

TASK FORCE TO RESPOND TO THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Membership

The Rev. Dina van Klaveren, <i>Chair</i>	Maryland, III	2021
The Rev. Amanda Kotval, <i>Vice-Chair</i>	Virginia, III	2021
Dr. Donna Barten	Western Massachusetts, I	2021
The Rev. Debra Bennett	Ohio, V	2021
The Rev. Jan M. Brown	Southern Virginia, III	2021
Ms. Amy Cochran	Southern Ohio, V	2021
The Rev. Canon Katherine Harrigan	Central Pennsylvania, III	2021
The Rt. Rev. William Klusmeyer	West Virginia, III	2021
The Rev. Dr. Benjamin Nelson	West Texas, VII	2021
The Rt. Rev. Jake Owensby	Western Louisiana, VII	2021
Mr. Merrick Williams	Long Island, II	2021
Ms. Twyla Wilson	North Carolina, IV	2021
The Most Rev. Michael Curry, <i>Ex Officio</i>	North Carolina, IV	
The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, <i>Ex Officio</i>	Ohio, V	

Acknowledgements

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Mandate

2018-C037 Call to Respond to Opioid Epidemic

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 79th General Convention call all dioceses and parishes in The Episcopal Church to respond to the opioid epidemic with training, pastoral care, advocacy, and liturgy; and be it further

Resolved, That dioceses and parishes be urged to: partner with First Responders and others in the medical community to host trainings on how to administer naloxone in the event of an overdose; partner with other faith communities and recovery programs in their local contexts to offer pastoral care to those affected by this epidemic; partner with other faith leaders to advocate with local and state government regarding policies and laws to promote healing and wholeness for those affected by this epidemic; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention direct the Office of Government Relations of The Episcopal Church to advocate for the federal government of the United States to address this as public health crisis, affirming that opioid use disorder is a disease, which needs adequate resources for treatment options; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to develop additional liturgical resources to address the needs and concerns of those whose lives have been profoundly affected by this epidemic; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention concurrently acknowledge the purpose and value of prescription opioid medications in appropriately treating chronic, intractable, pain; or acute pain resulting from curable, short-term medical conditions; and affirm the work of the medical community to create established medical guidelines supporting people living with pain; and call all dioceses and parishes in The Episcopal Church to partner with the medical community and health nonprofit organizations to understand the realities, risks, and barriers to access to care and effective treatments and cures for people living with chronic conditions and otherwise untreated or undertreated pain; and be it further

Resolved, that the Church recognize that issues of substance use disorders, access to diagnosis and effective treatment, and lack of appropriate treatment for untreated or undertreated pain affect all communities, but especially those marginalized in poverty, racial, gender, and ethnic discrimination, persons with disabilities, and other minority communities; and be it further

Resolved, that congregations be urged to include in the Prayers of the People intercessions for patients, families, and communities affected by substance use disorders and also by untreated and undertreated pain and chronic diseases; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention to authorize the Presiding Officers to create a task force to assist in the curation and creation of resources for education, prevention, pastoral care, recovery, advocacy, and partnering with community organizations to be use by dioceses and parishes for the purpose of responding to the opioid epidemic and substance use disorders; and be it further

Resolved, That the membership of this task force will be appointed by the Presiding Officers and consist of no fewer than 8 nor more than 14 members; and that the task force be made up of bishops, priests, deacons, and laity; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force will complete this work within two years.

Summary of Work

Meeting Summary

The task force convened its first meeting on May 2, 2019 via Zoom. Work began on the primary set of tasks related to the mandate: "to assist in the curation and creation of resources for education, prevention, pastoral care, recovery, advocacy, and partnering with community organizations to be used by dioceses and parishes for the purpose of responding to the opioid epidemic and substance use disorders..." We identified related tasks and decided to conduct a survey to better understand the needs of clergy and lay leaders regarding education, prevention, pastoral care, recovery, advocacy, and partnering with community organizations. We met again on June 4 and October 3, 2019 to work on resource curation and creation. We determined we would benefit from an in-person work session, and the General Convention office arranged a meeting for us at the Maritime Center in Linthicum, Maryland, on November 5-7, 2019. The website was in process and being updated with relevant resources at the in-person meeting, and the task force continued to meet in small groups on survey analysis and resource collection, curation, and creation.

The meeting scheduled for March 18, 2020, was rescheduled due to COVID-19. The task force met on April 28, 2020, to check in on one another and to share updates about changes in recovery ministries and partnerships due to the pandemic. After a pandemic hiatus, the task force reconvened on November 30th to focus on the following tasks for the coming three months: understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted recovery ministry; continue resource work on the website; complete survey analysis; and draft a resolution for General Convention.

A Plan to Provide Critical Resources

The task force decided on a two-fold approach to the work of the mandate. First, a survey would be conducted with the assistance of the GCO to determine what kind of resources are needed by local congregations and other ministries. Second, a website featuring existing resources curated and organized in easy-to-find categories would be developed and publicized.

Survey Results

The survey was released on October 30, 2019. 527 surveys were returned, including 520 in English, five in Spanish, and two in French. The survey results confirmed and directed efforts to curate and create useful resources on the website, which was the bulk of task force work during the November 5-7, 2019 in-person meeting.

Survey respondents expressed deep concern for individuals and families facing substance use disorder involving opioids/heroin. Many assessed their access to resources as lacking and were eager to utilize resources for education and prevention, especially for children, youth, and families. Respondents identified related issues such as unemployment, violence, homelessness, incarceration, and access to medical care in their communities and seek practical tools from the Church in creating partnerships to transform lives, communities, and systems. Several existing key partnerships and programs throughout the Episcopal Church were identified through the survey, including harm reduction strategies, 501(c)3 recovery centers, liturgical resources, and support strategies for families affected by opioid/heroin use.

The task force appointed a member to follow up with respondents with ministry partnerships and programs to share with the wider Church. These ministries will be highlighted on the website as examples for dioceses and congregations seeking ideas for a ministry of caring and transformational response in the face of the opioid/heroin epidemic.

Website Content Curation

The task force decided early on that the best way to assemble and distribute current resources would be through a website that could be shared across parishes and dioceses. A website would also allow for ease of updating as needed, without the expense of printing or mailing. At the November 2019 meeting, the task force worked together to find online resources for each area the mandate addresses, including the addition of resources to help find treatment in individual localities. These resources were added to the website, which can be accessed at:

<https://sites.google.com/view/opioid-task-force>

At the meeting in November 2020, the task force also noted a need to provide resources on how the opioid/heroin epidemics affect people and communities of color, as well as how the work of responding to these crises has changed since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. These resources are to be added to the website.

Remaining Work

The website content is still in progress. The task force looks forward to completing this work by April 1, 2021 and releasing a press release about the survey results and the website's critical content and availability. The task force also plans to submit a resolution to the next General Convention in regard to promoting the resources via diocesan websites, encouraging Recovery Ally Training for clergy and lay leaders throughout the Church, maintaining the resources that were curated and created by this task force so that the resources continue to save lives, reducing stigma/discrimination, and supporting families/communities.

Proposed resolutions

A090 Allies for Recovery in the Episcopal Church

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 80th General Convention urge all dioceses and parishes in The Episcopal Church to include www.generalconvention.org/sites/opioid-task-force on websites and encourage training, advocacy, and pastoral care resources for individuals, families, and communities affected by opioid addiction; and be it further

Resolved, that dioceses and parishes designate persons within their region to be trained as Recovery Allies, encourage Naloxone training for members, and disseminate the SAMSHA Toolkit (available on website) to clergy and lay leaders; and be it further

Resolved, that the 80th General Convention direct the Office of Government Relations of The Episcopal Church to continue advocacy for the federal government of the United States to address this as public health crisis, affirming that opioid use disorder is a disease, which needs adequate resources for treatment options; and be it further

Resolved, that the Church recognize that issues of substance use disorders, access to diagnosis and effective treatment, and lack of appropriate treatment for untreated or undertreated pain affect all communities, and there is a disproportionate effect on persons of color, persons with disabilities, and those affected by poverty; and be it further

Resolved, that congregations be urged to pray weekly during the Prayers of the People for those affected by substance use disorders and their families; and be it further

Resolved, that the General Convention designate an existing office to oversee website management, partner with seminaries and other organizations for Recovery Ally training, and be it further

Resolved, that the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$40,000 for implementation of this resolution.

EXPLANATION

The 2018-C037 Task Force on Responding to the Opioid Epidemic met over the course of 2.5 years to create resources, explore best ways for dioceses and parishes to respond pastorally and as advocates for recovery, and to conduct a survey of response needs throughout the church. Based on the survey, research, and meetings of the task force members, there is a need for useful science-based strategies for combating the disease of addiction in communities. As many survey respondents noted a need for resources and training to better support the recovery needs in their communities, the Task Force curated resources and encouraged those engaged in Ally Training opportunities. Seabury Seminary is offering an online Recovery Ally Training in the Spring of 2021,

and the Task Force encourages similar offerings throughout the Church. Additionally, the Task Force encourages all congregations to include intercessions for those in recovery as a part of weekly worship to eliminate stigma and create safe space for families and individuals in recovery.

The following steps are recommended for continuing a robust response to the epidemic of opioid addiction:

- (i) all diocesan and parish websites contain a link to the website created by the task force: www.generalconvention.org/sites/opioid-task-force ,
- (ii) the management of the website and the administration of Recovery Ally Training be designated to existing offices or standing committees,
- (iii) resources be allotted to the offices or standing committees designated with the task of maintaining the website and administering the training.

Much of the work of this Task Force was completed before the COVID-19 pandemic. The public health crisis has intensified the effects of opioid addiction and these recommendations are even more critical as communities face the trauma of loss and seek to care for our siblings in active addiction or in recovery.