

**GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH 2018  
ARCHIVES' RESEARCH REPORT**

**RESOLUTION NO.:** 2018-D048  
**TITLE:** Review of Disability Language in the Constitution and Canons  
**PROPOSER:** Ms. Charis Hill  
**TOPIC:** Inclusive Language

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**Directly Related:** (Attached)

2009-A080 Address Access of Disabled Persons to Ministry Discernment  
2009-D032 Commit to Non-Discrimination in Lay Employment  
1988-A073 Direct Episcopal Church Staff to Use Inclusive Language in All Communications

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

2015-A077 Publicize Formation Resources for People with Disabilities

*In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1976 through 2015, 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 at 800-525-9329 before Convention or at Convention in the General Convention Secretariat.*

# D048 Review of Disability Language in the Constitution and Canons

<b>Proposer</b>	Ms. Charis Hill
<b>Endorsed by</b>	Geiszler-Ludlum, Ms. Joan; Clarke, Mr. Myles B.
<b>Sponsored by</b>	
<b>Page numbers</b>	Blue Book: p. N/A; Constitution & Canons: p. 1, 31
<b>HiA / Leg. Cttee</b>	/
<b>Current Status</b>	Pre-Filed Resolution
<b>Version</b>	Original (as filed)
<b>Review Status</b>	Not yet reviewed

## RESOLUTION TEXT

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That the 79th General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Structure, Governance, Constitution and Canons to review the governing documents of The Episcopal Church concerning the use and definition of the words ‘disabled’ and ‘disability’ and report their findings to the 80th General Convention; and be it further
- 2 *Resolved*, That the Standing Commission on Structure, Governance, Constitution and Canons propose amendments to the Constitution and Canons regarding the use of the words ‘disabled’ and ‘disability,’ implementing language, where appropriate, that accurately reflects the intended meaning in the documents.

## EXPLANATION

Throughout the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, the current use of the words ‘disabled’ and ‘disability’ by and large suggests that being disabled or having a disability is synonymous with an incapacity to do ministry as an ordained person. There are presently 5 uses of “disabled” and 29 uses of “disability” in the Constitution & Canons (2015).

For many people, there are two common understandings of what ‘disabled’ means:

- 1) An impairment that reduces a person's capacity to engage in certain activities, whether mental, physical, or cognitive; but that does not prevent a person from fulfilling a job or career (ex. a person who relies on a wheelchair can perform priestly ministry. Being a priest doesn't inherently require that a person always use all parts of their body).
- 2) An impairment that prevents a person from being able to achieve a career or meaningful employment because their disability/ies are limiting to the point that they are indeed incapacitated.

In the Constitution and Canons it seems the use of disability language relies on the second definition, but without clarity. Considering that The Episcopal Church has ordained and continues to support people with disabilities entering the ordination process, with several nondiscrimination clauses present in the Canons, these governing documents should be reviewed and amended to reflect the actual intention of the words ‘disabled’ and ‘disability.’ At present, it seems the meaning is more in

line with wording such as ‘incapable’ and ‘incapacitated.’ Our baptismal covenant calls us to respect the dignity of every human being; therefore, it is important to consider how language in the Church’s governing documents affects the perception and treatment of clergy and potential clergy living with disabilities.

Examples:

In the Constitution, Article 1.3 states, “But if the Presiding Bishop of the Church shall resign the office as such, or if by reason of infirmity shall become disabled, or in case of death,…”

In the Canons, Title I, Canon 4.1(h) states, "Should any vacancy occur in the Council through death, resignation, disability, or other reason, with respect to a member elected by the General Convention,…”

Title III, Canon 3.3(a.3) "If the Ecclesiastical Authority is satisfied that the person so elected is a duly qualified Priest and that such Priest has accepted the office to which elected, the notice shall be sent to the Secretary of the Convention, who shall record it. Race, color, ethnic origin, sex, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by these Canons, shall not be a factor in the determination of the Ecclesiastical Authority as to whether such person is a duly qualified Priest.”



**Resolution Number:** 2009-A080  
**Title:** Address Access of Disabled Persons to Ministry Discernment  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Substituted  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 76th General Convention direct provincial Commissions on Ministry networks in the next triennium to address the access and welcome of qualified persons with disabilities to begin ministry discernment as described in Title III of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church; and be it further*  
*Resolved, That their findings be shared with bishops diocesan and diocesan Commissions on Ministry in order to encourage persons with disabilities to begin ministry discernment and to educate them about the process.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), p. 716.



**Resolution Number:** 2009-D032  
**Title:** Commit to Non-Discrimination in Lay Employment  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Amended  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 76th General Convention commit The Episcopal Church not to discriminate in employment of lay employees based on race, color, sex, national origin, age, familial status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), p. 712.



**Resolution Number:** 1988-A073  
**Title:** Direct Episcopal Church Staff to Use Inclusive Language in All Communications  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred As Substituted and Amended  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 69th General Convention direct the Presiding Bishop and Church Center staff to ensure the use of inclusive language in all communications and materials issued by the Executive Council and the Church Center so these do not perpetuate stereotypes of race, age, sex, and disabling conditions; and be it further*

*Resolved, That they monitor all national, provincial and diocesan training under the auspices of units of the Church Center to ensure the use of inclusive language by trainers in training materials; and be it further*

*Resolved, That the Education for Mission and Ministry unit in collaboration with the Women in Mission and Ministry and other units identify and disseminate information concerning available educational resources which would help dioceses, congregations, educators and trainers teach at every age level about the influence of inclusive language and imagery in shaping and communicating our biblical and theological tradition, and in affecting patterns of relationship and participation within the Church.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Detroit, 1988* (New York: General Convention, 1989), p. 708.