Bishops itself. It is clear from the Canons and Constitution of General Synod that matters of doctrine are a matter for the General Synod to determine.

The House of Bishops, in its statement, has done nothing more than affirm what our teaching on Baptism and Eucharist are in the Anglican Church of Canada. The House has agreed that this is an important enough matter to take a substantial time in our meetings to engage theological experts in sacramental theology as well as those in the field of evangelism in a discussion of the issues raised by the desire to move toward an "open table".

In the meantime, I am affirming the current teaching of our Church. The teaching, however, needs to be accompanied by sensitive pastoral practice. I would be distressed to learn if anyone who came to receive communion during a service in this Diocese was turned away because they had not been baptized. We do not have membership cards, nor do we quiz people as to their Christian credentials. If you as a pastor were to learn that a communicant was not baptized and desired to receive communion as a part of their ongoing life in Christ, my recommendation is that you continue to welcome them to the table, but within a reasonable time (several weeks) invite them to consider baptismal classes and being baptized. We face a massive educational challenge in this generation, and well prepared baptismal classes offer a huge opportunity for Christian teaching.

Since the teaching of the Church has not changed regarding Baptism and Eucharist, it is not appropriate for a public invitation to be made regarding an “open table”. For parishes that have moved in this direction I ask that the public invitation no longer be made either verbally or in the service leaflet. You may need some time to make this adjustment and I ask that the changes be made by the first Sunday in Advent 2011.

For some of you this will be a non-issue. For others this will mean a real change in outlook and practice. I encourage you to use this as an opportunity for teaching and learning, and an opportunity to explore more deeply the nature of our worship in a time when the mission field is right outside our door. I invite you to share your learning with me as the House of Bishops continues to engage in the same process of teaching, learning and listening to the Spirit in this time and context.

I have sent this Pastoral Letter to active clergy only at the request of some of you and I encourage you to share this letter as widely as you wish.

Faithfully,

✠ *John*

John E Privett