Resolution #12: To Promote the Use of Gender-Neutral Titles for Priests

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RESOLVED, that the 230th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut affirms that including both genders in the priestly order has been a transformational example of advancing God’s mission in this place;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we applaud the work of the various General Conventions in committing us to challenge the sin of sexism by striving to eliminate the use of gendered language in worship and in church life;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, in contrast to the orders of Bishop, Deacon, and Laity, we find that the continued practice of using gendered titles to refer to male and female priests effectively creates a different and unequal status for female priests;
AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, while context, culture, and class are critically important dimensions of ministry, and that while there is not yet a consensus on the use of a common gender-neutral title for priests, to advance the goal of developing and using such titles, it is a necessary first to eliminate any gendered titles for priests still in use in parishes, such as “Father” and “Mother,” while encouraging congregational conversations about the preferred use of gender-neutral titles;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in all parishes in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, we commit to ending the use of gendered titles for priests no later than the 231st Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that parishes in which female and male priests serve together shall begin using a specific common gender-neutral title, according to the shared preference of the clergy in that parish;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that parishes in which title changes are to occur begin, as soon as is practicable, to engage in congregational education and discussion about the reasons for, and the benefits of this change;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Convention direct the deputation to the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church to draft a similar resolution for the deliberation of the national church to eliminate gendered language in the titles used to refer to priests;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the submitters of this resolution will conduct a survey of all parishes prior to the convening of the 231st Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, and report on the progress of advancing gender-neutral titles for priests throughout the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

Explanatory:
The use of gendered titles for priests, unlike bishops and deacons, has promoted a “different but equal” priesthood that is inherently unequal. Our patriarchal history, and the deference accompanying the term “Father” in the church and in the larger society, casts male priests as “real priests” and women priests as “the other.”

This resolution, by ending the use of gendered titles, encourages experimenting with various gender-neutral titles in different contexts, and perhaps developing a common title, should Convention ultimately choose. It also sensitizes the whole church to avoiding inappropriate gendered language in other areas of our common life.
How does this resolution further God’s ministry of restoration and reconciliation with all of creation:

1. It unites all orders of the Church, across genders, in challenging institutional sexism throughout the church and society, advances the goal of full gender equality, and strengthens the witness of the priesthood as a whole.
2. It invites ordained men to re-examine the nature of male privilege, and to evaluate what they are willing to sacrifice in the pursuit of justice on behalf of their sister priests.
3. It respects the importance of context, class, and culture by not immediately replacing gendered titles with a common gender-neutral title, but instead, encouraging discussion, and experimentation in our various congregations.

REQUIREMENTS TO IMPLEMENT THIS RESOLUTION

There are no specific costs, materials or time required to implement this resolution, other than the time clergy typically devote to formation in their parishes, and the time that co-signers employ to conduct a survey of the results of this resolution.

In some cases, members of the Bishops’ staff may be invited to facilitate discussion of this change within certain parishes, but it is expected this will be minimal. It may also be helpful for the Bishops to issue a pastoral letter on this subject following the passage of this resolution.