

A Statement by the President of the Disciplinary Board for Bishops

Regarding the Bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina

On November 22, the Disciplinary Board for Bishops met via conference call to consider whether, based on information previously submitted to the Board by lay communicants and a priest of the Diocese of South Carolina, the Bishop of that Diocese, the Right Rev'd Mark Lawrence, has abandoned the communion of The Episcopal Church.

Based on the information before it, the Board was unable to make the conclusions essential to a certification that Bishop Lawrence had abandoned the communion of the Church. I have today communicated the Board's action to Bishop Lawrence by telephone, to be followed by an e-mail copy of this statement.

The abandonment canon (Title IV, Canon 16) is quite specific, designating only three courses of action by which a Bishop is to be found to have abandoned the church: first, "by an open renunciation of the Doctrine, Discipline or Worship of the Church"; second, "by formal admission into any religious body not in communion with" the Church; and, third, "by exercising Episcopal acts in and for a religious body other than the Church or another church in communion with the Church, so as to extend to such body Holy Orders as the Church holds them, or to administer on behalf of such religious body Confirmation without the express consent and commission of the proper authority in the Church...." Applied strictly to the information under study, none of these three provisions was deemed applicable by a majority of the Board.

A basic question the Board faced was whether actions by conventions of the Diocese of South Carolina, though they seem—I repeat, *seem*--to be pointing toward abandonment of the Church and its discipline by the **diocese**, and even though supported by the Bishop, constitute abandonment by the **Bishop**. A majority of the members of the Board was unable to conclude that they do.

It is also significant that Bishop Lawrence has repeatedly stated that he does not intend to lead the diocese out of The Episcopal Church—that he only seeks a safe place within the Church to live the Christian faith as that diocese perceives it. I speak for myself only at this point, that I presently take the Bishop at his word, and hope that the safety he seeks for the apparent majority in his diocese within the larger Church will become the model for safety—a "safe place"—for those under his episcopal care who do not agree with the actions of South Carolina's convention and/or his position on some of the issues of the Church.

The Right Rev'd Dorsey F. Henderson, Jr.

President, Disciplinary Board for Bishops

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