

The Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany



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The Reverend Scott Garno, President
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COMMUNIQUÉ No 003 February 2021

Grace and peace to you in the Lord Jesus Christ.

On Monday, February 1, the Standing Committee automatically became the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese of Albany following Bishop Love's retirement. We want you to be informed about developments, challenges, and questions we face together as a diocese. The Standing Committee is attending to these in an orderly and deliberate manner.

1. Drawing on the wisdom and experience of a bishop

The Standing Committee believes that a judiciously structured, temporary relationship with a retired bishop will promote healing and provide needed support as people, parishes, and clergy seek creative approaches to pressing issues. The Standing Committee, in consultation with Bishop Todd Ousley of the Presiding Bishop's Office of Pastoral Development, will establish the nature of the relationship, scope of activity, and terms of service. It is important to emphasize that, as Ecclesiastical Authority, the Standing Committee controls the choice of individual and the nature of the relationship. Nothing beyond ordinary canonical responsibilities is imposed on the diocese of Albany.

2. Changes in the diocese

People. Our unity comes, not from our own will or choice, but God's design; the Holy Spirit empowers us to love one another, even as we disagree. Nevertheless, demographic shifts often accompany changes in leadership. Though we feel the separation keenly, we continue to respect and love brothers and sisters, clergy and lay, who leave our diocese or communion. We pray for the healing of all concerned; that all be preserved from resentment, bitterness, and hardness of heart; and that good will, compassion, and understanding will always characterize our interactions.

Requests by clergy to leave the diocese or the Episcopal Church, are ordinarily honored. It is inappropriate for the Standing Committee to comment on the specific details of any case.

We are also aware of intentions to plant ministries under other auspices in our midst. Though we rejoice that Christ is proclaimed, we remain concerned about their immediate and long-term impact. We ask prayers for guidance as we hope for reconciliation.

Parishes. Declining church attendance and shifts in participation patterns have been evident for many years, and are now exacerbated by the pandemic. Parish resources may be strained; arrangements for Sunday worship and pastoral care may be difficult. A few churches have signalled plans to close.

There are no simple, pre-existing solutions, but Christians in every age have weathered unusual, adverse circumstances. And there are **signs of hope**: clergy from other dioceses still inquire about coming to serve here. We are blessed with experienced, creative, caring people who can help wardens and vestries explore how to nurture their communities. Among the resources available are the regional deans and

Disciples Making Disciples

Canon Robert Haskell. In time, we may identify patterns that inspire promising initiatives. Meanwhile, thanksgiving and perseverance in prayer are essential disciplines for us all.

3. Resolution B012

We understand the desirability of detailed, authoritative guidance regarding the necessary implementation of Resolution B012. The Standing Committee is reviewing best practices and will address this topic in greater detail in future communiqués. Meanwhile:

- (a) it remains within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy to decline to solemnize or bless any marriage (Canon I.18.7); and
- (b) Resolution B012 expressly does not narrow the authority of a Rector or Priest-in-Charge under Canon III.9.6(a) regarding the worship and spiritual jurisdiction of the parish and the use and control of the Church and Parish buildings.

We appreciate the regional Deans' initiative to build generalized pastoral competence for dealing with controversy and crisis while maintaining congregational health. Their efforts will serve us well in this and other potentially controversial issues that may arise.

4. Other news

Diocesan Finances. Thanks to a Payroll Protection Plan (PPP) loan (forgiven), the diocese ended fiscal year 2020 without a deficit. We are in the process of applying for a second PPP loan for 2021. As always, Diocesan Council exercises authority over the diocesan budget between Conventions.

The Bishop Search subcommittee is studying the rules for the election of a diocesan bishop. In a future communiqué, we will share information on how the formal bishop search committee is constituted.

5. Ongoing communications and Call to Prayer

Communiqués appear monthly or as needed. We welcome questions and input by e-mail (SCPresident@albanydiocese.org) or (518) 692-3350. Please allow one or two business days for a reply.

We ask all parishes, people, and clergy of the diocese to use A Prayer in a Time of Transition (<https://albanyepiscopaldiocese.org/episcopaltransition/>) regularly in every parish and service.

May the blessing of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be among you now, and remain with you always.

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