

# The Standing Commission on The Church in Small Communities

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## A. COMMISSION MEMBERS

The Rt. Rev. William J. Cox, *Chairman*, Tulsa, Oklahoma  
The Rt. Rev. William Davidson, Cleveland, Ohio  
The Rt. Rev. William Beckham, Columbia, South Carolina  
The Ven. Carlson Gerdau, St. Louis, Missouri  
The Rev. Vernon A. Jones, Jr., Tuskegee Institute, Alabama  
The Rev. George E. Bates, Pendleton, Oregon  
Mr. F. Peter Finger, Geneva, New York  
Mr. Douglas F. Fleet, Jr., Tazewell, Virginia  
Dr. Arthur Raymond, Grand Forks, North Dakota  
Dr. Rosa J. de Cisneros, San Salvador, El Salvador (deceased, 9/81)  
Mr. Stephen B. Smith, Blacksburg, Virginia  
Mrs. William (Carol) Nichols, Littleton, New Hampshire

### Also assisting the Commission:

The Rev. Richard E. Gary, national Church staff, New York  
The Rev. Robert H. Greene, Resource Center for Small Churches, Luling, Texas  
The Rev. James R. Gundrum, Executive Secretary, General Convention, New York  
The Rev. Charles R. Wilson, CRW Management Services, Easton, Pennsylvania

## B. PURPOSE

Canon 1.1.2(h): "To concern itself with plans for new directions for Churches in Small Communities."

## C. BACKGROUND

In 1979 the Commission set forth a vision of the future of the small congregation, a vision intended to guide its work through the triennium. Our proposals for the next three years are not limited to issues suggested by that vision. However, we again affirm that vision; and our proposals do include continued efforts on its behalf.

**A Vision of the Future of the Small Congregation**

Commission Report to General Convention in 1979

- Members are proud to stand in the tradition of the Episcopal Church: supporting of the mature in the faith as well as those who are seekers yet unsure.
- The congregation is a true mix of people of various states . . . in different stages of religious growth . . . people affirming and depending upon each other.
- Varieties of small congregations are appreciated. *Small* does not imply inferiority. Small congregations are seen as complete Christian communities, capable of carrying on the full ministry and mission of Christ; yet *small* as a value does not stand as a block to energetic evangelistic efforts.
- Members are aware of each other's ministries . . . each ministry validated; each person involved . . . vital. "Total ministry" is understood and finds many expressions; and the plight of the poor and the powerless is receiving attention.
- Newly ordained clergy as well as mature and experienced priests see small congregations as an attractive option, not a stepping stone.
- Leaders are competent—teaching, preaching, and living the gospel. Environmental forces and events affecting the congregation are recognized. Decisions are formed in prayer and with an awareness of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In 1979 we also set forth five objectives. Here is a report on activities of the Commission related to its objectives for the triennium.

**Objective 1.** To encourage and assist the formation of regional strategies of mission in the non-metropolitan areas of the nation.

- The Commission chairman has, on behalf of the Commission, attended meetings and participated in the work of the Leadership Academy for New Directions and in its formation of regional groupings of "landsmen." In this way we have supported and kept in touch with this important program now operating out of a new corporation called New Directions Ministries, Inc.
- We have, in similar ways, through the chairman or other members, maintained contact with regional efforts to strengthen the work of the Church in small communities—such as the five Carolina dioceses' annual small church conference, similar conferences of the Texas dioceses, in Province V, and the work of APSO in the Appalachian region.

These conferences are proving to be productive for participating dioceses. For example, one Carolina diocese, as a direct result of its participation, has scheduled a series of conferences for clergy of small congregations; improved its minimum salary; engaged The Church Pension Fund in a retirement/investment presentation to groups and consultations for individuals. It has launched a major renewal program for small churches, tailor making the program for each congregation, and established a new continuing education program.

- Through these contacts we have shared experience, encouraged regional efforts and kept ourselves informed of grassroots activity. As a result we see a new consciousness of small community church work emerging and a positive attitude about it.

**Objective 2:** To foster increased communication and sharing of experiences relevant to the needs of small congregations.

- In February, 1980, in New Harmony, Indiana, we sponsored a consultation with seminary representatives on the special needs of the Church in small communities. This lively consultation was attended by Commission members and representatives of:

Seabury-Western Theological Seminary; General Theological Seminary; Nashotah House; School of Theology of the University of the South; Church Divinity School of the Pacific; Episcopal Theological Seminary in Kentucky; and the George Mercer Jr. Memorial School of Theology.

This forum, which was followed by correspondence among participants, resulted in putting people with common interests in touch with each other. Commission members are indeed grateful for renewed interest in small community church work now being expressed by our seminaries. One of the resolutions proposed later in this report was suggested by a seminary representative. The seminary-related demonstration projects now supported by APSO, involving Central Pennsylvania with Virginia and Tennessee with Sewanee, offer further evidence of progress in this arena.

- In September, 1980, we were one of four sponsors of the International Consultation of the Church in Small Communities. Some twenty people attended this consultation, including British and Canadian representatives, and small church specialists from throughout the United States.

By all accounts the consultation was a success. Some of the material covered was extremely thought-provoking and still claims the attention of Commission members.

- + *For example*, the British have moved from a system of high disparity in clergy stipends to one of essential equity (Russell Report). However, the level of stipends is very low by our standards. Does "equity" equate with "low"? What implications are to be drawn out of this experience for the American situation?

- + *Another*: The British clergy's sense of collegiality seems to be quite different from that of American clergy. The "parish" is viewed as a geographical area and the priest's assignment is within the boundaries. To cross the boundary and lend a hand in the other priest's territory happens, but it is not casual and apparently is not experienced as the natural thing to do.

- + *Research* conducted by two churchmen and professors at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis on the relationship between small church structure and church effectiveness stimulated the interest of Commission members. The research dealt with small, mainly Lutheran congregations in rural Minnesota (Cantrell and Kriie Report). One finding is that when one pastor serves two or more small town congregations, the church's ability to deal with local social concerns is significantly reduced. These were basically traditional multi-church pastorates. Implications for the Episcopal Church, and for the new forms of "shared" and "total" ministry now under development in many places have yet to be studied.

- + *Demographics* is not dull when presented by one who is really in charge of his material (Calvin Beale Report). Of special interest to the group was the report of a clear reversal of migratory trends "back to the country."

An abstract of this consultation was published in *Grassroots*. The full transcript of presentations was published and distributed to a selected group of people. The abstract (free) or the full transcript (\$12.50) is available from Jethro Publications, Box 10, Creek Road, Frenchtown, NJ 08825. A second international consultation on the Rural and Small Town Churches is planned for the summer of 1982.

**Objective 3:** To encourage efforts seeking to promote leadership development, educational programs, and other appropriate services to small congregations.

- In addition to relevant activities reported under the first two objectives, we have been keeping in touch with the Commission on Church Music for the purpose of assuring that the special needs of the small congregation are reflected in their work.

The main concerns for the new hymnal that we have kept before the Commission are:

+ *Key* signatures should be simple.

+ *Melodies* should be easily singable in vocal ranges comfortable to the average person.

+ *Optional* descants or instrumental parts should be included to make some hymns useful as anthems for small choirs.

We are happy to report that the Commission on Church Music has been responsive to these concerns and has expressed its willingness to meet with us in the future.

• We have continued to press The Church Pension Fund in its efforts to deal with a resolution from 1979 dealing with minimum pensions and a higher degree of equity of retirement income.

During the triennium, The Church Pension Fund made two adjustments in pensions. In January, 1981, all pensions were reviewed and brought into line with a 20% increase in the minimum. (The \$100 minimum in the formula had been raised to \$120.) In January, 1982, the minimum was raised another 8% to \$130 and an additional weighting factor of 10% was allowed to the first \$3,600 of pension, providing some relief for those on smaller pensions.

However, our concerns in this area continue. We do not see the issues resolved yet.

Out of these experiences we have learned:

+ *A large* capital increase in Church Pension Fund reserves could not be used exclusively to the benefit of those on small pensions. It would increase the total capitalization of the Fund and benefits would have to be spread over everyone's pension. (This was the subject of the 1979 resolution.)

+ *The Church Pension Fund* operates under New York State insurance laws and this places serious constraints on what they can do.

+ *We tend* to assume that the full burden of retirement should belong to The Church Pension Fund. It is not a necessary, and probably not a helpful, assumption. A diocese, a parish, or an individual can establish supplemental plans—and perhaps should. One point to remember is that the Fund must treat people in accordance with established policy. It cannot cover special needs or extenuating circumstances with discretion. On the other hand, a diocese *could* establish a program for dealing with individual cases with discretion.

We have commissioned the preparation of a guide on how to use supplemental retirement plans permissible under new IRS regulations to help in cases where projected Fund benefits will not adequately cover retirement income needs.

**Objective 4:** To assist and support occasional research and studies which will inform this Commission and others in their planning.

We have arranged for a study on vitality in small congregations which will result in a report expected to be ready in time for the 1982 General Convention.

This paper will be framed primarily on ten case studies. It will set forth factors contributing to effectiveness in small congregations and offer suggestions to those leading or working with the leadership of small churches.

Initial work on this project is underway as we prepare this report, and we are encouraged by the enthusiastic response to, and support of, the project that we have experienced already.

**Objective 5:** To continue to exercise a strong advocacy for the needs of the Church in small communities in the interest of seeing a broad national strategy of small church support emerge out of what could be isolated and sporadic attempts to contribute solutions to small church problems; and to bring to the attention of the General Convention via

resolutions or recommendations appropriate national Church action which will be supportive of national strategy for small congregations.

While all of the Commission work has addressed this objective, we have also supported and contributed to the work of the National Mission subcommittee of the Executive Council's Standing Committee on National Mission in Church and Society (Two Commission members serve on this subcommittee).

The Commission thanks the many individuals and groups who helped with its work over the past three years; those who have attended and contributed to its various consultations, hosted meetings, and responded to requests for information. Also to the Episcopal Church Foundation for a grant of \$10,000 to help with the small church study. To the Paddock Foundation for a grant of \$5,000 to the Resource Center for Small Churches which contributed to the International Consultation. And to the Division of National Mission in Church and Society of the Episcopal Church Center for its help in the distribution of the small church study.

FINANCIAL REPORT

1980

Balance forward	-0-	
From General Convention Budget	\$21,400.00	
Credits	424.82	
<b>Total</b>		<u>\$21,824.82</u>

February forum with seminary representatives— New Harmony, Indiana.	\$ 3,784.92	
September International Consultation on Small Churches—Buckeystown, Maryland	5,134.59	
Professional assistance	3,750.00	
Office expenses	36.80	
Budgeted expenses	<u>\$12,706.31</u>	
Year end balance	<u>9,118.51</u>	
		<u>\$21,824.82</u>

1981

Credit balance	\$ 8.22.00	
From General Convention Budget	16,750.00	
<b>Total</b>		<u>\$17,572.00</u>

Commission meeting, April, N.Y.C.	\$ 4,297.46	
Commission meeting, Sept., N.Y.C.	5,691.83	
Subcommittee meeting, Dec., Tulsa	506.95	
Professional assistance	2,250.00	
Office expenses	14.60	
Printing/distribution of manuscript	<u>1,765.00</u>	
Budgeted expenses	<u>\$14,525.84</u>	
Year end balance	<u>3,046.16</u>	
		<u>\$17,572.00</u>

**1982**

(estimated)

Balance forward	\$ 3,046.16	
From General Convention Budget	14,000.00	
Special research grant, E.C.F.	10,000.00	

**Total** \$27,046.16

Commission meeting, Feb., N.Y.C.	\$ 3,513.85
Commission fall meeting	4,500.00
Planning meeting	2,000.00
Office expenses	40.00
Special research and other services including expenses	15,700.00

**Total** \$25,753.85

**Balance** 1,292.31

**\$27,046.16**

**D. HOW THE SCCSC VIEWS ITS WORK**

Our Church's strategy in small communities does not come out of a simple plan assembled by any single agency. Rather, it is a composite emerging out of the planning going on in many interdependent centers: diocesan, regional, institutional (such as seminaries) and national.

In light of this the SCCSC views its job as two-fold:

- 1) On the one hand, we provide opportunity for people to share in the cause, to receive encouragement and inspiration in their work, and to learn about the work of others. Through this the overall work is strengthened and integrated into something we can indeed think of as a coherent "strategy" in small communities.
- 2) On the other, we pay careful attention to all this in order to discern matters that should be brought to the attention of the General Convention. Through its action our church's central legislative body then makes policy contributions to the total effort appropriate to its sphere of authority.

Thus through higher levels of communication flow, sharing, and mutual influence among those who share the task, this Church attempts to respond to the promptings of the Spirit and sets its course in the small communities of our land.

**E. THE NEXT THREE YEARS**

The Church in rural and small town America is in a crisis that is still largely unappreciated. We are encouraged by the new attention to, and interest in, the small town church—but the crisis is real and it persists. Its symptoms are largely economic: clergy salary standards the small churches cannot meet; a diocesan program they cannot afford to support; building costs and utilities escalating far faster than the cost of living index would lead us to believe.

Beneath these symptoms are the basic questions of how we deploy our full-time ordained leadership; how we develop and organize to make use of everyone's ministry; how the church relates to the environment in which it is called in God's name to serve.

Many of the concerns of the past three years will continue to occupy the attention of the Commission over the triennium 1983-1985.

- Ministry and economics: clergy salaries, more equity in the retirement benefits.
- Congregational life: total ministry development issues; ecumenical opportunities.
- Environmental concerns: land use; absentee land ownership.

**F. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

With these general areas of concern in mind, and recognizing the need for flexibility in the years ahead, this Commission proposes the following objectives for the new triennium.

1) *To conduct a study* of national Church Canons in an attempt to identify anything, previously unnoticed, that may be detrimental to the ministry or life of a small congregation; to publish findings; and, as appropriate, to propose responses.

2) *To sponsor or contribute to the sponsorship* of three forums which will connect appropriate people and interests for dialogue, stimulate new action or generate new information or insights related to church work in small communities. And, out of this, to propose appropriate policy for General Convention consideration.

One forum will deal with the economics of ordained ministry, one with aspects of total ministry related to small churches, and one will take a look at land use and corporate absentee ownership.

3) *To sponsor, encourage and/or contribute* to one to three research projects related to the work of the Church in small communities, to disseminate findings and perhaps propose responses. Areas under consideration are: compensation/pension plans and their impact on small community mission strategy; the present state of clergy who work in small churches in other than full-time jobs: how are they doing? how do they feel about their lot?

4) *To continue to be involved* in an advocacy role for the needs and concerns of dioceses, congregations, and individuals (clergy and laity) who are engaged in ministry among people who are located in small communities or isolated places. For example, those engaged in agriculture, forestry, mining, and fishing; and those on Indian reservations and in resort areas.

5) *To continue in liaison* with agencies and networks (Episcopal Church, ecumenical, and secular) making common cause on behalf of the Church in small communities; to stimulate and encourage where possible; to attempt to identify new issues; and to attempt to bring appropriate matters before the General Convention of this Church.

**PROPOSED BUDGET**

	1983	1984	1985
For commission meetings (2 per year)	\$14,500	\$15,960	\$15,960
For forums (1 per year)	6,070	6,680	6,680
For study/research/reporting	3,000	3,000	3,000
For misc. telephone/postage/office costs	500	500	500
For professional assistance	3,800	4,200	4,600
	\$27,870	\$30,340	\$30,740
			Total: \$88,950

G. RESOLUTIONS

Resolution #A—106.

*Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That \$88,950 be appropriated for the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities for the ensuing triennium.

Resolution #A—107.

*Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That the 67th General Convention urge each Diocese to assign specific concern and advocacy for small congregations to an appropriate department or committee, and to appoint an individual to serve as liaison with regional and national activities and groups (including seminaries); and, be it further

*Resolved*, that the Episcopal Church Center be urged to assign an appropriate staff member to maintain contact with such diocesan units in the interest of encouraging them, sharing information and coordinating activities.

RATIONALE: Innovative and hopeful approaches in varieties of ministry are cropping up in many places. There are many national and regional activities stimulating these ventures, such as LAND, Syndicators, Rural Workers Fellowship, APSO, and the Resource Center for Small Churches, as well as the visibility of the SCCSC. A diocesan contact would facilitate these efforts and a clear national linkage would offer further sanction and provide for coordination and cross-fertilization.

Resolution #A—108.

*Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, that this General Convention urge each Seminary to identify an interested faculty member to be a resource person in small church life and ministry; and be it further

*Resolved*, that the Executive Council provide a source from which grants may be made available to assist Seminaries in the training and preparation of these resource persons; and be it further

*Resolved*, that this Convention urge appropriate diocesan and regional groups to explore the use of Seminaries as resources for small congregations.

RATIONALE: There is an increasing interest on the part of seminaries in the area of special needs of small congregations. It is believed that many seminarians today look forward to small town ministries. We believe these developments should be encouraged and supported.

Resolution #A—109.

*Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That the 67th General Convention urge every Diocese to adopt a ministry strategy for work in small communities in which the Diocese makes use of all approved forms of lay and ordained ministry.

RATIONALE: There is a crisis in ministry in small town congregations. If we don't learn how to sustain ministry vitality in small churches, we will soon be back in the business of closing churches. Our Canons and our *Prayer Book* provide for many varieties of ministry. We are encouraged by the renewed emphasis on lay ministry, new concepts of total ministry, new insights concerning the Diaconate and the particular functions of Priesthood, and on the use of Canon 8 and Canon 10 ordination. Though we do not claim



that every innovation, or every variety of ministry, is appropriate in every Diocese, we believe that under the current and emerging diverse social, economic, and demographic conditions, we are called to exercise our imagination in assuring a full and effective ministry wherever we serve.

**Resolution #A—110.**

*Resolved, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That the 67th General Convention urge the Commission on Church Music to fully test the proposed musical settings in small congregations in order that the final product of its work be of maximum use to small congregations. Of particular importance are: simple key signatures; easily singable melodies in vocal ranges comfortable to the average person; inclusion of optional descants or instrumental parts to make some hymns useful as anthems for small choirs.*

**RATIONALE:** While the Commission on Church Music has indicated its desire to address this concern, we feel that its efforts are deserving of the support and encouragement of this Convention.

**Resolution #A—111.**

*Resolved, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That the 67th General Convention of the Episcopal Church ask dioceses to work ecumenically in their states to help form land stewardship councils dedicated to responding spiritually to issues of land use ownership and stewardship; and be it further*

*Resolved, That dioceses report their learnings to the next General Convention, through the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities.*

**RATIONALE:** The Episcopal dioceses in North Carolina were active, during the last triennium, in the forming of an ecumenical land stewardship council. This group's successes can be shared with the rest of the country as a local method for addressing issues of land stewardship. In addition, information on land stewardship is available through the Episcopal Church, in the Seabury Press's Jubilee Series book, *Let the Earth Bless the Lord*, and through similar studies of other Christian denominations.

**Resolution #A—112.**

*Resolved, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That the 67th General Convention urge the Executive Council to review its policies, funding practices, and overall strategy of supporting Mission and Ministry in Indian country; and be it further*

*Resolved, That the Executive Council, through an appropriate body, actively recruit, train, assign, and support Native Americans in ordained and specialized ministries.*

**RATIONALE:** The concern of this Commission is with the Church in small communities. The small communities of the reservation and the congregations of Native American Episcopalians are among those most desperately in need of assistance.