

Episcopal Church lays off 14 as presiding bishop marks 'major milestone' in churchwide realignment

by [David Paulsen](#)

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The headquarters of the Episcopal Church in New York City. (Photo: Egan Millard/Episcopal News Service)

Sean Rowe, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, announced [staff cuts and the reorganization of several church departments](#) last week as part of an anticipated structural realignment that will eventually save an estimated \$2.13 million a year in personnel costs.

The announcement, including news that 14 current employees' positions were eliminated, follows Rowe's [presentations to the denomination's executive council](#) outlining the ways he hopes to reorient churchwide operations to prioritize serving dioceses and congregations. The plans were announced to continuing staff in a memo and an afternoon Zoom meeting before the public release.

In his February 20 letter to the church, Rowe said these changes involved "difficult decisions," though the realignment is "the first major milestone" toward strengthening church ministries at the local level.

The lengthy announcement covered a wide range of changes in staffing, departmental organization, and support for ongoing ministries. The church remains committed to church planting, Rowe said, though those efforts will be reorganized in ways he did not specify.

Changes also are planned in how the church promotes evangelism and Christian formation. And the offices of Transition Ministry and Pastoral Development will become part of a newly formed "leadership development department."

The executive council, the denomination's governing body between meetings of the general convention, first proposed a "strategic adaptive realignment of our institutional structures" in a June 2023 resolution. The realignment also aims to achieve a financial goal identified by the 81st general convention in June 2024. That \$143 million spending plan called for nearly \$3.6 million in personnel savings over three years.

The cost reductions to be achieved by Rowe's staff realignment will not take full effect until the 2026 budget year, but the \$2.13 million in annual savings are expected to exceed the goal set by general convention.

The announcement did not specify which positions would be eliminated or in which departments. Instead, it provided a numerical snapshot of the staff reductions: Sixteen employees volunteered this month to participate in a retirement incentive program; fourteen additional employees were told that their positions had been eliminated, and they were offered "a generous severance package and substantial outplacement program to support them as they discern their next vocational steps;" and an additional 13 vacant positions will not be filled.

Of the remaining churchwide staff, 17 will be invited to participate in a new employee-development program.

“This is one way we hope to develop talent throughout the organization to build capacity for leadership in the years ahead,” Rowe said.

He also announced three changes to his senior leadership team

Rebecca Blachly, director of the Washington, DC-based office of governmental relations, will take on a broader role as chief of public policy witness. She will oversee global partnership, ecumenical and interreligious relations and Episcopal Migration Ministries, which laid off 22 of its 33 employees in January after President Donald Trump suspended the federal refugee resettlement program.

Charles Robertson, who previously served as canon to the presiding bishop for ministry beyond the Episcopal Church, will remain on the staff as canon and senior advisor to the presiding bishop. His priorities will include engagement with theological seminaries, assistance to the Diocese of Haiti, partnerships across the Anglican Communion and fundraising.

Rowe also concluded that the canonical role of chief operating officer does not need to be filled. Jane Cisluycis, who had been serving as acting chief operating officer, will continue fulfilling many of her existing responsibilities in a newly created position, senior director of operations. —Episcopal News Service