

R1 TASK FORCE REPORT

October 21, 2021

Dear Colleagues in Ministry:

In response to Resolution R-1a, from the 2020 Virtual Convention, the Virtual Governance Task Force was assembled in April 2021. Our task was to address the issues of virtual governance, and the related issues of accountability, transparency, inclusivity, and accessibility. The eleven of us called into this work have presented seven proposals for consideration by the 2021 Virtual Convention.

These proposals address the following issues

- Identifying Best Practices for Virtual and Hybrid Meetings
- Identifying Best Practices to Assure People with Special Needs Can Participate
- Setting Standards for Open and Closed Meetings
- Governing Virtual and Hybrid Meetings
- Making Elected Diocesan Leaders More Accessible and Accountable
- Changing Convention Rules (for 2022) to Make Proceedings Fairer and More Transparent

These proposals are found in Resolutions R-2, R-3, and R-[TBD], and in Canonical Resolutions C-3, 4, 5, and 6. These are consensus recommendations, the product of hundreds of hours of work by our members, who represent a broad cross-section of our diocese.

Findings

The Diocese of Virginia, its governing bodies, and its congregations, have successfully adapted to virtual governance during the unprecedented global pandemic. While our virtual adaptations have sometimes been awkward and leave room for improvement, they have done two important things, one practical and one theological.

On a practical note, our virtual migration has assured continuity of faithful operations through a chaotic and difficult time in our national life.

Theologically, our Episcopal governance is grounded in the truth that we best discern the Holy Spirit's direction when we fully engage all four orders of ministry – lay people, deacons, priests, and bishops – in that discernment. Faithful collective discernment is integral to our identity as The Episcopal Church.

This Diocese has faithfully continued that collective discernment work in our virtual governance since March 2020. We have grounded our Task Force recommendations in that theology of collective discernment. Do not let this report's focus on recommended improvements obscure our primary finding: our virtual governance has been faithful and successful in continuing to advance the Gospel in this Diocese and beyond.

Your Task Force has worked to learn how we have adapted, to discern what has worked well and what has not, and to make recommendations about improvements in the future.

Approach

In making our recommendations for future governance, both for virtual and for in-person proceedings (as well as any hybrid versions), we have sought to assure that we make collective congregational and diocesan decisions by means that assure:

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Accessibility, and
- Inclusivity.

These attributes are vital to assure that all orders of ministry and all communities in our Diocese have a fair opportunity to be heard.

Recommendations:

We recommend improvements at the congregational level, in our standing committee and Executive Board procedures, and in our rules for Diocesan Convention. Most of these improvements are compiled as best practices. These are found in resolutions addressing **best practices for virtual and hybrid meetings:**

- **Resolution R-2 (Regional Councils, Standing Committee and Executive Board)**
- **Resolution R-3 (Vestries & Congregations)**
- **Resolution R-[TBD] (People with Special Needs in Virtual Proceedings)**

[Resolutions | The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia \(thediocese.net\)](#)

We recommend changes in the Rules of Order for Convention, beginning in 2022. Based on a very strong survey response, the biggest change is to provide two weeks between hearings and Convention, and to require advance posting of Committee reports and amendments. By a very wide margin, survey respondents, both lay and clergy want much more time to review the language of specific proposals and counterproposals before Convention starts. ***These proposed changes are found in C-6, before the Committee on Constitution and Canons.***

We recommend three canonical changes, largely to resolve any doubts about the validity of virtual proceedings, and to assure transparency and accountability on the part of our elected leadership.

- **C-3 sets forth the standards for open and closed meetings**, making clear that Diocesan Convention is open to all communicants, the public, and the press;
- **C-4, following analogous Virginia statutes, sets the standard for valid virtual and hybrid proceedings**, making clear that it provides no basis to challenge the results of prior virtual meetings;
- **C-5, makes it the responsibility of elected diocesan leaders to provide a valid, working e-mail or surface mail address for people in the Diocese to contact them directly**, and requires reasonable efforts to respond to such inquiries in a timely manner.

[Amendments | The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia \(thediocese.net\)](#)

The Task Force has adopted these recommendations by consensus, after many hours of thoughtful work by a wide spectrum of diocesan leaders.

The Task Force members will speak to our recommendations at the November 6, 2021 virtual hearings and at the virtual November 12-13 Convention.

Rationale for the Virtual Governance Task Force

At 226th Annual Convention in 2020, which was held virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Resolution 1-a was passed. The purpose of this resolution was to determine if changes were necessary to our governing canons, related rules of order, and administrative practices regarding virtual meetings of the Diocesan Convention, the Executive Board, the Standing Committee, the Regional Councils, as well as Parish Annual and Special Meetings. Resolution 1-a also sought your Task Force to identify any problems and provide recommendations to assure any virtual governance meeting was inclusive.

Methodology

In its collective discernment, your Task Force listened to and consulted with various stakeholders and members of our diocese, as well as Diocesan staff and staff of the National Church. We conducted an electronic survey regarding attendance of the Annual Convention held in 2019 and the Special Convention held in 2020, which were both held virtually. The surveys concerned participation at Annual Convention, participation at the hearings at Annual Convention, and information provided in advance of the virtual meetings.

The online surveys were offered to the 503 face to face delegates attending the 2019 Annual Convention and 437 online attendees at the 2020 special meeting.

The responses for the online survey were:

Year	Sampled Population	Responses	Response as a Percent of the Sample Population*
2019	503	109	22%
2020	437	86	21%

Based on a survey validity/margin of error table, the response to sample ratio yields a validity rate of +10 - +15. The detailed responses are attached as an appendix.

The most noteworthy finding from these surveys is that both clergy and lay delegates, by more than a two to one margin, want two weeks between hearings and convention, and significant time after the hearings and before Convention meets, to review changes in language made by the committees, as well as any significant amendments to them.

Of the 2019 attendees who responded to these questions, 59 said that committee amendments to the budget, canonical proposals and proposed resolutions should be posted at least a week before Convention, 20 said at least 3 days before Convention, and only 6 said the first morning of Convention. By 69% to 31%, more than a two to one margin, delegates want at least a week's notice of committee amendments to proposed resolutions, canonical changes, and the proposed budget. This timing means

that hearings must take place at least two weeks before Convention, so Committees have time to consider the testimony they have heard.

Of the 2020 attendees who responded to these questions, 73 said that committee amendments to the budget, canonical proposals and proposed resolutions should be posted at least a week before Convention, 29 said at least 3 days before Convention, and only 4 said the first morning of Convention. Once again, by 69% to 31%, more than a two to one margin, delegates want at least a week's notice of committee amendments to proposed resolutions, canonical changes, and the proposed budget. Once again, this timing means that hearings must take place at least two weeks before Convention to give Committees time to give adequate consideration to the witnesses' testimony at these hearings.

We ask our clergy and lay leaders to invest significant time and effort to attend Convention, whether virtually or in-person. As a Diocese, Convention is a significant expense. As Episcopalians engaged in collective discernment of the most faithful decisions for our diocese, we need to give lay delegates and clergy the critical written proposals they will debate and vote upon early enough to consider carefully.

The online survey approach was selected based on:

- The large number of the population to be surveyed (Approximately 400)
- The geographic dispersion of the population to be surveyed (The Diocese of Virginia)
- The consistent attributes of the sample population, i.e. laity and clergy of the Diocese of Virginia. This increases the accuracy of the subset that actually responds.
- The sharing of the same experiences (difference in quality of digital access was the one variant and covered by specific questions)
- The questions were developed based on conference calls with subsets of the target population: Zoom calls, input from Task Force members, and Diocesan staff.

In addition to the online survey, your Task Force listened to and consulted with:

- Clergy and lay leaders facilitated by the Diocese through Zoom meetings,
- The Rt. Rev. Susan Goff, Bishop Suffragan and Ecclesiastical Authority,
- Diocesan Staff, including Mark Eastham (Secretary and Chief of Staff), Bill Martin (Assistant to the Secretary), Nancy Chafin (Minister of Communications), Erin Monaghan Kamron (Communications Associate), and Joe Klem (Consultant),
- J.P. Causey, Esq., Chancellor of the Diocese,
- Staff members of the Episcopal Church Office of the General Convention,
- Members of the Executive Board,
- Members of the Standing Committee,
- Communications with clergy of parishes who did not participate in the 226th Annual Convention of 2019 or the Special Convention held in 2020, and
- Personal experiences of your Task Force members in virtual governance meetings.

Membership:

Our members include nearly equal numbers of lay and clergy. We are from large and small congregations, from missions and cardinal parishes, and from rural, suburban, and urban locations. Our

members are men and women, LGBT and straight, Black, White, and Hispanic. As much as eleven people can, we reflect the wide diversity of our Diocese.

Your Virtual Governance Task Force recommends adoption of the proposed resolutions, canonical changes, and changes in Convention Rules (for 2022 and thereafter) so that we can learn from our sometimes difficult experience in the pandemic and improve the fairness, transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness of our decisions and the way we make them.

Respectfully submitted,

The Hon. Kristen Amundson

The Rev. Collins Asonye

The Rev. Cass Bailey

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The Rev. Webster Gibson

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