RESOLUTION TITLE: Apportionment Reduction

RESOLVED, that the 233rd Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island direct Commission on Finance and Diocesan Council to propose a Diocesan Budget for 2026 with an apportionment rate of 14%. And be it further,

RESOLVED, that this Convention direct Commission on Finance and Diocesan Council to propose a Diocesan Budget for 2027 with an apportionment rate of 13%. And be it further,

RESOLVED, that this Convention encourage Diocesan Council to continue implementing additional apportionment deductions in the future that may especially provide supplemental apportionment relief to smaller and mid-sized congregations.

EXPLANATION

We commend the Commission on Finance for working diligently on apportionment reform this year by proposing long-needed updates to the deductions that will promote greater equity to the apportionment formulations, particularly helping our smaller congregations. We propose building on this work for all congregations by adding an across-the-board apportionment percentage reduction.

Our diocese has often stated that it exists to support the ministry expertly and best done at the local level by each congregation in its own context. We have congregations reaching out to their neighborhoods providing food, clothing, hot meals, ESL classes, 12 Step programs, music classes and much, much more – to say nothing of daily faith formation, fellowship, pastoral care and advocacy work. Our buildings are home to dozens of non-profit rental groups doing similar mission and ministry. Congregations have been increasingly creative and nimble at diversifying fundraising by increasing their rental incomes, moving to online payments and creating ministry partnerships.

Yet, our congregations are struggling under the weight of the current required 15% apportionment. Each congregation sends, in many cases, tens of thousands of dollars to the diocese each year. For some, their apportionment line item is larger than lay staff members' salaries, sometimes combined. For some congregations, it is the single largest expense after clergy compensation. Meanwhile, we are each struggling on our own to cover rising non-discretionary expenses like insurance, utilities, salary and service costs related to running a congregation in a digital age and maintaining our many and needy buildings in a manner suitable for service to the modern community.

It is true that many new members are being incorporated into our congregations and many congregations are experiencing growth in vitality. We celebrate such blessings of the Spirit! However, it is also a well-documented fact that new and younger members are not pledging at nearly the level of older parishioners who have died, moved or otherwise left. Our building rentals and alternative income streams very often are not covering the amounts lost from pledging combined with rising costs. Congregations are no longer receiving large in-kind donations (ie: heating oil, etc) nor are they able to rely on volunteer labor, but instead increasingly need to pay staff for what was once accomplished by volunteers. Consequently, we need to keep more of the faithfully given pledge dollars in our congregations to do local ministry. The burden of fund-raising and budget management is taking away valuable and finite time and energy from clergy staff who are called and better trained to do the work of Gospel proclamation, pastoral care and community building that is at the heart of our mission as followers of Jesus.

We realize this resolution will require the Commission on Finance and Diocesan Council to evaluate diocesan costs and make some potentially challenging financial decisions. It will require a focusing of diocesan ministry on what we can only do best together and what resources are actually needed to accomplish it. These sorts of challenging conversations of mission evaluation and financial impact are a reality our congregations have themselves been living with for many years. It is possible and necessary work as we move into new models of ministry for an evolving spiritual landscape. The resurrection happens as we move forward, not stay at the tomb looking backward. We need not be afraid of what this will require for God is with us in the journey.

Further, we believe this apportionment reduction is feasible as our diocese has demonstrated its financial strength by running a surplus in recent years, developing new income streams and being supported by significant and growing investment funds. Since this is the case, surely it can relieve its congregations of a small part of their apportionment burden. In consideration of these assets held by the Diocese, a 13% apportionment (alternately called an "assessment" or "fair share") should suffice to carry out the responsibilities required of a diocese in the Episcopal Church.

Jesus encourages us to put our treasure where our hearts will go. Our hearts are in the congregations we know and love. People are members of a congregation, not a diocese. They mark the seasons of their lives and grow as disciples in a particular community. We call on the diocese to better support those individual communities and their leaders by reducing the flat apportionment percentage (in addition to this year's welcome and overdue deduction reforms) thus allowing more resources to remain in the places where our hearts live.

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