



How will what we are doing here affect or involve people living in poverty? -- The Deacons' Resolved

At the most recent General Convention of The Episcopal Church held in Indianapolis in July of 2012, the Association for Episcopal Deacons sponsored the following resolution B008 –

Resolved that the 77th General Convention of the Episcopal Church call upon its members to begin every meeting in calendar year 2013, whether at the parish, diocesan or church-wide level and no matter what the purpose, with this agenda item: "How will what we are doing here affect or involve people living in poverty?"

This resolution was inspired by an initiative undertaken in the early 1990's by the late Roman Catholic late Bishop Kenneth E. Untener, who for a three month period required meetings in the Diocese of Saginaw to start with this agenda item. (See Bishop Untener's later reflection piece in Catholic Update "How Should We Think About the Poor?") More recently, variations on this resolution were adopted in the Dioceses of Atlanta and [Indianapolis](#).

AED's purpose in bringing this resolution before General Convention was to change the conversation in The Episcopal Church and assess our relationships with people living in poverty as the church wrestles with questions of declining membership and budget reductions that prioritized maintenance over mission. We did not succeed in getting Convention to adopt the resolution as offered – the assigned subcommittee incorporated it into a larger omnibus resolution A135 on the alleviation of poverty and economic justice. AED's proposal, which came to be known as the "Deacon's Resolved," was revised into a call for the church to "cultivate mindfulness about poverty" through prayer and reflection time in every meeting agenda. Though this missed the point of assessing relationships and living into our baptismal covenant, the discussion and debate over the subcommittee's language versus AED's kept the Deacons' Resolved on the convention agenda and heightened awareness of our effort to speak diaconally to and through the church.

Convention was only a start. AED concluded that a good way to implement A135's call to cultivate mindfulness about poverty would be to encourage local dioceses to adopt the Deacons' Resolved as AED had envisioned it, that is, to devote time at every church meeting for participants to ask "How will what we are doing here affect or involve people living in poverty?"

As of June 2013, some form of the Deacons' Resolved had been adopted in the following dioceses:

Atlanta
[Indianapolis](#)
Wyoming
California

Maine
Oregon
Massachusetts
El Camino Real
Pennsylvania
Olympia
San Diego
New Jersey
Maryland
Central Pennsylvania

Reasons for proposing and adopting the Deacons Resolved –

The Deacons Resolved was offered as a specific response to the call in 2009 General Convention Resolution A155 for The Episcopal Church to “recognize the pressing challenges to those living in poverty and the working poor throughout this nation [.]” As our church considers significant changes to our infrastructure, how we do business, and how we engage in the world around us, the practice of asking the question posed by the Deacons Resolved will lead to both awareness of and solidarity with those who are living in poverty.

Continually asking ourselves “How will what we are doing here affect or involve people living in poverty” also provides a way to see church issues through a diaconal lens and develop contexts for responding and living into the charges we are given and covenants we make as bishops, priests, deacons, and all the baptized in The Episcopal Church.

Will you be merciful to all, show compassion to the poor and strangers, and defend those who have no helper? BCP p. 518

Will you do your best to pattern your life in accordance with the teachings of Christ? BCP p. 532

At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ’s people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself. BCP p. 543

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? BCP p. 305

The Deacons Resolved is not a poverty program, nor should it be seen as an effort to push poverty to forefront of the church’s agenda while pushing other needs and concerns to the side. It is about changing the conversation in the church – raising consciousness, if one wants to use that expression -- to

encourage people to think diaconally and live their baptismal covenant, whether the subject is outreach ministries, auditing the books, or where to hold the Sunday School picnic.

The objective of this resolution is not to create a successful program or increase church membership. Rather it is a matter of assessing our own relationships and placing our conversations into a local context where God's people can invite each other into accountability and into friendship with those living in poverty.

Implementing the Deacons Resolved

Once a diocese, congregation, or other church institution adopts the Deacons Resolved, all it needs to do is begin having the conversation. This may seem stilted at first, but like any practice or discipline, it will become more natural, comfortable, and meaningful over time. There are no training materials or guidelines beyond what is stated in the resolution. And there is no end point or goal other than to assess relationships and invite each other in accountability and friendship with those living in poverty.

This conversation is just as important for the Altar Guild as for the Vestry or Outreach Committee because it is part of the baptismal covenant of every one of us, and these relationships affect every part of our church lives, sometimes in ways we won't recognize or respond to if we don't think and talk about it.

The practice of including the question "How will what we are doing here affect or involve people living in poverty" on the agenda of each meeting is not intended to go on indefinitely. Each diocese, congregation, or institution can ask itself whether three months, six months, or a year is an appropriate time frame in which to begin having the discussion in earnest and move into a deeper understanding of our relationships and response to the Gospel message. There is no requirement for a self-assessment or report at the end of this time period, though participants are encouraged to reflect back on the experience in the same way that Bishop Untener did – on what they learned and whether their success will be temporary or life-changing.

Resources and Commentary

Sample Resolution [adopted by Dioceses of California, Maine, Olympia, Pennsylvania, and San Diego]

Article from *Diakoneo*, Vol. 34, No. 2 "Looking for a Diaconal Lens and What to do with It Once you Find One"

Deacon Stan Baker's convention floor speech on the Deacons Resolved

2012 General Convention Resolution B008

AED's Letter to Bishops and Convention Deputies Introducing and Urging Support for Resolution

Post-convention Deacon Update on Resolution B008

Bishop Untener's article "How Should We Think About the Poor?"

Diaconal Lens View-Masters®

AED Committee on Church-wide Issues

For more information on the Deacons Resolved, contact one of the following AED Board members or staff: John Cumming (Lay member, Diocese of California), Maureen Hagen (Deacon, Diocese of Oregon), Pamela Nesbit, Immediate Past President and Archdeacon, Diocese of Pennsylvania) or Susanne Watson Epting (retired Executive Director of AED and Deacon, Diocese of Iowa).