

# **Episcopal Diocese of Western New York**

## **Resolutions submitted to the 185th Convention**

### **Resolution NY-A**

**Originator:** Lawrence Schlossin (St. Michael and All Angels, Buffalo)

**Subject:** Calling for the Election of a Bishop Diocesan

**Be it resolved**, that, pursuant to Canons III.13.1(a) and (c) of The Episcopal Church, the 185<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western New York (Diocese) revokes the action of the 181<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese to place the Diocese under the provisional charge and authority of the Rt. Rev. Sean W. Rowe effective on a date to be mutually agreed upon by the Standing Committee and Bishop Rowe but in no case later than December 31, 2023, and

**Be it further resolved**, that the Standing Committee be directed to immediately begin the process of unwinding and terminating the Partnership Agreement with the Episcopal Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania as soon as possible but in no case later than June 30, 2023, and

**Be it further resolved**, that the Standing Committee is directed, pursuant to Canon III.13.1(b) of The Episcopal Church, to arrange for one or more Bishops to visit and exercise episcopal offices in the Diocese or any part of it after the date on which the Diocese is no longer under the provisional charge and authority of the Rt. Rev. Sean W. Rowe, and

**Be it further resolved**, that the Standing Committee is directed, pursuant to Canon III.13.1 of The Episcopal Church, as amended by the General Convention in 2022, and Canon 19 of the Diocese, to commence a process to elect a Bishop Diocesan, and

**Be it further resolved**, that the Standing Committee is directed to prepare Special Rules governing the election of the Bishop Diocesan for adoption by this Convention at an Annual or Special Convention held in advance of the Annual or Special Convention at which the election commences, including but not limited to a requirement that the election take place no later than April 30, 2024.

#### **St. Michael and All Angels, Buffalo:**

Kerwin Axford, Vestry

Nancy Axford, Clerk

Beatrice Bidell

John Bidell, Vestry

Mark Bidell

Deborah DiLiberto

Dennis DiLiberto, Vestry

Michael Ham

John Neubert, Vestry

Lawrence Schlossin, Warden

Sharon Schlossin, Vestry

Carol Weekley, Warden

Robert Weekley, Vestry

**St. Paul's Cathedral, Buffalo:**

Michael J. Bonilla, Vestry

Denise Doherty

Judy Elliott

Su Heyer

Thomas Heyer

Elizabeth Rundle

William Siener, Ph.D

Anne Simet

Evelyn Smigelsky

Sarah E. Steinmetz

Andrea Szymanski-Larracuente

**St. Andrew's, Buffalo:**

Lesta Ammons

Serita Barry, Vestry

Nancy Cribbin, Treasurer

Robert Dean

Leigha Eichhorn, Vestry

Angela Fulk, Ph.D

Mark Fulk, Ph.D

Kevin Koczka

Ryan Lysarz, Warden

Shirley Magee

Barbara Northan

David Nuijens

Fred Packer, Vestry

Scott Sciumeca

Timothy Tilbe, Warden

### **Rationale:**

The Diocese of WNY has been brave and courageous, we have tried something new - a partnership with a neighboring diocese in order to share resources, energy, ideas, and a bishop. Going into the partnership, we had goals and hopes. Promises were made to us. But the goals have not been met. The hopes have fallen flat. And the promises have been broken.

Specifically, we had the **following goals** that were not met in the following ways:

- **Save Money** – We imagined that we might save on everything from the bulk purchase of supplies to people's time. Instead we have a shrinking staff in WNY, a Diocesan Ministry Center where no one answers the phone anymore, and an ominous feeling as if our diocese is disappearing. Our overall budget has remained largely the same, despite claims that we are saving money. Year over year, our budget is larger than the budget in Northwestern Pennsylvania, and we are a larger diocese (at least in membership, if not perhaps geographic area). So it doesn't make sense that the majority of our resources and staff are being concentrated in Northwestern Pennsylvania.
- **Grow Congregations** – So many of our congregations are facing decreases in membership and attendance, and feel like they lack the tools and resources to combat these decreases. It's all too easy to blame the lack of growth on the pandemic, but the partnership dioceses didn't look for useful ways to innovate during the pandemic, as other dioceses did, to varying levels of success. We've driven away good clergy, and we're overworking the ones who remain. Three churches have closed. We have been told that there is a clergy shortage across the church, and that it is in particular, difficult to attract clergy to our region. However, congregations in search are being counseled by Transitions staff to advertise positions that do not meet the same standards being offered by churches in other dioceses, particularly with respect to job stability and tenure.

Specifically, we had the **following hopes** that fell flat in the following ways:

- **Partner with each other in new and exciting ways** - administrative committees have successfully partnered with each other to good effect (some examples being the Joint Board of Examining Chaplains, the Joint Commission on Ministry, and the agreement between 6 dioceses to share a common disciplinary board), but at least one of these agreements began before the dioceses shared a bishop and staff, and their existence does not require that we necessarily share a bishop and staff to continue. Moreover, we had hopes that congregations between our two dioceses would be brought together in new and interesting ways, based on things such as shared ministry goals and outreach efforts. This has not come to pass. Cooperative efforts between parishes have largely been at the deanery level within each diocese.

- ***The relationship would be transformative in every good way - we would have an exciting new direction, doing more and accomplishing more within our churches and out in our communities,*** and this has not occurred.
- ***Transparency:*** we hoped that the Bishop would be as transparent and present to us as our previous bishop. Instead, the bishop's calendar immediately disappeared from the newsletter and there were some noted discrepancies that rose in clergy calls as to whether the Bishop was actually in WNY as often as he said he would be.

Specifically, we received the ***following promises*** which were broken in the following ways:

- ***Conversations about the Future of the Partnership*** - we were promised this at the last convention and it has not occurred. While the partnership did hold some regional gatherings this past winter, these were announced in advance of the last convention, and there was no effort made in partnership communications following convention to reframe their focus to address the promise made at convention, that we would discuss the future of the partnership. Even those who attended one or more of these conversations did not understand them to be the fulfillment of the promise made at convention, but something else entirely, having been planned and conceived prior to convention.
- ***Time Limit on the Process of Partnering:*** Whether or not there were canons to enforce it, we were promised by the Bishop that his tenure with us had a time certain point of decision making for us to participate in the question: do we want to continue with the partnership, or do we want to call a bishop election. Last year we discovered that this promise, once made, was entirely empty; we have no agency, there is no time certain point, and the two Standing Committees asserted their right to keep extending the Bishop's contract as long as they see fit.

We've been told by the Office of the Bishop that this Partnership has been a success, freeing money for mission and ministry, but the reality is that most congregations do not get to experience that freedom, nor that success.

It is time to continue to be a brave and courageous diocese; it is time to acknowledge that the partnership is not working as advertised; it is time to begin dissolving the partnership, rebuilding the structures and capacities in Western New York that have been dismantled, and it is time to move on and call a new bishop.