

The Standing Commission on The Church in Small Communities

COMMISSION MEMBERS

The Rt. Rev. William Beckham—Columbia, South Carolina
The Rt. Rev. Donald J. Davis—Erie, Pennsylvania
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The Rev. George E. Bates—Albuquerque, New Mexico
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Mr. Clarence R. Pierce—Jackson, Mississippi
Mr. Stephen B. Smith—Blacksburg, Virginia
Mrs. William Nichols—Littleton, New Hampshire
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Also assisting the Commission

The Rev. Richard E. Gary—National Church staff, New York
The Rev. James R. Gundrum—*Executive Secretary*, General Convention, New York, New York

PURPOSE

Canon 1.1.2(n): “. . . to concern itself with plans for new directions for Churches in Small Communities.”

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 1982 we also set forth five objectives. Here is a report on the activities of the Commission related to its objectives for the triennium.

Objective 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 the small congregations; to publish findings; and as appropriate to propose responses.

This objective was not completed in this triennium because major revisions of the Canons which have to do with ministry will not take place until the 1988 General Convention. A beginning towards achieving this objective, however, was made as a member of the Commission was asked to attend, and did attend, a meeting of the Council for the Development of Ministry, the originator of these canonical changes. A member of the Commission will be attending meetings in the future.

Objective 2. To sponsor or contribute to the sponsorship of three forums which will bring appropriate people into a dialogue that will 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.

The Standing Commission of the Church in Small Communities in the summer of 1983 called together a group of 20 bishops, clergy, and laity from all sections of the country with wide ranging experience in churches in small communities. This group met for two days to consider the problems that limit clergy placement and continuing ministry in small rural and isolated churches. This meeting was held under the leadership of the Alban Institute and resulted in *A Study in Clergy Leadership in Small Communities*.

Objective 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. Other 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 and other than full time jobs: How are they doing? How do they feel about their lives?

As a result of the two-day forum, a major study was undertaken to ascertain the factors that limit effective stable clergy placement in continuing ministry in small, rural, and isolated churches. The Rev. Alice Mann, in association with the Alban Institute, assumed direct responsibility for that study, and during 1983 and 1984 polled all bishops in the Church and did extensive interviewing of 21 dioceses and individuals who have been involved in small community church work. The results of that study are now available under the title, *A Study in Clergy Leadership in Small Communities*, and are available to each diocese.

The initial assumption that the difficulty of providing and sustaining able clergy leadership in small communities has multiple causes was strongly confirmed by the study. "No matter how one sifts the data, no one or two action steps emerge as 'the solution'."

The study identifies a number of potential points of intervention for the Church at both the diocesan and national levels. We feel that all of these are important and would like to stress several of them in this report.

1. The assumption is widespread that since Episcopalians comprise slightly more than 1% of the total population, we are doomed to be a small and probably dependent Church in small communities. We must begin to assume that the Episcopal Church can and should claim a larger percentage of the population in most communities, and structure ministry to support an effective evangelization. This will require a self-conscious effort toward attitudinal change at national, diocesan, and congregational levels.
2. We must address inequities in pension and salary among clergy in congregations of different sizes and locations. Weighing pension increases towards the lowest salaried clergy and providing diocesan benefits (annuities for those living in rectories, supplementary retirement accounts, etc.) are a positive step. However, the fundamental problem is the wide disparity in salaries from one parish to another. On the whole, our compensation schemes have sought to rationalize and justify the discrepancy (sometimes with size as the stated criterion, sometimes with size expressed indirectly as "level of responsibility"). We need a serious inquiry into the way salaries are equalized in other parts of the Anglican communion, and proposals for steps in our system to remove the inequities.
3. It is obvious to this Commission when candidates present themselves from small communities for seminar-trained ordination, our selection and training process for clergy chooses with difficulty and perhaps infrequently selects candidates who are likely to function well in small and isolated communities. Dioceses need to shift from a passive to a more active stance in the entry steps of the ordination process, and actively seek those with a vocation and gifts to carry out mission in a variety of settings. At the seminary level, seminarians need greater exposure to small community ministries, and training for such should be a required part of the ordination process.
4. There are six major approaches to small community churches: Full-time single cures; part-time single cures; yoking; clusters and cures served by local residents with alternate preparation. The study shows that it is perceived by a majority of the Church that full-time single cures, where they can be realistically sustained and where the clergy have parish development training and collegial support structures, have the greatest potential for supporting a full expression of the Christian life, long-term stability, effective service, evangelization and stewardship. Others, however, feel very strongly that other approaches must be used in small churches because full-time single cures cannot be realistically continued or theologically justified in many places.
5. It has been obvious from the beginning of the study that one of the great needs of ministry in churches in small communities is some ongoing agency or entity to be a repository of information and a clearinghouse for resources in the special needs and concerns of churches in small communities. We continue to reinvent the wheel with alarming regularity because there is no such coherent and ongoing system. Providing such a resource is seen by this Commission as a very high priority. (See resolutions)

"While it is frustrating to wrestle with a systemic problem, decision makers who take the time to map out the elements and consider the inner relationships will see more long-term results than those who pour their energies into gimmicks or one dimensional 'answers.'" Overemphasis on promoting a "new" ideology of ministry, constructing the "right" kind of seminary training, establishing "the" program or center for churches in small communities, etc. will distort the problem-solving process, even though theological concepts, seminary problems, and national programs and centers will all have a place in the solutions.

A study was also undertaken with The Church Pension Fund to deal with the question of "What can the Pension Fund do, if anything, about assisting competent clerical leadership to stay in small communities where salaries are low therefore pensions are lower than other areas?"

It was learned that the Pension Fund already operates on the principle that those receiving the lowest pension should receive the largest increases. The question of late entry into the ministry and early retirement of clergy to small communities was discussed at considerable length by the Commission and is being addressed by The Church Pension Fund.

Concerned with helping the large number of clergy and dependents involved, the Fund supported two meetings with members of the Commission and met with the entire Commission during its October 1984 and February 1985 meetings. At that meeting Mr. Robinson, President of The Church Pension Fund, presented some alternatives which might assist clergy in small churches.

The Rev. Craig Casey and Mr. Barry Podob of The Church Pension Fund also met with the Commission and agreed to sponsor and conduct a study of the salaries in small communities versus other areas in the domestic life of the Church. The purpose of this study was to determine the veracity of the statement that those in small communities are paid significantly lower salaries. Seven test dioceses were chosen and thoroughly studied.

While this was a cross-section of only five percent (5%) of the clergy of the Church, it did show that in those dioceses compensation for clergy in small communities was approximately \$4,000, or 20%, less than for clergy in large communities. This difference may be a factor that contributes to instability of ordained ministry in churches in small communities.

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

The Commission spent significant time monitoring the use of the proceeds of the sale of the Roanridge property. In the fall of 1984, it spent a large part of its meeting discussing the sale of the Roanridge property (which is the basis of the Cochell Trust). The Commission expressed its strongly felt concern that this money continue to be used for *The Training of Town and Country Ministry and Rural Christian Workers of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America*. Expressions of the Commission's concern on this matter were circulated at various levels of the Church.

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

The Commission has already reported and met frequently with The Church Pension Fund in the cause of the clergy in small communities. A member of the Commission attended the Council for the Development of Ministry to represent the concern for ministry in small communities. Members of the Commission were at the Presiding Bishop's Conference on peace in April, 1984.

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Regarding Resolution #B-60

The 1982 Convention offered the following resolution:

“Resolved, That the question of changing the name of the Commission on the Church in Small Communities to the Standing Commission on Small Churches be referred to The Standing Commission on Church in Small Communities for a report to the 68th General Convention.”

The Commission decided to continue its work under its present banner, “The Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities,” concluding that a name change would limit both focus and effectiveness.

The Commission affirms that smallness can be beautiful, and it will do all in its power to help dispel the assumed myth within the Church that smallness in size equals ineffectiveness in ministry. However, to limit the Commission’s focus to small churches would mean that its focus would always be changing. The church within any community is not static. Many of the Episcopal Church’s small congregations are in a state of flux. They may grow in size and become medium or large-sized parishes or they may decline and die along with a declining and dying community.

The focus will continue to be the Church in small communities. The commission believes that churches in a rural or small town setting, regardless of size, have more in common than do churches which are small regardless of their setting. The Commission, then, may work with congregations, dioceses, and the General Convention on some of the following issues faced by the churches in the setting of the small community: increased concentration of land ownership and use in the hands of a few; the secular society’s continued desensitization of humankind’s relationship with the Creator and the created order (especially the land and natural resources); and the procurement of clergy in non-metropolitan ministries.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Establish an Office of Ministry in rural and small communities.
2. A major consultation on the theology and stewardship of land use, the findings of which would be shared with the General Convention and other churches for 1986.
3. A meeting will be held in a diocese of the Ninth Province to experience church life in small churches in this important part of our Church.
4. To continue study and recommendation about churches in small communities. Special emphasis will be placed on information from lay persons.
5. To continue to develop linkages with other groups concerned with churches in small communities. A special linkage will be made with the Council for the Development of Ministry to continue the investigation and development of supplemental retirement benefits for clergy in churches in small communities.

RESOLUTIONS OF THE 1982 GENERAL CONVENTION

Referred to the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities

(A-107a)

Subject. Specific concern and advocacy for small congregations in each diocese. Appro-

priate staff persons at Executive Council with responsibility for work in churches in small communities.

Results. Resolution communicated to dioceses. Specific person appointed who participated in regional small church meetings in Piedmont, through New Directions, and with the work of the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities.

(A-108a)

Subject. Seminary training for work in small communities.

Results. Chairperson of the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities wrote each seminary urging one faculty member be responsible for this work. Executive for Mission discussed needed training at Missions Conference. Three seminaries have problems.

(A-111)

Subject. Land use.

Results. To be a major part of the work of the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities in the next triennium.

(B-006)

Subject. Hunger and land use.

Results. The Hunger Network has begun to work in this area.

(B-60)

Subject. Name change.

Results. See report of the Standing Commission on the Church in Small Communities.

(D-75a)

Subject. Economic crisis in small communities

Results. Inner faith organizing network has been in this area. There have been ecumenical consortiums on plant closings as well as the Great Lakes Conference, September 1984.

(D-97)

Subject. Specialized training in seminary

Results. Chairman wrote urging seminary so to do.

RESOLUTIONS FOR THE 1985 GENERAL CONVENTION

Resolution #A—136

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That there be an officer on the Executive Council staff whose primary responsibilities are to be a resource, trainer, developer of programs, historian, and advocate of the ministry of churches in small communities; and be it further

Resolved, the House _____ concurring, That the income from the Cochell Trust be used for this purpose.

EXPLANATION: *A Study in Clergy Leadership in Small Communities*, and other persons and studies, show conclusively that any movement or work to be successful

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needs an advocate in the structure of the Church as well as someone whose primary responsibility is to develop the program training events and the linkages of that movement.

Resolution #A—137

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 68th General Convention recognizes the continuing urgent need for ministry among migrant workers and the rural poor; commends the dioceses and congregations that are deeply committed to this ministry; and urges the increasing awareness by dioceses and congregations to opportunities to undertake and support this ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That the appropriate members of the Executive Council staff are encouraged to assist those who are engaged or about to be engaged in this ministry in communicating with and supporting each other as well as those ecumenical partners already engaged in this ministry.

PROPOSED BUDGET

	1986	1987	1988
Commission meetings	\$10,000	\$24,000	\$12,000
Subcommittee meetings	1,500	2,000	2,000
Forums	15,000		
Telephone, postage, office expense	250	250	250
Study, research, reporting	2,500	2,500	2,500
Totals	<u>\$29,500</u>	<u>\$28,750</u>	<u>\$16,750</u>
Total—Three-year period			<u><u>\$74,750</u></u>

Respectfully submitted,

William A. Beckham