

STANDING COMMISSION ON SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC POLICY

Membership

Ms. Sarah Lawton, *Chair*, 2015
Ms. Laura Russell, *Vice Chair*, 2015
Ms. Athena Hahn, *Secretary*, 2018
The Rev. Randolph Charles, 2015
Ms. Caitlin Frazier, 2018
The Rev. Canon Daniel Gutierrez, 2018
The Rt. Rev. Michael Hanley, 2018
The Rt. Rev. Alan Scarfe, 2015
The Rt. Rev. Prince Singh, 2015
Mr. Newland Smith, 2015
The Rev. Bessie Titus, 2015
Ms. Bonnie Weaver, 2018
Mr. John Johnson, *Executive Council Liaison*
Mr. Alex Baumgarten, *Staff*
Ms. Jayce Hafner, *Staff*
Ms. Helen Bluehorse,* *Consultant*

Changes in Membership

The Rev. Bessie Titus resigned in 2012. Ms. Helen Bluehorse's position was changed in 2012 from member to consultant. Ms. Sarah Dreier resigned her staff position in 2013 and was replaced by Ms. Jayce Hafner.

*Late in 2014, we received with sadness the news of the death of our consultant and colleague, Ms. Helen Bluehorse of the Navajoland Area Mission. We are grateful for her faithful witness to us and for her contributions to our work in this triennium, especially in the area of food policy. She is deeply missed.

Representation at General Convention

Bishop Prince Singh and Deputy Laura Russell are authorized to receive non-substantive amendments to this report at General Convention.

Summary of Work

Mandate: To identify, study, and theologically interpret social justice issues facing the United States and their impact on other nations, and to develop and recommend policies and strategies to the General Convention. The members of the Commission have adhered to this mandate as they performed their work and prepared recommendations to the 78th General Convention.

Meetings: The Commission began its work at an in-person meeting in St. Louis, Missouri November 12-15, 2012. We then had two teleconferences August 13 and 16, 2013 to continue our work. We met for our second and final time in person November 11-14, 2013 in Linthicum Heights, Maryland. We held our last meeting on August 18, 2014 via teleconference.

The Commission was referred, and took action on, three resolutions from the 77th General Convention. The first, A076, was a mandate to ensure small congregations had voice in our Commission. As many members were from small congregations, we fulfilled this mandate.

A084 called for the Establishment of an Episcopal Credit Union. We discussed this endeavor, but realized we were too small to create such an organization. We also discussed A087, which called for a national conversation on the income gap. Unfortunately, we were unable to procure funds from the Constable Grants to hold these conversations. We did embody the heart of this resolution in our work during this triennium and in the resolutions we put before you now.

Statement of Purpose

All around The Episcopal Church, on the local level, we are feeding people. Countless congregations have food pantries, soup kitchens, and frequent food drives. Some are growing congregational gardens, and a few are even keeping bees and livestock. Some of these projects have been sponsored by Jubilee grants or have been inspired by the principle of Jubilee Centers over many years.

A recent stepped-up focus on food has also been a response to pressing needs in our communities. As middle- and working-class wages have stagnated, national median income has fallen more than 8 percent since 2007, and almost 9 percent since it reached its highest level in 2000, with almost all benefits from the post-recession economic recovery going to higher-income households.

Official poverty levels, which are set unsustainably low at \$23,850 in 2014 for a four-person household, remain stubbornly high at 14.5 percent in 2013 (almost 20 percent for children); and without safety-net programs, poverty rates would be doubled. Even with safety-net programs, many families rely on charitable programs provided by non-profits and faith communities to put food on the table, month after month.

Children are particularly vulnerable, with 22 percent living in households that are food-insecure, meaning that the children may not be sure if they will be fed on a given day. Food insecurity among US children increased 35 percent between 2007 and 2011. Each day during the school year, 21.5 million children eat free or reduced-price school meals, including breakfast and lunch; and for many children, including inner-city, rural, reservation, and even many suburban locations, these meals may be their only food for the day.

The school lunch program is also deeply entangled with the farm subsidy programs. Farm subsidies continue to assist farms, while the subsidized food continues to supply the National School Lunch Program. However, the legislative bedrock for the program, the Farm Bill, has been withered in its ability to provide for the least among us. Public assistance measures such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) have seen reductions in funding, while the majority of the federal budget continues to be spent on defense.

These references are not the Church playing politics. The Book of Common Prayer leads us to consider the poor and neglected among us, using these words: “Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

As a Church that prides itself on praying that shapes believing, we have a task before us of learning how to be formed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ in reference to identity with the poorest of our brothers and sisters, as well as to provide for children as the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus continually speaks of the poor and of our calling for the physical care of our neighbors; and Matthew 25:31-46 has become one of the most well-known passages of the Gospels.

There are few parishes that are not involved in some kind of food ministry, and many Episcopalians are finding their way to farmers’ markets and are joining the CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) movement. This activity is also linked with issues of climate justice, in which we recognize that the poorest

suffer the most at the ravages of an increasingly estranged nature; and the way we grow our food is an issue of climate justice.

The rich are getting richer, and the gap continues to expand. At the same time, there is a tendency to resist tackling systemic causes that perpetuate the situation. Why is there poverty? Why do people go without food while others live in abundance? Human sinfulness is a root cause of this, and so simply knowing of our disparity is insufficient to overcome our tendency to self-protection or self-service. There is a need for deeper inner transformation, and the Church recognized this reality.

The Church has recognized the need for deeper formation processes in becoming aware of racial relations, and even in being able to provide for a safer Church with regard to our children and with regard to appropriate adult relationships within the Church; and has mandated training for those in leadership, both lay and ordained. We believe that when it comes to our discipleship in following the One who became poor that we might become rich in Him, we need more than a workshop on identifying the needs of others; we need a process of formation that helps make us one across our socio-economic barriers. It takes time to allow ourselves to recognize the layers of resistance that separates us from the experience of living in poverty, which might then enable us to move further up the systemic chain of events out of which poverty grows.

Just as the body of Christ has many parts but is one Body, we acknowledge that this is an effort of unity in diversity, both in the alleviation of poverty through immediate responses such as food pantries, charitable giving, and community gardens; and also in those actions that engage our legislatures and the creation of humane and reasonable state and federal budgets. The Church's own budget priorities need to be challenged, as does our tendency to function at the high end of privilege which, by its nature, exempts the poorer members of our Church from offering their important leadership. Ultimately it is the enabling of the voice of those for whom poverty is a daily experience to articulate their demands and needs from our common wealth that is the Church's prophetic mandate.

At the same time, we recognize that we are living in a time when food and water security is not assured for everyone on the planet. Addressing this issue will require a serious look at the growing disparity in wealth, which impacts health and well-being and potential prospects for many. It is also felt among immigrants, the younger generation, and the elderly, as well as along the racial divide.

This Church has sought in recent Conventions to highlight the impact of slavery and the Doctrine of Discovery, and this is no time to take the spotlight off these original sins of the nation. However, there are no resolutions, as such, focusing on the responsibility and contribution of global corporations in this growing disparity. Yet they remain a significant player, and we realize that a large proportion of Episcopal leaders hold positions of leadership and influence at the corporate level. Formation and discipleship needs to support their efforts to become aware of the ethical impact of their presence for godly influence.

All of this has led the Standing Commission to focus on resolutions for this General Convention that seek new formation processes to enable us to overcome deeper resistance to engagement with those living in poverty. Although it continues to be important that we lift our voice as Episcopalians for social justice in a collective way on national and global issues alongside other faith communities, we know the work of Christian formation for this work happens most effectively on the local (diocesan and congregational) levels.

We hope all of the concerns we present will be addressed at the level of broad policy through our Office of Government Relations (OGR) and the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN), but most importantly we hope they will be undertaken on the local level. We believe that social-justice work — which certainly needs to address systems and root causes — also starts with relationships, and that means formation and engagement with the people in our neighborhoods, towns, and cities.

We invite the Church to address the disparity of wealth between us, especially as it might influence this disparity through a reform of the tax code. We have extensively looked at issues of food security. We therefore offer resolutions on the following: food security; entitlements; defense spending; the tax code; engagement of all peoples; and working through relationship-based social justice.

Finally, we ask the Church to take a serious look at its impact on these social ills. While honoring work done in the immediate relief system, we call the Church to look further up the system and to ask questions of our practices and belief system that perpetuate disparity and poverty. Being identified with the lost, needy, and “least of these” as a servant is God’s reconciling method. That is how God makes us one; and as ambassadors with Christ, we are invited to follow God’s ways. The Book of Common Prayer states that the mission of the Church is to “restore all peoples to unity with God *and with each other in Christ.*” To that end, along with our prayers and worship, we seek to promote justice.

Walter Wink warns of a consolidation of negative spirituality that has us in its grip. He calls it a Domination system. “This spirit-killing atmosphere penetrates everything, teaching us not only what to believe, but what we can value and even what we can see.” To such a situation, we must remind ourselves that in Jesus “*God made you alive together with Him, when He forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them triumphing over them in it*” (Colossians 2: 13b-15).

Christ’s message is our liberation to serve, our freedom to be one with others. This engages every part of our spiritual lives and common existence including our socio-economic selves. To this liberty, to this self-awakening, we call the Church.

The Commission, based on its meetings and its review of social justice issues, presents the following resolutions for action to the 78th General Convention:

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

Food Ministry

A091: AFFIRM WORK FOR FOOD MINISTRIES AND FOOD SECURITY

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th Convention affirm the work and projects being carried out across the Church in food ministry, including food pantries, feeding programs, community gardens, educational programs, and advocacy; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention reaffirm and celebrate the continuing of Native and Indigenous Episcopalian communities in carrying out Asset-Based Community Development, including food ministry such as the project in Navajoland to teach the children to grow and prepare traditional Navajo food; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention call on dioceses, congregations, and all the baptized to deepen our understanding of the moral implications of how our food system works, through educational programs on food issues, looking at issues of sustainability, equity, and accessibility of all people to healthy food; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention call on dioceses, congregations, and all the baptized to deepen our commitments as Christian communities to address food insecurity, food-related health issues, and food-related environmental effects in our communities and nations, through new and creative community, regional, and ecumenical projects, such as, but not limited to, school and community gardens, church garden

tithing to food banks, involvement with migrant ministries, and farm-worker and food-worker organizing; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention call on dioceses, congregations, and all the baptized to increase our involvement in advocacy on food issues, using principles of sustainability, equity, and accessibility of healthy food for all people; and it further

Resolved, That this Convention reaffirm this Church's support for farm legislation that is based on the following principles (originally enumerated and affirmed by the Presbyterian Church, USA in its 220th General Assembly, 2012): *renewability, sustainability, resilience, minimized carbon emissions, participatory research and decision-making, revitalized rural communities, strong local food economies, security of food supply, ethical treatment of animals, and fair and dignified treatment of persons working throughout the food chain*; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention support public policies and laws that protect the health and safety of workers throughout the food system, from farms to distribution systems to stores to restaurants, which support the workers' rights to organize; and which support a fair family wage for food workers throughout the system, from farm workers to warehouse workers to fast-food workers; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention support public policies and laws designed to protect our Earth's natural environment and to protect humanity's ability to produce food for generations to come, including restrictions on pesticide overuse, harmful industrial farming practices (e.g., overcrowding of livestock), and carbon emissions throughout the food system that threaten animal and human health, damage the soil, and threaten the climate for future generations; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention support public policies, laws, and programs designed to increase access to healthy food for all people, including support and development for farmers' markets, policies permitting use of the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at farmers' markets, and the development of policies and agreements that encourage the siting of full-service grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods and communities; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention support policies and local school and community programs, such as school gardens, which support nutrition education for adults and children, recognizing that many people in recent generations are unaware of what is healthy food or how to prepare food; and to work with communities to help improve access to healthy and affordable food and places to be active; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention reaffirm support for full and adequate funding for public food programs for the poor and vulnerable, such as the National School Lunch Program, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, SNAP, senior center feeding programs, and summer feeding programs for children, so that families, elderly, children, disabled, unemployed, and others can meet their basic nutritional needs with food that is healthy.

EXPLANATION

Food is central to life, both in sustaining our physical lives and nurturing our community and family lives, and in how we prepare and share food. Food in the form of bread and wine is also at the heart of our sacramental life in the Eucharist. Providing for the needy and for widows and orphans, and offering hospitality to strangers in the form of food, are Biblical mandates in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The Early Church organized its common and liturgical life around gatherings with food and made arrangements, beginning with the first deacon, Stephen, to feed the hungry. It is hard to imagine anything more elemental and universal in our material life than food, along with water and air.

The central sacrament of Eucharist grounds us in this literal and metaphorical convergence that impacts our common life in a way that is contextual, abundant, and sustainable. The root word from which we get "companion" is "*panis*," meaning bread. As followers and friends of Christ, we are called to be "bread fellows" building beloved community. The identity of giver and receiver is blurred or lost in such holy encounters where heaven does come down. This blurring of the distinction between giver and receiver is a holy economy articulated in the Taize chant, "I come like a beggar with a gift in my hand."

The need is great and is increasing even more in these challenging times, and our engagement as followers of the bread of life helps reflect the abundant life he promises. The five marks of mission, in a nutshell, are about sharing the Good news, nurturing new believers, helping those in need, working toward fairness, and taking care of the planet. Engagement with food can align all marks of mission.

Perhaps this is why so many, if not most, of our congregations are already involved in some way in food ministry, from actions as simple as occasionally collecting cans of food for the local food bank to more complicated programs such as running soup kitchens and food pantries. This is good news! However, as our nation's and world's food systems have grown more complex and industrial, even while hunger persists — even while, ironically, hunger persists among many of those workers who grow, transport, prepare and sell our food — it can be hard to imagine how a local band of Christians can help to "feed the hungry" on a national or global scale.

This resolution asks and encourages Episcopalians at all levels to engage in both direct action and advocacy at both local and national levels in response to this most elemental Biblical call, to feed the hungry. Wherever we are located, and whatever level of activity exists already, we call on the Church to take another step for food justice — whether that means setting up a local food pantry, planting a garden, or educating ourselves about food systems and how they work. We also encourage the Church to advocate at all levels of governance for the hungry and for a just food system.

Government Entitlements

A092: AFFIRM SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT ENTITLEMENTS

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church affirm that God has provided for all of creation, forming a world of sufficiency for all, and that inequality exists not because there is not enough, but because of the way resources are distributed; we depend on God and one another and are commanded to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention affirm its support for full funding of government programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), food assistance for Women,

Infants, and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program, and the Affordable Care Act, all of which lift and keep people out of poverty and address basic food and health care needs in vulnerable populations.

EXPLANATION

The wealth gap between rich and poor is widening at an alarming rate, further stratifying our society. Executive pay has sky rocketed, increasing 127 times faster than worker wages (<http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2012/05/03/475952/ceo-pay-faster-worker-pay>).

Thirty-seven million Americans live below the official poverty line, while millions more teeter on the brink of poverty (<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/news/2007/04/24/2923/the-poverty-epidemic-in-america-by-the-numbers>).

Entitlement programs such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, WIC, and SNAP are being targeted for substantial cuts and reductions based on partisan legislation. These programs, which have lifted millions of Americans out of poverty, allow them to live with dignity and are desperately needed for those still living at or near poverty. Continuing these programs should be a priority of good government.

Defense Spending

A093: EVALUATE DEFENSE SPENDING

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention commit The Episcopal Church to work for a reordering of federal budget priorities, with a goal of evaluating the balance between legitimate military security needs and poverty alleviation programs; and be it further

Resolved, That The Episcopal Church encourage the federal government to reduce military expenditures wherever possible in favor of poverty alleviation programs.

EXPLANATION

Guns vs. butter: It is the classic debate learned in basic economics. What is the priority of the federal budget — military spending, or national (domestic) needs? The United States currently spends more on defense than do the next eight countries combined. Defense spending equals Social Security spending, or the combined spending on Medicaid and Medicare.

The United States needs a ready military, but it also needs a strong domestic economy. In the current economy of the United States, poverty alleviation programs are underfunded, and federal monies never seem to be available to fund these programs fully, and yet a large portion of government spending is used for the military and defense establishment. Frequently money is diverted from poverty alleviation and other domestic programs. The Episcopal Church needs to work toward a fair federal budget — one that does not leave us vulnerable, yet also takes care of the most vulnerable among us.

Income Tax

A094: SUPPORT INCOME TAX PARITY

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church support efforts to reduce economic disparities in the United States by:

Calling for a reversal of federal tax cuts, such as decreased taxes for the highest tax brackets, for inheritances, and on capital gains; and tax cuts that have increased the wealth gap and reduced budget revenue for domestic needs; and

Calling for a reversal of the recent erosion of progressivity in federal tax rates, as highly progressive tax rates were a means of building a strong middle class in the past, and must be an important means of reducing severe inequalities of income and wealth in the future.

EXPLANATION

The tax code of the United States is one of the main factors in growing the “wealth gap” in the United States. The tax cuts that have been enacted in recent years help those in the highest wealth (income and assets) categories to retain this wealth. The money that is not received by the government from taxation cannot be given to support poverty alleviation programs, and as such the wealth gap only continues to expand.

Even though the tax code contains one of the largest poverty-alleviation programs in government (Earned Income Tax Credits), it is not enough. An erosion of the progressivity in tax rates has left those in the lower and middle brackets paying the same, if not more, as the nation’s highest incomes. It has also left the federal government with limited funds to support poverty-alleviation programs such as Supplemental Nutritional Assistance (SNAP), Social Security, and Medicaid.

The Episcopal Church’s support for social-welfare programs, social justice, and poverty alleviation should continue to this next step. These programs must be funded by a tax base — a tax base based on the Christian principle that those who have more should pay more so that everyone in our society has a chance.

Resolution of Engagement

A095: DEEPEN ENGAGEMENT OF ALL PEOPLE

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church challenge the baptized throughout all congregations of our Church to deepen the Gospel work of unmasking attitudes and institutions that help maintain the structural injustice of wealth disparity by ongoing formation of engagement among those on both sides of the wealth divide.

EXPLANATION

Mark 4 Mission, “to seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation” gives The Episcopal Church the grounds for raising to consciousness those attitudes and institutions that help maintain the structural injustice of wealth disparity. Just as members of anti-racism teams name white privilege as a major impediment to enabling white people to acknowledge their entitlement gained at the expense of people of color, there must also be an acknowledgement of the privilege of wealth and the structural injustice of wealth disparity.

In her paper, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack,” author Peggy McIntosh defines white privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious.” McIntosh goes on to reflect how pervasive white privilege has become in American social systems, and argues that to “redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding white privilege are the key political tool here.”

The privilege of wealth is similar. It is a set of invisible assets that are used every day. Unmasking of attitudes and institutions of wealth disparity will take restructuring of social and political systems. It will take long-term formation and engagement that includes all peoples.

It may be that engagement between those on both sides of the wealth divide is a way for those with “wealth,” many of whom are white, to have their lives interrupted by the reality of the lived lives of those

without “wealth.” In her book, *Kinship Across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration* (Georgetown University Press, 2013), author Kristin E. Heyer describes the work of Dolores Mission Parish in East Los Angeles as a case study of ongoing formation of engagement between those on both sides of the wealth divide. This Jesuit parish took a risk by opening its doors to the homeless and to the day laborers of Los Angeles, many of whom were undocumented workers. But they did not stop by simply providing a safe place for meals and sleep. The parish, in time, found kinship with the “other.”

Just prior to Lent 2006, as a shared spiritual exercise, the parish undertook a month-long communal fast for justice for immigrants. Participants conceived of the fast as both prayer (in terms of the desire to empty ourselves of what distracts us from knowledge of God’s love) and as an act of solidarity (a bond of sympathy with those who, like so many immigrants, suffer physical, spiritual, and emotional hunger). The prayer and fasting were coupled with prophetic preaching and consistent legislative advocacy and voter education on behalf of comprehensive and humane immigration reform.

On Good Friday 2008, the community undertook a Way of the Cross procession through the city, culminating at the federal building downtown. The parishioners united their own sufferings with Christ’s passion; and public devotionals at each station focused on issues such as poverty, families torn apart by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, and exploitative labor practices. This engagement, by both sides, brought together those with and without privilege, and taught each side not only the meaning of formation and engagement, but also the idea of unmasking attitudes and seeking institutional change.

Relationship-Based Social Justice Ministry

A096: AFFIRM RELATIONSHIP-BASED SOCIAL JUSTICE

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention affirm the many justice ministries of service and advocacy throughout The Episcopal Church, ministries that are grounded in the Baptismal Covenant and that were initiated by General Conventions, dioceses, congregations, and other Episcopal organizations; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention affirm and encourage the use of various methods to discern, develop, and sustain justice ministries, such as Asset-Based Community Development, needs surveys, and community organizing; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention affirm and encourage the formation of partnerships between congregations and service providers, advocacy agencies, and other organizations in order to do justice ministry more effectively and efficiently; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention acknowledge that one of the greatest challenges of our time and culture is the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the sin of economic injustice that pervades our society; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention challenge all Episcopalians to hear in a bold way the call of both Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi to befriend and be with the poor, and that we come to know that the future vitality of The Episcopal Church is grounded in our mutually affirming relationships with our brothers and sisters who are poor; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention encourage all Episcopal congregations to establish relationship-based, social-justice ministries through which relationships are developed between those who serve and those who are served, resulting in shared and transformational experiences and in a greater commitment to work for justice on all sides of the socio-economic divide; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention ask Episcopal groups that are participating in relationship-based social justice to share their experiences with the broader Church through social media, the internet, and official communication channels, so that other groups can learn from their successes, challenges, and insights.

EXPLANATION

Servant ministry takes place when people with resources respond to the needs of people without resources, so that there is a more equitable distribution. Advocacy ministry is action taken in order to address and effect change in regard to a systemic injustice. Relationship-based social justice is ministry that both responds to human needs and moves toward advocacy for systemic change, but it is centered and grounded in relationship experiences between people who have been separated by some social divide, such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, education, ability, wealth, or religion.

Jesus commanded us to “love one another.” The Baptismal Covenant first asks, “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?” Then it asks, “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

With conflicts and encounters between groups of people, it is possible to reach agreement on what is fair and just through reason and education; however, in order to know God’s justice, our hearts must be touched in a way that enables people with differing perspectives and circumstances to be emotionally connected to each other, which can only happen through relationships. In moving toward a greater degree of racial justice and sexual-orientation justice, progress has been made through legislation. Deep justice, however, only comes when the divide is diminished through relationships.

The hope of relationship-based social justice is that both parties are changed and transformed. It all begins with a shared activity or conversation in a structured and supportive environment. Let’s say that a homeless man and a middle-class woman share a meal and conversation as part of a justice-ministry activity. They are strangers to each other. They have little in common, and yet during the course of that meal, something happens.

The woman decides that homeless men are not that threatening after all. She enjoyed sharing a meal and stories with the man, and she realized that homelessness was an issue that she could embrace. She decided to become an activist because of her personal encounter. The man was, at first, self-conscious, but he could tell that the woman was genuine and authentic. She was really interested in what he had to say, and he was interested in learning about her. It was just a 30-minute meal and conversation, but he walked away feeling affirmed and encouraged to take more steps toward personal stability.

Relationship-based social justice does not replace any of the many dimensions, types, and practices of justice work. It does, however, remind us that as Christians, responsible and mutually transformative relationships are at the center of our faith journeys.

Goals for the Next Triennium

No one standing commission, in one short period of time, could possibly look at all issues or at every angle of how our Church should support social justice in the public realm. We are a relatively new commission (formed in 2009), so we have felt the responsibility of helping to shape its mandate.

In addition to the resolutions referred to us, we tried to focus on areas where there may be gaps in our Church's public statements, which provide a basis for the work of our Office of Government Relations (OGR) and the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN). This is why, for example, we did not address immigration reform, which is an abiding concern, but one about which we have many previous and comprehensive statements from General Convention. On the other hand, the fairness of our tax system is an issue that has been addressed by other faith groups, but is an issue about which The Episcopal Church has said relatively little.

We also tried to address broad issues, such as the growing wealth gap and food insecurity, which provide a lens for thinking about structural injustice. The process of discussion of these led us to conversations about how we understand justice and injustice theologically; about processes of formation for the work of Christian witness in the public square; and about how to connect our church-wide statements on social justice with the work of ministry in local communities.

We know we have only skimmed the surface.

We commend the ongoing work of the OGR and EPPN that faithfully calls us to advocate for the social-justice concerns articulated by General Convention and Executive Council. We especially appreciate that so much of their work is accomplished with our Anglican, ecumenical, and interfaith partners; this joint work magnifies our witness and makes it more effective. We hope our resolutions will provide the OGR and EPPN with helpful mandates to better carry out this good work in the future.

In the brokenness of our world — brokenness that separates us from each other and from God — we reaffirm the call to witness to injustice and to help build the beloved community. We believe that this work has to begin, as so much of Christian witness must, in the local communities and regions where we meet each other face to face.

We call on all of us Episcopalians to deepen our engagement at the local level with theology of social justice, with education and formation in social justice work, and with the building of relationship-based social justice work as a foundation for broader witness in the form of advocacy for public policy and social change. We hope our Commission's efforts will encourage further prayer, debate, and action at local (congregational and diocesan) levels. We encourage the next Standing Commission for Social Justice and Public Policy to pursue this conversation about how to support formation and action in the local context.

Budget

Our Commission's allotted budget for the 2013-2015 triennium was \$17,000. With no further meetings planned, and with no other expenditures, we currently have \$3,895.83 remaining. The Commission was blessed with almost full attendance at our meetings. Unfortunately, we were only able to hold two in-person meetings. For the next triennium, it is anticipated that the Commission should meet at least three times, so that the momentum of the work is not diminished. Therefore, the Commission requests a budget of \$24,000 to accomplish this work.