

DO01 TOPIC: CANONS Amend Canon III.11.10(b)

PROPOSER

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ENDORSED BY

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SPONSORED BY

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Blue Book: p. N/A; Constitution & Canons: p. 107

HOUSE OF INITIAL ACTION / LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

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N/A; N/A; currently in proposed budget

RESOLUTION TEXT

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 77th General Convention
2 amend Canon III.11.10(b) to read as follows:
3 (b) Bishops Suffragan
4 (1) If a Diocese discerns a need for another Bishop due to the extent of diocesan
5 work, the Diocese may elect a Bishop Suffragan in accordance with this Canon.
6 (2) Before the election of a Bishop Suffragan in a Diocese, the consent of a
7 majority of the Bishops exercising jurisdiction and of the several Standing
8 Committees must be obtained.
9 (3) (i) A Bishop Suffragan shall act as an assistant to and under the direction of
10 the Bishop Diocesan.
11 (ii) Before the election of a Bishop Suffragan in a Diocese, the Bishop Diocesan
12 shall submit a consent with a description of the role and the duties of the Bishop
13 Suffragan to the Convention of the Diocese.
14 (4) The tenure of office of a Bishop Suffragan shall not be determined by the
15 tenure of office of the Bishop Diocesan.
16 (5) No Bishop Suffragan, while acting as such, shall be Rector, but may serve as
17 Member of the Clergy in charge of a Congregation.

EXPLANATION

The office of Suffragan Bishop was a creation of the Church of England, and it flourished from the mid-13th Century through the 16th Century but was revived in 1870. Under the English practice, the suffragan's commission expired upon the end of the term of the diocesan, and he would have to be reappointed, or not, by the successor. The Episcopal Church largely resisted the establishment of such an office because of the possibility of a suffragan continuing in such a situation without being attached to a diocese. In 1829, a canon specifically prohibiting suffragan bishops was enacted. (Edwin White & Jackson Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons* (1981), pp. 58–60)

Following the revival of suffragans in England in 1870, several proposals were presented to General Convention to authorize them in The Episcopal Church, but no authorization was enacted until 1910. Spurred by a felt need to provide a form of auxiliary bishop for dioceses that "may need this help for special racial conditions," the Constitution was amended in 1910 to provide for suffragan bishops and a new Canon 11 adopted to provide for their election and general terms of service. That canon included as section 5 the provision that "No Suffragan Bishop, while acting as such, shall be Rector or settled Minister in charge of a Parish or Congregation" —

substantially the same text as now appears in Canon III.11.10(b)(5). (Id. pp. 752–54)

"When the canon on suffragan bishops was first being considered in the committee on canons of the House of Deputies, a member of the committee proposed to strike the section prohibiting a suffragan bishop, while acting as such, from having charge of a parish as rector or settled minister thereof, stating that he did so at the request of the bishop of his diocese, who desired to have two clergymen, rectors of parishes in his diocese, elected as suffragans, and for the purpose only of assisting him in administering the rite of confirmation. As one purpose of this section was to prevent any such misuse of the canon, the committee refused to consider the proposition."(Id. p. 760)

In the Church of England, however, both originally and after the revival in 1870, suffragans were supported not by their diocese but by being appointed to parishes or other benefices instead, which made their cost to the diocese "negligible". While centralized funding began in the mid-20th Century, much of the funding of English suffragans comes from nondiocesan sources. (Colin Podmore, *Dioceses and Episcopal Sees in England: A Background Report for the Dioceses Commission (2008)*, pp. 71–74)

Moreover, in 1910 there were little restrictions on how a diocesan bishop might select a suffragan; there only was a requirement that the suffragan be elected by dioceses with the consent of the bishop. Today, Canon III.11.1(a) requires specifically for suffragans (and not for diocesans or coadjutors) that each diocese "shall establish a nominating process either by Canon or by the adoption of rules and procedure for the election of the Bishop Suffragan at a regular or special Diocesan Convention with sufficient time preceding the election of the Bishop Suffragan." Furthermore, before an election can even take place, Canon III.11.10(b)(2) requires that "a majority of the Bishops exercising jurisdiction and of the several Standing Committees" give their prior consent, and after that the Bishop Diocesan must give prior consent to the electing convention, specifying "the role and the duties" of the new bishop. Bishops may not merely name candidates and have them rubber-stamped by diocesan convention. These procedural safeguards require deliberation and outside consents, to the extent that the objections raised in the 1910 General Convention should no longer be an issue.

Currently in The Episcopal Church, there is no prohibition on Bishops Diocesan, Bishops Coadjutor, Assistant Bishops, or Missionary Bishops from serving also as priest in charge of a congregation — only Bishops Suffragan. Whatever the historical reasons for this anomaly, there appears to be little reason for its continuation. In these straitened financial days, if a diocese can responsibly extend its episcopal ministry by having a Bishop Diocesan or Coadjutor serve also as a parish rector, why not also a Bishop Suffragan?