

2021 Convention Resolution

TITLE: R1-2021: PETITION TO THE 80TH GENERAL CONVENTION ADDING JOHN R. LEWIS TO THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH COMMEMORATIONS CALENDAR

PROPOSED BY: The Rev. Jim Richardson, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Sacramento;
Br. Simeon (Lewis) Powell, C.G., St. John's Episcopal Church, Chico;
Lynn Zender, St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Davis

REPRESENTATIVE: The Rev. Jim Richardson

PRESENTER AT CONVENTION: The Rev. Jim Richardson

DATE SUBMITTED: July 20, 2021

RESOLUTION:

RESOLVED, That this 111th Convention of the Diocese of Northern California adopts the following resolution and hereby directs the Secretary of this Convention to forward this resolution to the Secretary of General Convention of The Episcopal Church as a duly authorized resolution from this Diocese; and be it further,

RESOLVED, That the Diocese of Northern California requests that 80th General Convention designate July 17 in ***Lesser Feasts and Fasts, or the supplement A Great Cloud of Witnesses: A Calendar of Commemorations*** as the annual celebration of the life and work of John R. Lewis, pastor, civil rights leader and public servant.

EXPLANATION:

This resolution petitions the next General Convention, scheduled for July 2022 in Baltimore, to add John R. Lewis to the calendar of commemorations on the date of his death (July 17) in the supplemental resource to *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* entitled *A Great Cloud of Witnesses: A Calendar of Commemorations* (more on this resource below), with appropriate readings and collects. Approval of this resolution would require our diocese file a "C" resolution (designating a diocesan sponsored proposal) for consideration by General Convention, which meets only every three years.

Background:

John Robert Lewis (Feb. 21, 1940 – July 17, 2020) was born near Troy Alabama, the son of sharecroppers. He was mentored by Martin Luther King, Jr., and was ordained a Baptist pastor. He later earned a degree from Fisk University. As a student he organized lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville. He was one of the "Freedom Riders" in 1961, challenging Southern policies that imposed racial segregation on buses. He was assaulted and beaten by angry mobs in South Carolina and arrested.

In 1963 Lewis became chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and was one of the "Big Six" who organized the March on Washington where Dr. King delivered his "I have a dream speech." Lewis was a leader of the 1965 march in Selma, Ala., and was severely beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, suffering a skull fracture. At the time, Lewis believed he would die on the bridge. In 1970 he became the director of the Voter Education Project, registering nearly 4 million minority voters nationwide. In 1986, Lewis was elected to a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives from Georgia, serving in Congress until his death in 2020.

2021 Convention Resolution

Lewis was arrested more than 40 times in non-violent protests against racial injustice and remained committed to non-violence throughout his life. “Our struggle was not about politics,” he said a few years before his death. “It was about seeing a philosophy made manifest in our society that recognized the inextricable connection we have to each other.”¹

Author Jon Meacham, who is an Episcopalian and Canon Historian at the Washington National Cathedral, wrote a recent biography of Lewis, making the case that Lewis meets the definition of a Christian saint.

“To John Lewis, the truth he had lived out on that bridge in 1965 was of a piece with the demands of the gospel to which he had dedicated his life since he was a child. He was moved by love, not by hate,” Meacham wrote. “To put complicated matters simply: John Robert Lewis embodied the traits of a saint in the classical Christian sense of the term...One test of a saint, closely tied to the test of a martyr, is the willingness to suffer and die for others. Which Lewis was willing to do—again and again and again.”²

Another recent historian, Douglas Brinkley, wrote of Lewis: “He is our apostle of quiet strength. His eyebrow raised or finger wagged carries more weight than a hundred bombastic speeches or clever pontifications.”³

Background: *A Great Cloud of Witnesses: A Calendar of Commemorations*

The Episcopal calendar commemorates more than 300 individuals, but only nine are African American, and only a handful are from the twentieth century (King, Pauli Murray, W.E.B. Du Bois and Thurgood Marshall). Lewis would be the first who died in the twenty-first century.

The introduction to *A Great Cloud of Witnesses* describes the purpose of our Episcopal calendar: “This resource recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to our understanding of our calling as the Body of Christ within the complexities of the twenty-first-century world without making a statement one way or another on their sanctity. It serves as a family history, identifying those people inside and outside the Episcopal/Anglican tradition who help us proclaim the Gospel in word, deed, and truth.”

John R. Lewis certainly meets this description and should be included on our calendar.

For further reading about the calendar:

<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/19349>

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

¹ John Lewis, *Across That Bridge*, by John Lewis, Hyperion Books, 2012, p. 7.

² Jon Meacham, *His Truth Is Marching On: Jon Lewis and the Power of Hope*, Random House, 2020, p. 4.

³ Douglas Brinkley, Foreword, *Across That Bridge*, p. ix.