

General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2024 Archives' Research Report

Resolution No.: 2024-A158
Title: Addressing Church Decline and Fostering Church Revitalization
Proposer: 09 - Evangelism & the Future Church/HoD
Topic: Congregations, Membership

Directly Related: (Attached)

2022-A096 Develop Sustainable Congregational Revitalization Ministries
2022-A132 Create a Task Force to Study 21st Century Congregational Vitality Indicators
2022-A156 Create a Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church
2018-A032 Create a Task Force on Congregational Redevelopment and Mission
2015-A100 On the Topic of Assessing Diocesan Viability and Vitality (Rejected)
2015-D009 Create a Congregational Revitalization Network

Indirectly Related: (Available in the [Acts of Convention](#) database, searchable by resolution number)

None

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1973 through 2022, selecting “direct” resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. The “direct” resolutions are attached and “indirect” resolutions are available in the Acts of Convention database. Committee members who require other research assistance should contact the Archives through the [Research Request Form](#).

A158 - Addressing Church Decline and Fostering Church Revitalization

Final Status: Not Yet Finalized

Proposed by: 09 - Evangelism & the Future Church/HoD

Has Budget Implications: Yes

Cost: \$100,000.00

Amends C&C or Rules of Order: No

Requests New Interim Body: No

Changes Mandate Of Existing Ib: No

Directs Dfms Staff: Yes

Directs Dioceses: Yes

Directs Executive Council: No

HiA: HB

Legislative Committee Currently Assigned: 08 - Congregational Vitality & Data-Driven Initiatives

Completion Status: Incomplete

Latest House Action: N/A

Supporting Documents: No

Resolution Text

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring,

That the 81st General Convention direct every diocese which has experienced a decline in Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) between 2013 and 2022 to submit a report to the Secretary of the General Convention by June 30, 2025 that includes (1) a straight-line forecast of ASA for the following decade; (2) the diocese's efforts to halt or reverse the decline in ASA and other membership statistics, if any; and (3) all quantitative data on the efficacy of those efforts, if any; and be it further

Resolved, That the author(s), length, and format of the report is left to the discretion of each diocese but the Ecclesiastical Authority in each diocese is to signify their assent to its publication and dissemination; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the General Convention publish the reports on the General Convention website in their entirety once they are received in the language originally received, but will translate the reports as soon as possible, with the exception of large quantitative datasets for which it may not be prudent to publish on a website, but which will be made available upon request; and be it further

Resolved, That a clearing-house of resources to address decline and foster church revitalization be created by December 31, 2025; and be it further

Resolved, That a Church Revitalization Audit be done and a report submitted to the 82nd General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Budget Committee of Executive Council consider a budget allocation of \$100,000 to fund the Church Revitalization Audit.

Explanation

The Episcopal Church has been in free-fall decline for some time. It's also true there are multiple causes for the decline and The Episcopal Church is far from the only church experiencing it. The fact remains however that we are shrinking. A straight-line forecast would show us having 0 worshippers in our pews within the next few decades.^[1] Besides being a failure to follow the risen Jesus's great commission to us, decline makes everything else we try to do as a church much more difficult.

But a forecast is not a promise. Only God knows the future and the Holy Spirit empowers us to discern and make different decisions. A good place to start is to stop denying the truth or trying to minimize it with euphemisms of "change."

Addressing our decline, most exemplified by the 43.2% churchwide loss in Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) from 2013-2022^[2] is an "adaptive challenge" that requires us to make a fundamental shift in our mindsets, values, and behaviors, not a "technical problem" that can be solved with the "right" solution or expert knowledge.^[3] Foremost, to halt, let alone reverse, our losses, we need to daily turn away from the many idols and false gods that distract us and turn back towards the God who made and liberated us in Christ, as did generations of the faithful before us.

Beyond that, we don't have a churchwide understanding of how to deal with decline and thus, our desire is to hear from every diocese, the basic unit of our church, how they are addressing it in their own contexts with the required reports. We also intend for the reports to generate useful resources of which not every diocese, parish, or individual leader might be aware. Hence, we call for a clearing-house of collated resources available to the entire church, as SCLM did with www.episcopalcommonprayer.org.

Finally, as the 2021 Racial Justice Audit proved,^[4] there is valuable information to be gleaned when experts can guide questions, dive deeper into promising avenues of renewal and resurrection provided by the diocesan reports, analyze data, and provide concise summaries to the church. Thus, we respectfully request \$100,000 to fund the audit.

It is this committee's hope that with these efforts, we can have a "whole-of-church" approach to better define the challenge, identify its causes and obstacles to change, discern new experiments, and discover ways to get promising solutions into the hands of all Episcopalians as quickly as possible.

[1] <https://religioninpublic.blog/2021/07/06/the-death-of-the-episcopal-church-is-near/>

[2] <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/32265>

[3] For more information, see *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* by Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky

[4] <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/racial-reconciliation/racial-justice-audit/>

Note: this resolution and/or its explanation contains external references, such as URLs of websites, that may not be in the required languages of General Convention. Because of copyright restrictions, the General Convention cannot provide translations. However, your web browser may be able to provide a machine translation into another language. If you need assistance with this, please contact gc.support@episcopalchurch.org.



Resolution Number: 2022-A096
Title: Develop Sustainable Congregational Revitalization Ministries
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 80th General Convention and the Episcopal Church celebrates and actively supports the revitalization of congregations, seeking not to restore past glories, but to move into the new callings of our loving, liberating, life-giving God; and be it further

Resolved, That the Church continues to prioritize the revitalization of congregations and a church-wide network of support for congregational revitalization work that was initiated by 2018-A032; and be it further

Resolved, That the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies establish an advisory group of not more than twelve (12) people, consisting of those with experience in revitalizing congregations, diocesan oversight of such work, working with evangelism and mission, to carry out provisions of this resolution, including making recommendations to Executive Council about grants to be awarded, helping to identify potential revitalizers, and developing a network of coaches, and working with staff on training church revitalizers; and be it further

Resolved, That in the revitalization of congregations, the Church continues to prioritize commitment to mission and evangelism engaging people historically underserved and/or under-represented by the Church, for example, people of color, immigrants and refugees, youth, young adults, people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQI+), gender non-conforming people, people living in poverty, people with disabilities and/or all others who are disenfranchised from the Church; and be it further; and be it further

Resolved, That the budget for development of sustainable congregational revitalization throughout the Church will be \$2,000,000 for 2022-2024 to be allocated as follows:

- **\$100,000 to engage Bishops and the diocesan representative(s) they appoint in development of a framework for congregational revitalization, identifying roadblocks that regularly thwart this work and identifying resources that are proven to enhance this work;**
- **\$100,000 to engage clergy and lay leaders in gleaning learnings from congregational revitalization that they have successfully done and/or they have failed in attempts to do, identifying roadblocks that have thwarted their work and identifying resources that have enhanced their work;**
- **\$100,000 for translation services and to facilitate participation of Spanish-speaking lay and ordained leaders in training for congregational revitalization;**
- **\$200,000 for further development of five-phase congregational redevelopment strategy - (1) diagnosing/assessing resources and challenges, (2) discerning next calling, (3) connecting with local and diocesan partners, (4) iterating and continued resourcing, and (5) evaluating, refining and sustaining**
- **\$1,000,000 to support a team of local and regional church-wide office staff to oversee the work; and**
- **\$500,000 to provide mentorship/coaching/training for lay and ordained leaders in revitalization of their congregations.**

And be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$2,000,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Baltimore, 2022* (New York: General Convention, 2023), pp. 773-774.



Resolution Number: 2022-A132
Title: Create a Task Force to Study 21st Century Congregational Vitality Indicators
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 80th General Convention authorizes the creation of a task force to study indicators of 21st century congregational vitality and how The Episcopal Church can collect data that measures those indicators; and be it further

Resolved, That the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies appoint the members of this task force, to include at least 2 bishops, 5 clergy, one of which must be a deacon, and 5 laypeople with appropriate representation from urban and rural congregations, congregations in which people of color are a majority, and congregations that represent the full geographic and economic diversity of the Episcopal Church, including at least one member from outside the United States; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of House Deputies is encouraged to include as an additional member one who has served on the most recent House of Deputies State of the Church Committee; and be it further

Resolved, That this task force work closely with the Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church (A156) and the House of Deputies State of the Church Committee; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force coordinate with the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church to ensure that the parochial report form is revised to collect data from congregations that will measure vitality in the 21st century; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force issue a report to the 81st General Convention that includes proposed canonical changes to codify the proposed measurements; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$25,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Baltimore, 2022* (New York: General Convention, 2023), pp. 903-904.



Resolution Number: 2022-A156
Title: Create a Task Force on the State of Membership in The Episcopal Church
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 80th General Convention authorizes the creation of a task force to re-envision membership as defined in Canon I.17.1-4: Of Regulations Respecting the Laity and Canon 1.6.1: Of the Mode of Securing an Accurate view of the State of This Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies appoint the members of this task force to include at least 3 bishops, 5 clergy and 7 laypeople with appropriate representation from urban and rural congregations, congregations in which people of color are a majority, and congregations that represent the full geographic and economic diversity of the Episcopal Church, including at least one member from outside the United States of America; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of House Deputies is encouraged to include as an additional member one who has served on the most recent House of Deputies State of the Church Committee; and be it further

Resolved, That this task force work closely with the Task Force to Study Congregational Vitality Indicators (A132) and the House of Deputies State of the Church Committee; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force be charged with developing new and relevant membership definitions that reflect the experience, practices, and needs of congregations, including membership definitions that are:

- *expansive and applicable to a wide range of cultural and regional contexts*
- *easy to ascertain and report in yearly parochial reports*
- *faithful to the distinct role and sacramental understanding of the baptized in the life of the church*
- *new and expansive, including those who are not yet baptized or whose baptisms are not recorded in an Episcopal church*

And be it further

Resolved, That the task force be charged with examining the impact that a changed understanding of membership would have on diocesan canons and congregational bylaws; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force reevaluate the present connection between confirmation and membership; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force issue a report to the 81st General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$50,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Baltimore, 2022* (New York: General Convention, 2023), p. 905.



Resolution Number: 2018-A032
Title: Create a Task Force on Congregational Redevelopment and Mission
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention requests that the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies in consultation with the Church Center staff create a church-wide Community of Practice that works with congregations and their bishops to help them redevelop to better engage the cultural realities of their communities for the sake of launching new ministries and multi-cultural missional initiatives; and be it further

Resolved, That the Communications Office be directed to make a priority of reporting on the stories of redeveloped congregations on an ongoing basis through news media, video, and other means and through developing online resources that provide detailed information about the redevelopment efforts happening throughout the church; and be it further

Resolved, That the cost of this initiative will be equally shared by the church-wide budget, participating dioceses and redeveloping congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the presiding officers appoint a task force to coordinate this initiative in collaboration with Church Center staff. That task force may be combined with a task force on Church Planting and Missional Initiatives at the discretion of the presiding officers; and be it further

Resolved, That the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance consider a budget allocation of \$725,000 during the triennium for the implementation of this resolution.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Austin, 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), pp. 542-543.



Resolution Number: 2015-A100
Title: On the Topic of Assessing Diocesan Viability and Vitality
Legislative Action Taken: Rejected
Text of Resolution:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 78th General Convention encourages Bishops and Dioceses to prayerfully engage in a candid assessment of the viability and vitality of their Dioceses and to seek creative possibilities for enhancing the viability and vitality of their Dioceses, and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission of the Structure of the Church support these efforts by developing and making available tools and processes for such processes and by facilitating conversations and communications about processes for increasing the viability and vitality of Dioceses.



Resolution Number: 2015-D009
Title: Create a Congregational Revitalization Network
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention shall promote the revitalization of existing congregations within The Episcopal Church through the creation of a congregational revitalization network; and be it further

Resolved, That a churchwide staff position be created to facilitate the creation of this network, coordinate training opportunities for congregational leaders, and encourage collaboration between existing revitalization ministries; and be it further

Resolved, That regional coaches with practical revitalization experience be identified and trained in congregational revitalization, who shall be available to congregations in varying parts of the church to consult with them on revitalization efforts; and be it further

Resolved, That the staff leader and the coaches shall provide training opportunities for congregational clergy and lay leaders in order to help them re-vision their purpose, use of space, outreach to their communities, evangelism efforts, and new ways of proclaiming the gospel of Christ; and be it further

Resolved, That a Congregation Revitalization Venture Fund be created to fund grants to existing congregations, with special attention given to congregations reaching out to populations that are underrepresented in The Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, That Congregation Revitalization Venture Fund grants shall be administered by a grants committee established for that purpose by Executive Council in consultation with the staff leader; and be it further

Resolved, That the Development Office be directed to make raising \$300,000 for the Congregation Revitalization Venture Fund one of its priorities in the 2016-18 triennium; and be it further

Resolved, That the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance be requested to consider an allocation of \$700,000 for the 2016-18 triennium for the implementation of this resolution.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), pp. 315-316.