

## General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2024 Archives' Research Report

**Resolution No.:** 2024-B007  
**Title:** Standing Committees and Ecclesiastical Authority  
**Proposer:** Whalon, The Rt. Rev. Pierre  
**Topic:** Bishops, Dioceses

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**Directly Related:** (Attached)

2022-A151 Amend Constitution Article IV [Standing Committees--Second Reading]

**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](#).*

# B007 - Standing Committees and Ecclesiastical Authority

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**Final Status:** Not Yet Finalized

**Proposed by:** Whalon, The Rt. Rev. Pierre

**Endorsed by:** Benhase, The Rt. Rev. Scott, Fitzpatrick, Rt. Rev. Robert, Edington, The Rt. Rev. Mark

**Has Budget Implications:** No

**Cost:**

**Amends C&C or Rules of Order:** No

**Requests New Interim Body:** No

**Directs an Interim Body:** Yes

**Directs Dfms Staff:** No

**Directs Dioceses:** No

**Directs Executive Council:** No

**HiA:** No House Assigned

**Legislative Committee Currently Assigned:** No Committee Assigned

**Completion Status:** Incomplete

**Latest House Action:** N/A

**Supporting Documents:**

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## Resolution Text

*Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring,

That the 81st General Convention require the Standing Commission on Structure, Governance, Constitution and Canons (SCSGCC) to study the matter of ecclesiastical authority as this Church conceives of it, as exercised (1) by the diocesan, coadjutor, or suffragan bishop, subject to certain canonical restrictions devolving to the standing committee; and (2) as exercised by the standing committee in the absence of a bishop, there being currently no accountability for the committee's exercise of such authority; and be it further

*Resolved*, That SCSGCC present its findings, including a clear overall definition of ecclesiastical authority and recommendations of action to the 82nd General Convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the SCSGCC begin its work no later than January 1, 2025, with the Standing Commission concluding its study at the conclusion of the 82nd General Convention, unless this mandate is extended by the 82nd Convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the SCSGCC report annually to the Executive Council detailing its work and present recommendations to the 82nd General Convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the SCSGCC appoint up to four representatives with expertise in the ecclesiology, history and polity of The Episcopal Church to advise it.

## **Explanation**

Standing Committees are essential to the life of their diocese, sharing with the diocesan bishop to direct and support it. Unlike new bishops, however, there are no mandated support services to guide committee members when they must take on the weighty responsibility of exercising ecclesiastical authority in the absence of a bishop. The fact that no person or body should ever exercise rule and authority without accountability does not currently apply when a Standing Committee assumes such authority. Furthermore, it is not clear how that authority is defined in those circumstances. This lack of accountability and clarity of scope have occasionally led to significant abuses of power.

An important aspect of our Church's ecclesiology since its beginnings in America is the bishop's accountability for the exercise of episcopal authority, including ordinations and depositions, to the diocese's Standing Committee. The approval of episcopal elections by Standing Committees is also significant since it replaces and represents the original requirement of the General Convention's approval of new bishops. This constitutes the Committee's ordinary ecclesiastical authority, conferred on its members by election of the diocesan convention or council. How that authority changes in the absence of a bishop is what remains to be understood and defined, in order to hold accountable the Committee.



**Resolution Number:** 2022-A151  
**Title:** Amend Constitution Article IV [Standing Committees--Second Reading]  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That Article IV of the Constitution is hereby amended to read as follows:*

**ARTICLE IV**

**In every Diocese a Standing Committee shall be elected by the Convention thereof, except that provision for filling vacancies between meetings of the Convention may be prescribed by the Canons of the respective Dioceses. When there is a Bishop in charge of the Diocese, the Standing Committee shall be the Bishop's Council of Advice. If there be no Bishop or Bishop Coadjutor or *Bishop Suffragan Bishop* canonically authorized to act, the Standing Committee shall be the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese for all purposes declared by the General Convention. The rights and duties of the Standing Committee, except as provided in the Constitution and Canons of the General Convention, may be prescribed by the Canons of the respective Dioceses.**

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Baltimore, 2022* (New York: General Convention, 2023), p. 505.