



Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina

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September 23, 2010

Dear Members and Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina,

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies and the God of all encouragement, who encourages us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God."

(2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Yesterday a group within the Diocese known as the *Episcopal Forum of South Carolina* wrote to the House of Bishops and the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church urging them to investigate my actions as Bishop and the actions of our Standing Committee. They have cited seven concerns as the foundation for their request. While these are trying times for Episcopalians and there is much need for listening carefully to one another, I do not want to let these accusations stand or go without response. Perhaps in their anxiety they have done us all a favor—indeed, presenting me with a teachable moment for this diocese and, dare I hope to believe, for others as well who may have read their letter. I will strive to refrain from using ecclesiastical language (Episcopalianese) or unduly difficult theology. Unfortunately, due to the accusations, a certain amount of each is necessary. Nevertheless, I will tune my writing as well as I can for the person in the pew. I will proceed by first putting forth in italics the accusation. In most cases I will just use their language, then, give my response. This could be much longer, but there is little need to try your patience.

- a) *The Bishop has taken no disciplinary measures or legal action against the leadership of the St. Andrew's Parish, Mt. Pleasant, since it withdrew from TEC [The Episcopal Church] in March 2010.*

I met with the rector of St. Andrew's and have taken what I believe is godly and appropriate action to maintain the good order of the Church within this diocese, while seeking to keep the bonds of Christian fellowship between brothers and sisters in Christ free from rancor and misunderstanding. These are Christians with whom we have served side by side in the service of our Lord, whether on diocesan committees or in cooperative missions and ministry—Cursillo, missions to the Dominican Republic, St. John's Chapel on the East side, St. Christopher, Youth Events, just to name a few. The legal action that this diocese took against All Saints, Pawleys Island drained from the mission and ministry of this Diocese of South Carolina over \$500, 000 and along with losing the property bore only the sour fruit of animosity, broken relationships within families and long-time friendships, as well as within the larger community. Only now, through the sacrificial efforts of the parishioners and the leadership of what is now Christ the

King Parish, Waccamaw and others, is the sour fruit of animosity being replaced with the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, given the Biblical injunctions and the ruling of the Supreme Court of South Carolina (which even the “national” Church chose not to contest) I see no need to replicate that experience here in the Charleston community—unless it is the one of reconciliation. The Diocesan Convention affirmed me in this approach. You cannot make people love you, or bind them to your Church through coercion or fear. But if the Christian graces prevail may we not yet see our unity restored?

- b) *The Ecclesiastical Authority (bishop or Standing Committee) has done nothing to stop other parishes which outwardly appear to be moving in the direction of withdrawal from TEC.*

Actually my staff and I have met or spoken with the leadership of every parish in this diocese that has taken or which I have heard was preparing to take steps to change their documents based upon their understanding of the State Supreme Court’s ruling in the Pawleys Island case. The two parishes that had already taken this action have subsequently written letters assuring me of their commitment to this Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. For those preparing to take such steps we have counseled patience and have received assurances that their intention is not to leave. I have dealt with their concerns in a pastoral rather than a public way. Had those in the Episcopal Forum wanted to know about these matters they could have asked me rather than first accuse me of inaction. What they and some of our Episcopal Church leaders ought to do is spend a bit more time listening to and seeking to understand what is motivating the leadership of some of our strongest and most dynamic parishes to even consider such actions.

- c) *The Ecclesiastical Authority [bishop] has declared verbally and in writing that the Diocese of South Carolina is a “Sovereign Diocese” and that the Presiding Bishop has wrongfully intruded into this “sovereignty”.*

I learned long ago as a young man studying to be what was then referred to as a Lay Reader a very clear explication of our Church’s polity in this regard: Professor Powell Mills Dawley in his classic work in the Church Teaching Series states, The Presiding Bishop “...exercises no direct pastoral oversight of his own, nor does he possess visitatorial or juridical power within the independent dioceses of The Episcopal Church.” The Constitution of the Church affirms this fact. The history of this Diocese of South Carolina on numerous occasions has affirmed this independent or sovereign character. It ought to be of concern to every Episcopalian that there are those who would ignore this history and our constitutional heritage. An action which goes unchallenged may soon become a practice and a practice unchallenged may soon become policy or rule. I am not willing to surrender the freedom of this diocese or the historic polity of this Episcopal Church. For a further explanation of the intrusion issues behind my statement I would refer those interested to my [Bishop’s Address](#) at our Convention on March 26, 2010, (see www.dioceseofsc.org).

- d) *The Diocesan website has removed substantially all references to The Episcopal Church. Further, of the 44 parishes with working websites... over 25 1) have taken out "Episcopal", 2) have no link or mention of TEC or 3) have links to "partners"*

I'm not quite sure how to address the research and anxiety that this charge suggests, but let me begin by saying that as I drive around this diocese on visitations I see the familiar *The Episcopal Church Welcomes You* sign as a ubiquitous presence. The word "Episcopal" remains in much of our signage. The Episcopal Church flag flies above the beach at St. Christopher. I might illustrate the absurdity of their charge by noting that in their letter they never refer to this diocese as The Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina but only as The Diocese of South Carolina. Should one deduce from this fact that they themselves do not wish the word "Episcopal" in the title or is it merely that they fell back on the common usage here for over 200 years? If some parishes down play an institutional affiliation on their websites in an attempt to reach the unchurched or institutionally disinterested seeker is that some great travesty? Upon my visitations and confirmations I often meet with the candidates, I teach about the sacraments, about confirmation, about our being part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ, and our work as Episcopalians and Anglicans. Until the departure of St. Andrew's Mt Pleasant, this diocese was one of the few Episcopal Dioceses in the United States to grow faster than the demographic growth in the region. If we can keep a fossilized institutionalism from becoming the focus and emphasize through a living faith the transforming freedom that is found in the good news of Jesus Christ, we shall do so again!

- e) *Missions are being planted within the Diocese; however, the [bishop] will not recognize or approve the establishment of St. Mark's Chapel, Port Royal, a congregation of loyal Episcopalians that has doubled its membership over the past year.*

I have met several times with the leaders of St. Mark's Chapel, Port Royal—a fellowship of mostly disgruntled members of St. Helena's Beaufort. St. Helena's is one of the strongest and fastest growing parishes in the diocese—if not the country. The leaders of St. Mark's Fellowship are well aware of my concerns. I have allowed them access to retired priests, which as the bishop I licensed to officiate at services. I have even allowed vacationing clergy from other dioceses to preach and celebrate among this fellowship. There are many complex issues to this matter which date back to the time of Bishop Salmon's episcopacy that I shall not go into here. Frankly, this charge is a disappointing way for this group to repay my kindness to some of their requests.

- f) *With the support of the Ecclesiastical Authority a special Diocesan Convention held in October 2009 modified the declaration of conformity, signed by ordinands to the Priesthood or Diaconate, as specified in the Book of Common Prayer and the TEC Constitution....*

This is just a wrong understanding of what the Diocesan Convention approved. There has been no modification of the Declaration of Conformity. The ordinands sign only the Declaration as it appears in the Constitution & Canons of TEC and the Book of Common Prayer. The statement referenced is read as clarification of the teaching of this Church for the edification of the faithful in the midst of the many controversies today. I would ask those in the Forum which of the expressions of our heritage they find so offensive—what is expressed in the Creeds, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral or the theology of the historic prayer books? (For an intriguing discussion of this matter I suggest members of the Episcopal Forum or other interested persons read a scholarly article in the Journal of Episcopal Canon Law by Jonathan Michael Gray, an assistant Professor of Church History at the Virginia Seminary <http://www.vts.edu/canonlaw>)

g) With the support of the Bishop, the Standing Committee of the Diocese proposed six Resolutions for the Reconvened Convention to be held on October 15, 2010.....


In March we recessed the Diocesan Convention with the constitutional question still pending: The ability of a diocese to govern its common life in a manner that is obedient to the teaching of Holy Scripture (to which every ordained person in this Church has given his or her verbal and written assent), the received heritage of The Episcopal Church, and in accordance with the Constitution of TEC. This has remained unresolved or, more accurately stated, entirely unaddressed by the Presiding Bishop; therein leaving in question our ability to pursue our mission, free from unauthorized intrusions. We sent her the Resolution stating the Convention's desire that she relent from her unconstitutional intrusion by certified mail. This Resolution, supported by 85% of the clergy and lay delegates of the Convention, has received not so much as a phone call or a written note. The refusal of the Presiding Bishop to respond, along with the concerns we have discovered in the revised Title IV disciplinary canons is the reason for the continuation of the Annual Convention, (see [Alan Runyan and Mark McCall's article](#) on our Diocesan website www.dioceseofsc.org).

In Conclusion

It is increasingly clear that we are engaged in a worldwide struggle for the soul of Anglicanism in the 21st Century. This Diocese of South Carolina has been affirmed in our stand by numerous Dioceses and Provinces around the world: Archbishops and bishops from Ireland to Australia, Southeast Asia to Tanzania, from England to Egypt have pledged us their prayers and their hearts. What will emerge from this struggle we cannot say—but I am convinced of our vocation to Make Biblical Anglicans for a Global Age. It is far more than a slogan for a T-shirt. Not unlike a battalion in a military campaign which is ordered to hold a pass even against overwhelming odds, we are called to resist what appears is a self-destructive trajectory by many within The Episcopal Church. We are called to stand our ground and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ until it is no longer possible; and at the same time to continue to help shape the emerging Anglicanism in the 21st Century, which is increasingly less provincial, less

institutional and more relational. If this is our calling then we rejoice that his strength is made perfect in weakness. This is not a time to give-in nor give up; rather let us hold fast to the best of our Episcopal heritage while sharing Christ's transforming freedom—with hearts set free—to a needy world today.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mark Joseph Lawrence" with a small flourish at the end.

The Right Reverend Mark Joseph Lawrence