

PEP Argument Briefing Paper

Title: Archives Left without Supervision or Support
Applicable to: 2008 Changes to Canon XI
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Summary

The proposed revision of Canon XI represents a complete restructuring of the diocese's approach to history and record keeping, eliminating the Commission of Archives and History, removing all duties from the historiographer, and vesting all functions in the archivist.

Background

- In its efforts to keep track of its own records and history, The Episcopal Church (TEC) first created the office of Registrar/Historiographer. Many dioceses followed suit. In some dioceses, the historiographer is an elected office; in others it is appointed. More recently, dioceses have also added archivists to their staffs. While some historiographers serve as archivists, more often, the two are separate. Archivists are concerned with the preservation and cataloging of records, and historiographers are concerned with promoting and writing history. The two positions are normally complementary. Archivists and historiographers together created their own organization, National Episcopal Historiographers and Archivists (NEHA), one of three historical organizations associated with TEC.
- The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh had a model program for history and its archives before 2003. The diocese began building this program with the appointment of a Registrar/Historian and then created a Commission on Archives and History. The Commission members included those with graduate training in history or related disciplines, parish historians, genealogists, and professional archivists or librarians. The Commission then consulted with the bishop on the hiring of an archivist and provided oversight of and support for the archivist, the archives, and the historiographer. The Commission drew up an RFP that led to the hiring of the person currently completing a history of the diocese. However, as church controversy intensified, the Commission found it increasingly difficult to recruit members, and it was eventually unable to function. The proposed canon change dismantles the model system, leaving all responsibility in the hands of the archivist, including duties originally assigned to the historiographer. The current historiographer is a retired priest who has long been working on a series of short parish histories for the diocese. The current archivist is a professional, well versed in her field and is employed by the diocese part-time.

Argument

- The proposed change leaves no one to advocate for history or the archives except a part-time archivist. A part-time employee is not in the same position as a strong commission to advocate for better facilities, budget, space, or additional staff.
- An archivist's perspective on records is different from an historian's. Whereas archivists sometimes prepare exhibits or write history, and historians sometimes catalog collections or collect and reserve records, the perspectives of these professionals are different. Archivists will put preservation of records first; historians will concern themselves first with the use of those records. Elimination of the Commission eliminates the user's perspective in the development of policies for the collections of the diocese. It also provides no one with appropriate background in archives and history to oversee the work of the archivist.
- The proposed changes to Canon XI eliminate several sections that set up basic policy for the archives and cover such things as guaranteeing access to the collections, appropriate time-certain sealing of records to maintain confidentiality in personnel matters, de-accessioning of duplicate or inappropriate items, and the scope of the duties of the archivist. It is standard practice for boards of directors of archives, libraries, and museums to approve such policies, working closely with the professional staff (i.e., the archivist). The revision eliminates the Commission that served the function of a board of directors. This leaves the professional staff person to set such policy unilaterally, without consultation with knowledgeable people or stakeholders, or to have policy dictated to the archivist by those in the diocesan office who lack such background or perspective.
- The revised canon makes the historiographer an optional office. It assigns to that office "safekeeping and preservation of all Diocesan records not otherwise under the custody of the Archivist," duties more appropriate to an archivist. On the other hand, the archivist is assigned tasks more appropriate to an historiographer ("historical documentation of the Diocese and Parishes.")

Conclusions

The proposed revision accurately describes the situation the diocese is now in respecting its archives, but represents a step backward from the model program it once had. The changes include troubling omissions of basic policies and permissions and confuse the role of the historiographer and archivist, leaving the historiographer with no meaningful role.

Supporting Documents

Canon XI, Showing Proposed Additions and Deletions

(Additions are underlined, and deletions are struck out.)

Canon XI

Of the History and Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh

Registrar/Historiographer

~~Section 1. Election. At each annual session of Convention, a Registrar/Historiographer shall be elected to serve for one year.~~

~~Section 2. General Duties. It shall be the duty of the Registrar/ Historiographer to provide for the safekeeping and preservation of the Diocesan records and other materials that relate to the history of the Episcopal Church in this Diocese and any parish therein, and to transmit such materials into the custody of the Diocese to be kept in the Diocesan Archives.~~

~~Section 3. Duties at Trials and Inquiries. The Registrar/ Historiographer shall act as clerk at all ecclesiastical trials and inquiries held in the Diocese.~~

~~Section 4. Convention Responsibilities. The Registrar/ Historiographer shall serve as eustodian of records for the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese; shall see that all changes or additions to the Constitution or Canons authorized at any convention are entered in the official copy of the Constitution and Canons which the Registrar shall place in the Diocesan Archives, and that a current copy of the Constitution and Canons as revised be supplied to the President of the Convention, the Chancellor of the Diocese, the Secretary of the Convention, and the Committee on Canons.~~

~~Section 5. Preservation Ordination Records. It shall be the duty of the Registrar/ Historiographer to preserve in a proper registry book a record of the ordination/consecration of the successive bishops of the Diocese, designating accurately the time and place of the same with the names of the ordaining/ consecrating bishops and the others present and assisting, and to record such additional facts as may be worthy of preservation.~~

~~Section 6. Historical Responsibilities. It shall be the responsibility of the Registrar/ Historiographer to note any facts which illustrate important aspects of diocesan and parish history. Such historical information may be reported to convention each year.~~

~~Section 7. Appointment. There shall be a Diocesan Archives and Historical Commission appointed by the Bishop with the approval of the Diocesan Council. The members shall be persons concerned with and knowledgeable about the keeping of diocesan records. The chairman shall be designated by the Bishop. The Registrar/ Historiographer shall be ex officio voting members of the Commission.~~

~~Section 8. General Duties. The Commission shall set policy for the Diocesan Archives. It shall nominate the Diocesan Archivist and set forth the terms and conditions with regard to the work of the Diocesan Archivist. It shall also serve as a committee of advice and support for the Registrar/ Historiographer and for individual parishes. The Commission shall adopt such procedures consistent with the Constitution and Canons of this Diocese for its organization and functioning and shall establish such plans and mission objectives that will advance an appreciation of the recorded history of the Episcopal Church in this Diocese. The Diocesan Archives and Historical Commission shall report to the Diocesan Convention.~~

~~Section 9. Appropriation for the Diocesan Archives. The diocesan convention may each year make an annual appropriation toward the expense of the Diocesan Archives as recommended by the Diocesan Archives and Historical Commission.~~

Archivist

~~Section 10. Selection. The Chairman of the Diocesan Archives and Historical Commission, with the consent of the Commission, may nominate to the Bishop a person trained in archival management. The Bishop may appoint the person nominated as the Diocesan Archivist.~~

~~Section 11. General Duties. The appointed Archivist shall be responsible for the direct day-to-day supervision of the Archives and management of all aspects of that work, and shall propose policies and make other recommendations as appropriate.~~

~~Section 12. Archival and Records Management Duties. The Archivist shall organize and preserve the journals, files, papers, reports and other documents that have been deposited in and are under the custodianship of the Diocesan Archives. The Archivist shall also undertake responsibility for managing the non-current records of the Diocese by carrying out records retention and disposition practices in consultation with the creating officers and agencies.~~

~~Section 13. Certification of Records. It shall be the duty of the Archivist to issue, on request, proper certification of records in the Archives including, but not limited to the following: Consecration, Ordination, Baptism, Confirmation, Marriages and Burial Records.~~

Records

~~Section 14. Diocesan and Parish Records. The Archivist shall document and preserve the history of the Diocese and Parishes which provides for historical continuity and promotes an understanding of our common life.~~

~~Section 15. Closed or Dissolved Churches. Records, including vestry minutes and parochial registers, of officially closed or dissolved missions and parishes shall revert to the custody of and be preserved in the Diocesan Archives.~~

~~Section 16. Disposition of Records. The Archivist, with the consent of the Diocesan Historical Commission, may dispose of duplications and other materials which do not fall within the scope of the established Collection Agreement.~~

~~Section 17. Confidentiality of Diocesan Records. The Bishop may direct that documents, which for pastoral or other reasons should be kept in confidence, shall be placed under seal. The Bishop shall specify for what period each security shall continue, who shall have access, and for what purpose.~~

~~Section 18. Accessibility. All books, papers, and documents in the Archivist's charge, not previously sealed under Section 16, shall be subject to the call of the Convention and shall be open to the inspection of the Bishop, the Standing Committee, and any committee or officer of the Convention or Diocese.~~

Section 1: The Bishop may appoint an Archivist who shall administer the Diocesan archives, including the historical documentation of the Diocese and Parishes, and perform such other duties as directed by the Bishop or Standing Committee. It shall be the duty of the Archivist to issue, on request, proper certification of records in the archives including, but not limited to, Consecration, Ordination, Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage and Burial Records.

Section 2: The Bishop may appoint a Historiographer who shall provide for the safekeeping and preservation of all Diocesan records not otherwise under the custody of the Archivist, and perform such other duties as directed by the Bishop or Standing Committee.