
The Joint Commission on Religion & Health

The Episcopal Church has responsibility to her people and to the world for dealing with health and wholeness. This involves both our Lord's own ministry of healing and our common human need for guidance and urgent ethical issues.

The present movement toward secularization presses us to maintain our spiritual integrity and openness to the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and to guide.

We face perplexing moral issues in the field of health and human welfare. Some are created by remarkable scientific discoveries and technical advances. Still others derive from changing value systems in our pluralistic society. They challenge the Christian to defend or uphold principles and concepts which have been traditional for centuries. Physicians, lawyers, nurses, clergy, counselors, teachers, social workers, and many others who give care and serve human needs in our society look to their church for guidance in regard to complex personal, social, and ethical issues. The General Conventions of the Episcopal Church often deal with these very issues and ask for both guidance and action of the church.

In our present structure there is no central forum in the church where issues of religion and health and human welfare can be confronted, examined with thoroughness, and spoken to from our theological point of view. Today's dilemmas emerge with urgency and with great pain for many who seek to be faithful to their Christian conviction. The future promises even more complex issues. These dilemmas – some coming upon us with an urgent ugliness and some with promise and hope – push us to establish a forum where they can be dealt with on behalf of the whole church.

Currently, in many quarters of our church and society, we face both a bewildered apathy and an explosive frustration in dealing with such critical issues as abortion, euthanasia, the right to die, fetal and genetic research, alcoholism and substance abuse, human sexuality, and others.

In order to respond to the urgency of this moment, the Joint Commission on Religion and Health proposes that a Standing Commission be created and designated as The Standing Commission on the Church and Health so as to be able to deal with consistency and continuity with questions that demand attention.

In many instances secular agencies wrestle seriously with these matters, and to an increasing extent seek dialogue with church bodies hoping and expecting meaningful exchanges which will help to elucidate and clarify questions of ethics and morality.

Such a Commission would not be called upon to force the church to accept "positions" regarding perplexing and controversial questions. This would not be constructive and would only introduce into the church a potential source of divisiveness and a disagreement. What is needed is a means for opening up questions for thoughtful investigations and thorough exploration as a means of providing information and insight that would enable clergy and lay persons to make informed decisions in keeping with their respective consciences.

The Standing Committee on the Church and Health would be called upon:

- 1) to develop a method for investigation and exploration of key issues
- 2) to devise a means of sharing through dialogue, discussion, and study – insights and relevant knowledge
- 3) to plan and carry out a system for preparing and disseminating materials to be used educationally throughout the church.

The Commission would create a method for working which would carry out faithfully and as fully as possible the mandate of the 64th General Convention by

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which the Joint Commission was created (see attached message #35, reference *A-108 Creating the Joint Commission on Religion and Health).

The work and function of the Standing Commission on the Church and Health will be informed and guided by a definition of health that reaches far beyond the view of health as simply freedom from illness. Health is more than the absence of disease; healing is more than recovery from illness. The church is dedicated to helping human beings realize the full potential the Creator intends for each of his children and for which He sent the Redeemer and the Sanctifier.

The present Joint Commission is grateful for the work done in the past by the Joint Commission on the Church's Healing Ministry (1961) and the Joint Commission on Religion and Health (1964 & 1967) and for the previous and continuing services of the Joint Commission on Human Affairs.

It is proposed that the Standing Commission on the Church and Health deal in depth in this triennium with three issues of critical importance: The Right to Die; Fetal and Genetic Research; and Abortion. The report back to the church will occur during the triennium and at the time of the next General Convention. Whenever and wherever possible provincial structures will be used for both efficiency and economy. Investigation, dialogue and discussion, and written materials will be offered in regard to each of these three issues.

The Joint Commission offers these 4 resolutions:

Resolution A-31

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that there shall be a Standing Commission on the Church and Health consisting of twelve persons as follows: three Bishops, three Priests, and six Lay persons who shall be representative of a broad diversity of both scientific and medical disciplines, and be it further

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that upon the adoption of this resolution and following the adjournment of this General Convention, the full membership of the Commission shall be appointed for terms as follows: one Bishop, two Priests and three Lay persons for terms which shall be the equivalent of the one Convention period; and two Bishops, one Priest and three Lay persons for terms which shall be the equivalent of two Convention periods; and be it further

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that following the adjournment of each subsequent General Convention, Bishops, Priests and Lay persons shall be appointed for terms which shall be the equivalent of two Convention periods, to succeed the persons whose terms have expired at such General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that the Standing Commission on the Church and Health shall select its own officers and shall have power to constitute committees and to employ consultants and coordinators necessary to the carrying out of its work; and be it further

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that the Standing Commission on the Church and Health shall study and concern itself with all aspects of psychological, physical and spiritual health; and in the education of the Christian persons with respect thereto, shall explore the possibility of cooperation with similar bodies established by other religious, scientific or lay groups and organizations, and be it further

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that \$63,700. be appropriated for the work of the Commission.

MESSAGE NO. 35

Ref. No. A-108

THE HOUSE OF DEPUTIES informs the HOUSE OF BISHOPS that it *has adopted* the following Resolution:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That there shall be a Joint Commission on Religion and Health, consisting of twelve persons, three Bishops who shall be appointed by the Presiding Bishop, three Clergymen who shall be appointed by the President of the House of Deputies, and six lay persons, including women, who shall be appointed by the President of the House of Deputies and who shall be representative of a broad diversity of scientific and medical disciplines; and be it further

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the Joint Commission on Religion and Health shall select its own officers and shall have power to constitute committees and to employ consultants and coordinators necessary to the carrying on of its work; and be it further

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the Joint Commission on Religion and Health shall study and concern itself with all aspects of psychological, physical and spiritual health, and in the education of Christian persons with respect thereto, shall explore the possibility of cooperation with, and to the extent found to be feasible, shall cooperate with similar bodies established by other religious, scientific or lay groups and organizations, and shall, in cooperation with the Standing Commission on the Structure of the Church, make recommendations to the 65th General Convention with respect to the desirability of establishing, by the enactment of appropriate canonical changes, a Standing Commission to carry on the studies begun by the Joint Commission.

BUDGET EXPLANATION FOR THE PROPOSED STANDING COMMISSION ON THE CHURCH AND HEALTH

The amount requested for this Commission is \$21,233 per year or a total of \$63,700 for the triennium.

It is proposed that the Commission serve as a resource to the church for dealing with critical issues in the field of health and human welfare. Increasingly the critical issues are demanding technical expertise and investigation ferreting out the essential aspects of the problems involved, and in interpreting this information so that it can be understood and used by clergy and lay persons who are required to confront and deal with these issues.

We have broken our proposed budget down in terms of the task to be done. We have costed out the procedure for dealing with a single issue. Our budget asks that the Commission be supported to the extent of dealing in depth with three major issues in the next triennium.

The methodology calls for expert investigation, contributing toward dialogue and open discussion, and the dissemination of written materials – and all of this so as to assist church members in making up their minds where to stand. We see the work of the Commission as supportive to the work of conscience and not directive.

Each issue will require the following steps:

1. One Commission Meeting	\$2,700
2. Contracting for services of consultants & technical experts to investigate & prepare background materials	4,000
3. Field testing materials for utility, correctness & credibility	3,000
4. Disseminating materials thru Provincial meetings (8 meetings at \$1,000)	8,000
5. Secretary Services	1,766
6. Evaluation of effectiveness of work done and materials prepared	1,766
Total per issue	\$21,232

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The cost of dealing with three major issues in the manner described above would be \$63,696.

With additional funding more issues could be dealt with.

We feel that this methodology and this budget would provide for thorough and responsible work being done on issues assigned to the Standing Commission on the Church and Health.

Already in this present triennium we have utilized some of our funds to start to work on the Right to Die issue. The Commission has assigned responsibility for the management of this project to Dr. John Weeth. By the time the General Convention meets in 1976 this work will be underway. However, continuing funding by the 65th General Convention will be required in order to complete this particular task.