



The Rt. Rev. Mark J. Lawrence, XIV Bishop of South Carolina

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to you in this Christmas season to share some news. Today, parishes representing approximately 75 percent of baptized members in our Diocese joined in filing for a declarative judgment in a South Carolina Circuit Court against the Episcopal Church (TEC). We are asking the court to declare that The Episcopal Church (TEC) has no right to the Diocese's identity and property or that of its parishes.

We are saddened that we feel it necessary to ask a court to protect our property rights, but recent actions compelled us to take this action. As you know, The Episcopal Church (TEC) has begun the effort to claim the Diocese of South Carolina's identity by calling for a convention to identify new leadership for the diocese, creating a website using the Diocesan seal and producing material that invokes the name and identity of the Diocese of South Carolina.

Our suit asks the court to prevent TEC from infringing on the protected marks of the Diocese, including its seal and its historical names, and to prevent it from assuming the Diocese's identity, which was established long before TEC was formed. It also asks the court to protect our parish and Diocesan property, including church buildings and rectories, which our forefathers built and even shed blood over, and you have maintained without any investment of any kind from the national church.

The underlying point is that the Diocese disassociated from TEC in October 2012, after TEC attempted to remove me as your bishop. The congregations, participating in the lawsuit, many of the Diocese's largest and oldest, join many others in disassociating from TEC.

Of our 71 parishes and approximately 30,000 baptized members, 22,244 members of you have decided to remain with the Diocese. Fifty Three Hundred say they want to be with The Episcopal Church- with nearly half of those from one church in Charleston, and 1900 are still undecided. We respect the decision of those who wish to remain with TEC but believe they must also respect the identity and property of the Diocese of South Carolina, which has been painstakingly built over two centuries.

Though we have separated from TEC, as have 200 parishes and four other dioceses across the United States, we remain committed to our vision of Making Biblical Anglicans for a Global Age, as well as helping to shape emerging Anglicanism in the 21st Century. It is encouraging that so many Provinces of the Anglican Communion have expressed their continuing support for this Diocese of South Carolina.

I ask that you join me in praying for a peaceful and timely resolution of this situation so that we may continue to freely uphold the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as we have received them and as faithful stewards of the gospel and the church's resources to joyfully proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who live across the street and around the world.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

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