

## **Resolution: Condemning Censorship**

Resolved, That the 159th Episcopal Diocesan Convention of Pittsburgh condemn harmful and oppressive book bans which undermine the Beloved Community and be it further

Resolved, That the 159th Episcopal Diocesan Convention of Pittsburgh advocate for the access to material affirming of LGBTQIA+, racial minority, and other marginalized experiences in schools and libraries: and be it further

Resolved, That the 159th Episcopal Diocesan Convention of Pittsburgh encourage local parishes to work more broadly to support the reading of and access to these affirming materials through initiatives such as:

- Storing affirming books and materials in church libraries
- Archiving affirming material about LGBTQIA+ and POC Christian experiences
- Facilitating connection and affirmation of oppressed individuals

And be it further

Resolved, the 159th Episcopal Diocesan Convention of Pittsburgh request grant making bodies affiliated with The Episcopal Church to consider directing funds to support these aims.

### **EXPLANATION OR RATIONALE**

This Resolution (D039) was concurred by the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops at the 81<sup>st</sup> Episcopal General Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, June, 2024

It was originally submitted by the Union of Black Episcopalians in partnership with Unite Against Book Bans of the American Library Association

The 81<sup>st</sup> Legislative Committees were Social Justice and United States Policy

This resolution reaffirms the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh commitment to Beloved Community

In The Episcopal Church, we firmly believe in the power of intellectual freedom, the beauty of the diversity of thought, and the importance of open discourse within the Beloved Community. These principles not only foster an environment of inclusivity and respect but also encourage the exploration of new ideas and the growth of individuals and the community as a whole.

The American Library Association released data and statistics about book bans in the United States in 2023 on March 14, 2024. It is alarming to note that in 2023, 4,240 book titles were censored. The significant number highlights the urgency of protecting our fundamental rights to access information and express ourselves freely.

The number of targeted titles in 2023 increased significantly by 65%, surpassing the previous year's figure. Compared to 2021, the increase was a staggering 128%.

Censorship is a major challenge faced by many historically marginalized communities. Shockingly, around 47% of the books that are targeted for censorship are written by or about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more ( LGBTQIA+) individuals as well as individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). These include both fictional and historical works. Such book bans and censorship clearly send a message to these communities that certain stories and people are considered too dangerous to be part of our society. It is important to note that these challenges are often initiated by a small but vocal minority within our communities.

<https://uniteagainstbookbans.org/2023-book-bans/>

Our lives and even our sacred texts are full of challenging stories. Those stories cannot be ignored just because they are challenging. We are called to become a Beloved Community, which requires telling and hearing the truth. Being in a community requires that we hear and allow others to hear the stories of those in our communities who are different from us, especially the stories of those who have historically been marginalized.

Removing, banning, or restricting access to books from public libraries or public schools is a slippery slope to government censorship and the erosion of our country's commitment to freedom of expression. Attempts to restrict the teaching about race in history is revisionist history that can prevent the whole of the community from being included and feeling a sense of belonging.

Censoring information and banning books not only represents a dangerous attempt at engaging in revisionist history but also, more importantly, excludes certain community members from being recognized and included in the community's story. This exclusion is not just an injustice but a clear and significant threat to our community's unity and progress that we must address.

The Episcopal Church recognizes parents' role in guiding their children and that bans on materials limit access to materials that can help children and others better understand themselves and fellow members of their community. Book bans and censorship are often disguised as a means to protect young people and other readers from inappropriate or potentially upsetting materials. However, we recognize these attempts as blatant violations of our freedom to access information and make our own choices.

Other national organizations like Unite Against Book Bans, the African American Policy Forum, the Human Rights Alliance, the Interfaith Alliance, the National Education Alliance, and the National Coalition Against Censorship already are addressing the censorship of information and potentially could be excellent sources of information as well as partnership.

It is crucial, therefore, to recognize that any actions that undermine our efforts to become a Beloved Community and erode our progress toward creating a truly diverse and inclusive society are detrimental to our goals. The Episcopal Church opposes efforts to censor materials that focus on and affirm the lives of members of the LGBTQIA+ communities and other historically marginalized communities as well as efforts to censor materials about racial justice and the history or racism. We must oppose such efforts and work towards fostering a culture of open dialogue, free expression, and intellectual freedom. The Episcopal Church, with unwavering commitment, not only affirms but champions its dedication to intellectual freedom, diversity of thought, and open discourse within our

communities while opposing any actions that contradict these values. This commitment is not just a source of reassurance and unity but a beacon of hope and progress for us all.

### **Supporting Resolutions**

Calls upon all Episcopalians, dioceses, parishes, and institutions to actively urge their elected officials to champion the inclusion and promotion of Black history education while steadfastly opposing any efforts to eliminate, restrict, or impede the teaching of Black history. (2023 MBMW 001)

[https://extranet.generalconvention.org/governing\\_and\\_interim\\_bodies/executive\\_council/resolution?id=451](https://extranet.generalconvention.org/governing_and_interim_bodies/executive_council/resolution?id=451)

Oppose any laws that make the teaching of ethnic studies illegal and penalize school districts financially for incorporating ethnic studies in their curriculums. (EC 012012.04)

[https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/executive\\_council/EXCgenerate\\_pdf.pl?exc\\_id=EXC012012.04](https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/executive_council/EXCgenerate_pdf.pl?exc_id=EXC012012.04)

That the church gives strong support to responsible local public and private school programs of education in human sexuality. (GC 1988-A089)

[https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_generate\\_pdf.pl?resolution=1988-A089](https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_generate_pdf.pl?resolution=1988-A089)

Urge the Church to increase dialogue and improve education on racial injustice and to create and share resources on curriculum and programs dedicated to ministries of reconciliation. (GC2015-A182)

[https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_generate\\_pdf.pl?resolution=2015-A182](https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_generate_pdf.pl?resolution=2015-A182)

Deplore the desecration of any religious text or space and call upon all people to respect religious diversity and never to defame or abuse that which is considered holy by others. (EC 062005.38 Executive Council: Resolution # EXC062005.38 (episcopalarchives.org))

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