Resolution 2026–3

Title Intention To Become a Constituent Diocese of the University of the South

Proposer(s) Walker Adams

WHEREAS, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH, Sewanee, Tennessee, worthily represents the contribution which the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America is making to the cause of Christian education in the country, and

WHEREAS, The Convention of the Diocese of West Missouri desires to give its support and encouragement, formally and officially, to this great cause; therefore,

Be it Resolved, That the Convention of the Diocese of West Missouri hereby petitions the Board of Trustees of THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH to enroll the Diocese of West Missouri as an active member of the group of Dioceses owning and controlling THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH; and hereby pledges itself to accept and discharge whatever obligations, financial or other, may be involved in membership in this union, and

Be it Resolved, That the Convention proceed to elect one presbyter and two lay representatives to attend the next meeting of the Board, and, with the Bishop, to present this petition and act as representatives of this Diocese on the Board of Trustees of THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH.

Explanation

History & Background

At its 2023 Annual Convention, the Diocese of West Missouri adopted Resolution 2023-4, expressing the Diocese's desire "to become a Constituent Diocese of the University of the South" and directing that "a liaison from the Diocese" be appointed "to facilitate conversations between the Diocese and the University until such time as the Diocese may vote on entering into a constituent relationship."

Following the adoption of the resolution, this work was temporarily paused during the transition in diocesan leadership and the election and ordination of a new bishop. With the Rt. Rev. Amy Dafler Meaux now having completed her first year as Bishop of West Missouri, the Diocese has resumed conversations with the University regarding the possibility of becoming a Constituent Diocese.

The Diocese and the University met on August 25, 2026, to continue these conversations and to discuss the process, opportunities, and implications of a constituent relationship.

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Progress Since Resolution 2023-4

The conversations to date have confirmed that West Missouri already has a substantial and longstanding relationship with the University of the South. West Missouri's connections to Sewanee extend back to the founding of the Diocese. Then University Chaplain Thomas Gailor was a candidate to become the first Bishop of West Missouri, although he was ultimately not elected.

More recently, the Diocese has maintained a consistent relationship with the School of Theology. West Missouri has had seven seminarians at Sewanee since 2015 and currently has two students enrolled at the School of Theology, Justin Smith (St. Mary's, Kansas City) and Timothy Sallee (Good Shepherd, Kansas City). The Rev. Warren Thomas Swenson, a priest of the Diocese, also serves as a faculty member of the School of Theology.

The relationship extends beyond the School of Theology. West Missouri clergy who are Sewanee graduates serve congregations throughout the Diocese. Young people from the Diocese have attended the University's College of Arts and Sciences, and West Missouri youth leaders have served as counselors for the high school SUMMA Theological Debate Society. Musicians from the Diocese consistently participate in the Sewanee Church Music Festival. In addition, more than 250 people in West Missouri's congregations have completed Education for Ministry (EfM) through the University's Beecken Center.

These connections demonstrate that the Diocese is already meaningfully engaged with multiple aspects of the University's mission. As Resolution 2023-4 recognized, the question before the Diocese is therefore not whether to establish a relationship with Sewanee, but whether to deepen and formalize an existing one.

What a Constituent Relationship Would Mean for West Missouri

A constituent relationship would give West Missouri a formal place within the governance structure of the University of the South and a voice in the institution's life and mission.

As a trustee diocese, West Missouri would join the network of dioceses that share responsibility for the University and would have representation in its governance. This would provide the Diocese with a stronger voice in matters of theological education and formation for the wider Episcopal Church.

Such a relationship would complement, rather than compete with, West Missouri's existing investment in the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry. The two institutions serve different populations and employ different models of theological formation. Participation in Sewanee would therefore allow West Missouri to engage more fully in the mixed ecology of theological education that is emerging throughout The Episcopal Church.

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A constituent relationship would also strengthen West Missouri's connections with other dioceses. The trustee dioceses constitute a network of diocesan relationships that provides opportunities to share ideas, resources, and practices across the Church.

Finally, a deeper relationship with Sewanee could provide additional opportunities for the Diocese to connect with the University's extensive alumni network as it seeks clergy for open calls. Sewanee's graduates serve throughout The Episcopal Church, and the Diocese could benefit from those connections as it seeks to recruit clergy who are a good fit for its congregations and communities.

Current Status & Next Steps

The August 25 conversation represents a significant step forward in the process initiated by Resolution 2023-4. The Diocese and the University have now resumed formal discussions about a constituent relationship following the period of episcopal transition. The conversation has confirmed substantial existing connections between West Missouri and Sewanee and has provided an opportunity to discuss the mutual benefits of formalizing those relationships through constituent status.

The discussions to date affirm that West Missouri already has a substantial relationship with Sewanee through theological education, EfM, the College, SUMMA, church music, alumni, and clergy formation. Becoming a Constituent Diocese would formalize and deepen those existing connections while giving West Missouri a voice in the governance of an institution whose mission is closely connected to the formation of leaders for The Episcopal Church.

Next Steps

Article XIV of Sewanee's Constitution lays out the process for a new diocese to petition to join the University's Board of Trustees. "Subject to the concurrence of the Board of Trustees by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those present and voting, any Diocese desiring to become a member of the group of dioceses which support and control THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH shall be requested to adopt the following preamble and resolutions at a regular meeting of the Convention or Council of the Diocese and to send a copy to the Chancellor of the University." To continue this process, the following resolution will need to be passed and temporary trustees would need to be elected to present the petition which would be brought to Sewanee's Board of Trustees for a vote at their annual meeting in October 2027.

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