

Resolution Title: Formation of a Special Commission to Review the Diocesan Canons and the Governance Structure of the Diocese.

RESOLVED that the 234th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island direct Diocesan Council to oversee the formation of a special commission to review and suggest revisions to the diocesan canons and the governance structure of the diocese. And be it further

RESOLVED that this commission give a report to the 2026 Diocesan Convention and present the completed report at the 2027 Diocesan Convention. And be it further

RESOLVED that the composition of this commission include members of the Committee on Elections, the Committee on Canons, and Diocesan Council, as well as representatives from congregations of all sizes from across the diocese.

EXPLANATION

The Committee on Elections recruits volunteers to be elected to an assortment of committees and commissions that share in the governance of the diocese. This committee also helps the Bishop find volunteers whom he appoints to other committees and commissions. The current canons of the diocese outline how many members serve on each group, the length of terms as well as additional requirements based on canonical residence of clergy and (in one instance), the deanery from which a member belongs.

According to diocesan canons, there are 14 groups* (committees/commissions/other) that need to be populated. In past years, individual canons have been revised to reflect the changing composition of the diocese. As a result, the diocesan canons are convoluted and, in some cases, they contradict each other. The selection process and the number of people for each group can be found in the canon that is pertinent to each group. Some groups are defined as committees of Convention, a few are committees of Diocesan Council, and others are committees or commissions that stand alone. The various ways to fill these positions are: appointed by the Bishop, nominated by the Bishop and confirmed by Diocesan Council, appointed by the Bishop and confirmed by Convention, elected by Diocesan Council and approved by the Bishop, nominated by Diocesan Council and elected by Convention, or elected by Convention. There are a total of 93 people needed to fill all the positions for these 14 groups. Of these, 37 are appointed and 56 are elected. And of these 93 positions, 44 must be clergy and 49 must be lay. In addition to these openings, there are other advisory boards and taskforces in the diocese that are populated using the same pool of members.

The diocese is currently made up of 49 congregations. About half of them are served by part-time clergy-many of whom already retired from full-time ministry. In 2025, it is a challenge to find enough clergy and lay members to populate all the openings defined by the canons. The Committee on Elections believes that a special multi-year commission should review the canons and study the committee structure and deanery model that is in use. A simpler format is needed that requires fewer elected and appointed members. It would also be useful to have more flexible wording in the canons that can accommodate future changes in the composition of the diocese. This would eliminate the need to constantly revise the canons. This commission should be staffed by members of Diocesan Council, the Committees on Elections and Canons, as well as members of diverse congregations who can provide valuable input.

* While there are 14 groups that need to be populated, three groups of nominees- members of the Standing Committee, deputies to General Convention and delegates to Provincial Synod- are elected according to guidelines outside of our diocesan canons.