

MEMORIAL TO THE 79TH GENERAL CONVENTION

To the Deputies and Bishops of the Episcopal Church assembled at the 79th General Convention in Austin, TX:

The Episcopal Diocese of San Diego, gathered in its 44th Diocesan Convention November 11, 2017, adopted the following resolution regarding Compassionate Care of Victims of Clergy Sexual Misconduct:

Resolved, that the 44th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego calls upon all members of congregations and all affiliated organizations, individually and in community, to acknowledge that:

- reporting clergy misconduct is a courageous and sacrificial act, demonstrating love for and trust in the church;
- such reporting is an act of service to the church;
- a victim has a right to expect our faith communities to respond with the love and compassion of Christ.

Resolved, further, that the 44th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego form a task force to study the experience of victims who report clergy sexual misconduct; become educated on best practices for safeguarding these reporters; and issue recommendations to the Standing Committee, Executive Council and the 45th Convention and memorialize to the 79th General Convention to do the same.

Resolved, further, that the Standing Committee appoint task force members by February 1, 2018, and which task force shall be comprised of passionate advocates for misconduct victims who are committed to ensuring that our faith communities respond with love, compassion, and respect for the reporting victim. Victims of clergy sexual misconduct will be a significant presence on this task force.

Resolved, further, that the recommendations shall reflect a trauma-informed approach (i.e., an approach based on the knowledge and understanding of trauma and its far-reaching implications) to the care of reporting victims, both through the canonical reporting process, as well as in their home parish.

Resolved, further, that the work of the Task Force will in no way alter current Title IV processes, procedures or confidentiality requirements for Complainants and Respondents.

For far too long, the Church has failed to adequately care for those who have the courage to bring forward a claim of being harmed to the very institution that inflicted that harm. The following is the Explanation that accompanied that Resolution:

“It has been 15 years since the Boston Globe exposed the horrific sexual abuse of children by priests within the Roman Catholic Church. There is now a general awareness that clergy sexual misconduct occurs in all denominations; however, it is a lesser known fact that adult women are more likely than children to be victimized by clergy. In fact, based on the size of our own diocese, statistics would suggest

that scores of women who are active members of our congregations have been or will be victims of clergy sexual misconduct in their adult lifetimes.

Reflecting this growing awareness within the past two decades, the Episcopal Church has striven to prevent clergy misconduct, primarily through its Safeguarding God's People program. Further reflecting an evolving culture in which the reality of and the damage caused by sexual exploitation of women is increasingly recognized, the church has strengthened its response to clergy misconduct through the codification of disciplinary procedures in Title IV of its canons. Within Title IV, the desire to promote healing and reconciliation is stated six times. In practice, though, the church lacks sufficient policies to facilitate the healing and recovery of victims. Indeed, studies suggest that at least 5 out of 6 adult victims who report sexual exploitation end up leaving their church as a result. Most leave the Church entirely. Many lose their faith.

Literature, therapists, and victims themselves often attribute this alienation from the church not so much to the original clergy misconduct, but to re-traumatization by both clergy and congregations during and after the reporting process. This re-traumatization often involves disbelief, minimization, slander, isolation, and shunning of the victim. This has been described as an effectual excommunication. In analogous situations outside of the church, whistleblowers are given legal protection, and creating a hostile environment is illegal in both workplaces and schools. There are no such statutes offering protection within one's church. Yet, as followers of Christ and called to be a reconciling community, the church has an even greater obligation than a statute might mandate.

Although an incident of clergy sexual misconduct always represents a failure of the church, this truth is often overlooked. The incident may even be treated as a failure on the part of the victim. Rather than promoting healing and reconciliation, this scapegoating of the victim, who is already deeply traumatized by the misconduct itself, results in deep emotional and spiritual anguish. It does irreparable harm to the victim. It is a missed opportunity for the community to grow into what it should be. And it greatly diminishes the Body of Christ."

Therefore, the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego strongly urges this 79th General Convention to remain vigilant in its care of those affected by clergy misconduct and to adopt measures that seek to lessen that harm and the re-traumatization that follows.

Respectfully submitted,
The 44th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego