

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

**Resolution No.:** 2022-A139  
**Title:** Resolution to Change the Constitution of the General Theological Seminary  
**Proposer:** Board of Trustees of the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church  
**Topic:** Seminaries

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### **Directly Related:** (Attached)

2015-D075 Evaluate the Relationship with General Theological Seminary

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

2018-A083 Concur with Constitutional Amendment on GTS Board Membership

*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.*

# A139 - Resolution to Change the Constitution of the General Theological Seminary

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**Final Status:** Not Yet Finalized

**Proposed by:** Board of Trustees of the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church

**Endorsed by:** The Rt. Rev. Robert Wright, The Rt. Rev. Kevin Brown, The Rev. Ellen Tillotson

**Requests New Interim Body:** No

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

**Has Budget Implications:** No

**Cost:**

**HiA:** HD

**Legislative Committee Currently Assigned:** 17 - Agencies & Boards

**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 concur with the March 28, 2022 unanimous resolution of the Board of Trustees of The General Theological Seminary of The Episcopal Church that Article VII of its Constitution should be deleted and replaced with a new Article VII that reads as follows:

Article VII: This Constitution may be amended, superseded or rescinded upon the vote solely of the Board of Trustees.

## Explanation

Proposers: The Very Rev. Michael W. DeLashmutt, PhD (Acting Dean and President, The General Theological Seminary) The Rt. Rev. Robert Wright (Chair of the Board of The General Theological Seminary, Bishop of Atlanta), The Rt. Rev. Kevin Brown (Vice-Chair of the Board of the General Theological Seminary, Bishop of Delaware, and The Rev. Ellen Tillotson, Deputy to General Convention and Vice-Chair of the Board of the General Theological Seminary)

The purpose of this resolution is to facilitate the mutually understood and supported decoupling of the General Theological Seminary (GTS) and the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (General Convention).; This resolution comes with the full and unanimous support of the GTS Board of Trustees, following a structured, prayerful, and data-informed process of discernment that occurred between March 2021 —; March 2022, after which the Trustees of GTS determined that the best future for the Seminary is one where the Seminary is affiliated to, or embedded within, a larger institution. To facilitate this type of affiliation, GTS requires the unilateral authority to modify its own Constitution.

The 2015 General Convention adopted Resolution D075 calling for the appointment of a committee to “evaluate the relationship between the General Convention and the General Theological Seminary...” and to “report to the 79th General Convention ... with recommended action, including the possibility of ending the relationship.” The committee’s work can be found in the Report to the General Convention of the Committee to Study the Relationship of the General Convention and the General Theological Seminary, pp. 609-629, 2018. While the report concludes that rather than decoupling from the General Convention the ties between the two should be strengthened, the failure of the General Convention to adopt proposed Resolution A007 to study the relationship of ALL Episcopal seminaries with the General Convention and its failure to implement any of the Committee’s other recommendations, GTS continued its own discernment which led to its conclusion of the need to move forward, separate from actions of the General Convention as explained below.

Decoupling from the General Convention is the natural consequence of the evolving relationship between GTS and the General Convention. As is outlined in greater detail in the aforementioned 2018 report, General Theological Seminary was established by an act of General Convention in 1817 in order to create a centralized resource for ministry training for the whole Episcopal Church.

The Seminary’s Constitution reflects the General Convention’s original intent to create through GTS a Seminary that served the whole church. Bishops were given prominent roles in the Board of Trustees and the Seminary’s Constitution (now one of its two governing documents) was only alterable by a vote of the Seminary Trustees and a concurrent vote by the General Convention.

Within a few years, this founding vision for the creation and maintenance of a single official Seminary was clearly not universally shared within the growing church. From the founding of Virginia Theological Seminary in 1823 to the founding of the Seminary of the Southwest in 1952, rather than a single seminary or a single seminary system, the Episcopal Church had developed a network of regionally (or ecclesially) oriented institutions that grew alongside the church itself. Today this network is even more diverse, as it now includes a number of diocesan programs of formation and Anglican houses of study, in addition to theological programs offered by ecumenical seminaries and divinity schools across the country.

General Seminary is the only educational institution with a formal relationship with the General Convention. The role of the General Convention in the governance of GTS is largely a vestigial remnant of an early 19th century dream for a centralized seminary

system. The resolution proposed here acknowledges the successive withdrawal of the General Convention in the governance of GTS and seeks to formally end this relationship.

Currently, no funding comes from the General Convention to General Seminary, nor is General Seminary mentioned in the Constitution and Canons of the General Convention, and no formal reporting or accountability exists between the Seminary and the Convention. The only lasting link is the appointment of Trustees by General Convention to the Board of GTS (Article III) and the need for a concurrent approval by General Convention and the GTS Board to any changes to the GTS constitution (Article VII).

## **Conclusion**

The facts of General's founding history will never change. General remains the Seminary created by an act of the General Convention and will always be the oldest continuously operating Seminary within the Anglican Communion. Similarly, as was reaffirmed robustly by our Board of Trustees throughout this discernment process, General Seminary is resolutely committed to its 200-year-old mission of preparing leaders for ministry within the Episcopal Church.

By decoupling from the General Convention, General is not severing ties with our beloved Church, nor are we devolving into a generic protestant Seminary. Rather, this freedom grants General the ability to lead a new life in partnership with another institution, so that we can continue to serve in the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement, here in our home in Chelsea.





**Resolution Number:** 2015-D075

**Title:** Evaluate the Relationship with General Theological Seminary

**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Substituted

**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the Presiding Officers appoint a committee of no more than 5 members, including one of the Trustees elected at the 78th General Convention, to evaluate the relationship between the General Convention and the General Theological Seminary to determine whether this relationship is mutually beneficial at this point in the life of the Church; and be it further*

*Resolved, That the committee report to the 79th General Convention of The Episcopal Church with recommended action, including the possibility of ending this relationship.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), p. 455.