

Committee on Congregational Stewardship & Diocesan Support January 15, 2026, Report to Diocesan Convention

I. Introduction

The Committee on Congregational Stewardship & Diocesan Support has been facilitating a dialogue among congregations and others about how to support our Diocese financially. The Diocesan Council did not ask us, and we have not sought, to affect the amount that congregations give to our Diocese. We have submitted to our Diocesan Convention a resolution calling for:

- A theology of stewardship that envisions our Diocese as the body of Christ and promotes connections among congregations and with them and our Diocese.
- A giving standard that envisions congregations with greater income shouldering a proportionately greater share of funding our Diocese.
- An accountability mechanism that embodies transparency, connection, and support, but no sanctions, for congregations that do not meet the giving standard.

II. Findings

- Our Canons call for congregations to tithe (10% of their income) as a “normative standard,” but only three did so in 2024.
- Giving varied widely, with about 30 congregations giving less than 3% of their income and 24 congregations giving more than 6% of their income. The average was about 4.6% of income.
- Our survey yielded 234 responses, from approximately 74 congregations, finding:
 - Many respondents said that the Diocesan pledge is one of the first expenses cut when confronted by a tight budget or other major financial need.
 - Responders identified support to persons in need, supporting struggling congregations, and Bishop Mariann’s ministry as factors that they would consider in deciding about Diocesan giving.
 - Over two-thirds of responders seem to be comfortable with how our Diocese is spending its resources. A significant minority of congregations, however, may be limiting their financial support because they disapprove of some Diocesan activities.
- Based on data from approximately half of U.S. dioceses, we found:

- Unlike our Diocese's voluntary system, 70% of reporting dioceses, and 55% of Province III dioceses, mandate contributions from their congregations.
- Revenue from congregations as a percentage of diocesan budgets ranges from 18%-100%, with an average of 70%, far higher than our 47%, which is the third lowest of reporting dioceses.
- We do not see a strong correlation between the percentage of diocesan income covered by congregational assessments and whether assessments are mandatory or voluntary.
- Few dioceses (17% for reporting dioceses) have "consequences" for churches that fail to give the assessment percentage; however, many of these dioceses offer assistance to those churches.
- The Diocese of Minnesota has a well-developed system for addressing the failure of a congregation to meet its assessment. Diocesan leaders have a dialogue with the congregation and provide advice on specific issues, connect the congregation with resources, and stay in regular contact with the congregation.
- Several broad themes emerged from discussions with the people of our Diocese:
 - The most common theme is a desire for connection among people and parishes, including but also well beyond clerical networks. There is a yearning to be part of something bigger than our individual parishes.
 - The giving standard issue elicited the most diverse views. Some advocated for giving based on Pledge and Plate; others advocated calculating based on a measure of total income (with deductions for one-time gifts and use of endowment principal).
 - It is a challenge for members to know our diocese thoroughly and well. For example, almost no one is aware we *have* a tithe as a giving standard. Many do not know what critical services and infrastructure our diocese provides for us or what supports and resources are available to congregations.
 - There was general opposition to (and no support for) punitive consequences for failing to meet the giving standard.

III. Analysis and Recommendations

The Diocesan Council would not have established our Committee if it believed our current system was working well. On the other hand, we note our Diocese is adequately funded and is using our resources to do good work. Yet the current system generates inadequate resources, creates wide disparities in congregational giving as a percentage of income (with few congregations meeting the tithing standard), and fails to educate our people about what God is doing through their diocese.

Theology of Giving

We asked ourselves and our Diocese this question: “What is our theology of giving?” We offer this answer: “We are the Diocese and the Diocese is one body” as 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 and Ephesians 4:15-16 describe. We recommend these supports to help us remember that we are the body of Christ and are created to work together as we resist evil while seeking and serving Christ in all persons:

- Sharing concrete and specific examples from across our diocese about how God is at work in and through our diocese.
- Promoting connections among the people of our congregations by creating informal networks to address issues of common interest, such as stewardship, social justice, service to vulnerable people, education, and youth activities, thus encouraging people to live into the truth that we are members of the Body of Christ.
- Creating an ethos of “faithful dissent, faithful support.” See Colossians 3:15.

A. Giving Standard

The proposed giving standard consists of two variables: (1) the base on which we calculate it and (2) the formula we apply to calculate it (currently a tithe or 10%). We believe a more complicated giving standard rather than a tithe would be fairer and more likely to be achieved.

Although there was some support for basing the standard on plate and pledge, we believe total income less restricted gifts (“regular income”) makes the most sense, because it is the most accurate measure of a congregation's capacity to give. Note that the *investment income* from restricted gifts is included in regular income. We also propose to give our

Bishop the power to exclude payments of *principal* from endowments and other restricted accounts.

We affirm that each congregation has the responsibility to determine the amount to give our Diocese. Nevertheless, we believe guidelines provide a useful basis for guiding such discernment. We have come to believe that (1) congregations with the most income are better able to support our Diocese and (2) the prior year's giving provides a useful starting point where the congregation exceeds the minimum ask. Thus, we propose that the ask be the *higher* of:

- A congregation's prior year's actual giving to our Diocese.
- A progressive formula as follows:
 - 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% of regular income above \$2.5 million.

In addition to a cash contribution (currently \$100,000), the Washington National Cathedral supports our Diocese by providing Church House and compensation for our Bishop's service to our Cathedral. For 2026, the estimated value of our Cathedral's in-kind support of our diocese is \$255,794.

Working from the Parochial Report, our Bishop or a member of the staff she designates would send to each congregation its minimum ask under our Diocese's giving standard (including the way it was calculated). The minimum ask is intended to be exactly that, a minimum; perhaps a first goal to reach towards, but the committee affirms the tithe as the canonical standard of support for our shared mission as a diocese and encourages all congregations to honor with their intentions that biblical ideal.

Based on 2024 giving figures, this formula would raise about \$2.6 million, about 20% more than what congregations are giving now. The committee does not envision that every church will be able to meet the minimum ask every year, so this additional revenue is unlikely to be realized. Instead, this standard will allow us, as members of the body of Christ, to organically take turns sharing from our abundance and resting in the generosity of others.

B. Support, Not Sanctions

Currently, there is almost no accountability for failure to meet the normative tithing standard. We believe that is one reason giving varies so widely. We also believe that absence of accountability is not serving us and that we should be more willing to discuss how we offer our resources to God and use them to do God's work in the world. We hope this discussion about investing in the shared ministry of our diocese will lead our congregations to devote more education and energy to stewardship.

Accountability does not have to be punitive. We learned this from other dioceses and adopted their approach of support instead of sanctions.

Where a congregation fails to meet the minimum ask, we propose a system of support, with no sanctions whether or not such support works. If a congregation fails to meet its minimum ask because

- its income is insufficient, we would work with that congregation to generate more income. That might involve encouraging it to partner with willing congregations and/or using the expertise of Diocesan staff or other leaders. See 1 Corinthians 12:26.
- it disagrees with how our Diocese would use its contribution, then we want to encourage respectful dialogue and reconciliation. See Colossians 3:15.

To initiate this process of offering support, a small group of leaders from diocesan congregations will need to be designated by our Bishop and/or our diocesan council to have those first conversations with a parish's lay and clergy leaders about how we can come together to strengthen each other as we strive to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

Respectfully submitted, January 15, 2026

Committee on Congregational Stewardship & Diocesan Support:

Jessica Hitchcock (Rector, St. Luke's Bethesda) - Chair, Mary Frances Bruce (Treasurer, St. George's Glenn Dale), Caron Gwynn (Supply Priest, Church of The Holy Communion), Timothy Cole (Rector, Christ Church, Georgetown), Katherine Krile (Vestry Member, St. John's Norwood, Chevy Chase), Randy Marks (Vestry Clerk, St. Mark's, DC), Robert E. Smith (Vestry Member, Episcopal Church of the Atonement), Margaret Stamper

(former Vestryperson, Resurrection Parish; Diocesan Council), and Francisco Valle (Rector, Church of Our Saviour, Hillandale). (Former members: Kate Heichler (Rector, Christ Church La Plata/Wayside & Regional Dean, Southern MD) and Thom Sinclair (Deacon, St. Mark's, DC).) The Committee is grateful for the fantastic support of Andrew Walter, former Canon to the Ordinary, and Emily Blecksmith, Convention and Data Manager.