

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

**Resolution No.:** 2022-D087  
**Title:** Delete Canon III.15 Of the General Board of Examining Chaplains  
**Proposer:** Mr. Adam Lees  
**Topic:** Canons, Theological Education

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

2015-A041 Refer a Resolution on Canon III.15 [General Board of Examining Chaplains] (Referred)  
2006-C036 Convene Task Force to Review the General Ordination Examinations (GOE)  
1997-B006 Request a Study of the General Ordination Exam  
1982-B053 Report on Ordination Exams and Prepare Supplementary Educational Guidelines

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

None

*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.*

# D087 - Delete Canon III.15 Of the General Board of Examining Chaplains

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**Final Status:** Not Yet Finalized

**Proposed by:** Mr. Adam Lees

**Endorsed by:** Ms. Alice Holinger, The Rev. Mary Norton

**Requests New Interim Body:** No

**Amends C&C or Rules of Order:** Yes

**Has Budget Implications:** No

**Cost:**

**HiA:** HB

**Legislative Committee Currently Assigned:** 15 - Ministry

**Completion Status:** Incomplete

**Latest House Action:** N/A

**Supporting Documents:** No

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## Resolution Text

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

<The text to be deleted can be found after the \*\*\*\*\*>

That Canon III.15 is hereby deleted; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the subsequent canons in Title III be renumbered as appropriate; and be it further

*Resolved*, That bishops, commissions on ministry, and standing committees be encouraged to consider successful completion of a program of study approved by the Bishop at an accredited Episcopal seminary as *prima facie* evidence of proficiency of the subjects outlined in Canon III.8.5.g.

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~~Canon 15: Of the General Board of Examining Chaplains~~

~~**Sec. 1.** There shall be a General Board of Examining Chaplains, consisting of four Bishops, six Priests with pastoral cures or in specialized ministries, six members of accredited Seminary faculties or of other educational institutions, and six Lay Persons. The members~~

~~of the Board shall be elected by the House of Bishops and confirmed by the House of Deputies, one half of the members in each of the foregoing categories being elected and confirmed at each regular meeting of the General Convention for a term of two Convention periods. They shall take office at the adjournment of the meeting of the General Convention at which their elections are confirmed, and shall serve until the adjournment of the second regular meeting thereafter. No member shall serve more than 12 years consecutively. Additionally, the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Chair of the Board, may appoint up to four other members for a term. The House of Bishops, at any special meeting that may be held prior to the next meeting of the General Convention, shall fill for the unexpired portion of the term any vacancy that may have arisen in the interim. The Board shall elect its own Chair and Secretary, and shall have the power to constitute committees necessary for the carrying on of its work.~~

**Sec. 2.**

~~(a) The General Board of Examining Chaplains, with professional assistance, shall prepare at least annually a General Ordination Examination covering the subject matter set forth in Canon III.8.5.g, and shall conduct, administer, and evaluate it in respect to those Candidates for Holy Orders who have been identified to the Board by their several Bishops.~~

~~(b) Whenever a Candidate has not demonstrated proficiency in any one or more of the canonical areas covered by the General Ordination Examination, the General Board of Examining Chaplains shall recommend to the Commission on Ministry, and through the Commission to the Board of Examining Chaplains, if one exists, of the Diocese to which the Candidate belongs, how the proficiencies might be attained.~~

**Sec. 3.** ~~The General Board of Examining Chaplains may prepare, in each Convention period, guidelines based upon the subjects contained in Canon III.8.5.g, which guidelines shall be available to all persons concerned.~~

**Sec. 4.** ~~The General Board of Examining Chaplains shall promptly report, in writing, to the Candidate, to the Candidate's Bishop and to the Dean of the Seminary the Candidate is attending, the results of all examinations held by them, together with the examinations themselves, whether satisfactory or unsatisfactory, making separate reports upon each person examined. The Bishop shall transmit these reports to the Standing Committee and to the Commission. Notwithstanding the results of the examinations, in no case shall the Standing Committee recommend a Candidate for Ordination under Canon III.8 until the Standing Committee has received from the Commission on Ministry a certificate to the effect that the Candidate has demonstrated a proficiency in all subjects required by Canon III.8.5.g and h.~~

The report of the Board shall be made in the following form:

To \_\_\_\_\_ (Candidate), the Right Reverend \_\_\_\_\_,  
Bishop of \_\_\_\_\_ (or in the absence of the Bishop the Standing  
Committee of) \_\_\_\_\_: (Place) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)  
\_\_\_\_\_

To the Dean of (Place) \_\_\_\_\_ : (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

~~We, having been assigned as examiners of A.B., hereby testify that we have examined A.B. upon the subject matter prescribed in Canon III.8. Sensible of our responsibility, we give our judgment as follows: (Here specify the proficiency of A.B. in the subject matter appointed, or any deficiency therein, as made apparent by the examination.~~

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_

~~Sec. 5. The General Board of Examining Chaplains shall make a report concerning its work to each regular meeting of the General Convention, and in years between meetings of the General Convention shall make a report to the House of Bishops.~~

## Explanation

The General Board of Examining Chaplains was established by the General Convention of 1970 with the sole task of preparing and administering a series of standardized tests – the General Ordination Exams or GOE’s – to gauge the proficiency of postulants for the priesthood across the areas of learning outlined in Canon III.8.5.g as well as one additional topic. Per the Episcopal Church’s website, these exams are to be advisory prior to ordination to the diaconate (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/general-ordination-examination-goe/>). While it would be preferable to eliminate the GOE alone, the exams are the entire *raison d’être* of the GBEC. Without the GOE’s, it has no purpose.

Why eliminate the GOE’s? For one, they are not required for ordination either to the diaconate or the priesthood. Indeed, they are redundant. Canon III.6.6.b.4 and Canon III.8.6.c.4 – for deacons and priests respectively – already require recommendations concerning ordination from seminaries or other programs approved by the Bishop based in part on academic proficiency. Moreover, Canon III.8.5.j requires annual reporting from the seminaries or other programs on the academic performance of postulants and candidates for the priesthood. Because of this redundancy, diocesan practices run the gamut from not requiring GOE’s or any similar examination to barring postulants from candidacy or ordination should they fail any of the tests.

Secondly, these exams are a waste of the Church’s resources. In fact, the value add is so minimal that many dioceses will ordain candidates for the priesthood as transitional deacons before the completion of GOE’s while others have developed their own processes in lieu of the tests having found them inadequate. Over \$140,000 per year is spent on an exam administered on a laughingly dilapidated web-system, which one former classmate described as “straight out of 1998.” Exam takers are warned ahead of time that the system tends to slow down or crash in the final fifteen-minute window of the testing period due to high volume and so are advised to finish in advance of that. If the infrastructure is bad, the questions are worse. As an example, the questions on the 2022 exams contained horrendous typos and rubrics whose requirements did not fully match the question asked. The worst example, which became a running joke, was the misspelling of “ordained” as “lordfained” – a confusion so widespread that Google began suggesting “what does lordfained mean” as a search request during the test.

Like any standardized test, the GOE reinforces the bias of the writers and their backgrounds. On the first tests in the 1970's, female postulants took great care to obscure any detail that could reveal their sex. These biases may account for dramatic swings in proficiency results between certain of the exams in 2019 and 2020. The GOE is a barrier in another way: it costs \$750 to take, more the SAT, LSAT, and MCAT combined. For those whose schools, dioceses, or congregations cannot afford to pay it, it is a not insubstantial cost – about a year's worth of text books – that lower income students can ill afford.

Finally, the GOE is an unnecessary cause of stress for test takers. It is a high risk, low reward set of exams, completely superfluous to all other educational preparation, which have the added insult of being administered during the break between semesters, interrupting what should be a period of (at least relative) rest before the final semester when test takers are preparing for ordination and discerning their calls. For these reasons, the GOE and the GBEC should be eliminated.





**Resolution Number:** 2015-A041  
**Title:** Refer a Resolution on Canon III.15 [General Board of Examining Chaplains]  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Referred  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church amend Canon III.15.1-3 and delete Canons III.15.4-5 as follows:*

**Sec. 1.** There shall be a General Board of Examining Chaplains, consisting of four Bishops ~~, six Priests with pastoral cures or in specialized ministries, six members of accredited Seminary faculties or of other educational institutions, and six Lay Persons and eight other members.~~ The members of the Board shall be elected *to six-year terms* by the House of Bishops ~~and confirmed by the House of Deputies from nominees presented by the existing Board and the Presiding Bishop,~~ one-half of the members in each of the foregoing categories being elected ~~and confirmed~~ at each regular meeting of the General Convention for a term ~~of two Convention periods~~ *not to exceed two General Conventions, except that for the first election following the approval of this canon, one half of the members shall be elected for a three-year term and one half for a six-year term.* They shall take office at the adjournment of the meeting of the General Convention ~~at which their elections are confirmed~~ *of their election,* and shall serve until *the earlier of the end of their term or the adjournment of the second regular meeting of General Convention thereafter.* No member shall serve more than 12 years consecutively. ~~Additionally, the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Chair of the Board, may appoint up to four other members for a term.~~ The House of Bishops, at any special meeting that may be held prior to the next meeting of the General Convention, shall fill for the unexpired portion of the term any vacancy that may have arisen in the interim. The Board shall elect its own Chair and Secretary, and shall have the power to constitute committees necessary ~~for the carrying on of~~ *to carry out* its work.

**Sec. 2. (a)** The General Board of Examining Chaplains, with professional assistance, shall prepare at least annually a General Ordination Examination covering the subject matter set forth in Canon III.8.5 (g); and shall conduct, administer, and evaluate it in respect to those Candidates for Holy Orders who have been identified to the Board by their several Bishops.

**(b)** ~~Whenever a Candidate has not demonstrated proficiency in any one or more of the canonical areas covered by the General Ordination Examination, The General Board of Examining Chaplains shall recommend to the Commission on Ministry, and through the Commission to the Board of Examining Chaplains, if one exists, of the Diocese to which the Candidate belongs, how the proficiencies might be attained promptly report to each Candidate, to the Candidate's Bishop, and to the dean or other official of the educational program at which the Candidate is studying, the results of the General Ordination Examination, the examinations themselves, and the proficiency or lack of proficiency noted, along with the reasons for any lack of proficiency. The Bishop shall transmit these reports to the Standing Committee and to the Commission on Ministry.~~

**Sec. 3.** The General Board of Examining Chaplains ~~may prepare, in each Convention period, guidelines based upon the subjects contained in Canon III.8.4(c), which guidelines shall be~~

~~available to all persons concerned shall make a report concerning its work to each regular meeting of the General Convention.~~

~~Sec. 4. The General Board of Examining Chaplains shall promptly report, in writing, to the Candidate, to the Candidate's Bishop and to the Dean of the Seminary the Candidate is attending, the results of all examinations held by them, together with the examinations themselves, whether satisfactory or unsatisfactory, making separate reports upon each person examined. The Bishop shall transmit these reports to the Standing Committee and to the Commission. Notwithstanding the results of the examinations, in no case shall the Standing Committee recommend a Candidate for Ordination under Canon III.8 until the Standing Committee has received from the Commission on Ministry a certificate to the effect that the Candidate has demonstrated a proficiency in all subjects required by Canon III.8.5(g) and (h).~~

~~The report of the Board shall be made in the following form:~~

~~To \_\_\_\_\_ (Candidate), the Right Reverend \_\_\_\_\_, Bishop of \_\_\_\_\_ (or in the absence of the Bishop the Standing Committee of) \_\_\_\_\_: (Place) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_ To the Dean of (Place) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_~~

~~We, having been assigned as examiners of A.B., hereby testify that we have examined A.B. upon the subject matter prescribed in Canon III.7. Sensible of our responsibility, we give our judgment as follows: (Here specify the proficiency of A.B. in the subject matter appointed, or any deficiency therein, as made apparent by the examination.~~

~~(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_~~

~~Sec. 5. The General Board of Examining Chaplains shall make a report concerning its work to each regular meeting of the General Convention, and in years between meetings of the General Convention shall make a report to the House of Bishops.~~

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), pp. 454-455.





**Resolution Number:** 2006-C036  
**Title:** Convene Task Force to Review the General Ordination Examinations (GOE)  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Amended  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 75th General Convention request the Standing Commission on Ministry Development (SCMD), in consultation with the Presiding Bishop, to convene a task force to review the purpose of the General Ordination Examinations (GOE), including how the examinations are constructed, administered, evaluated, and scored, with attention to cultural bias and diverse ministry contexts. This task force will also seek to determine whether the examinations and the examination process meet the needs of the church today; and be it further*

*Resolved, That this task force solicit information from the General Board of Examining Chaplains (GBEC), the seminaries, diocesan Commissions on Ministry (COMs), diocesan ordination programs, and the House of Bishops, among other appropriate entities; and be it further*

*Resolved, That this task force report its findings to the Standing Commission on Ministry Development which will report to the 76th General Convention.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Columbus, 2006* (New York: General Convention, 2007), pp. 512-513.



**Resolution Number:** 1997-B006  
**Title:** Request a Study of the General Ordination Exam  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Substituted  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the General Board of Examining Chaplains, with information resources such as bishops, seminary deans, Commissions on Ministry, and any other sources it may deem necessary, study and evaluate the timing, function, and purpose of the General Ordination Exams. The General Board of Examining Chaplains shall report its study and evaluation, along with any recommendations and/or canonical changes, to the 73rd General Convention.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, 1997* (New York: General Convention, 1998), p. 272.



**Resolution Number:** 1982-B053  
**Title:** Report on Ordination Exams and Prepare Supplementary Educational Guidelines  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred  
**Final Text:**

***Resolved, That the General Board of Examining Chaplains include in its reports to the House of Bishops the results of the decade of testing Candidates for Ordination and prepare guidelines for Theological Education to supplement the canonical list of seven fields.***

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, New Orleans, 1982* (New York: General Convention, 1983), p. C-89.