



# EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

## EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT (ECCT) DEFINITION OF A PARISH AND CLOSING PARISH PROTOCOL

### WHAT IS A PARISH?

1. **A community of theological imagination** (a place to talk, wonder, and imagine about what God is up to in the world, our common life, and in our individual lives);
2. **Fed by Word and sacraments** (shaped by our common narrative of Holy Scripture and served by the consistent presence and ministry of a priest);
3. **Forming disciples (schooled) and apostles (sent) in God's mission;** and
4. **Connecting with the wider body of Christ** (fulfilling canonical requirements).

### CANON 1 SECTION 11.C

"Where, in the judgment of the Bishops, any such Parish shall fail to fulfill the obligations set forth in these Canons, the Bishops may, upon the recommendation of the Mission Council, with the advice and consent of the Standing Committee terminate the existence of any such Parish after due notification of such intent at least six (6) months prior to such termination. Such notification shall also set forth the right of such Parish to appear before the Mission Council prior to termination."

### CANON 1 SECTION 12

Canon 1 Section 14 describes the process for terminating or suspending the parochial organization of parishes that do not fall in the category of congregations described by Canon 1 Sec 11.C.

"Any Parish desiring to terminate or to suspend its parochial organization, may do so by vote of two-thirds of the adult communicants in good standing entitled to vote present at a Parish meeting legally warned for that purpose, with the approval of and under such conditions as shall be required by the Bishop Diocesan and Standing Committee provided that such conditions shall include the valid transfer by the Parish to the Diocese of Connecticut of all right, title and interest of such Parish to all property, real and personal, theretofore owned or controlled by it, and the valid and effective succession of the Diocese to all fiduciary rights and obligations of such Parish."

In short, the process for terminating or suspending these parochial organizations is:

- Approval by Bishops and Standing Committee (including provisions named in Canon 1 Section 11.C)
- A vote in favor of closing comprised of 2/3rd vote of the adult communicants in good standing entitled to vote and present at a parish meeting legally notified for that purpose



- Voting members, per Canon 1.4, are:
  - Adults in the church are 16 years of age or more
  - Communicants (those who have received Holy Communion at least three times in said church at least three times in the preceding year)
  - Those entitled to vote at any parish meeting are those who for at least 6 months prior to that meeting have been faithful attendants at the services of the Church in the Parish, unless for good cause prevented; faithful contributors to its support; and faithful in working, praying and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God; these facts to be determined in each case by the Vestry in accordance with the provisions of Canon 1.4

## I. Beginning the Conversation

An initial conversation with Wardens, Vestry and Canon for Mission Collaboration (and possibly a Bishop) to include:

- Markers of Viability
  - How the church is participating in God's Mission
  - Mission opportunities/demographics
  - Financial review
  - Leadership (clerical and lay) review and options
  - Membership history and trajectory
  - What's been done to sustain/grow the congregation in the recent past?
  - Options for the future in present configuration or alternative
- Follow-Up Meeting(s)
  - If it has been determined that there are strategies to implement, identify realistic ones that have active support and engagement and a timeline in which to complete the effort, and ensuring that the current financial status of the congregation can support this work
  - Check-in at subsequent meetings about revival strategies, holding close to timeline and engaging a bishop in the conversation
  - If efforts for revitalization are not successful and closing seems inevitable, a whole parish meeting is scheduled for conversation with the Bishop and/or Canon for Mission Collaboration reviewing congregational status and closing procedures
  - The Vestry meets with the parish to invite their support for petitioning the Bishop and Standing Committee for permission to take a vote to close
  - The Vestry writes to the Bishop and Standing Committee seeking permission to vote to close



## II. Next Steps

1. The Bishops and Standing Committee determine whether to grant permission for the parish to vote on the dissolution or suspension of parochial organization (Canon 1 Section 12)
2. If given, the Parish posts notice of parish meeting (two weeks in advance, in writing) and describes the vote to close
3. The Parish conducts vote:
  - If the vote to dissolve the parochial organization carries, at the same meeting, an odd numbered committee of the parish vestry (three or five members) is elected to assist with the eventual disposition of goods (this committee works in concert with the ECCT Property Manager); the Canon for Mission Collaboration or another ECCT delegate meets with the Wardens and Vestry to begin closing procedures, beginning with the creation of a timeline
  - If the vote fails, the parish will be given six weeks to make current all financial obligations. At the end of this time, if any outstanding financial obligations remain, the bishop will exercise his/her canonical authority under Canon 1 Sec 12 to dissolve the parochial organization.

## III. Communicating the Decision

Information shall be sent in writing to:

- The parish roll and parish friends including Region members
- Clergy who have formerly served the parish
- The press/media outlets
- Programs and institutions who use the space (AA, BSA, etc.)
- Mission partners (local, regional, national, international, ecumenical, interfaith, etc.)

## IV. Closing Operations

- Pastoral Care
  - A chaplain may be appointed by the Bishop for the care of the congregation in the time of discernment and transition. The chaplain will meet with the Canon for Mission Collaboration and the clergy of the parish to learn about special needs of the parish and to discern the duration of the work. This person may be lay or ordained depending in the particular needs of the parish and may be reimbursed by the diocese at the supply clergy rate, or work without fee. (*Note:* reimbursement ECCT expenses will be made at the time of the sale of the building and/or settlement of accounts.)



- The chaplain will meet with congregants for processing emotions, individually or in small group settings as needed; will visit the homebound; and may help to make connections with other churches and arrange for transfer of membership for homebound as time allows.
  - The chaplain will offer pastoral care for all employees who desire it
  - The closing liturgy will be planned by the bishop in consultation with the clergy, Wardens, Chaplain, and others, as appropriate.
  - Arrangements for disposition of memorial garden/columbarium will be made by the Wardens and Vestry, the Diocesan Property Manager, and the Canon for Mission Collaboration.
- **Physical Plant (ECCT Property Manager and Parish Committee)**
    - Create a list of deferred maintenance projects and estimated costs, including environmental items (*e.g.*, asbestos and lead abatement)
    - Arrange for locks to be changed
    - Install security/alarm system (if deemed necessary)
    - Determine caretaker
    - The ECCT Property Manager conducts a walk-through and notes current condition of building and preventative measures for moth-balling (*i.e.*,

*(Physical Plant, cont'd)*

- care for organ, bleeding pipes, reducing heat to minimum, humidifiers installed, etc.)
  - Develop a vendor list of preferred local professionals
  - Arrange for lawn care services, snow removal, etc.
  - Review all copier and other equipment leases
  - Manage current building lease arrangements and set a “quit date” for all tenants to vacate the premises
  - Remove all signage (in/around town) that welcome passersby to the parish
- **Stewardship of Goods and Property**  
Working at the direction of the Property Manager, the Committee will:
    - Inventory all goods of any value, including vestments, statuary, vessels, furniture, machinery, and offer recommendations for disposition
    - Contact ECCT Archivist and arrange for appointment to assist with inventory/collection of archival property (including parish histories, artifacts, etc.)



- Create a list of other church goods and furniture to be offered to neighboring churches/the community (e.g., Sunday school tables and chairs, dishes, choir robes, etc.)
- Inventory all groups/organizations who use the church/building and provide adequate time for these ministries to be re-located
- **Financial and Administrative Procedures**
  - Termination letters are sent to all employees
  - Severance is negotiated with the Vestry; and, in the case of clergy, in concert with the Bishops' office
  - Severance agreements are added to parish files
  - **To be collected and given to ECCT representative:**
    - Seven years of financial records including General Ledgers
    - Software, passwords for computers, information on hard drives
    - Check books, registers, pass books
    - Bank statements incl. cancelled checks
  - (Financial and Administrative Procedures, cont'd)*
    - Credit cards
    - Financial statements—seven years
      - Balance Sheets, Income & Expense
      - Accounts payable (including 1099s)
      - Accounts receivable (including cash receipts)
      - Payroll
      - All papers and information with identifying information, such as addresses, phone numbers, SSN
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    - Outstanding bills
    - Pledge and giving statements
    - Parochial Reports, audits, and D&B/investment accounts
    - All HR/Personnel files and records
    - Membership records
    - Parish records
    - Sacramental registers
    - Canonical registers (list of services)
    - Vestry minutes (from the earliest to date)
    - Church directories and histories



- o Provide a list of all financial accounts, (checking, CDs, outside brokerage firms, savings, discretionary funds, ECW, Altar Guild, Youth Group savings, etc.), including account numbers, signatory lists/contact info for signatories
- o Close and transfer to custodial account(s)
- o Notify all vendors of change of address/billing address (ECCT) and relinquish authority to manage accounts to Canon for Mission Operations and Finance and/or his/her designee
- o Provide a list of all outstanding loans, mortgages, liens, listing institutions or persons, addresses and amount due (include amortization schedules)
- o List all unfulfilled bequests that are known and notify individuals of closing
- o List trust funds held for the benefit of the parish and include all detail and documentation

*(Financial and Administrative Procedures, cont'd)*

- o The Church Treasurer prepares all final employment tax information for employees, state and federal government, including year-end W-2 forms
  - o Arrange for deed transfer to the ECCT, including a quit claim deed, signed by the wardens and any additional authorized personnel
- Internet and Social Media
    - o Close website
    - o Close social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)

## V. Final Steps

- Executive Council ratifies the vote of the congregation as approved by the Bishops and Standing Committee
- A closing service is held with Bishop in attendance
- Bishop issues a notification that the parochial existence of the parish is terminated
- Copies of all paperwork is added to the parish file, Bishops' file, and Standing Committee's file
- Secularization of the Church building, as determined and conducted by the bishops' office, is arranged for a time after the church has been closed

## VI. Ongoing Property Management

- ECCT Property Manager oversees care
- A management company or individual(s) may be hired to oversee vacant buildings

## VII. Marketing and Sale of Building(s) and Land



- The ECCT Property Committee discerns options regarding property sale/use
- Under the leadership of the Canon for Mission Collaboration, a series of public meetings will be held with a variety of local constituencies to determine the potential for all possibilities of buildings and property
- After study and conversation, the Property Committee recommends to the Mission Council and Standing Committee the options for the disposition of the property

*(Marketing and Sale of Building(s) and Land, cont'd)*

- If it is determined that property will be sold, an appropriate broker/agent with local ties lists the property for sale
- Proceeds from sale settle all debts (outstanding ECCT loans, bills, salaries/pension/insurance that was paid to employees or carried by ECCT, and all other costs related to the closing of the parish (e.g., reimbursement for maintenance services between closing and sale, etc.)

## ECCT MANAGING RESOURCES

### Discernment & Decision

- Bishop
- Canon for Mission Collaboration
- Canon for Mission Finance & Operations
- Consultant—Emotional Intelligence, Conflict, Adaptive Leadership

### Closing Parish

- Bishop
- Canon for Mission Collaboration
- Chaplain
- Consultants (optional)

### Post-Closure

- Bishop
- Canon for Mission Collaboration (exploration of how the parish assets [buildings, property, furnishings, books, etc.] continue to serve God's mission?")
- Canon for Mission Operations & Finance (team): marketing/sale

### Convention Budget

- Closing Parish budget (ECCT Canon I.11.A)