



The Episcopal Diocese of Georgia Policy Manual

Revised December 2023

These policies, approved by Diocesan Council, supplement the policies established in the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church and the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia.

These other canons and policy manuals are also available on the Diocesan website:

- Diocesan Constitution & Canons
- Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church
- Bishop's Customaries (Ordinations & Visitations)
- Clergy Handbook
- Discernment Handbook (the process of discerning Ordination in the Church)
- Transition Handbook (for congregations during clergy transitions)

Diocesan Lay Employees

The Diocesan Convention adopts an annual budget that sets salaries for all diocesan lay employees based on the recommendation of the Bishop, Diocesan Council, and the Finance Committee. While not required of congregations, the following provides a model of benefits for lay employees in churches. Benefits provided lay employees are:

- *Group Medical Insurance* – The Diocese pays the premiums for lay full-time employees at the same rate as for clergy full-time employees.
- *Life Insurance* – The Diocese pays the premium for a \$30,000 term life policy for all full-time lay employees.
- *Pension* - The Diocese provides a 10% contribution annually to the defined contribution lay pension plan in compliance with 403(b) of the IRS.
- *Vacation* – Full time employees are entitled to paid vacation as follows: Two weeks during the first four years; three weeks through the ninth year; four weeks beginning in the tenth year. The Bishop may increase vacation benefits as part of his annual Letter of Agreement with each staff person.
- *Parental Leave* - See below.
- *Other Paid Absences* – The Diocese permits an employee up to ten days paid absence for illness or a family death or crisis.

Licensed Lay Ministers

The Bishop authorizes the following Lay Minister licenses. The application form is in the Resource Library at the diocesan website. All licensees are authorized to serve under the direction of a member of the Clergy:

- *Pastoral Leader* – exercises pastoral or administrative responsibility in a congregation under special circumstances defined by the Bishop.
- *Worship Leader* – regularly leads public worship.
- *Preacher* – preaches in congregations.
- *Eucharistic Minister* – administers the sacrament at the Holy Eucharist.
- *Eucharistic Visitor* – takes the sacrament following the Holy Eucharist to those who for reason of illness or infirmity were unable to attend the Celebration.
- *Evangelist* – proclaims the Gospel in a ministry under the direction of the Bishop.
- *Catechist* – prepares candidates for Baptism, Confirmation, or Reception.

Remarriage in the Church after divorce

The Bishop's policy is on the Diocesan website and is congruent with the Church's Canons.

Convocations

The Diocese is divided into six convocations. The Bishop appoints a Dean in each convocation to a three-year term. Diocesan canons specify that Convocation Councils meet at least annually. Each Convocation has three representatives on the Diocesan Council: One clergy and two laity. One member is elected at Convocation Council annually for a three-year term.

Parish Register

It is the responsibility of the Rector/Priest in Charge (or absent one, the Senior Warden) to maintain it accurately. All entries must be in ink.

Parochial Reports

Parochial reports are canonically required to be submitted no later than March 1 following the close of the calendar year. Instructions and further information on the parochial report may be found at <https://reports.dfms.org/>

Clergy Compensation

Diocesan Council approves minimum clergy compensation. The Diocese also publishes an annual salary survey, posting these in *From the Field* and in the Resource Library at the Diocesan website.

List of Wardens

The Diocesan office maintains a list of wardens. Congregations are required to send to the Diocese the names and contact information for these elected officers as they change each year.

Delegates to Diocesan Convention

Diocesan Canons specify that lay delegates and alternates to Diocesan Convention shall be elected. Elections shall take place no less than forty-five (45) days prior to the annual meeting of Convention.. Those elected comprise part of the local Convocation Council and assume this responsibility as well.

Episcopal Visitations

The Bishop's visitation schedule provides for his pastoral visitation to each congregation. About three weeks prior to his visitation the Rector/Priest in Charge (when none, then the Senior Warden) will receive the Visitation Customary. The form enclosed should be completed and returned to the diocesan office promptly so that the Bishop may complete his plans.

Calls and Vacancies

The Bishop must be advised when a priest is being considered for a call to a parish. A priest leaving a parish shall give at least 30 days' notice other than for significant health concerns. The priest should advise the Vestry of canonical procedures and shall not attempt to influence the selection of a successor. No Vestry will issue a call without the Bishop's approval of the candidate.

Special Offerings

Diocesan Canon II.10 specifies that special offerings shall be taken at certain times of the year for the following:

- *Bishop's Visitation* – The undesignated offerings shall go to the Bishop's Fund. The clergy should announce this during the Visitation.
- *Episcopal Youth and Children's Services* (EYCS) – A special offering on the Sunday immediately preceding or following Thanksgiving Day.
- *The University of the South* – A special offering shall be taken on a Sunday in April or May for the University of the South.
- *Episcopal Relief and Development* (ERD) – One Sunday/year is designated as "ERD Sunday" and a special offering is taken on that designated Sunday.

Diocesan Canons allow congregations to budget support for EYCS and the University of the South in lieu of special offerings.

Audit Procedures

Diocesan Canons specify that all receipts, expenditures or investments by all congregations, including guilds and groups within the congregation, and church organizations be audited and certified by a CPA or an audit committee authorized by the vestry in accordance with Diocesan Canons. These canons state that entities having annual receipts from all sources of \$500,000 or more shall be reviewed or audited by an independent Certified Public Accountant. Entities having annual receipts from all sources of less than \$500,000 shall be reviewed or audited by an independent Certified Public Accountant or, alternatively, shall be reviewed by a person or committee knowledgeable in financial matters and chosen from within or without the entity. Treasurers and bookkeepers shall not be eligible to review or audit the financial records of their respective entity. A report of the completion of a parish audit must be submitted annually to the diocesan office by September 1.

Fidelity Bond

The Diocese pays for and maintains a master fidelity bond through the Church Insurance Corporation that covers all parishes and diocesan organizations. All persons in an organization with gross receipts of more than \$25,000 are bonded in the amount of \$25,000. Additional coverage is available at the congregation's expense through Church Insurance.

Denominational Health Plan

A congregation with a priest or lay employee working at least 30 hours per week must ensure insurance coverage through the Church Medical Trust. For those who do not otherwise have medical insurance provided through a spouse or an existing plan such as Tri-care, this means selecting at least the lowest cost option from the available plans through the Diocese. Employers must comply with "Parity"* set by the Denominational Health Plan. All employees must receive the same minimum level of funding for coverage. What is offered for one employee, clergy or lay, must be provided for all. For example, if 100% family coverage is provided for one staff member, it must be provided for all. Health insurance coverage policies for employers should be documented at the employer level.

For those in a High Deductible Plan with a Health Savings Account, the Diocese expects the employer will pay \$200 per month or \$2400 per year into the HSA for those electing the single HDHP and \$400 or \$4800 per for the plus one or family plan in the first year of coverage and to continue to pay \$150 per month for Single HDHP and \$300 per month for plus one, and \$400 for family plans in subsequent years.

**Set by resolution A177 at the 76th and 77th General Convention

*** <https://www.cpg.org/active-lay-employees/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/resolution-a177/>

Family Leave Policy

A member of the clergy or full-time lay employee who has been employed by the church for at least one full year and is the designated "primary child-care parent" is entitled to leave for the birth or adoption of a child for a minimum of twelve weeks with pay. Up to four additional weeks may be taken without pay. The member of the clergy or full-time lay employee may elect to use vacation leave or sick leave during these final four weeks.

Employment benefits, including but not limited to health insurance, will continue during Parental Leave as set by Letters of Agreement.

A member of the clergy or full-time lay employee who has been employed by the church for at least one full year and is the “non-primary-care parent” is entitled to leave for the birth or adoption of a child for a minimum of four weeks with pay and up to eight additional weeks without pay. The member of the clergy or full-time lay employee may elect to use vacation leave or sick leave during these eight additional weeks.

A member of the clergy or full-time lay employee employed by the church for less than one full year is entitled to the same number of weeks leave. Pay during this period is negotiated between the church and the member of the clergy or full-time lay employee.

Upon return from Leave, an employee will be restored to their prior position, or to a position with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment, provided that an employee has no greater right to reinstatement or to other benefits and conditions of employment than if the employee had been continuously employed during Leave period, such as, but not limited to lay-off, re-structuring or conduct subject to disciplinary action.

Employers are encouraged to provide short-term disability plans to their eligible staff. The coverage can help offset the cost associated with family leave. For details please visit: <https://www.cpg.org/globalassets/documents/publications/disa-std-benefit-summary-26-weeks66.67-employer-paid.pdf>. Once you have examined these documents, you can reach out to the Canon for Administration for additional details.

Glossary of Terms:

Primary child-care parent: Is the primary care provider for a child through birth or adoption. Roles can include but are not limited to mother, father, sibling, grandparent, and/or partner.

Non-primary child-care parent: Does not provide the primary care of the child but is entitled to leave to bond and provide support.

Worker’s Compensation

Each parish paying a salary or wages to three or more employees (including stipendiary clergy) must have Worker’s Compensation Insurance by Georgia state law. The Diocese maintains a master Worker’s Compensation Policy through the Church Insurance Corporation. Each parish is covered under this master policy as it pays its premium directly to the Church Insurance Corporation.

Travel Expenses

The Diocese reimburses all travel costs for diocesan employees. The Diocese also reimburses expenses for volunteers at current IRS rates for laity and non-stipendiary clergy when traveling beyond 50 miles from home to serve a diocesan ministry. When traveling for a Diocesan ministry, the Diocese reimburses individuals for their lodging, as requested, and for meals at a rate reasonable for the context. During the triennium preceding General Convention, Diocesan Convention escrows a designated amount in the annual budget to assist our diocesan deputation with their General Convention expenses.

The Board of the Corporation

The Diocese established a corporate entity: “The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Georgia, Inc.” Its purpose is to administer funds placed in trust for the benefit of the Diocese and its congregations. The Corporation’s Officers consist of the Bishop and seven lay members elected by Diocesan Convention. The Diocesan Canons and the by-laws of the Corporation set forth the method of election and the responsibilities of the Officers. Officers report directly to the Diocesan Convention and exercise corporate power under its charter. The Diocese publishes the list of funds with a description of their purpose. All diocesan congregations and organizations can invest their funds with the Corporation.

Alienation or Encumbrance of Property

The Canons require the consent of the Bishop and Standing Committee for any congregation to alienate (give or sell) or encumber (lien, easement, lease, mortgage or restrictive covenant) property owned by the Diocese or any congregation.

Congregations requesting such a consent must send the Bishop a written request for the sale or encumbrance of the property. The request must be signed by the Senior and Junior Wardens and Clergy-in-Charge. A copy of the minutes of the meeting in which the action was taken should be included with the request. The Bishop will forward the request to the Standing Committee. If the Standing Committee deems necessary, the Vestry and Clergy-in-Charge should be available to meet and discuss the request, either in person or via Zoom.

The request for the sale or encumbrance of property must include the following:

- A survey or tax parcel map showing the exact dimensions of the property, its relation to other church-owned property; major or satellite business districts, together with some note of the surrounding land use (residential, industrial commercial); and comparable sales.
- Reasons and benefits for encumbering or alienating the property and proposed use of the funds should the request be approved.

Encumbrance—Diocesan Canon 5.1.(a) requires the approval of the Bishop and Standing Committee when a parish desires to incur indebtedness for permanent improvements, replacements or additions to real estate or equipment, where the amount of such indebtedness of every kind already existing shall not exceed 150% of its average annual receipts of such Parish during the past three years. Encumbrance includes a church’s proposed use of the property which would permanently limit its future use, such as a park or cemetery.

Alienation—It is expected that the proceeds from the sale of the property be used by the requesting church to maintain the church property, grow the church, improve an existing ministry, and/or develop a new ministry, and not for the sole purpose of increasing the operating budget. If the property is sold, funds will go to the Diocese and the church must request funds for the approved use. If the church no longer exists, the Bishop will determine the use of the funds.

In the event there is a request to use proceeds for operations, the Standing Committee will consider the local situation, a recommendation by the Bishop, and/or recommendation of the Canon for Finance. The focus will be on making a decision that is best for the longer-term Episcopal presence in the local community.

The request for the sale of property must include the following:

- Detailed explanation of the reason for the sale and anticipated benefits

- Explanation of what actions have previously been taken to avoid the sale
- Explanation of how the funds will be used, if the request is approved
- Three year budget projections if the sale is approved or not approved

Meetings and Election of Officers of the Standing Committee—The Standing Committee normally meets monthly via Zoom or in person and jointly with the Commission on Ministry in person three times per year: in December, after Easter, and in the fall. The Standing Committee meets at other times as needed. Immediately following adjournment of the annual Diocesan Convention, the Standing Committee meets to elect officers for the coming year. Traditionally, the senior clerical member is elected president and the senior lay member is elected secretary.

Amendments to the Policy—This policy may be amended at any time by majority vote of the Standing Committee with concurrence of the Bishop.

Alcohol use in the Diocese

1. The Church seeks to provide a safe and welcoming environment for all people, including people in recovery from substance abuse and addiction.
2. All applicable federal, state and local laws shall be obeyed, including those governing the serving of alcoholic beverages to minors.
3. Some congregations may decide not to serve alcohol at events or gatherings. Others may decide to permit the responsible use of alcoholic beverages at church-sponsored events.
4. Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages must be clearly labeled as such. Food prepared with alcohol does not need to be labeled provided the alcohol is completely evaporated by the cooking process; however, it is recommended that even in this case the use of alcohol in cooking be noted on a label.
5. Whenever alcohol is served, appealing non-alcoholic alternatives must be offered with equal prominence and accessibility.
6. The serving of alcoholic beverages at church events should not be publicized as an attraction of the event, e.g. “wine and cheese reception,” “cocktail party,” and “beer and wine tasting.”
7. Ministries inside or outside of congregations will make certain that alcohol consumption is not the focus of the ministry and that drinking alcohol is not an exclusively normative activity.
8. Food must be served when alcohol is available for consumption.
9. Reasonable measures shall be taken to prevent service of alcohol to persons who are visibly intoxicated and to prevent any such persons from leaving the premises while operating a motor vehicle including such measures as providing transportation home.
10. Whenever alcohol is served, those persons having oversight of the event must appoint an adult to oversee its serving. That adult must not drink alcoholic beverages during the time of his or her execution of his or her responsibilities.
11. No distilled spirits shall be served on church property, except at non-church events for which caterers have obtained the required license to serve distilled spirits. If the church owns a rectory or vicarage, then this does not apply to that dwelling.
12. Serving alcoholic beverages at congregational events where minors are present is discouraged. If minors are present, alcohol must be served at a separate station that is monitored at all times to prevent underage drinking.
13. Groups or organizations sponsoring any activity or event on church property at which alcoholic beverages are served must have permission from the clergy or the vestry. Such groups or organizations are responsible for compliance with this policy.
14. Alcoholic beverages shall not be served when the business of the Church is being conducted.

15. Clergy shall consecrate an appropriate amount of wine when celebrating the Eucharist and perform ablutions in a way that does not foster or model misuse.
16. Clergy are encouraged to acknowledge the efficacy of receiving the sacrament in one kind and consider providing non-alcoholic wine when appropriate to the liturgy, such as a 12-Step Eucharist.

This policy is not intended to create any duties owed to third parties or to represent any standard of care, but reflects this diocese's concern for the spiritual health and welfare of our communities.

Honey Creek Retreat Center

The Diocese owns and operates a camp & retreat center located in Camden County. An Executive Director, who serves on the Bishop's staff, oversees operations. Facilities are available for conferences, workshops, parish or vestry weekends, retreats, and family recreation. During the summer the facilities are used for a summer camping program for diocesan youth.

Safe Church, Safe Communities: Policy and Online Modules

The full policy can be located on the Diocesan [website](#).

The policy sets forth statements of expectations and guidelines of behavior for ordained and lay people in the Diocese of Georgia when engaged in ministry with children and youth. This policy is mandated for all such activities sponsored by every congregation, institution, organization, school, and agency in this diocese. The purpose of these policies is to create safe and welcoming space for all children and youth in our communities and those engaged in ministry with children and youth and to prevent sexual abuse. This policy presents best practices for creating such safe space. Circumstances in some localities may make a few of these best practices difficult to implement or even unworkable. As a result, local entities may make additions or revisions in developing local policy so long as they meet the spirit and intent of these policies, with the advance permission of the Office of the Bishop. This requires that local leadership understand this policy thoroughly enough to propose appropriate revisions in light of local circumstances. Any such additions or revisions must be submitted in writing to Canon for Program and Liturgy. No provisions may be omitted from a local policy.

Clergy checks are at no cost to the congregation. Additionally, the Diocese now offers up to ten checks per year at no cost (beyond your ongoing support of the Diocese). These checks will be limited to the typical Multi-State Criminal and Sex Offender Registry report. Additional checks may be ordered and invoiced. In most cases, this will cover all the background checks needed to fulfill the policy.

Clergy Cottage

The Diocese owns a cottage in Saluda, North Carolina. Clergy have priority in reserving it, but lay persons may also use the cottage. It is available only from May through October. Linens are not furnished. Occupancy is normally on a weekly basis, beginning on Saturday afternoon and ending Saturday morning. Occupants will maintain the cleanliness of the house. Contact the Diocesan office to arrange for the rental of the cottage. An online calendar is kept so prospective renters can know when it is available.

Diocesan Office Holidays

The Diocesan Office will be closed on Federal holidays and these additional days:

Easter Monday

Good Friday

Thanksgiving (Wednesday - Friday)

Christmas Eve & Day

St Stephen's Day

St Patrick's Day (due to Savannah's parade)