

2021 Convention Resolution

TITLE: R2-2021: PETITION TO THE 80TH GENERAL CONVENTION ADDING HOWARD THURMAN 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 April 10 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 Howard W. Thurman, pastor, educator, theologian, and civil rights leader. EXPLANATION: This resolution petitions the next General Convention, scheduled for July 2022 in Baltimore, to add Howard Thurman to the calendar of commemorations on the date of his death (April 10) 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:

Howard Washington Thurman (Nov. 18, 1899 – April 10, 1981), had an enormous influence on the civil rights movement and its leaders. Born in Florida, Thurman was educated at Morehouse College and ordained a Baptist pastor. He was appointed as the first Black chaplain of Marsh Chapel at Boston University which today has a center bearing his name.

In the 1930s Thurman led a six-month pilgrimage of African Americans to India where he met Mohandas Gandhi who had an enormous influence on his work. Incorporating Gandhi's theories of non-violence, Thurman wrote a ground-breaking book in 1949, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, which had a major impact on a young ministry student, Martin Luther King, Jr. In later years, Dr. King carried Thurman's book in his suitcase in his travels as a leader in the civil rights movement. Thurman also mentored to Pauli Murray, who became the first Black woman ordained an Episcopal priest and is on the Episcopal Church calendar. After leaving Boston, Thurman founded a racially integrated church in San Francisco. He was named an honorary Canon of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City in 1974. Thurman died in San Francisco in 1981.

Ebony magazine once called Thurman one of the fifty most important figures in African American history. In the 1950s, *Life* magazine ranked Thurman among the twelve most

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important religious leaders in the United States. In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in Thurman's life and work. Thurman's books have been used in the Sacred Ground program in the Episcopal Church and as supplemental reading in the Education for Ministry program. His speeches, articles and books have been the topic of recent seminars, webinars and retreats.

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

In our Anglican/Episcopal *Via Media* method of theology, the calendar of *A Great Cloud of Witnesses* is part of the "Tradition" leg of the "three-legged stool" (the others are "Scripture" and "Reason"). The calendar seeks to commemorate those who in the past still speak to us in our own time. Thurman is certainly among them.

Our Episcopal calendar commemorates more than 300 individuals, but only nine are African American, and only a handful are from the twentieth century (King, Murray, W.E.B. Du Bois and Thurgood Marshall). The calendar honors numerous educators and theologians from a broad array of denominations and religious traditions (Evelyn Underhill, Karl Barth, F.D. Maurice to name three). But the calendar dimly reflects the rich contributions of African American theologians, educators and religious leaders who played an enormous role in shaping the civil rights movement and, more broadly, how we engage with the difficult issues of race and justice in our world today. Thurman's addition to our calendar is long overdue.

The introduction to *A Great Cloud of Witnesses* states this about the reasons people are included on the calendar: "Following the broad stream of Christian tradition, there are no formal criteria for defining saints. Rather, holiness and faithful witness are celebrated locally by a decision that individuals so honored shine forth Christ to the world. They illuminate different facets of Christian maturity to spur us on to an adult faith in the Risen Christ and the life of the Spirit. As illustrations, they mirror the myriad virtues of Christ in order that, in their examples, we might recognize those same virtues and features of holiness in people closer to our own times and contexts. And, seeing them in those around us, we may be better able to cultivate these virtues and forms of holiness in the life of the Church—through grace—as we strive to imitate Christ as well."

For further reading about the calendar:

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

FISCAL IMPACT: None.