

## General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2022 Archives' Research Report

**Resolution No.:** 2022-A109  
**Title:** Developing Curriculum and Required Training for Clergy in Mental Health Pastoral Care  
**Proposer:** Task Force on Ministry with Individuals with Mental Illness  
**Topic:** Health

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### Directly Related: (Attached)

2018-C034 Create a Task Force on Mental Illness  
2015-C020 Increase Ministry and Mission to the Mentally Ill  
2000-C032 Urge Congregations to Commend and Support Mental Health Support Groups  
1991-D088 Encourage Understanding of Mental Illness and the Needs of the Mentally Ill

### Indirectly Related: (Available in the [Acts of Convention](#) database, searchable by resolution number)

1991-D100 On the Topic of Mental Illness (Rejected)

*In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1973 through 2018, selecting “direct” resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. The “direct” resolutions are attached and “indirect” resolutions are available in the Acts of Convention database. Committee members who require other research assistance should contact the Archives through the [Research Request Form](#) or call 800-525-9329.*

# A109 - Developing Curriculum and Required Training for Clergy in Mental Health Pastoral Care

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**Final Status:** Not Yet Finalized

**Proposed by:** Task Force on Ministry with Individuals with Mental Illness

**Requests New Interim Body:** No

**Amends C&C or Rules of Order:** No

**Has Budget Implications:** Yes

**Cost:** \$15,000.00

**HiA:** HD

**Legislative Committee Currently Assigned:** 14 - Christian Formation & Discipleship

**Completion Status:** Incomplete

**Latest House Action:** N/A

**Supporting Documents:** No

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## Resolution Text

*Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring,

That the 80th General Convention authorize the creation and launch of new curriculum to train all Episcopal ordained clergy, candidates, and postulants in mental health and mental illness awareness that emphasizes pastoral care, the forming of caring relationships, and effective advocacy. This new curriculum will incorporate and expand upon a range of resources including Mental Health First Aid, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Interfaith Network on Mental Illness, WISE for Mental Health, and other helpful organizations and networks; and be it further

*Resolved*, That all those to be ordained from January 2024 onward be trained in this new curriculum that will include training in Mental Health First Aid and in the advocacy work of the National Alliance on Mental Illness; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 80th General Convention requires the training of all active priests, deacons, and bishops in this curriculum for mental health and mental illness awareness by December, 2028; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 80th General Convention request that the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance consider a budget allocation of \$15,000 to support curriculum development for this training of clergy.

## Explanation

The explanations offered with the resolutions of the Task Force on Ministry with Individuals with Mental Illness set the stage for this Resolution. Further education and training for clergy and laity alike in the realities of mental illness in our communities and churches will lead to a demystification, destigmatization, and increased confidence in care, support, and advocacy for people experiencing challenges in mental health.

Education and training for clergy in awareness and in basic skilled response is essential, as clergy can help set the tone for care, support, and advocacy in Episcopal congregations, schools and seminaries, and other church entities. Research from prior decades has indicated that clergy often function in society as gatekeepers and gateways for people to enter into mental health care. Even in an age of declining religious affiliation, people may first come to their pastors, rabbis, imams, priests, or deacons with life concerns that carry with them matters of mental health.

However, education and training in pastoral care for clergy has not consistently given sufficient or even the most basic awareness, understanding, and development of best practices in relation to mental illness and challenges to mental health. Resources for ministerial and congregational care are available and are continuing to be developed, across denominations and faiths. However, these are not consistently incorporated into seminary- and diocesan-based education and training for deacons and priests.

General ignorance of Episcopal clergy about mental illness is not an acceptable sustained practice. General ignorance leads to avoidance of and lack of awareness of how mental health challenges can impact individuals, families, congregations, and communities. Failure by clergy to engage the topic of mental health as a part of life only serves to sustain a culture of avoidance, shame, silence, and unintended stigmatization. But clergy will not engage the topic or approach a situation of mental health distress if they are not equipped to understand, recognize, and effectively respond.

A foundation in Mental Health First Aid can provide a good introductory understanding. But, to help communities become more equipped and resourceful, to increase effectiveness in building bridges for people into helpful mental health care, and to help open healthy space for affirmative inclusion of people with mental illness in the life and mission of the Church, a fuller curriculum and set of resources for education and training of clergy needs to be developed. The aim is not to turn clergy into alternative mental health counselors. Rather, the aim is to equip clergy with sufficient knowledge and skill that they have confidence in helping to create good space and respectful boundaries for people struggling with mental illness, connecting wisely with mental health professionals and with mental health support networks, and fostering more positive cultures of response and relationship in the congregations, schools, and entities of the Episcopal Church and the communities they inhabit.

The expectation set in this Resolution makes clear that clergy education and training about mental health and mental illness will become required in the same way that training in prevention of sexual abuse and misconduct is required and anti-racism training is required. With over 25% of the population, nationally and worldwide, experiencing significant mental

health challenges at any time, it is essential that clergy become more fully aware of and ready to engage with people experiencing mental health challenges, to be equipped to help Episcopal Church entities become responsive and natural in care, support, and advocacy, and to offer whole and life-affirming spiritual and theological perspectives about mental illness.



**Resolution Number:** 2018-C034  
**Title:** Create a Task Force on Mental Illness  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Substituted  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 79th General Convention authorize the establishment of a Task Force on Mental Illness to further the Episcopal Church's commitment to, with and for persons with mental illness and their families as reflected in the General Convention resolution 2015-C020, as adopted and which reads:*

(2015-C020)

*Resolved, That the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church calls upon diocese, congregations, schools and other entities of The Episcopal Church to explore and adopt best practices for the vitality and increased capacity of their mission and ministry in the inclusion, support and spiritual care for persons with mental illness and their families; and be it further*

*Resolved, That dioceses, congregations, schools and other entities of The Episcopal Church increase understanding about mental illness by providing educational material and training; utilizing existing programs such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness, veterans groups, government departments on mental health, local organizations and other programs; and sharing the information so it is readily accessible.*

*And be it further;*

*Resolved, That this task force be appointed jointly by the Presiding Officers, with between 10 and 12 members, two or three of whom shall be bishops, two or three of whom shall be clergy, and not more than six lay persons, and all of the members shall have some professional, family or personal background with mental illness, and that this task force report back to the 80th General Convention; and be it further*

*Resolved, That the General Convention request that the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance consider a budget allocation of \$30,000 for the implementation of this resolution.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Austin, 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), p. 894.



**Resolution Number:** 2015-C020  
**Title:** Increase Ministry and Mission to the Mentally Ill  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Substituted  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church calls upon dioceses, congregations, schools and other entities of the Episcopal Church to explore and adopt best practices for the vitality and increased capacity of their mission and ministry in the inclusion, support, and spiritual care for persons with mental illness and their families; and be it further*  
*Resolved, That dioceses, congregations, schools and other entities of the Episcopal Church increase understanding about mental illness by providing educational material and training; utilizing existing programs such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness, veterans groups, governmental departments of mental health, local organizations, and other programs and organizations; and sharing the information so that it is readily accessible.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), p. 369.



**Resolution Number:** 2000-C032  
**Title:** Urge Congregations to Commend and Support Mental Health Support Groups  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Amended  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 73rd General Convention urge all congregations of the Episcopal Church to seek out and commend local members of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and other mental health support groups for their valiant struggle of many years to support and educate the general public, that many mental illnesses are brain disorders that may be treatable with new medications and other forms of treatment; and be it further*

*Resolved, That congregations be encouraged to read, study, and implement relevant portions of Resolution D088, entitled "Encourage Understanding of Mental Illness and Respond to the Needs of the Mentally Ill" (see explanation) adopted by the 1991 General Convention; and be it further*

*Resolved, That congregations offer their facilities to local members of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and other mental health support groups, for the purpose of educating and supporting family members of the mentally ill.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Denver, 2000* (New York: General Convention, 2001), p. 610.



**Resolution Number:** 1991-D088

**Title:** Encourage Understanding of Mental Illness and the Needs of the Mentally Ill

**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred As Amended

**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That members of the Episcopal Church are encouraged to become knowledgeable about mental illness in order to reduce stigma and stereotypes which are prevalent within the Church body and the Community-at-large; and be it further*

*Resolved, That the Episcopal Church and all its units and organizations, be encouraged to reach out, welcome, include and support persons with a mental illness, particularly those who have a prolonged, serious mental illness, and the families of those persons, and recognize the abilities and celebrate the gifts of those who have a mental illness; and be it further*

*Resolved, That the church encourage the development of specific programs to equip the clergy and laity for ministry to the mentally ill and their families and that clergy and lay ministers seek out training and opportunities to minister to the spiritual needs of those who are affected by a mental illness; and be it further*

*Resolved, That dioceses and congregations work with existing agencies and organizations to assist with and initiate programs, such as support groups, drop-in centers, housing and employment opportunities, which lead to an improved quality of life for people who have a mental illness, with specific attention to those who have become homeless; and be it further*

*Resolved, That dioceses, congregations and individual parishioners become advocates for public policy and adequate funding to provide comprehensive community-based services, hospital care and research into the causes and treatment of mental illness; and be it further*

*Resolved, That dioceses, congregations and individuals utilize the resources and support services offered by the Episcopal Mental Illness Network (EMIN) of the Presiding Bishop's Task Force on Accessibility.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Phoenix, 1991* (New York: General Convention, 1992), p. 822.