



Alaska State Legislature

1974

Source:

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SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 33

Honoring the Right Reverend William Jones Gordon, Jr., Bishop of Alaska.

BE IT RESOLVED

BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

WHEREAS on Friday, May 11, 1973, Alaska's Episcopalians listened almost in disbelief as the third Bishop of Alaska, William Jones Gordon, Jr., announced he would step down from his episcopal office not later than September 1, 1974; and

WHEREAS, born May 6, 1918, in Spray, North Carolina, the son of the Rev. William Jones Gordon and Anna Barrow (Clark), Bishop Gordon received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of North Carolina in 1940, the Bachelor and Doctor of Divinity from Virginia Theological Seminary in 1943 and 1953, respectively; and

WHEREAS Bill Gordon's service as an Episcopal clergyman in Alaska dates from 1943 when he became Deacon-in-Charge of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Seward, then moved with Shirley, his bride of but a few weeks, to Point Hope where for five years he was Priest-in-Charge of St. Thomas Mission, and during these years traveled some 6,000 miles, usually alone, by dog team to serve the outstations at Point Lay, Kivalina and Kotzebue; and

WHEREAS on May 18, 1948, he was consecrated Bishop of the then Missionary District of Alaska; at age 30, he became the youngest bishop in the Protestant Episcopal Church; and

WHEREAS for more than three decades Bishop Gordon has ministered the Word of God and shared His love throughout "The Great Land;" he is one of the few Alaskans of whom it can be said that he knows most of the state and its people; few have experienced more intimately the heartbreaks and hopes, the isolation and the challenge of Alaska; and

WHEREAS with love and charity toward every Alaskan, Bishop Bill Gordon has reached out across the vastness that is Alaska -- across its nearly impassable mountains, the unending tundra and muskeg, the broad and wild rivers -- and threaded his way by steamer, ferry, motor launch, dog team and ultimately by plane along the waterways, down the trails and across the air corridors to the parishes and missions that comprise his charge; whether winging his way on a mission of mercy to isolated Alaskans or keeping in touch with his widely scattered flock, Bill Gordon is known to most Alaskans, whatever their faith, as the "flying bishop;" and

WHEREAS, as one of the state's best known "bush pilots," Bishop Gordon, who learned to fly in 1949, pioneered in the use of the airplane in church work and has logged more than 8,300 hours and flown more than 1,000,000 miles (averaging 60,000 miles annually) in single-engine aircraft, some affectionately known as the "Blue Box," during his 26 years as Bishop of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, in addition, he has spearheaded and fostered the concept of the "ministry of the laity," and led in the development of cooperative Christianity by organizing and serving as the first president of the Alaska Council of Churches and encouraging the formation of ecumenical congregations; and

WHEREAS what Bill Gordon has preached in terms of Christian brotherhood, he has practiced in his life's ministry: witness the emerging policy of training Native Alaskan peoples as priests to take over the missions of the Episcopal church in an increasing number of villages throughout the state; in 1957, he ordained the first Native Alaskan priest, 15 since that date, and in 1974, seven more Native Alaskans will be ordained; and

WHEREAS Bishop Gordon long has been particularly interested in the needs of the Alaskan Native people, actively promoting the Native land claims settlement before this idea was widely accepted throughout Alaska; during the years before a just settlement was arrived at, the Episcopal Church under the Bishop's leadership was instrumental in supporting financially the Alaska Federation of Natives in presenting the needs of Indian and Eskimo peoples, both to the residents of this state and to the country at large; and

WHEREAS, Bishop Gordon, by virtue of his years of concern for, and experience with Native peoples, has served on the Episcopal National Committee on Indian Work, and most recently as Chairman of the Overseas Bishops, composed of the 19 overseas dioceses of the Episcopal Church; and, he is now the senior diocesan bishop in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States; and

WHEREAS, this noted Alaskan was selected by the National Junior Chamber of Commerce as one of America's "Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Year" in 1953, was presented Sheldon Jackson College's "Christian Citizenship Award for Outstanding Missionary Service to Alaska" in 1963; and, in recognition of his distinguished service to this state, has been selected as "'49er of the Year" on three occasions during his 30 years in Alaska, and also has been elected to membership in the Alaska Hall of Fame;

BE IT RESOLVED by the Alaska State Legislature that on the occasion of his relinquishment of episcopal duties, the members

of this body salute the Rt. Rev. William Jones Gordon, Jr., Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska, and honor him for his service to Alaskans of every faith, creed and race; with humility and purpose, his leadership inspired us all; it has truly been: "One in the Spirit;" and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of the Alaska State Legislature acknowledge with gratitude and pride Bishop Gordon's announced desire to remain in Alaska, continuing to make his home in Fairbanks; we are confident that he will be called to further service in this state for its people: Alaska always will have need of a good shepherd.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to Bishop and Mrs. William J. Gordon, Jr., and to their children, Paneen (Mrs. Douglas Davidson), William J., III, Rebecca (Mrs. Gerald Chisum) and Anna Clark.