

The Diocese of Rhode Island
221st Annual Convention
November 11-12, 2011

SPECIAL RULES OF ORDER

Resolved: That the 221st Convention of The Diocese of Rhode Island hereby adopts Special Rules of Order of the Diocese of Rhode Island as follows:

SPECIAL RULES OF ORDER

The Diocese of Rhode Island

Election of the Thirteenth Bishop of Rhode Island

Preliminary

1. **Open Assembly.** The convention shall be open to all persons unless otherwise ordered by the convention. All persons seeking admission to convention shall present such credentials as may be required by the secretary of convention. For members of convention credentials may include evidence of right of membership and photographic identification.

2. **Roll of Members.** At all times during a session of convention, the secretary shall maintain a roll of members entitled to vote.

Membership and Seating

3. **Registration.** While ascertaining the names and number of clergy and delegates and their alternates present at the organization of the convention, the secretary shall register the names of only such alternates as fill the places of delegates whose absence is confirmed in writing by the rector or chair of the delegation of the parish or mission; provided, that a delegate may at any time reclaim the seat, in which case the name of the alternate shall be withdrawn from the roll, provided further however, that no change in the roll of members shall be made during consideration of a vote.

4. **Seating.** To the extent feasible, members shall be seated by parish or mission affiliation. Other members and guests may be seated in designated sections.

Nomination Procedure

5. **Committee on Nomination and Search.** In accordance with Canon 3.6, the Committee on Nomination and Search shall prepare a report to the convention, which shall include the names of the persons selected by the committee, the names of the persons added by petition, and biographical information as to each person. The report of the committee shall constitute the nomination of the individuals for the thirteenth bishop of Rhode Island. No nominations may be made other than as provided by Canon 3.6.

Withdrawal of Nomination

6. **Withdrawal.** An individual nominated for the thirteenth bishop of Rhode Island may withdraw at any time in person or by notifying the chairman of the Committee on Nomination and Search who shall promptly notify the convention. No one withdrawing a nomination may make any statements other than informing the convention of withdrawal. The name of an individual nominated for the thirteenth bishop of Rhode Island shall be withdrawn upon authorization of the secretary of convention when such individual has failed upon two successive ballots to obtain in each of the clerical and lay order at least ten percent (10%) of the aggregate votes cast in such order.

Conduct of Business

7. **Ballots.** The names of all individuals nominated for the thirteenth bishop of Rhode Island shall listed on the ballots in an order determined by random selection, subject, however, to withdrawal.

8. **Voting.** Voting shall be undertaken in a manner to provide each voting cleric and delegate with a confidential means to record a vote. No voting shall commence prior to 9:00 a.m. nor after 7:00 p.m.

Rules of Order

9. **Standing Rules of Order.** In the absence of a Special Rule of Order, the Standing Rules of Order shall govern the special convention.

10. **Suspension of Rules of Order.** No rule of order shall be suspended without the consent of two-thirds of the members present.

11. **Robert's Rules of Order.** Unless in conflict with the Canons of the Church or of the Diocese, or with these Special Rules or Order or of any applicable Standing Rules of Order of the Diocese, Robert's Rules of Order shall govern the conduct of convention.

Explanation. The resolution adopts the Special Rules of Order of The Diocese of Rhode Island for the election of the Thirteenth Bishop of Rhode Island.

The Diocese of Rhode Island
Proposal to Revise Canon 10.7 and Add New Canon 10.8
September 2011

10.7. Conversion of Parish to Mission

(a) If, after notice to the parish and opportunity to be heard, the Bishop, ~~with the advice and consent of~~ *and* the Standing Committee shall have determined that any parish:

- i. is unable to support a rector *full time*;
- ii. *fails to provide financial support necessary for the spiritual program of the parish*;
- iii. ~~F~~fails adequately to insure and maintain ~~its~~ parish property;
- iv. *fails to provide a proportionate share of the expenses of the Diocese in the manner described in Canon 14.2; or*
- v. ~~F~~fails to observe ~~in a significant manner~~ the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church and of the Diocese;

and that such condition is not of a temporary *or insignificant* nature, the *parish shall, at the request of the Bishop, may require the Parish to* surrender ~~its~~ *all* rights and privileges as an organized parish and, ~~become~~ *at such date specified by the Bishop, convert to* an organized mission upon such terms as the Bishop *and Standing Committee* shall prescribe.

(b) Upon termination of ~~its~~ *parish* status ~~as a parish~~, the parish, if so requested by the Bishop, shall forthwith take the steps necessary to transfer to the Diocese of Rhode Island, all ~~of its~~ *tangible and intangible* property of the parish to be held, managed or ~~disposed of~~ *transferred* in such manner as the Bishop and the Standing Committee may determine. *In addition, the Bishop may remove the wardens and vestry and appoint a Bishop's Committee in accordance with Canon 11.3.*

10.8. Reestablishment of Parish. *A parish classified as a mission in accordance with Canon 10.7 may be reestablished as a parish with the consent of the Bishop and Standing Committee upon submission of evidence that in the discretion of the Bishop and Standing Committee establishes qualification as a parish.*

10.89. Aided Parishes. If the Bishop and the Standing Committee deem any condition described in Canon 10.7 to be temporary, the parish may be allowed to continue its parochial relationship with the Diocese as an aided parish upon such terms and with such financial assistance as the Bishop and the Diocesan Council may authorize.

Explanation

The Diocese of Rhode Island is at a crucial tipping point in relation to its long-term health, vitality, and growth. We are currently a diocese of fifty-three churches, down from sixty-five less than ten years ago, and several more churches face closure in the next two to three years. In 2009, twenty-five of the fifty-three churches in the diocese used more than 5% of their investment accounts for operating expenses. This is shocking news when you consider that the survival rate for non-profits spending from their endowments at the same level is 50%.¹ The financial crisis for many of our churches is matched by a crisis in membership. In 2009, only seven churches in the diocese had an average Sunday attendance above 150.² Many of our churches are too small to provide for a full-time priest, and they often cannot afford the ministries, programs, and staff that are mainstays of healthy, growing churches of all denominations. If we fail to take decisive action now, in five years we may be a debt-ridden diocese with deteriorating church buildings, shrunken ministries, and disheartened congregations.

On the other hand, God may be presenting us with an opportunity for extraordinary transformation and rebirth. Our financial challenges are a reminder that as the Body of Christ, we are an interdependent community defined not by our church buildings, but rather by our common worship and discipleship. Perhaps God is calling us through this crisis to new levels of collaboration. In this diocese we are blessed that no church is more than 10 miles from its nearest neighbor. Yet many of our churches continue their own unsustainable struggle to remain financially viable, while the spiritual, emotional, and material resources of their people are taxed to the point of exhaustion.

Our canons exist to help us live out our mission to “live in Christ” and “transform the world.” However, the weak language of the existing canon 10.7 may be contributing to the gradual demise of the very communities it is meant to support and sustain. The current canon states that if a parish fails in three critical areas, and if the condition of failure is not of a temporary nature, then the Bishop *may* require that parish to revert to mission status. The inclusion of the word “may,” and the impetus falling solely to the bishop to apply or not apply the rule, has resulted in several churches remaining parishes of the diocese long after they violated the language of the canon. This has allowed some parishes to continue struggling into their own demise without receiving the outside support, council and resources they may need to change and survive. Because of its vague language, the current canon makes the

¹ Source is the research and investment advisory firm Sanford C. Bernstein & Co., Inc., private marketing report provided to St. Michael’s Church, Bristol, RI

² A study conducted by the Alban Institute in the mid-1990’s indicated that church viability stabilized when the ASA was 150. The cause for that number was the ever-increasing expenses of basic operation (energy, salaries and benefits, maintenance). We can only assume that operational costs have increased since the study was conducted, thus increasing the minimum ASA needed for viability well above 150.

decision to require a parish to convert to mission status extremely difficult, and almost entirely reliant on the judgment of the Bishop.

The two centerpieces of the proposed change are

- (1) clearly stating the requirement that parish status is contingent upon the presence of a *full-time* rector, and
- (2) failure to meet the five stated criteria (10.7 i – v) in a significant and non-temporary way initiates a consideration process among Bishop, Standing Committee and the parish in question which may lead to the conversion of a church from parish to mission status.

The requirement of full-time priestly leadership recognizes the importance as chief pastor, worship leader, teacher and administrator that priests have in Episcopal churches. Priestly leadership is about more than celebrating the sacraments and preaching; it is about working with the lay leadership of a church to cast vision, form disciples, and empower ministry. Less than full-time priestly leadership is a model that has proven ineffectual in this diocese, and severely handicaps churches from growth and congregational vitality. While some churches may attain a unique form of viability with part-time rectors, as a diocese we must aspire toward proven models of leadership that offer the greatest opportunity for congregational health and dynamism.

Currently the process by which a mission church attains parish status includes demonstration of full-time priestly leadership.³ Therefore, altering the canon governing the transition from parish to mission would simply create mirror processes; if a church is required to have full-time clergy leadership to become a parish, then lack of full-time clergy leadership leads to mission status.

The likely result of approval of this canonical change would be a significant number of churches transitioning from parish to mission status.⁴ For some, the possibility of such a transition engenders anxiety and fear about loss of control and autonomy. We believe this reaction is governed by two common misconceptions about the status of missions in the Diocese of RI:

Misconception #1: Missions have no control over their day-to-day operations.

Response: While missions receive guidance from, and are ultimately answerable to, the Bishop and Diocesan Council, they continue to manage their property and resources on behalf of the Diocese. St. Francis in Coventry and St. Thomas in Alton are two examples of mission churches that operate with a generous amount of independence and autonomy. While it is true that major decisions about property

³ This is a procedure governing the process, which does not appear in diocesan canons.

⁴ Currently there are twelve churches that would be affected by this proposed canonical change.

and finances require the Bishop and Council's approval, the day-to-day life of missions is virtually indistinguishable from parishes.

Misconception #2: Missions have fewer resources than parishes and are therefore weaker. They are basically on "death row."

Response: In fact, missions are eligible to receive assistance that would not otherwise be available to them as parishes. For instance, the Congregational Development Commission has significant grant money available *exclusively* for the work of missions in the diocese.⁵ These funds are used to support the growth of missions, with the hope that they will become self-sustaining parishes in the future. When a church is facing a crisis of survival, conversion to mission status enables direct intervention in the form of outside counsel, resources, strategic thinking, and financial support that may affect positive transformation.

As a diocese, we need canonical language that will make the process of reversion to mission status transparent and predictable. Furthermore, this canonical change will assist us in accurately identifying as missions those churches where intervention and counsel is necessary, a process that is severely hindered by the autonomy granted parishes.

The current challenges facing us as a diocese may be a reminder that each congregation has particular gifts to contribute to the work of Christ, and that we are responsible for nourishing each other in our roles as disciples. This proposed canonical change is intended to enable transformation, to help struggling parishes make admittedly difficult sacrifices for the health and vitality of their communities and of the diocese as a whole.

⁵ The current amount available for mission-related grant funding by CDC is \$250,000.