Resolution for the Faithful Stewardship of Our Diocese as the Body of Christ

Submitted by: the Committee on Congregational Stewardship and Diocesan Support

***WHEREAS*,** we, the congregations of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, are part of the body of Christ, living into that theology by knowing each other, caring for the vulnerable people in our midst, and ensuring that all our congregations are able to serve their people and others; and

***WHEREAS*,** we seek and serve Christ in each other, connecting our work as congregations through formal and informal networks of common interest and partnering with Diocesan staff to ensure clear communication about our activities and successes; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the One Hundred Thirty-First Convention of the Diocese of Washington affirms the canonical expectation that the normative level of giving by congregations in support of our common diocesan ministry is a tithe, a norm worthy of each congregations' aspirations and intentions; and

RESOLVED, that the standard level of congregational giving to the diocese be based on a measure of plate, pledge, and other income (excluding restricted gifts), which shall be called "regular income"; and

RESOLVED, that, each congregation is asked to commit to supporting our Diocese with the standard level of giving described below, which is the higher of:

a. 4% of regular income up to $400,000; plus 4.5% of regular income between $400,000 and $900,000; plus 5% of regular income between $900,000 and $2.5 million; plus 2% above $2.5 million, or

b. The congregation's giving from the prior year, with due allowance to be made for changed parish financial or other circumstances, and

RESOLVED, that when a congregation does not meet the standard level of giving, the clergy person in charge and the wardens will be contacted by a member of diocesan leadership, excluding the Bishop's staff, to determine possibilities for strengthening the congregation so that they are willing and able to meet the minimum ask in the future.

EXPLANATION: Since April of 2024, the Committee on Congregational Stewardship and Diocesean Support has been facilitating a dialog among congregations and diocesan leaders about how to support our Diocese financially. Historically, congregations in the Diocese of Washington fund the third lowest percentage of the diocesan budget based on data from reporting dioceses throughout the Episcopal Church. Congregational giving in 2024 was 3.6% of total congregational income, with wide variation from parish to parish even though our canons state:

> SEC. 5103. ANNUAL FINANCIAL COMMITMENT TO THE DIOCESE.
>
> (a) IN GENERAL.— The vestry of each parish shall make an annual financial commitment to support the mission and ministry of the Diocese.
>
> (b) TITHE.— The normative standard of the annual financial commitment of a parish under subsection (a) shall be a tithe of the annual operating income of that parish.

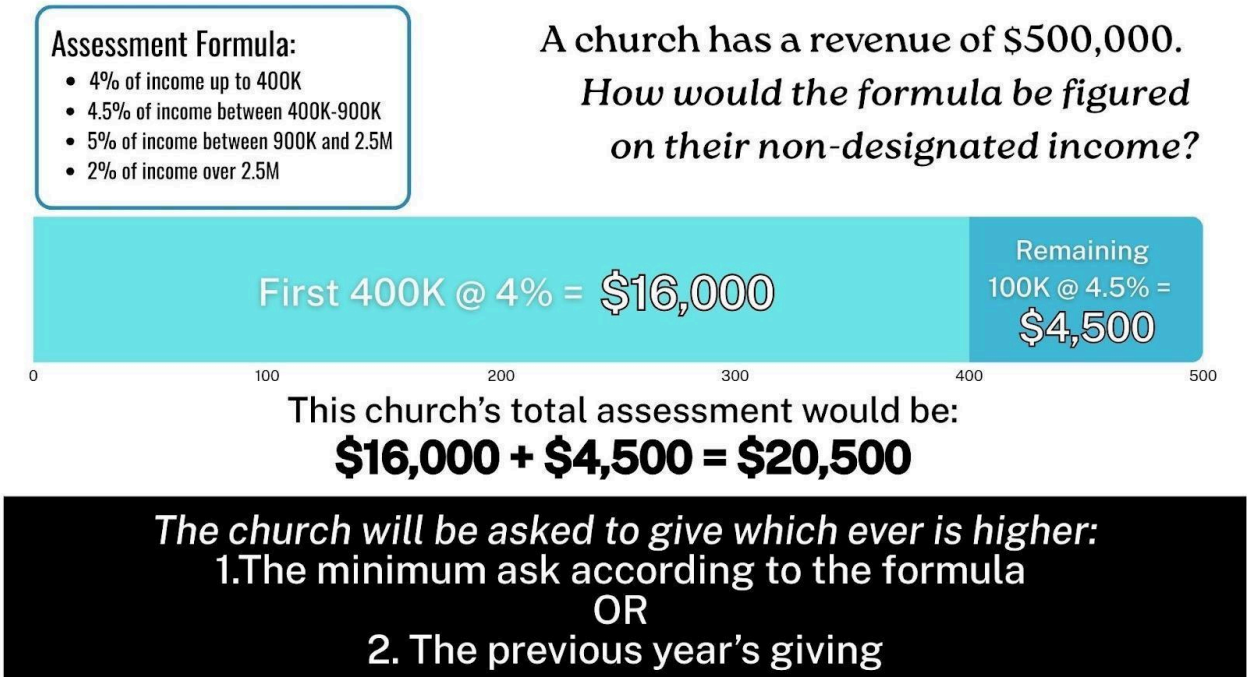
And, yet, through the committee's efforts of listening and creating opportunities for conversation, we have sensed a widespread desire to be faithful stewards of our diocese and to invest in our collective work and ministry through a workable financial giving standard.

The committee recommends that Convention adopt this resolution that reconciles these feelings of support for our diocesean shared ministry with our practices of financial stewardship:

- A theology of stewardship that envisions our Diocese as the body of Christ and promotes connections among congregations and with them and our diocesan staff.
- A realistic giving standard that asks congregations with greater income to fund a greater share of our Diocese's costs.
- An accountability mechanism that embodies connection, guidance, and support (but no sanctions) for congregations that do not meet the giving standard.

The committee proposes to use "regular income" as the basis for calculating the minimum ask part of the giving standard. This definition excludes restricted gifts and, with our Bishop's approval, draw-downs from the *principal* of endowments and other restricted accounts. It includes investment income that a congregation uses to fund its activities, but not unrealized gains that remain in the fund. As a broad measure of income that includes investment and rental income, this definition of regular income ensures that the responsibility of funding our Diocese is shared equitably.

The committee acknowledges that the formula is complicated, but determined that a graduated approach is necessary because congregations with lower incomes depend on those first $400,000 to fund the very basics of parish ministry. A flat percentage at first glance would seem fair, but, in practice, would place a larger burden on our more vulnerable congregations, who are often serving populations under-represented in our diocese. The Committee thus proposes increasingly higher percentage asks for income between $400,000 and $2.5 million. For income about $2.5 million, the Committee proposes a 2% ask. Using 5% or more for that bracket would lead a few congregations to have very large asks that the Committee believes would be unrealistic, as a practical matter, to meet. It thus believes the 2% figure is more honest.



The Committee's charge did not include a mandate to affect the amount of congregational giving. If every congregation meets the proposed giving standard, 2024 figures suggest our Diocese would receive about 20% more to fund our Diocesan shared ministries. The committee believes such a cushion is necessary because not every congregation will be able to meet the standard.

Where a congregation falls short of meeting the giving standard, we agree that our Diocese - not only the Bishop's staff but the whole diocesan community - will seek to support and strengthen that congregation through shared resources, experience, expertise thus living into the holy truth that we are connected as members of the body of Christ, and that when one of us becomes stronger in our ability to carry out God's work in the world, we all become stronger. This process will be initiated with a conversation between the congregation's leadership and a small designated group of leaders from congregations around the diocese.