

A Statement by the Connecticut Six

May 27, 2005

A recent statement by the Bishop of Connecticut (issued through his spokesperson, Karen Hamilton), which has been masquerading as a piece of journalism, includes distortions of fact and blatant misrepresentations; it is proof positive of the need for immediate intervention here in Connecticut. There are two major issues that must be addressed: Bishop Smith's abandonment of orthodox Anglican faith and order and his continued harassment of faithful clergy and congregations in Connecticut.

Theological Divide

At its core, our disagreements with Bishop Smith involve the most basic issues of theology and Christian teaching. Since Andrew Smith became diocesan bishop in October 1999, he has expressed theology that exhibits a marked departure from Scripture truth and Anglican teaching. By word and action he has challenged essentials of faith including the nature of revelation, the person and work of Jesus, the authority of Scripture, and human sexuality. In June 2003, he ordained two non-celibate homosexuals to the diaconate. At General Convention 2003, he voted to confirm the election of V. Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire; voted for approval of the blessing of same-sex unions; and voted against a resolution upholding the authority of Scripture. Despite the protest of numerous clergy and lay people of Connecticut, and in the face of warnings by the Primates, Bishop Smith and his two suffragan bishops participated in the consecration of Gene Robinson in November 2003. It is of particular and grave concern to our six parishes that the Bishop has fostered policies which effectively exclude from ordination all who follow traditional, catholic teaching on human sexuality and attempted to force congregations to conform to his unbiblical theology during the process of clergy succession.

We are concerned about the profound consequences for the Bishop, for us, for this diocese, and for the Episcopal Church resulting from policies and actions that he has actively supported. His failure to conform his ministry to the clear teaching of Scripture, the Anglican Communion, and even to the official teaching of the Episcopal Church, is tearing apart the Church we love. Clearly, in light of the Primates' Communiqué, he has brought this diocese and himself to a day of decision that cannot be avoided: to remain on his present course is a choice to walk apart from the Anglican Communion. If Bishop Smith chooses that course, what reasonable and inclusive provision will he make for the congregations of this Diocese who desire to remain in the Anglican Communion?

Harassments and Threats

Since April 2004, we have been in fruitless discussions with Bishop Smith regarding the Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO) plan created at the March meeting of the House of Bishops. Bishop Smith devised his personal version of DEPO that required payment of voluntary financial contributions to the diocese in order to be eligible, thus ignoring the consciences and expressed, legally binding will of our people. Requests from our six congregations, which included joint meetings to discuss the issue of oversight, were refused, and these requests were inaccurately characterized as "demands." He gave each rector three untenable options: leave the Episcopal Church; accept his form of DEPO; or do

nothing and be subject to canonical initiatives. While refusing to negotiate, he excluded the faithful laypeople of our parishes who requested, but never received, a response from their bishop. At no time has Bishop Smith acknowledged or attempted to fulfill the Primates' intent for "adequate provision of episcopal oversight". The Primates have made it clear that "adequate" refers to oversight deemed acceptable by those receiving it.

He informed us that the Standing Committee of the diocese, based on unspecified and unsubstantiated information he alone supplied, had determined that the six rectors had "abandoned the communion of the church". He also sent a letter to each congregation in the diocese declaring that our six churches themselves had "abandoned communion." As a result he notified us of impending inhibition with a deadline of April 15, 2005 and ultimate deposition. Despite requests for details, justification, and evidence of the vague charges leveled against us, we have been left to guess at the specific nature of the offenses for which we are asked to repent.

Bishop Smith's actions represent an abuse of power. His threats of inhibition and deposition based on canons which are grossly misapplied here, seem designed to force us and our churches to conform to and financially support policies that have been declared by the Primates of the Anglican Communion to be "tearing the fabric of our Communion". In addition he has abrogated his canonical responsibility to "guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church" and elevated the "authority" of his office above the demands of obedient, biblical faith, demanding an allegiance to him which would, in light of that faith, transcend our obedience to God.

Everyone in the Episcopal Church concerned with the preservation of the Anglican Communion and the imperatives of simple Christian charity, should call on the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church and the Archbishop of Canterbury to employ the Panel of Reference to intervene immediately, so that adequate episcopal oversight can become a reality for faithful Episcopalians of Connecticut. No further adversarial action, or threats of such action, should be countenanced.

On this first anniversary of our fellowship, we thank God for his abundant life. We are grateful for the ongoing expressions of support from bishops, clergy, and laypeople around the country and the world.

The Rev. Allyn Benedict, Mr. Dan Ruminski (Sr. Warden), *Christ Church, Watertown*

The Rev. Ronald S. Gauss, Mr. Rick Vanderslice (Sr. Warden), Mr Art Heyward
Bishop Seabury, Groton

The Rev. Mark Hansen, Mr. Richard Gonneville (Sr. Warden) *St. John's, Bristol*

The Rev. Donald Helmandollar, Mr. Fred Clark (Sr. Warden) *Trinity, Bristol*

The Rev. Christopher Leighton, Mr. Bill Jolly (Sr. Warden) *St. Paul's, Darien*

The Rev. Gil Wilkes, Ms. Jan Celone (Sr. Warden) *Christ and the Epiphany, East Haven*