

**THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN UTAH**

**RESOLUTION FOR DIOCESAN CONVENTION 2023**

In order that debate may be directed toward the resolution and not toward its justification, only the "RESOLVED..." will be moved. The explanation of the resolution will, however, be distributed to delegates. Resolutions may be submitted to the Convention by the Bishop, Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, a member of the Clergy canonically resident in the Diocese, a Warden, a delegate to the Convention, a Diocesan Council representative of any Region of the Diocese, a Vestry, A Bishop’s Committee, a Congregation, a Diocesan Commission or a Diocesan Committee.

**TOPIC: Replenish and Restore Great Salt Lake**

1 **RESOLVED:**

2 WHEREAS Great Salt Lake is facing unprecedented danger; without a significant increase in water  
3 flow to the lake, its disappearance could cause immense damage to Utah’s public health,  
4 environment, and economy, according to the 2023 report “Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue  
5 Great Salt Lake from Ongoing Collapse”; and

6 WHEREAS Episcopalians around the world believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven  
7 and earth; and

8 WHEREAS Our Baptismal Covenant calls us to strive for justice and peace among all people; and

9

10 WHEREAS during the sacrament of Baptism, the water is blessed:

11 *Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of*  
12 *creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In*  
13 *it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the*  
14 *Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life. We*  
15 *thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism.*

16

17 WHEREAS in 2018, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church affirmed the President of  
18 the House of Deputies’ and the Presiding Bishop’s call to the Church to recognize Care of Creation  
19 as an integral part of The Jesus Movement; and

20 WHEREAS we Episcopalians residing in the Diocese of Utah, as Christians, acknowledge the  
21 Gospel lessons of Jesus – including his journey into the wilderness, his ministry centering around  
22 the Sea of Galilee and his interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well (Φωτεινή or Photini) –  
23 and the vital role of water that is an essential part of God’s magnificent creation; and

24 WHEREAS prior to the colonization of Utah by people of European ancestry, the Great Salt Lake  
25 watershed was the resplendent life-giving home of the original Ute, Goshute, Shoshone, and Paiute  
26 people who lived near Great Salt Lake, along its tributaries and in mountain canyons. These Native  
27 American people have endured, despite challenges, as sovereign tribes today throughout and  
28 beyond Utah; and

29 WHEREAS our Episcopal forebears migrated to Utah in 1867 during the territorial period and  
30 before the Transcontinental Railroad united Utah with our American nation. Episcopalians

31 planted, grew congregations, and made tangible, spiritual, life-affirming contributions to society  
32 such as the first hospital and schools built in Utah Territory; and

33 WHEREAS Great Salt Lake and its watershed are deeply valued by people from many different  
34 spiritual traditions as places of inspiration, connection, renewal and solace; and

35  
36 WHEREAS Great Salt Lake is a keystone ecosystem in the Western Hemisphere. The lake and its  
37 wetlands provide minerals for Utah's industries, thousands of local jobs, and habitat for 10 million  
38 migratory birds. Fertilizer and brine shrimp from the lake feed millions of people worldwide. The  
39 lake provides \$2.5 billion in direct economic activity yearly, as well as increasing precipitation,  
40 suppressing toxic dust, and supporting 80% of Utah's wetlands; and

41  
42 WHEREAS Great Salt Lake's water has historically suppressed natural and man-made pollutants  
43 such as arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel, chromium, lead, copper and selenium in addition to  
44 organic contaminants. Now and as the lake disappears, more than thousands of square miles of  
45 contaminated lakebed is exposed to windstorms which already carry toxic dust into the Wasatch  
46 Front airshed; and

47  
48 WHEREAS dust deposition on the mountains of Utah has received attention over the past several  
49 years. Dust drastically reduces the albedo of the snow. As a result, the snow absorbs more of the  
50 incoming solar radiation from the sun and thus melts quicker and sooner than a clean snowpack.  
51 The dust events exacerbate a growing problem in the western United States, earlier and more rapid  
52 snowmelt. This has implications for the concept of sustainability because it stresses the  
53 environment and people that rely on the water; and

54  
55 WHEREAS it is critical for the state of Utah to maintain a minimum lake level of 4,200 feet above  
56 sea level. Below this elevation, salinity begins to rise above healthy levels for the lake's food webs  
57 and much of the lake's toxic sediment becomes exposed. Below 4,200 feet, we are forced to make  
58 major compromises and tradeoffs between the lake's ecological, societal, and economic dimensions;  
59 and

60  
61 WHEREAS the urgent, existential threat posed by our warming planet and the rapidly disappearing  
62 Great Salt Lake will disproportionately and negatively impact the underserved, underprivileged,  
63 Black, Indigenous and people of color living along the Wasatch Front; and

64  
65 WHEREAS the lake is a vital link in the Pacific Flyway, providing food and habitat for more than  
66 10 million migratory birds and wildlife throughout the Wasatch Front. Almost 350 bird species  
67 depend on Great Salt Lake habitats, including globally significant numbers of Eared Grebes,  
68 Tundra Swans, Snowy Plovers, American Avocets, and multiple species of ducks, phalaropes, owls,  
69 and blackbirds. The lake's diverse wetland, island, and open-water environments are becoming even  
70 more crucial as habitat is lost or degraded throughout the western United States; and

71  
72 WHEREAS Great Salt Lake also provides numerous ecosystem services, including protection of air  
73 quality, removal of water pollution, and moderation of local weather. The lake is foundational to  
74 our cultural identity. Its dramatic vistas have inspired countless scientists, pioneers, artists, writers,  
75 photographers, and recreationists. We believe that our stewardship of the lake reflects our  
76 community's cultural values. Protecting the lake is not only a question of public health, economy, or

77 environment; it shows our moral commitment to create a healthy home for ourselves, other living  
78 things, and future generations; and

79  
80 WHEREAS excessive water use is destroying Great Salt Lake. At 19 feet below its average natural  
81 level since 1850, the lake is in uncharted territory. It has lost 73% of its water and 60% of its  
82 surface area. Our unsustainable water use is desiccating habitat, exposing toxic dust, and driving  
83 salinity to levels incompatible with the lake’s food webs. The lake’s drop has accelerated since 2020,  
84 with an average deficit of 1.2 million acre-feet per year. If this loss rate continues, the lake as we  
85 know it is on track to disappear in five years; and

86  
87 WHEREAS examples from around the world show that saline lake loss triggers a long-term cycle  
88 of environmental, health and economic suffering. Without a coordinated rescue, we can expect  
89 widespread air and water pollution, numerous Endangered Species Act listings, and declines in  
90 agriculture, industry, and overall quality of life; and

91  
92 WHEREAS tributaries of Great Salt Lake – many of which form our watershed – are in great peril  
93 from development of mining operations in Parley’s Canyon, an industrial-scale ski resort gondola in  
94 Little Cottonwood Canyon and hydroelectric dams on the Bear River which will reduce water to the  
95 lake; and

96  
97 WHEREAS the Commission on Peace & Justice of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah (the  
98 “Commission”), which is charged by canon with the task of developing and implementing  
99 recommendations and strategies on issues of peace and justice, has examined the issues of Great  
100 Salt Lake, its watershed, and tributaries – Jordan River, Bear River, Weber River and West Desert –  
101 as they relate to the mission and the environmental justice concerns of the Diocese; and

102  
103 WHEREAS, based on such examination, the Commission has determined that the Diocese of  
104 Utah’s commitment to preserving and protecting God’s creation mandates that the Great Salt Lake  
105 be preserved and has therefore recommended that the Diocese and its congregations call for its  
106 passage; and

107  
108 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the 2023 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of  
109 Utah urges its congregations and their members to:

- 110 • stand with the scientists who have studied the lake for decades and have composed the  
111 report which we have cited in this resolution; and  
112
- 113 • recognize that Great Salt Lake – which is at an existential moment – plays an important role  
114 in the future of our civilization along the Wasatch Front; and
- 115 • urge our leaders to use any and all measures to deliver at least one million additional acre  
116 feet of water to restore the ecosystem and habitat of Great Salt Lake in the immediate near  
117 term; and

- 118 • endorse the passage of Utah law to grant binding prior appropriation first-share water rights  
119 to Great Salt Lake – which is and has been the source of our watershed’s ecosystem for  
120 10,000 years – in order to maintain a 4,200 foot minimum lake level; and
  
- 121 • pull together with other faith and community leaders who are uncompromising with the  
122 facts to empower solutions and the will to make hard choices for the Beloved Community  
123 in Utah; and
  
- 124 • maintain a healthy Great Salt Lake for wildlife and avian habitat, the brine shrimp industry,  
125 the ski industry and for the 2.8 million people living in the lake’s air- and watershed; and
  
- 126 • recommend that the Episcopal Diocese of Utah and its congregations deploy waterwise and  
127 xeriscape landscaping at the Episcopal Church Center and at our congregational churches at  
128 a minimum; and
  
- 129 • support organizations which are working tirelessly to save Great Salt Lake, its ecosystem  
130 and its watershed such as Friends of Great Salt Lake, Save our Great Salt Lake, Great Salt  
131 Lake Audubon, Save Our Canyons, Wasatch Backcountry Alliance, Save Parleys and  
132 Friends of Alta.

133 *Academic Credits: Benjamin Abbott – BYU professor of ecohydrology, ecosystem ecology, aquatic biogeochemistry,*  
 134 *environmental and economic sustainability; Bonnie Baxter – Westminster College professor of photobiology of*  
 135 *halophiles (salt-tolerant bacteria), the microbial diversity of Great Salt Lake and applications of extremely*  
 136 *hypersaline ecosystems, in particular resistance to ultraviolet light and desiccation by halophiles, and director of the*  
 137 *GSL Institute at Westminster College; et al. We are grateful for their environmental stewardship of our natural*  
 138 *resources and for their support of the Episcopal Church in Utah.*

139

Date: March 22, 2023

Moved by The Commission on Peace and Justice

Congregation/Organization: Diocese

+ + +

**EXPLANATION:** The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Utah have called us as Christians to the Care of Creation standing as witness, affirming liberating advocacy, practicing life-giving conservation and restoring of damage to planet earth – our island home – in our communities. The Commission on Peace and Justice of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah was formed to draw attention to the critical issues facing our diocese and society at large. We follow Jesus, so we love the world God loves. Concerned for the global climate emergency, drawing on diverse approaches for our diverse contexts, we commit to form and restore loving, liberating, life-giving relationships with all of Creation.

**Fiscal Note:** N/A