

Bishop Duncan Removed as Bishop of Pittsburgh; Received as Bishop of Southern Cone

Friday, September 19th, 2008

Dear Friends of St Stephens,

It has been a wild week. Just 7 days ago I wrote to you about the surprising news that the House of Bishops in the Episcopal Church intended to bring Bishop Duncan's deposition (removal) to a vote. That vote has now taken place, and by an 88-35 majority they have unseated Bob Duncan as Bishop of Pittsburgh. He was immediately received into the Province of the Southern Cone as a Bishop, and will remain available to us in Pittsburgh as an administrative consultant through the weeks ahead.

We received the news yesterday while our Diocesan Clergy were gathered with Bishop Duncan at our annual Clergy Conference out in Ligonier. While it was not unexpected, it was a sober, heartbreaking moment, mixed with a strange sense of relief and hope! We loudly cheered and toasted the news that he had been immediately received as Bishop into the Province of the Southern Cone. As the evening went on there was a heightened sense of friendship, of love, and of the eagerness of the majority to move forward into the realignment – always tempered by the heartbreak of what our church has become.

What is the big picture that makes sense of these events?

There is a major movement going on in world Anglicanism (and – don't miss it - across all the historic mainline denominations). 'Realignment' is the key word. On one side are congregations and dioceses of biblical faith who are affiliating in new alignments for fellowship and gospel mission. They are generally called 'conservatives' because they want to conserve the historic, biblical faith of world Anglicanism. On the other side are congregations and dioceses who believe it is important to revise that historic faith in the light of modern understandings of justice. They are often called 'revisionists' (or 'progressives') because they want to revise the faith. Under the dominance of the progressive movement, the mainline denominations have suffered four decades of membership loss. The Episcopal Church has led the mainlines in these losses.

It would be fair to say that for some forty years we have tried to work within the structures of this church for the renewal and reform of the church, until about a decade ago the structures became so hostile, so toxic, to biblical faith that the long term future of our ministries was at risk. We appealed to the highest authorities in the Anglican Communion for support, and we sought special 'space' inside the Episcopal Church to guarantee the future continuity of our ministries. The Communion has supported us at every turn, from the historic 'Windsor Report' to the latest 'Tanzania Communique' (of

Jan '07, and affirmed unanimously by every Primate of the Anglican Church). Every proposal, however, has been met with delay and resistance from our House of Bishops. In their March '07 meeting they summarily rejected the Tanzania plan.

At that time, as a last measure, we developed the plan to reaffiliate, removing the accession clause of our Diocese to the Episcopal Church and replacing it with an accession to the Province of the Southern Cone of the Anglican Communion, carefully following the constitutional provisions for such change. Vote #1 happened at our Annual Meeting last year. Vote #2 (the required final vote) is scheduled for this coming October 4th, just two weeks away. The Episcopal Church has dealt with us as they have with every single parish and diocese that has chosen the path of realignment. They have refused repeated efforts at negotiated settlements, and instead have chosen a course of threats, litigation and depositions. The Episcopal Church seems determined to depart from the longstanding values and life of the Anglican Communion. We do not wish to depart with them. So we choose to realign to a different province of the Communion.

Bishop Duncan has given heroic and courageous leadership along these years, in the most difficult of circumstances. Inside the Episcopal Church (and from certain quarters of our Diocese) he has been opposed, reviled, ridiculed, and litigated. He has spent countless hours among his clergy and our parishes, and has travelled the world on behalf of the gospel, the realignment, and the future of the Anglican Communion. I have always known him as a friend, a mentor and a faithful, courageous leader. He is one of my heroes. I count it a blessing to serve under his oversight and alongside him in these remarkable days.

And now he has been deposed. It is further, tragic evidence of the hostility of the majority of the Episcopal Church to the historic faith of this Diocese and the majority consensus of the Anglican Communion. Statements of outrage at the actions of the Episcopal Church and support for our Bishop are pouring in from all over the globe.

What can we expect in the future?

I am full of encouragement that the majority of that convention will vote to realign. I am also encouraged by the hope that our 'stay' in the Province of the Southern Cone will be short, and that the Primates with whom we are happily working will authorize the launch of a new American Province next year. I would guess that the actions of the American House of Bishops will accelerate the timing of that launch, but we shall see.

If the vote on October 4th for realignment is successful, we will no longer be under the constitution and canons of the Episcopal Church, and will be free to fully devote ourselves to the work of the gospel and the building of a new province. The minority of the Diocese who choose to stay behind inside the Episcopal Church will in due time reorganize and move forward, and I have a number of good and faithful friends among

them. There will probably be litigation, but there are many, probably most, on both sides who are eager for a settlement and the opportunity to give grace as we move forward. We have hope that such voices will prevail, but again, we shall see what God gives us.

I remain convinced that it is His hand behind these events, reshaping us for what lies ahead. Between here and there we will have our share of hardships, but we have it on highest authority that hardships do come with the privilege of bearing the name of Jesus. We have it on similar authority that he will provide for us every step of the way.

Please be at prayer over these events. And let's be at our best, for the sake of our Lord Jesus and his gospel.

Faithfully,

Geoffrey W Chapman
Rector, St Stephens, Sewickley

Here is a roundup of the news:

Pittsburgh Tribune Review: "Duncan Out as Bishop"

http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/news/cityregion/s_589002.html

Pittsburgh Post Gazette: "Episcopalians vote to oust Pittsburgh bishop"

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/08263/913401-85.stm>

Associated Press: "Breakaway Episcopal bishop ousted from ministry"

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jigPtrhC2Kw5PQRWvWRtMvIkheqgD939G1V01>

Bishop Duncan's Statement on his "Deposition"

<http://www.pitan Anglican.org/news/local/duncanstatement091808>

Presiding Bishop's statement on today's HOB actions

<http://episcopalchurch.typepad.com/episcopope/2008/09/presiding-bisho.html>

Trustworthy sources for current news on the realignment:

St Stephens' Web Site: <http://www.ststephenschurch.net/>

Titusoneline: <http://www.kendallharmon.net/t19/>

Stand Firm: <http://www.standfirmfaith.com/>

The Statement of our Standing Committee, on which Theresa Newell and I serve (7 of 8 members signing):

We are profoundly disappointed by this action, and view it as yet another tragic rejection of the historic faith of our diocese and the majority consensus of the Anglican Communion. We continue to believe that the House of Bishops has clearly misapplied and misinterpreted the canons as we stated to the Presiding Bishop in our letter of May 28.

In light of this unfair and improper action to "depose" our bishop, we now assume our responsibility under the canons to be the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh. Bishop Duncan will continue to support the work of our diocese under the terms of his administrative employment agreement and within the bounds of his deposition, providing many of the services that he previously performed for the diocese. Our diocesan convention of October 4 will go forward as planned, at which the canonically required re-alignment vote will be taken.

We understand that Bishop Duncan has been received as a member in good standing of the House of Bishops of the Province of the Southern Cone. We rejoice at this news.

The Standing Committee asks that the clergy and people of Pittsburgh pray for the Duncans, the diocesan staff and the elected leadership of the diocese in the days ahead. We stand firmly on the promise of Holy Scripture found in Romans 8:28. *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

The Rev David D. Wilson, President
St. David's Church, Peter's Twp PA

Mr. Kenneth Herbst
St. Peter's Church, Butler PA

The Rev. Karen B. Stevenson
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