

Resolution 5 : Discerning Our Future

Diocese of Easton Convention 2011

Resolved, that the 143rd Convention of the Diocese of Easton strongly encourage our Bishop to appoint a Structures & Governance Task Force to review current diocesan systems and structures; *and be it further*

Resolved, that the Structures & Governance Task Force be authorized to engage the Diocese and its congregations in open and direct conversation about the structural, financial and missiological future of our Diocese and its congregations; to draft a report of findings; to make presentations at Convocation meetings, and to submit resolutions for consideration to the 144th Convention of the Diocese of Easton; *and be it further*

Resolved, that the Structures & Governance Task Force produce a written report for distribution to Convention Delegates no later than 15 December 2011.

Background Information

At the 143rd Convention of the Diocese of Easton in February 2011, Resolution 5, entitled “Discerning Our Future,” was passed. The resolution “strongly encouraged” the bishop to appoint a Structures & Governance Task Force to “review our current systems and structures.” It also called for this task force “to engage the diocese and its congregations in open and direct conversations about the structure, financial and missiological future of our diocese and its congregations; to draft a report of findings; to make presentations at convocation meetings, and to submit resolutions for consideration at the 144th Convention of the Diocese.”

Bishop Shand began the process of creating a task force after initial conversations with Canon Cook, the proposers of the resolution and other clergy and laity across the diocese. In May 2011 he made a presentation at the monthly clericus meeting. The clergy observed that the task was a challenge to be faced with many facets to be considered.

The bishop proceeded with individual conversations with Diocesan Council representatives from each of our convocations plus lay persons from parishes within each convocation. A group of seven individuals came together for five meetings. At the last meeting a consultant was also present to assist the group in preparing a plan for moving forward and developing a report for presentation to the diocesan council, and eventually the rest of the diocese.

In addition, to the presentation to the diocesan council a draft of the report was shared at the November clericus meeting. Dialogue with both these groups assisted in finalizing the report you have in front of you. This summary of the task force’s findings to date and their suggestions for further action will be followed up with drafting any required resolutions for Convention after meetings with delegates at the three November convocation sessions.

Response to Resolution 5

The Task Force has spent a great deal of time discerning the intent and impact of this resolution upon the entire diocese. After much discussion and prayer, several themes began to emerge. There seems to be a sense of anxiety, a cry for help from many of our churches. There are shrinking budgets and shrinking congregations. Our parishes are very concerned about size, structure and financial crises. This group however, was wary of thinking of a “fix” in terms of simply changing structures. While aligning size, structure and finance is important, there is a

sense that this is an opportunity to seize the moment to look at building an even more vibrant and relevant faith community.

Looking deeper into these issues, the task force believes that there may also be a spiritual crisis. Are we in the diocese looking at these issues from a perspective of scarcity rather abundance? Are we mourning what we don't have rather than celebrating what we do have? This attitude can draw us away from the love, trust and abundance that God provides for us.

What should be the response to this resolution? The world is changing observed a task force member, and people of all ages are seeking something more, and something deeper, more intimate, more real. To continue to function as we have will not be enough. A tide is turning and we can be a part of that turn if we are bold enough to step out, become one body, lean on each other, help each other, and shine God's love into a seeking world.

Our experiences with Phyllis Tickle, Brian McLaren, Bob Honeychurch, Peter Fellowes, and Bp. Katharine have paved the way for an attitude of change. What in our midst needs to be retained and built upon, what needs hospice care, and what may be emerging into a new birth? The task force concluded that these questions are part of ongoing discussions as we determine what are the best supporting structures and governance for the diocese.

God provides that which we need in order to move forward. Within the diocese are the resources needed to further his kingdom. *...its ... parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.* (I Corinthians 12:14, 24-27)

Worship and pastoral care are alive and well in the parishes of the Diocese of Easton. However, the following questions and others arise about our life together. Are we grounded in the teachings of Christ? How can we make better use of our facilities, personnel and allocation of resources? Are there alliances and relationships which can be developed and nurtured? How can we be "our brother's keeper"? Does the Diocese of Easton have a mission statement, a strategic plan, a goal, a sense of God's plan for us?

What exactly does the Holy Spirit want us to do? The task force felt pressure to develop a strategy and a process to respond to the resolution, yet struggled to find a starting point. A member of the group describes this dilemma:

"While looking at internal diocesan structure could be useful, I am not convinced it's the starting place, and could be an unhelpful distraction. Trimming fat from our structure won't help us clarify mission; it's the other way around. Perhaps a significant portion of the mission of the Episcopal Church right now is to get real about a relationship with Jesus. Before buildings and budgets, even before liturgy – sit with the Man Himself. Tend the relationship with Jesus as carefully as you would the most important people in our life. That informs everything else we do in "church" and in life. How do we invite people to do that?"

This thinking is what inspired the task force to choose its path forward.

Bishop Shand obtained the assistance of the Rev. John Tampa, rector of Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Southern Pines, N.C. Fr. Tampa used scriptural "bookends" to frame the discussion: *Neither the eye has seen, nor the ear heard, nor has the human heart conceived what the Lord has in store for those who love him.* (II Corinthians 2:9) Tampa believes that the task force cannot be charged with "solving" a problem for the diocese. The path is God's; our job is to follow the light. Sometimes God shines just a flicker of light at a time along the path. *The word of the Lord is a lamp unto my foot and a light that illumines my path.* (Psalm 119:105).

It is time for the next step on the path: congregational involvement. The task force noted several benchmarks in the resolution that requested consultations, reports and actions by certain dates. The task force will honor these in the following way:

- A report will be completed by December 15 after consultation with the Diocesan Council, clericus, the three November convocation sessions and further task force meetings.
- Based on this report, the task force will recommend a strategy, process and actions for Phase II of this effort.
- Resolutions to support these recommendations will be drawn up by December 26 and distributed to convention delegates. In part, the task force will consider the following questions as it develops the resolution:
 - What are the best ways of engaging all members of the diocese in these discussions?
 - What role can the task force best play in this process?
 - What are the resources needed to carry this work forward?

The Structures & Governance Task Force is asking the Convention delegates, and indeed anyone in the diocese, for comments, questions, or suggestions on the work done so far and the conclusions we have reached. Fundamentally, the task force feels that answers will only come when the whole diocesan community guided by the Holy Spirit is engaged in the effort. The task force views its role as catalyzing this effort and providing leadership and structure to the process. The first step in this engagement is bringing this report and subsequent resolutions forward to Diocesan Convention.

Resolution 5 Task Force

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