

The Archives of the Episcopal Church
Jurisdictional Relationship to the Dioceses of Haiti, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela
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A Shared History Working Toward Autonomy

The one element shared by the organizational histories of the three dioceses considered here, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, is their participation in late 20th century efforts toward creating autonomous regional provinces or other jurisdictional entities from the post-colonial transition from missionary district status. At the heart of the General Convention's and Executive Council's work on autonomy was reconsideration of the church's overseas mission work and its continuing relationships with the missionary churches that it had created or that were emerging from the remnant of the Church of England's missions. Particular energy was invested in exploring questions relating to independence, governance, and self-support among the dioceses, with the long-range goal of jurisdictional autonomy for the dioceses of Province IX.

By the mid-1970s, the work of the Standing Commission on the Structure of the Church included reviewing the functionality of the provincial structure and the viability of *ad hoc* groups such as Coalition-14 and experimental regional groupings of the former missionary dioceses. Many initiatives were informed by the work of the special appointment of the Overseas Review Committee (1970-1973), which was continued by the Joint Commission on World Mission (1973-1979) and later by the Convention and Council's standing bodies on World Mission.¹ The Overseas Review Committee named the first key change as a shift from unilateral decisions to "mutuality in mission."² To that end, the Committee proposed significant changes to the Constitution and Canons in 1973, which were paralleled shortly thereafter by similar canonical proposals on metropolitan councils by the Structure Commission.³ In 1976, General Convention enacted a canon (now I.9.3) to facilitate the addition and transfer of dioceses between adjoining provinces by mutual consent of their synods and General Convention.⁴

Despite unique national histories and levels of readiness, members of Province IX appeared to have the geographic, linguistic, and cultural cohesion sufficient to test the feasibility of provincial autonomy within the Communion.⁵ From 1985 through the late 1990s, virtually every General Convention adopted resolutions approving trial periods of autonomy for dioceses of Province IX as they worked toward achieving independence, either as one province or as separate regional councils. Mexico and Central America both became autonomous in the 1990's⁶ and a regional council now functions independently as the Anglican Church in Central America (i.e., IARCA). The efforts of regional councils of the Caribbean and the Andes were unsuccessful in their bid to achieve full autonomy.

Dependency was anathema to the church's leadership, but it was apparent that jurisdictional separation was being advanced without adequate evaluation of the sustainability of local infrastructure and resources. The World Mission Commission and other concerned observers were aware of the potential impact of current and future departures on the future of Province IX, which was significantly affected by the 1998 release of the dioceses of Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama to form the new

¹The Overseas Review Committee (ORC) was created in 1970 in response to a September 1969 House of Bishops resolution asking that "a process of rethinking the overseas mission and ministry of the Church be instituted now by the Executive Council." (Journal, 1969, p. 33). Its reports are found in the Journal, 1970, pp. 561-593, and 1973, pp. 682-701.

²Journal, 1973, pp. 682-683.

³ORC, Blue Book report, 1973, pp. 682-701; Standing Commission on Church Structure (SCCS), Blue Book report, 1976, see especially pp. AA-34 through AA-37. In 1973, Resolutions A-58 through A-77 on changes to the Canons were adopted; A-78 regarding Article II of the Constitution was not.

⁴Acts of Convention, 1976-A016. The canon was originally numbered I.8.2.

⁵ORC, Blue Book report, 1973, p. 686.

⁶Standing Commission on World Mission (SCWM), Blue Book report, 2003, p. 285.

autonomous province of Central America.⁷ Preparing for the next Convention, a church-wide Consultation on Autonomy was held in 1999 to evaluate the processes and effectiveness of independence. The Standing Commission acknowledged what that the experience was mixed at best with cases in which “a feeling of having been pushed out of ECUSA caused hurt and anger. [...]that some aspects of some covenants had not been fulfilled.”⁸ The 2000 General Convention requested further consideration of individual cases, and shortly thereafter, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Venezuela initiated discussions regarding membership in The Episcopal Church.⁹

In the two decades or more after 1970, the push toward jurisdictional autonomy, specifically the desire to make Province IX an autonomous jurisdiction, had been central to the church’s approach to mission and ministry in the region. By 2003, however, the Standing Commission on Structure acknowledged that those efforts had not been successful and that there was presently no support within the church or among the remaining dioceses of Province IX for separating or redistributing themselves among the other eight General Convention provinces.¹⁰

Enabling Legislation Regarding Transfer of Dioceses

In April 1979, recognizing the increased desire to set up overseas dioceses as independent jurisdictions, the Executive Council adopted minimum criteria for autonomy based on earlier recommendations of the Anglican Consultative Council.¹¹ The criteria stated that dioceses seeking autonomy from a province should be able at the same time to unite with another Province or Regional Council having metropolitan authority within the Anglican Communion, or to unite with at least three other viable and geographically contiguous dioceses or dioceses considered to be geographically of the same region. The purpose was to allow the establishment of new provinces or “regional councils” having metropolitan authority. Executive Council’s criteria were subsequently approved by the ACC, and it was on the basis of these that the Diocese of Puerto Rico was granted autonomy in 1979.¹² The Diocese of Venezuela, which had been part of these metropolitan discussions in the 1979, made use of the same process and the precedent when it applied for union in 2003.

Admission of Haiti

Unlike Puerto Rico and Venezuela, the Diocese of Haiti’s period of being a “foreign church” came early in its history. The Diocese began in 1861 as a mission effort organized and led by Rev. James Holly, an African American priest. Local church requests for a foreign missionary bishop were realized in 1874 when the House of Bishops consented to the consecration of Holly as Bishop of Haiti,¹³ and General Convention entered into a covenant with the Protestant Episcopal Church in Haiti.¹⁴ Noting that all of the clergy were Haitian rather than US citizens, the Covenant recognized the church in Haiti as a “foreign Church” within the meaning of Article 10 of the 1874 Constitution.¹⁵

Under the Covenant, The Episcopal Church agreed to continue supporting the Church in Haiti until it should become able to manage its own support and administration and a resident source of episcopal

⁷Acts of Convention, 1997-B019 and 1997-A197 (Review the Status and Work of Province IX).

⁸SCWM, Blue Book report, pp. 490-494.

⁹Acts of Convention, 2000-B005.

¹⁰SCSC, Blue Book report, 2003, p. 276; Vote of Province IX Synod, El Salvador, 1975, RG 312-16-2.

¹¹Resolves of Council, April 19, 1979, EXC401979.24.

¹²Anglican Consultative Council resolution citation: ACC-4, Resolution 19, “Criteria for Dioceses seeking Autonomy. Text at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/instruments-of-communion/acc/acc-4/resolutions.aspx#s18>.

¹³Journal, 1874, p. 374.

¹⁴Journal, 1874, p. 375-376. The Church in Haiti was also referred to in its early decades as the Orthodox Apostolic Church in Haiti, see for example Journal, 1913, p. 19.

¹⁵Journal, 1874, p. 375. The Covenant recognizes the church of Haiti “as also in point of fact a foreign Church to all intents and purposes within the meaning of Article 10 of the Constitution . . .” Article X of the 1874 Constitution addresses the consecration of bishops for foreign countries.

succession. When Bishop Holly died in 1911, the Presiding Bishop appointed the Bishop of Cuba as administrator of the diocese. The following year, the Convocation of the Church of Haiti submitted a petition requesting reception as a Missionary District of the Episcopal Church and in 1913 the General Convention granted the petition.¹⁶ In 1925 Haiti was assigned to Province II where it has remained, except for periods of trial autonomy (1988-1994, probably 1994-1997, and 1997-2000) when it was allowed to join other dioceses in working toward creation of an autonomous body in the Caribbean region which did not materialize.¹⁷

Admission of Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico was established as a missionary district of the General Convention in 1901, joined Province II in 1913, held that status until 1979, when the General Convention established a covenant and jurisdictional status for the Iglesia Episcopal Puertorriqueña (I.E.P.). The legislative history shows that, in 1970, the I.E.P. declared its intention to establish The Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico as a territorial, self-supporting church by 1982.¹⁸ Moreover, the I.E.P. planned to unite with no less than three other viable Dioceses in the Caribbean to form a Regional Council having metropolitical authority in accordance with the 1979 guidelines of both Executive Council and the Anglican Consultative Council IV. The understanding was that the covenant of 1979 gave the I.E.P. extra-provincial status under the metropolitical authority of the President of the Ninth Province.¹⁹

The independent, extra-provincial status was intended to be temporary and transitional. However, the autonomous Caribbean Province did not materialize, and in 2001 the Diocese requested full union with General Convention.²⁰ The request was approved and the Diocese was admitted into full union in 2003.²¹ The Diocese of Puerto Rico remained in Province IX, to which it had moved when that province was created in 1964. In 2022, with the passage of Resolution C021, the Diocese of Puerto Rico was transferred to Province II, where it joined other Caribbean dioceses such as Haiti and the Virgin Islands, the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, and the Dioceses of New York and New Jersey.²²

Admission of Venezuela

The origins of the Diocese of Venezuela date to 1972 when the Anglican Archbishop of the West Indies divided the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago to create an independent Missionary Jurisdiction in Venezuela.²³ By March of 1982, it was thought that the Diocese (along with the dioceses of Costa Rica, Cuba, and Puerto Rico) would likely be invited to join a hoped-for new province discussed at a Partners in Mission Consultation held in Panama City that month. The meeting was attended by Archbishop G.C.M. Woodroffe of the Province of the West Indies and Bishop H.H. Jones of Venezuela and describes Venezuela as “seeking translation from Archbishop Woodroffe’s jurisdiction to Province Nine.”²⁴

At the Synod meeting held shortly after the Partners in Mission Consultation, Province IX accepted metropolitical authority for the Diocese of the Anglican Church in Venezuela, and used the precedent of the earlier transfer of the Missionary Diocese of Puerto Rico to propose extra-provincial status under the President and Synod of Province IX.²⁵ This jurisdictional status was based on the 1976 change to Canon

¹⁶Journal, 1913, p. 38.

¹⁷Acts of Convention, 1988-B021; 1991-C065; 1997-C010. Resolution 1994-C039 on the topic of the Caribbean Dioceses died with adjournment.

¹⁸Journal, 1979, p. C-152– C-153.

¹⁹Acts of Convention, 1979-D050.

²⁰SCWM, Blue Book report, 2003, p. 285. By 2001, the General Convention had passed canonical amendments in 1970 and 1985 essentially translating the status of missionary dioceses and districts into full union with Convention.

²¹Acts of Convention, 2003-A141.

²²Journal, 2022, p. 854-855.

²³Presiding Bishop’s Official Acts, Journal, 1973, p. 58.

²⁴Episcopal News Service release, April 1, 1982.

²⁵Acts of Convention 1982-B010.

I.9.3 on the transfer of dioceses between synods and the same Executive Council and ACC guidelines that were applied to Puerto Rico. In 1982 General Convention approved Venezuela's request for extra-provincial status within Province IX.²⁶

From 1985 to 1991, the Diocese was granted a trial period of autonomy for the purpose of forming an independent Province of the Andes (ARENSA) with the Dioceses of Colombia and Ecuador,²⁷ an effort that was apparently endorsed in subsequent years when the General Convention authorized to continue work toward forming the Anglican Province of the Andes.²⁸ The new province did not materialize, however, and in the early 2000s the Diocese requested full union with the General Convention. Its proposal was approved conditionally in 2003 and fully accepted with admission in 2006.²⁹

Terms of Admission and Readmission of the Dioceses of Puerto Rico and Venezuela

In terms of oversight, the dioceses of Puerto Rico and Venezuela moved in tandem, first to regional autonomy and then to a request for full membership in the General Convention in the early 2000s, and resolutions to that effect were voted on in the same year ([2003-A141](#) and [2003-A142](#) respectively). The proposals came forward along with a similar expression of interest from Cuba that did not hold.³⁰ The unprecedented nature of these two proposals for fully developed but semi-autonomous dioceses to join the General Convention was noted as requiring “extensive consultation and careful reflection” invested in the resulting recommendations.³¹

The dioceses and the standing commissions each affirmed that the key reason for re-joining Province IX was the continuing ambiguity of extra-provincial status, which weakened the diocese's ability to fulfill their mission and ran contrary to standard Anglican jurisdictional practice. Although it was commonly assumed by North Americans at the time that clergy pension issues played a significant role in the desire for membership with The Episcopal Church, the Structure Commission report states clearly and emphatically that this was not the case.³² The SCSC report states that clergy pensions were the “*last* topic to be undertaken” and “the issue of pensions is *not* the driving force [author's emphasis].”³³

The canonical and related terms of reunion with The Episcopal Church were spelled out for Puerto Rico in Resolution [2003-A141](#) and for Venezuela in [2003-A142](#). The Convention reaffirmed the principle that dioceses of the church that were not located within the United States could seek autonomy or join other provinces of the Anglican Communion following the process outlined in General Convention in 1991.³⁴

The approval for the Diocese of Venezuela was contingent upon submission of additional required documentation, as approved and made effective by an Executive Council vote of acceptance certification by the Secretary of the General Convention that the required records had been received (e.g., conforming accession and approved diocesan constitution and canons, parochial report data, audits, etc.). The conditions were met, and the Canons were updated in 2006 to include Venezuela in Province IX.³⁵

²⁶Journal, 1982, p. C-166 and Acts of Convention, 1982-B010. The original canon was numbered I.8.2.

²⁷ Acts of Convention 1985-C071.

²⁸See, for example, Acts of Convention 1988-B033.

²⁹SCWM, Blue Book report, 2003, pp. 282-290; SCSC, Blue Book report, 2003, pp. 275-281; and Acts of Convention, 2003-A142.

³⁰SCWM, Blue Book report, 2003, p. 285-287. The Standing Commission was prepared to recommend a resolution to accept a petition from the Diocese of Cuba, however, in the end the Diocese did not submit the proposal, p.287.

³¹SCWM, Blue Book report, 2003, p. 285.

³²SCSC, Blue Book report, 2003, p. 277.

³³SCSC, Blue Book report, 2003, p. 277.

³⁴Acts of Convention, 1991-A235.

³⁵ International Concerns Report on the Diocese of Venezuela, October 7, 2005, Resolves of Council, EXC102005.02; also Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons, Blue Book report, 2006, p. 95.

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Acts of Convention, 2000-A129: Direct the Executive Council to Continue to Develop Relationships with Overseas Dioceses.

Overseas Review Committee Interim Report of 1970 (Journal, 1970, pp. 561-592) and Final Report (Journal, 1973, pp. 682-700).

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Standing Commission on World Mission Report, 2003 (Blue Book, pp. 282-290).

Standing Commission on Structure of the Church Report, 2003 (Blue Book, pp. 275-281).

Key Legislation and Documents Relating to the Episcopal Church in Haiti

Acts of Convention, 1988-B020: Approve a Trial Period of Autonomy for the Dominican Church and Support a Caribbean Region.

Acts of Convention, 1988-B021: Approve a Three-year Trial Period of Autonomy for the Diocese of Haiti.

Acts of Convention, 1991-C065: Approve a Three-Year Trial Period of Autonomy for a Province in the Caribbean.

Acts of Convention, 1994-C039 Rejected: On the Topic of the Caribbean Dioceses (proposed by the Committee on World Mission in the HoD). The resolution would have extended the trial period of the Caribbean Region Dioceses, Dominican Republic, and Haiti by three years, for them to join the Autonomous Dioceses of Cuba and Puerto Rico to become a Province within the Anglican Communion.

Acts of Convention, 1997-A197: Review the Status and Work of Province IX (General Convention requests that the Executive Council, in consultation with the remaining Dioceses of Province IX, review the impact the departure of the several dioceses that have formed IARCA will have upon the work of the Church in Province IX.)

Acts of Convention, 1997-C010: Approve a Period of Experimentation for the Church in the Caribbean Region

Key Legislation and Documents Relating to the Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico

Acts of Convention, 1979-D050: Establish a Covenant and Jurisdictional Status to Iglesia Episcopal Puertorriqueña (Diocese of Puerto Rico granted extra-provincial status under the metropolitan authority of the President of the Ninth Province and its Synod, pending the creation of a Regional Council having metropolitan authority. . . .)

Acts of Convention, 1988-B020: Approve a Trial Period of Autonomy for the Dominican Church and Support a Caribbean Region (Caribbean regional organization will be composed of the dioceses of Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic) and the 69th GC give[s] its support for the formation of a new province within the Anglican Communion

Acts of Convention, 1988-B020: Admit the Bishop Coadjutor of Puerto Rico As a Collegial Member

Acts of Convention, 1994-C039 Rejected: On the Topic of the Caribbean Dioceses (proposed by the Committee on

World Mission in the House of Deputies). The resolution would have extended the trial period of the Caribbean Region Dioceses, Dominican Republic, and Haiti by three years, for them to join the Autonomous Dioceses of Cuba and Puerto Rico to become a Province within the Anglican Communion.

Acts of Convention, 1997-C010: Approve a Period of Experimentation for the Church in the Caribbean Region (Resolved, That the 72nd General Convention grant to the Dioceses of Haiti and the Dominican Republic an extension of three more years (1997-2000) to continue the experimentation with the Caribbean Region (which includes the autonomous Dioceses of Puerto Rico and Cuba).

Acts of Convention, 2003-A141: Admit the Diocese of Puerto Rico to the Episcopal Church.

Acts of Convention, 2022-C0211: Transfer the Diocese of Puerto Rico from Province IX to Province II.

Key Legislation and Documents Relating to the Episcopal Church in Venezuela

October 16, 1972: Presiding Bishop Hines received notification from the Archbishop of the West Indies that the Synod had resolved to divide the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago and to create an independent Missionary Jurisdiction in Venezuela (Journal of Convention, 1973, Presiding Bishop's Official Acts).

June 6, 1976: Presiding Bishop Hines received notification of the consecration of the Rt. Rev. Hayden H. Jones as Bishop of Venezuela (Journal of Convention, 1979, Presiding Bishop's Official Acts).

1982: General Convention approved the transfer of the Diocese of Venezuela from the Church of the Province of the West Indies to the metropolitan authority of Province IX of The Episcopal Church ([1982-B010](#)). This action confirmed the decision of the VIII Synod of Province IX, meeting in Panama on March 25-26, 1982, to accept metropolitan authority for the Diocese of the Anglican Church in Venezuela. (Journal, 1982, p. C-166).

1985: General Convention approved a three-year trial period of autonomy for the Dioceses of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, who planned to form an independent Province of the Andes ([1985-C071](#)).

1988: General Convention extended the trial period of autonomy for the Dioceses of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela for another triennium ([1988-B033](#)).

2000: General Convention called on the Standing Commission on Structure, working with the Standing Commission on World Mission and Executive Council, to make recommendations to the 2003 Convention regarding "the future of Province IX" ([2000-B005](#)).

2003: General Convention admitted the Diocese of Venezuela to The Episcopal Church as a member diocese of Province IX ([2003-A142](#)).

2006: General Convention amended Canon I.9.1 to include Venezuela in the list of dioceses in Province IX ([2006-A024](#)).