

PEP Argument Briefing Paper

Title: Details of Resolution Problematic
Applicable to: Resolution 4 (Task Force on Reunion)
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Background

The proposed resolution would create a task force of six or more members to study the possible “reunion” of the Diocese of Pittsburgh with the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania, presumably—this is not at all clear—for achieving economies of scale. The timing of this resolution is problematic, but also problematic are the details (or, in some cases, the lack of details) of the resolution.

Argument

- The resolution proposes no budget for its task force, and the proposed 2010 budget contains no funds for the project. Whereas much work can be done by volunteers, certain aspects of reunion—financial and legal considerations come immediately to mind—should be studied by experts, preferably external experts with no stake in the outcome. It is unreasonable to expect the task force to carry out its charge competently without expending any funds.
- Even if the work could be carried out by volunteers, establishing the task force represents poor stewardship. Pittsburgh has more pressing issues to deal with, and the six (or however many people) on the task force will necessarily be prevented from helping the diocese carry out its mission in other ways.
- The resolution asks the task force to look at the “potential long-term impact” of reunion but is silent on any short-term impact. Even if there are substantial long-term advantages to reunion, the short-term costs, particularly to a diocese still working toward achieving stability and a sense of identity, could be substantial enough to make reunion contraindicated at this time.
- The composition of the task force seems arbitrary, and there is nothing in the resolution suggesting how either balance or depth of expertise is to be obtained among task force members. Nor is there any requirement that the study be transparent or involve wide participation by parishioners of the diocese. Other mechanisms for studying reunion seem more likely to produce a satisfactory report, for example, use of a larger committee served by a paid staff of consultants.
- Reunion with Northwestern Pennsylvania could make the incumbent Bishop of Northwestern Pennsylvania bishop of the combined diocese. Whether or not this might be desirable in the abstract, Pittsburgh Episcopalians may feel disenfranchised by a process that does not let them vote for a bishop of their choice.
- If reunion with Northwestern Pennsylvania is a good idea, should we not also consider other options? Pittsburgh borders at least five other dioceses. Perhaps joining

with West Virginia or another adjacent diocese would be a good idea. The resolution does not give the task force the freedom to explore such options.

- Given that there is no urgent need for combining our diocese to assure the survival of Episcopal churches in Southwestern Pennsylvania, the task force should be prevented from proposing an actual reunion resolution to the 2010 convention. In practice, most people of the diocese will pay little attention to the possibility of reunion until a serious reunion movement emerges, at which time, people should be given a year or more to study the issue. The resolution contains no such provision.

Supporting Information

Resolution (from *Preconvention Journal 2009*, pages C-3–C-4, <http://www.episcopalpgh.org/wp-content/uploads/file/Documents/2009%20DioConv/2009DioConventionPacketV3.pdf>):

4. Title: *Task Force on Reunion*

Resolved: that this 144th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh of the Episcopal Church direct the Standing Committee (or Ecclesiastical Authority) of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh to form a broadly based task force, including at least three clergy and three lay persons, to study the possibility of the reunion of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Episcopal Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania under the provisions of Title I, canon 10, section 6 of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, 2006 [see below], and to prepare a report on the results of that study and any recommendations to the 145th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, in the fall of 2010. The Task Force shall consider specifically the potential long-term impact of such reunion on the financial and administrative resources of the two dioceses, and shall invite the Bishop and Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania to participate in the study.

Explanation: The division of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, to create the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Episcopal Diocese of Erie, in the early 20th century took place in an era of growth in population and industry—and in church membership—in both the northern and southern quadrants of Western Pennsylvania. In the intervening century much has changed in both regions in terms of economics and demographics. In what was the Diocese of Erie (now the Episcopal Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania) there has been a significant decline of population. In the Diocese of Pittsburgh the Episcopal Church itself has experienced unprecedented change following the “realignment” and departure from the Episcopal Church of many clergy and congregations. This resolution, making no prior assumptions about any result, directs that one part of planning for the future of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh at this critical time should include a reconsideration of the early-20th century division of Western Pennsylvania into two dioceses and an exploration of the possible benefits of a reunion of the two dioceses at this time.

Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, Title I, Canon 10, Section 6 (2006):

Sec. 6 (a) When a Diocese, and another Diocese which has been formed either by division therefrom or by erection into a Diocese or a Missionary Diocese formed by division therefrom, shall desire to be reunited into one Diocese, the proposed reunion must be initiated by a mutual agreement between the Conventions of the two Dioceses, consented to by the Ecclesiastical Authority of each Diocese. If the said agreement is made and the consents given more than three months before the next meeting of the General Convention, the fact of the agreement and consents

shall be certified by the Ecclesiastical Authority and the Secretary of the Convention of each Diocese to all the Bishops of the Church having jurisdiction and to the Standing Committees of all the Dioceses; and when the consents of a majority of such Bishops and of a majority of the Standing Committees to the proposed reunion shall have been received, the facts shall be similarly certified to the Secretary of the House of Deputies of the General Convention, and thereupon the reunion shall be considered complete. But if the agreement is made and the consents given within three months of the next meeting of the General Convention, the facts shall be certified instead to the Secretary of the House of Deputies, who shall lay them before the two Houses; and the reunion shall be deemed to be complete when it shall have been sanctioned by a majority vote in the House of Bishops, and in the House of Deputies voting by orders.

(b) The Bishop of the parent Diocese shall be the Bishop, and the Bishop of the junior Diocese shall be the Bishop Coadjutor, of the reunited Diocese; but if there be a vacancy in the Episcopate of either Diocese, the Bishop of the other Diocese shall be the Bishop, and the Bishop Coadjutor if there be one shall be the Bishop Coadjutor, of the reunited Diocese.

(c) When the reunion of the two Dioceses shall have been completed, the facts shall be certified to the Presiding Bishop and to the Secretary of the House of Deputies. Thereupon the Presiding Bishop shall notify the Secretary of the House of Bishops of any alteration in the status or style of the Bishop or Bishops concerned, and the Secretary of the House of Deputies shall strike the name of the junior Diocese from the roll of Dioceses in union with the General Convention.

Sponsors:

The Rev. Bruce Robison, D.Min., Rector, St. Andrew's, Highland Park,

Fran Gargotta, St. Brendan's, Franklin Park

The Rev. Daniel E. Hall, M.D., Episcopal Priest in Residence, the First Lutheran Church
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The Rev. Stephen Smalley, Rector, St. Barnabas, Brackenridge

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