THE Episcopal CHURCH

**Written statement
submitted by
The Most Reverend Michael Bruce Curry[1],
Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church[2]
to the 67th session
of the
United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**

March 6th – 17th, 2023
"Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls"

The Episcopal Church is a Christian denomination of 1.8 million members in 17 nations in North America, Latin America & the Caribbean, Europe and Asia & the Pacific and a member province of the worldwide Anglican Communion, the third largest Christian denomination.

As Christians, Episcopalians believe that God is the originator of all creation and created all humans equally in God's image, worthy of dignity, love, liberty, and life-giving relationships with God and each other. Our scriptures, Jesus' way of love, and our baptismal covenant call us to love God and each other as ourselves, to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to care for creation. Responding to God's abundant grace and love, we affirm the call to empower women and girls in all their diversity, including those identifying as transgender[3] and non-binary persons.

Our Christian values explain The Episcopal Church's affirmation of United Nations international conventions, agreements and declarations calling for just and equal treatment of women and girls[4] in all their diversity. Episcopalians support women and girls through their mission, programs[5], legislation, policies and advocacy by individuals, women's groups, congregations, dioceses, schools, seminaries, agencies and networks. Women and girls participate in society as innovators, entrepreneurs, stakeholders, decision-makers, educators, caretakers, Indigenous and traditional knowledge keepers, storytellers and speakers.

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[1] The Most Reverend Michael Bruce Curry is the Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church. He submits this statement as the Church's spokesperson charged by its Church's *Canons and Constitutions* to "speak God's work this Church and its episcopate in its corporate capacity" (*Canons and Constitutions of The Episcopal Church*, 2015. Title I, Canon 2, Sec. 4 (a)(2).)

[2] The Episcopal Church is incorporated by the State of New York as "The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America."

[3] GC 2018-C022: Support End of Discrimination Against Transgender and Non-Binary People.

[4] GC 2018-A039: Affirm the Work of The Episcopal Church at the United Nations; GC 2015-A020: Urge Episcopalians to Support the UN and Be Informed of the Church's Consultative Status; 2015-D07: Ratify UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities; 1994-C024: Call for Ratification of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, etc.

[5] GC 2012-A076: Recognize Mission and Work in Small Congregations.

Episcopalians have embraced evolutions in innovation and technology, and education in a digital age, over decades[6]. From 1973 - 2022, Episcopal governing bodies adopted 37 resolutions on technology[7], expressing "gratitude"[8] and encouraging broad operational and programmatic adoption, including online resources and communications. Episcopalians addressed education in a digital age as early as 1988, with governing bodies encouraging use of computers in educational ministry[9]. Since then, Episcopal churches, schools and seminaries have adapted online tools for Christian theological education, formation[10] and training[11]. For example, the National Association of Episcopal Schools has provided a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers and chaplains around the responsible use of technology in Episcopal schools. Churches and schools offer scholarships for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and online connection hubs, and the Church has developed an online search tool for ministry discernment committees and female clergy applicants[12]. Episcopalians have called for public investment in economic transition for education and job training for growing industries such as the technology sector[13].

While celebrating advancements, realized in part by and for women and girls, we urge member states, United Nations entities, and civil society to:

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[6] Computers (1970s), internet and smartphones (1990s), social media (2000s), videoconferencing and remote working patterns (2010s), and transformed working and socializing patterns since the COVID-19 pandemic (2020s).

[7] See https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_topic_search.pl?topic=Technology. Innovations began with encouraging computer use (GC 1973-B167: Request CPF to Negotiate Computer Use with the Clergy Deployment Office), new tools for Christian formation and education, operational programming, electronic records retention and preservation (GC 2000-A016: Affirm the Responsibility of the Archives for Electronic Records Preservation), training in industry best practices for technology and communications (GC 2009-A046: Examine the Technologies, Policies and Practices Supporting Communication), use technology to accomplish an appropriate portion of their work using online tools, conference calls, and video conferences (GC 2006-A051: Direct Interim Bodies to Use Technology to Work Efficiently and Economically), examining the technologies, policies and practices of supporting communication (GC 2009-A046: Examine the Technologies, Policies and Practices Supporting Communication), appointing a Working Group on Science, Technology and Faith (GC 1997-D024:Appoint a Working Group on Science, Technology and Faith)as well as its own curriculum (GC 2000-D011: Authorize Development of a Science, Technology and Faith Curriculum), communications via email, websites, YouTube and social media, electronic voting at church meetings (2000, GC 2015-A119: Amend Canon III.5.2(b)), electronically convening church meetings, worship and prayer activities, developing coordinated strategic communications plans for mission and ministry (1997, GC 2009-A047: Conduct a Survey and Propose a Strategic Communication Plan, GC 2012-A026: Develop Strategic Information Technology Plan), equipping facilities with needed technologies and digital communications networks (2012); providing liturgies electronically (2012), engaging in social media (2012), challenging congregations to have a website by 2015 (GC 2012-A025: Challenge Congregations to Have a Website), digital evangelism (GC 2015-B009: Develop a Digital Evangelism Initiative) leveraging social media for evangelism (2015, GC 2015-A172: Create a Task Force for Social Media Evangelism and GC 2018-A081:Commend a Paper on Social Media for Evangelism, GC 2018-A082: Urge Completion of Curriculum on Social Media for Evangelism), providing training and insight on how to engage the world through the digital channel, affordable church websites, etc. Generally speaking, Episcopalians have adapted with the times, forming groups and networks such as the Information Technology Cooperative Network (GC 2006-D082: Launch an Information Technology Cooperative Network and GC 2009-D058:Authorize an Information Technology Cooperative Network of TEC), Episcopal Digital Network (an ad-supported media network that delivered news, information and resources to church leaders, members and general public, and later was folded into Episcopal News Service) and Episcopal Communicators, which have been central to the thinking, trial use and adoption of these technologies.

[8] GC 2003-D057: Express Gratitude for Expanded Technology at General Convention

[9] GC 1988-A072: Direct Church Staff to Use Computers to Communicate on Educational Matters

[10] See, for example, Forma's 2022 conference offering on hybridization- https://www.forma.church/forma-2022/.

[11] Includes anti-racism training, multicultural education, language classes, Safe Church and Safeguarding God's Children training, clergy training on suicide prevention, alcohol addiction.

[12] GC 2012-A143: Develop a Search Tool

[13] GC 2018-D006: Call for Public Investment and Community Participation in Transition to New Economies and GC 2022 D048: Supporting Public Investment in Post-High School Education and Training.

Extend accessibility to all and prioritize marginalized women and girls

Innovation and technology, and education in a digital age, empower women and girls by extending access to health care, education and training, flexible work arrangements and online community. Yet, the benefits are unequally experienced. We must close the unequal digital divide in availability and accessibility to technological know-how, digital equipment, infrastructure, and public services. People in geographically isolated communities and developing countries, people with disabilities, marginalized groups of women and girls and vulnerable communities are often left behind. Women with less education, older generations and women in traditional societal gender roles may not grasp or have access to technology's applications. Women and girls lag in educational and career opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Innovation and technology demand significant research, public investments, community participation, budgetary priorities and gender-responsive design and policies to be sustainable and inclusive.

Decision-makers also must confront sexism, colonialism, racism and discrimination as root causes and drivers that have marginalized women and girls for hundreds of years. We declare unacceptable the inequalities and sufferings experienced by Indigenous women[14]; women of color; women of African descent; women experiencing discrimination for their ethnicity, race, caste, descent[15], language, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression[16]; women with disabilities[17]; women experiencing poverty; migrants, refugees, internally displaced, undocumented, or stateless women; rural women; older and ageing women; and women heads of households. Often, they are not consulted on matters affecting them directly, and are especially vulnerable to online stereotyping and bullying. When Episcopalians embraced the call to "leave no one behind" and "reach the furthest behind first" in Agenda 2030[18], they committed to prioritizing these populations.

Ensure human rights protections, safety and security

In 2022, Episcopalians acknowledged that technology opens new doors for connection and possibility but also mechanisms for surveillance and intrusion, and that we have not fully grappled with practical and ethical implications of the Digital Age[19]. They recognized technology's uses, abuses, possibilities and detriments in our daily and institutional lives, and the ethical implications of the new Digital Age for connections to each other and to creation. Furthermore, despite their benefits, technologies jeopardize the dignity, privacy, security and human rights of women and girls through identity theft, fraud, tracking tools, manipulative algorithms, involuntary permanent data collection and unregulated artificial intelligence.

Technology also exacerbates and generates new encounters, spaces and forms of violence against women and girls: online abuse targeting women in leadership and public life, social media's negative effects on mental health, cyberbullying, exposure to age-inappropriate, sexualized and violent content, cyberstalking and harassment, online grooming by sexual predators, prostitution rings and human trafficking networks, nonconsensual sexting, and revenge porn. These violations call for greater awareness, education and protection of human rights, digital regulatory action, and law enforcement. Episcopal efforts to address these concerns include the National Association of Episcopal Schools partnering with the International Task Force on Child Protection to explore strategies for keeping young people safe while promoting human rights.

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[14] GC 2012-A131: Express Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples.

[15] GC 2000-D024: Calls on U.S. Government to Condemn All Forms of Caste based Discrimination; GC 2015-A049: Prioritize Gender Equality Concerns in Foreign and Church Aid; GC 2012-A016: Affirm the Moral Responsibility to Protect Populations from Atrocities.

[16] GC 2018-C022: Support End of Discrimination Against Transgender and Non-Binary People.

[17] GC 2018-D090: Engaging the Church in Advocacy for Disability Rights.

[18] EXC102016.30: Support for U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.

[19] GC 2022-D020: Addressing Implications of the Digital Age.

Accelerate gender equality education for all

Innovation and technology have not overcome the overarching systemic barriers that cause persistent gender inequalities. We must continually address gender imbalances in meeting basic socio-economic, social and political needs and promote gender equality education. Gender equality only will be realized once the whole of society understands its social, economic, and political benefits and agrees to transform root causes.

The Episcopal Church urges member states, the United Nations, civil society and all people to

- universally observe international legal frameworks including Agenda 2030, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography[20];
- allocate 0.7% of national operating budgets for Sustainable Development Goals[21];
- research and report scientific evidence of impact on and responses by women and girls using gender-specific indicators and sex-disaggregated data[22];
- support public investment to close the digital wealth and racial divide in access to technology and technology education;
- engage women in decisions affecting themselves, their families, and communities;
- lift women's leadership, support gender inclusive approaches to and make available as resources institutions and providers working with poverty alleviation, and addressing inequalities;
- amplify voices and prioritize participation of marginalized women and girls in planning, resource allocation and programs;
- uphold the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous women and girls[23];
- regulate technology companies to protect consumers, especially children and youth, from unreasonable surveillance, personal data collection, addictive features, and harmful content;
- regulate digital technology and artificial intelligence use in the workplace;
- regulate data collection and storage by public authorities, including local, national and international law enforcement agencies, to safeguard society while preventing unreasonable intrusions of privacy;
- ensure data and technology companies conduct ethical reviews of their products and impacts, especially for vulnerable populations, and create processes to mitigate harm;
- promote human rights education and awareness and enforce protections locally, nationally and internationally;
- continue multi-stakeholder collaborations and grassroots awareness campaigns to end gender violence[24];
- strengthen regulatory and judicial protections in digital spaces, including law enforcement, for all women and girls, especially survivors of violence;
- extend access to basic resources, public services, social protections and sustainable infrastructure for women and girls, including education and training, universal health care, maternal[25] and infant health, sexual and

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[20] GC 1991-A091: Endorse United Nations' Statement on Discrimination Against Women; GC 1994-C024: Call for Ratification of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[21] GC 2018-B027 Encourage Gender-Inclusive Responses to Climate Change.

[22] GC 2018-B027 Encourage Gender-Inclusive Responses to Climate Change.

[23] Enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and supported by GC 2009-D035: Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery.

[24] GC2012-A139: Endorse Efforts Against Gender Violence.

[25] GC 2018-D014: Addressing Maternal Mortality.

reproductive health[26], equal access to health care regardless of gender[27], paid family leave, affordable and safe childcare, viable social security systems[28], living wages for all[29] and equal pay for equal work;

- promote gender equality education for all, irrespective of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression[30], and engage men and boys;
- ensure gender equality in consultation, policy design, decision-making, leadership and representation.

Innovation, technology and education in a digital age must benefit and protect all. The Episcopal Church calls upon member states, the United Nations, civil society and all people to uphold the values, principles, programs and legislation for gender justice and human rights.

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[26] GC 2018-D032: Advocate for Gender Equity, Including Reproductive Rights, in Healthcare.

[27] GC 2018-D032: Equal Access to Health Care Regardless of Gender.

[28] GC 2018-C041: Repair America's Safety Net.

[29] GC 2015-C048: Support Living Wage and Increase in the Minimum Wage.

[30] GC 2018-C022: Support End of Discrimination Against Transgender and Non-Binary People.