

General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2022 Archives' Research Report

Resolution No.: 2022-D074
Title: Examine the Complicity of The Episcopal Church in Facilitating Forced Adoptions
Proposer: Mr. Alan Murray
Topic: Family

Directly Related: (Attached)

2009-C084 Refer a Resolution on Access to Information by Adoptees (Referred)
1982-D082 Urge State Legislatures to Make Information Available to Adoptees

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

2012-A060 Develop Liturgies for Adoption
2012-A078 On the Topic of a Right to Human Identity (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.

D074 - Examine the Complicity of The Episcopal Church in Facilitating Forced Adoptions

Final Status: Not Yet Finalized

Proposed by: Mr. Alan Murray

Endorsed by: The Rev. José Rodríguez-Sanjuro, The Rev. Daniel Robayo

Requests New Interim Body: No

Amends C&C or Rules of Order: No

Has Budget Implications: Yes

Cost: \$40,000.00

HiA: HD

Legislative Committee Currently Assigned: 13 - Committees & Commissions

Completion Status: Incomplete

Latest House Action: N/A

Supporting Documents: Yes

Resolution Text

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring,

That the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church acknowledges the forced adoption era, which is defined as the time between the end of World War II through 1972 when single pregnant women were sequestered in maternity homes, many of which coerced them to surrender their children for adoption; run by The Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, that the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church acknowledges the emotional and psychological pain caused by these forced adoptions, and the emotional, psychological, and sometimes, physical abuse inflicted on these mothers and their children, most of whom were forcefully isolated from family, friends and society; and be it further

Resolved, that the 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church requests the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church appoint a working group to study the historical and current relationship of The Episcopal Church to the forced relinquishment and adoption of infants born to unwed mothers during the years between approximately 1945 to 1975, in order to achieve greater clarity on their respective role, responsibility and authority; and be it further

Resolved, that this working group investigates The Episcopal Church's complicity, including its charitable arms' and their roles in facilitating the forced relinquishment of infants born to unwed mothers during the aforementioned years; and that this working group be composed of bishop, clergy (priests and deacons) and lay members. The overall composition of this working group shall include women, members of LGBT community, people of color with geographical diversity and at least 5 members who are mothers of adoption loss, adult adoptees of all gender; and be it further;

Resolved, that this working group works in consultation with individuals and organizations of mothers who lost infants to forced adoptions, and that the information gathering be used as the foundation for truth telling, confession, apology, repentance and reconciliation to facilitate inter-generational healing for mothers and families separated by forced adoption; and be it further

Resolved, that this working group of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church submits its findings and recommendations to the 81st General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, that the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church support public policies that calls for legislatures to investigate incidents of forced adoption and to enact policies that respect the rights and dignity of mothers of adoption loss and adoptees; and be it further

Resolved, that the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to allocate a budget of \$40,000 for the implementation of this resolution and to dedicate staff resources which may include, but not limited to the staff position proposed in resolution A063 Creation of a Director of Women's Ministries.

Explanation

Over 1.5 million women in the United States were forced to relinquish their infants to adoption during the 1940's through the mid-1970's. It was common practice during this time for a single woman who became pregnant to be sent away to a maternity home, of which there were hundreds in the United States owned and operated by charitable arms of major religious institutions including The Episcopal Church.

Great harm was inflicted upon the women who were forced to stay at maternity homes during this time which all culminated in the devastating event that left them permanently separated from their babies. Once a woman was admitted to a maternity home, which was usually done against her will, she was subjected to emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical abuse in an attempt to control and manipulate her into relinquishing her infant. Her unwed status was used to shame and humiliate her and she was gaslighted into believing her very existence was a plight on her baby—that a truly loving option, indeed the only option—would be to surrender her baby for adoption

Those who wielded their influence over women in maternity homes were social workers, emboldened by both a societal norm that viewed pregnant and unwed women as "fallen" and therefore in need of rehabilitation, but also by policies that allowed them to act in whatever manner they deemed necessary to carry out an unspoken mandate forcing unwed

women to relinquish their baby for adoption. Social workers claimed unwed mothers within their professional domain ultimately labeling them as deviant and psychotic, and therefore, morally unfit to parent her own child. If a mother residing in a maternity home expressed a desire to parent her own child she would, at the very least, be called selfish and unrealistic, and at worse, threatened with juvenile detention, jail, or psychiatric confinement.

The Episcopal Church and its representatives were active agents in the development, funding, policy making, and daily operations of maternity homes that used coercion, manipulation, and shame to facilitate the permanent separation of mothers from their infants. The mothers who lost their children to forced adoption between the 40's and the 70's were and continue to be in a state of suffering worthy of The Episcopal Church's attention today.

Many of those women are still living today with the lifelong effects of having been subjected to these unjust practices. They have lived for decades with disenfranchised grief causing them undue pain and suffering.

The harm inflicted by these practices extended to the lives of the infants who were adopted out. Their lives are shrouded in ambiguous loss and grief from having been taken away from their natural families. They carry a heavy burden of genetic bewilderment—which they pass on to their own children—because they were robbed of the basic human right to know who they were and where they came from.

Governments and churches from other anglosphere countries who acted as agents in forced adoptions between the 1940's and the 1970's have examined their own complicity and begun the process of healing for mothers and their adult children who were adopted. The Episcopal Church can be the first organization in the United States to do so, and as such, is positioned to facilitate the kind of intergenerational healing mothers and families separated by forced adoption truly deserve.



Resolution Number: 2009-C084
Title: Refer a Resolution on Access to Information by Adoptees
Legislative Action Taken: Referred
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 76th General Convention urge all dioceses to adopt the following statement: Personal history is a fundamental human right and knowledge of one's entire parentage should be assumed as part of a person's natural property; and be it further

Resolved, That the 76th General Convention urge all dioceses to adopt the following statement: That all state legislatures be urged to establish procedures that would enable adoptees [upon reaching legal age] to secure current information regarding their historical heritage, medical history and genetic derivation without the necessity of court action.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), p. 378.



Resolution Number: 1982-D082
Title: Urge State Legislatures to Make Information Available to Adoptees
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred As Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That state legislatures be urged to establish procedures that would enable adoptees [upon reaching legal age] to secure current information regarding their historical heritage, medical history, and genetic derivation: (1) without the necessity of court action, and (2) with sufficient safeguards provided for the protection of all parties in the adoptive triangle--the adoptee, the adoptive parents, and the biological parents; and be it further

Resolved, That every Diocese and Parish be encouraged to support such action in every state.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, New Orleans, 1982* (New York: General Convention, 1983), p. C-149.