

Breaking News on Bishop Duncan's Deposition

Saturday, September 13th, 2008

Dear Friends of St Stephens,

I enclose a copy of a pastoral letter from Bishop Duncan to our Diocese that I received an hour ago. The Bishop informs us that the Presiding Bishop of our Church has informed all Bishops that there will be a vote this coming Thursday at the previously scheduled House of Bishops meeting to depose (remove) Bishop Duncan. You may also have heard that in this process, he is being prosecuted under canons of the church never intended for this purpose, canons that also allow the accused no trial, no hearings, and no due process.

There had been wide speculation that she would step back from this action under pressure from the international Anglican Communion and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

I spoke to Bishop Duncan this morning about the situation and some of the details behind it – and the challenges ahead. He asks for extended prayer leading up to Thursday's events and the scheduled vote to realign our Diocese at our Annual Convention on October 4th. I join him in his request. He let me know of his own confidence that God is faithful, and that His ways may often include hardship. He sounds well, and at peace.

Over my own years in ministry I have served under the leadership of some 7 or 8 different Bishops. Bob Duncan's faith in Christ, personal integrity, courage of leadership and love of our Communion have towered over them all (though he would not like me saying so). It has been an honor to serve alongside him and under him in this Diocese for the last 13 years. I know him to be a faithful shepherd of the sheep and a pastor to the pastors. He is loved and respected both at home and abroad.

The challenge we have had to face is that of a national church whose leadership is determined to depart from the fundamental principles of the Christian faith, including matters of core doctrine and ethics. They have embraced a 'new gospel', far more in tune with the agenda of the secular progressive left than the wisdom of the Bible. In so doing they have managed to run off hundreds of thousands of people from their spiritual home in the Episcopal Church and have plunged the entire Anglican Communion into a generation of conflict

For decades we have worked within the structures for the renewal and reform of this church. When we were met with intolerance and the official affirmation of sexual immorality, we took our concerns to the highest levels of the Anglican Communion, who have repeatedly affirmed our faith and our values as consistent with the most deeply held faith and values of Anglicans everywhere. Or almost everywhere.

The Episcopal Church, however, has repeatedly rebuffed the counsel of the Communion, preferring instead aggressive attacks through litigation and depositions on the conserving minority. We probed over and over again for negotiated settlements and provisional solutions that would provide reasonable guarantees to the integrity of our churches and ministries. In response, the actions of the leadership of the Episcopal Church have been intransigent, destructive and toxic.

In the end, our response has been to scrupulously follow the rules of our diocesan constitution to remove our accession clause to the Episcopal Church, taking our Diocese to another Province

of the Communion. In a short time, we hope to start a new Province in the United States, one based on the enduring values of the Christian faith and one dedicated to a new season of Gospel ministry to the people of this country and beyond – a church and fellowship where you would be happy to raise your children and grandchildren. We have received widespread encouragement from the Communion in this, most recently from the GAFCON Conference in Jerusalem this summer. I remain convinced this is the best strategy for the way forward in a difficult situation.

We have confidence that the clear majority of this Diocese backs our Bishop, and is weary beyond measure with the litigation, the threats and the spiritual innovations of our national church. We are prepared to move towards our historic vote at Diocesan Convention on October 4th, come what may over the next weeks. If that vote proves successful, and if Bob Duncan is removed as our Bishop this coming week, we will immediately move to welcome him back at the conclusion of that Convention.

In the meantime, I ask again for much prayer, and for us to be at our best in the worst of times – for the sake of Christ and his work among us.

Your grateful Pastor,

Geoff

PASTORAL LETTER FROM BISHOP ROBERT DUNCAN

13th September, A.D. 2008
St. Cyprian of Carthage

TO THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH:

Beloved in the Lord,

In a letter to the House of Bishops yesterday, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori made it clear that there will be a vote this coming Thursday on whether to depose me from the ministry of the Episcopal Church. The charge is abandonment of the Communion of the Church, a charge initiated by five priests and sixteen laypeople of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Much of the "evidence" in the case is put forward by the House of Bishops Property Task Force, drawn directly from the Calvary litigation. We have long suspected that a principal purpose in the Calvary litigation was to have me removed, by whatever means, before the realignment vote. Whatever the purported evidence, I continue to maintain that the House of Bishops "vote" will be a gross violation of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church.

There are two things I would say, and one thing I would ask.

First, whatever happens on Thursday as to my status, the Diocese will carry forward under rules long-ago established. If I am "removed," the Standing Committee will be the Ecclesiastical Authority. Together with all the leadership presently in place, both appointed and elected, the Standing Committee will carry us through to our October 4th Annual Convention and beyond. We as a Diocese will not be intimidated or turned from our over-riding commitment, which is

faithfulness to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ within the mainstream of Anglicanism.

Second, I want to share with you the text of a letter I wrote to the entire House of Bishops on August 24th. It addresses my situation as yet one more manifestation of the moral collapse of the Episcopal Church in recent years. Whatever is decided on Thursday, this is a tragic moment for the Episcopal Church.

Third, I ask you to pray, to pray for me, for Nara, for all our leaders, for our Diocese and, above all, for whatever will best serve our Lord's purposes. Today is the eleventh anniversary of my "seating" as diocesan bishop. No one could have imagined that we (or I) would be facing this unprecedented trial without a trial. But at the beginning I asked you all to pray. You said you would. As a result, God has done remarkable things with and through us all. So fear not. It is confidence in our faithful God that will carry us all through to a better day, to the other side of the vote on September 18th and the other side of votes on October 4th. I expect that God will still grant me many years of service to the people and the place I have come to love so much.

"[Because of the storm] they were frightened. But Jesus said to them: 'It is I; do not be afraid.'" [John 6:19b-20?]

Faithfully in Christ,

+Bob Pittsburgh

Bishop Duncan's August 24 letter to the House of Bishops is available as a pdf here:
<http://www.pitanglican.org/news/local/filesforposting/HOB080824Final.pdf>

This letter is available as a pdf suitable for printing here:
<http://www.pitanglican.org/news/local/filesforposting/duncanpastoral091308l.pdf>

This story is available on the web here:
<http://www.pitanglican.org/news/local/duncanpastoral091308/>

Geoff Chapman
Rector, St Stephen's
Sewickley, Pa

Email: gchapman@ststephenschurch.net
Web: <http://www.ststephenschurch.net/>
Blog: <http://geoffchapman.blogs.com/>
Cell: 412-720-2004
Work: 412-741-1790