

## General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2024 Archives' Research Report

**Resolution No.:** 2024-C011  
**Title:** Add Howard W. Thurman to The Episcopal Church Calendar  
**Proposer:** California  
**Topic:** Church Calendar

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**Directly Related:** (Attached)

2022-C020 Refer a Resolution to Add Howard W. Thurman to the Church Calendar (Referred)

**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 2022, 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](#).*

# C011 - Add Howard W. Thurman to The Episcopal Church Calendar

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**Final Status:** Not Yet Finalized

**Proposed by:** California

**Has Budget Implications:** No

**Cost:**

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

**Requests New Interim Body:** No

**Changes Mandate Of Existing Ib:** Yes

**Directs Dfms Staff:** No

**Directs Dioceses:** No

**Directs Executive Council:** No

**HiA:** No House Assigned

**Legislative Committee Currently Assigned:** No Committee Assigned

**Completion Status:** Incomplete

**Latest House Action:** N/A

**Supporting Documents:** No

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## Resolution Text

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

That the 81st General Convention designate April 10 or another appropriate date on the Church Calendar as the annual celebration of the life and work of Howard W. Thurman, pastor, educator, theologian, and civil rights leader; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 81st General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to prepare appropriate biblical lessons, collects and other liturgical resources commemorating the life and work of Howard W. Thurman.

## Explanation

This resolution parallels a resolution submitted to General Convention in 2022 and under preparation for General Convention 2024 by the Diocese of Northern California to add Howard Thurman to the Church Calendar, commonly known as *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. The 2022 General Convention, held in Baltimore, directed the Standing Commission on Music and Liturgy to further explore whether Thurman should be added to the Calendar.

While guidelines have varied in the Church's consideration of suitable figures for addition to the *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, Howard Thurman is swiftly approaching the standard

qualification of two generations since his death. Moreover, local recognition of Thurman's work both inside and outside the Church have been resurgent in the past few years. Finally, it is difficult to overstate the influence of his Christian witness on the civil rights movement in the 20th century and its continuing struggle in our time.

### **Background:**

Howard Washington Thurman (Nov. 18, 1899 – April 10, 1981), had an enormous influence on the civil rights movement and its leaders. Born in Florida, Thurman was educated at Morehouse College and ordained a Baptist pastor. He was appointed as the first Black chaplain of Marsh Chapel at Boston University which today has a center bearing his name.

In the 1930s Thurman led a six-month pilgrimage of African Americans to India where he met Mohandas Gandhi who had a critical influence on his work. Incorporating Gandhi's theories of non-violence, Thurman wrote a ground-breaking book in 1949, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, incorporating material he had developed as early as 1935. The volume includes these seminal words, just as prescient today as they were nearly a century ago:

*Jesus rejected hatred. It was not because he lacked the vitality or the strength. It was not because he lacked the incentive. Jesus rejected hatred because he saw that hatred meant death to the mind, death to the spirit, death to communion with his Father. He affirmed life; and hatred was the great denial. To him it was clear*

*Thou must not make division.  
Thy mind, heart, soul and strength must ever search  
To find the way by which the road  
To all men's need of thee must go.  
This is the Highway of the Lord.  
The religion of Jesus makes the love-ethic central...*

*Once the neighbor is defined, then one's moral obligation is clear... Every man is potentially every other man's neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between.*

*(Jesus and the Disinherited, chapters Four and Five).*

Thurman's work had a major impact on a young ministry student, Martin Luther King, Jr. In later years, Dr. King carried Thurman's book in his suitcase in his travels as a leader in the civil rights movement. Thurman also mentored Pauli Murray, who became the first Black woman ordained an Episcopal priest and was recently added to the Episcopal Church calendar. After leaving Howard University, Thurman founded a racially integrated church in San Francisco. He was named an honorary Canon of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City in 1974. Thurman died in San Francisco in 1981.

*Ebony* magazine once called Thurman one of the fifty most important figures in African American history. In the 1950s, *Life* magazine ranked Thurman among the twelve most important religious leaders in the United States.

Local commemorations and recognition of Thurman's life and work are emerging in the wider Church. Since 2021, several congregations in the Diocese of Northern California, including Trinity Cathedral in Sacramento, have held liturgical celebrations, seminars and forums focused on Thurman's life. Thurman's book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, is used in the Episcopal Church's Sacred Ground program and as a supplemental text in our Education for Ministry program. Both programs are active in communities across the Diocese of California. Some Bay Area schools now include readings from *Jesus and the Disinherited* in their curricula. Thurman's speeches, articles and books have been the topic of recent seminars, webinars and retreats in a wide spectrum of church and secular settings. His work is archived and studied in many institutions of higher learning, including Boston College and the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. And the non-denominational Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples that he founded in San Francisco remains a vibrant worshipping community, which sponsors the annual Howard Thurman Convocation.

Our Episcopal Church Calendar commemorates those who in the past still speak to us in our own time. The authorized calendar includes more than 230 individuals, but only about a dozen are African American, and only a handful are from the twentieth century, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Pauli Murray, Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, and Thurgood Marshall. Our calendar honors numerous educators and theologians from a broad array of denominations and religious traditions (Evelyn Underhill, Elizabeth Ann Seton, and F. D. Maurice, to name three). But the calendar dimly reflects the rich contributions of African American theologians, educators, and religious leaders who played a significant role in shaping the civil rights movement and, more broadly, how we engage with the difficult issues of race and justice in our world today.

The introduction to *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2022* states this why people are included on the calendar: "What we celebrate in the lives of the saints is the presence of Christ expressing itself in and through particular lives lived in the midst of specific historical circumstances. In the saints we are not dealing with absolutes of perfection but human lives, in all their diversity, open to the movement of the Holy Spirit."

Thurman certainly meets this description and his addition to our calendar is long overdue.



**Resolution Number:** 2022-C020

**Title:** Refer a Resolution to Add Howard W. Thurman to the Church Calendar

**Legislative Action Taken:** Referred

**Final Text:**

***Resolved, That the 80th General Convention to designate April 10 in Lesser Feasts and Fasts, or the supplement A Great Cloud of Witnesses: A Calendar of Commemorations as the annual celebration of the life and work of Howard W. Thurman, pastor, educator, theologian, and civil rights leader.***

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Baltimore, 2022* (New York: General Convention, 2023), p. 662.