

Dear Friends:

Today, Thursday February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009, I accepted on behalf of the Bishop the following resignations:

- ◆ The Reverend Canon Ronald Corcoran, as Rector of St. Matthias, Victoria, and as a Diocesan Canon and priest of the Diocese of British Columbia.
- ◆ The Reverend Rodney May as Priest Associate of St. Matthias, Victoria and priest of the Diocese of British Columbia.
- ◆ The Reverend Glenn Sim as priest of the Diocese of British Columbia.

As well, I have withdrawn the Permission to Officiate of the Reverend Michael Pountney, a retired priest of the Diocese of Toronto living in Victoria.

All four have indicated that they could no longer give their obedience to the authority over them, namely, the Bishop of British Columbia. They have stated their intention to receive licenses from Donald Harvey and the Anglican Network in Canada. While they have said that their resignations became effective on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009, I have exercised the Bishop's prerogatives as bishop and employer to withdraw Licences and Permissions to Officiate effective today, with payout of compensation due. The clergy have all been informed that they must depart from the premises of St. Matthias, and may only return with the permission of the Bishop or his designate.

Over the past many months the ordained and lay leadership of the parish have led the people through a process of discernment, which has now led to a request for a Special Meeting of Parishioners to vote on whether the parish may come under the jurisdiction of the Donald Harvey and the Anglican Network in Canada. While still rector Mr. Corcoran scheduled this meeting for March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009. However, as such a meeting is beyond the powers of a parish, such a request is illegitimate. Mr. Corcoran was specifically ordered by both the Bishop and myself not to allow such a meeting, but he has defied those orders and called the meeting. The argument has been made that the people need the opportunity to conclude a "spirit-led process," but my observation and that of others is that this process has not allowed for any diocesan presentations, has possibly presented misleading and biased information, and has been manipulative. Efforts to speak with the ordained and lay leadership, and the parish itself, by other diocesan clergy and laity, have been rebuffed. The Anglican Church is episcopally led and synodically governed, but in this case congregationalism has been the dominant ecclesiology.

An example of the problematic nature of the process is that at the service last Sunday Mr. Corcoran's theme was "Be not afraid." The well known hymn of that name was sung, and during the sermon Mr. Corcoran picked out people by name in the congregation and told them "Be not afraid." At the communion the words "Be not afraid" was in some instances added to the words of administration. When it came time for the exchange of the peace he instructed the people to replace the greeting of the peace, – "The peace of the Lord be with you" – with those words "Be not afraid". Mr. Corcoran appears to have replaced an ancient rite of reconciliation in the Eucharist with an encouragement to not be afraid of schism.

It appears from Mr. Corcoran's written statement to me that the churchwardens have also been in breach of the declaration and trust accepted by them under our canons and regulations. I have written to them to inform them that under Canon 6.8 d that they are now removed from office.

The Special Meeting of Parishioners scheduled for March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 is now cancelled, and no meeting of any group of people to consider joining the Network will be permitted on Diocesan

property. It may be that some parishioners will gather somewhere else on that day or some other day and pass a motion to affiliate with the Network, but that motion will not be an action of the parish, but simply that of individuals. It may be that a significant proportion of the parishioners of St. Matthias will choose to follow Mr. Corcoran out of the Diocese and into the Network, but the leadership of the Diocese is committed to working with those who remain behind in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This coming Sunday services at St. Matthias will be held at the regular times, led by diocesan licensed clergy. The Rev. Dr. Gary Nicolosi will be the preacher this coming Sunday. Following the service I will address parishioners and answer questions. I have appointed the Rev. Dr. Robert Arril to be the priest-in-charge; as priest-in-charge he will have all the responsibilities and powers of an incumbent or rector. Dr. Arril was ordained in 1975 and has served in parishes in Edmonton and Toronto, including “Little Trinity Anglican Church” in downtown Toronto. He has spent much of his ministry as a teacher and chaplain in independent schools. He was recently awarded his doctorate from the University of Victoria.

Part of the misleading information that seems to have been given out is the prospect that a new Network congregation in Victoria made up of the former clergy and former parishioners of St. Matthias will be able to soon take control of the buildings following a victory by the Network in a major lawsuit in Vancouver. Some twenty individuals associated with four Network congregations in Vancouver and Abbotsford have sued the Bishop and Diocese of New Westminster for possession of the buildings. I need to emphasize that the Diocese of British Columbia is a separate body from the Diocese of New Westminster, and that any decision in that case will not have any immediate bearing upon the situation in this Diocese.

All church properties in the Diocese are registered in the name of the Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of British Columbia. The Bishop and Diocese of British Columbia have been sued by the former clergy and one former churchwarden of St. Mary’s, Metchosin for exclusive possession of the church property. This attempt has so far been denied, and the Network would have to proceed to trial and win in order to ever get use of the property. The Supreme Court of British Columbia ruled in favour of the Bishop and Diocese, and the Network was denied permission to appeal by the Court of Appeal. It is getting on to a year since that action was undertaken, and the plaintiffs have failed to deliver a Statement of Claim (which would initiate a trial over the property). The threshold of bringing any case to trial is very low, but the threshold for the Network to win this particular case is high. The fact that this case has not been pursued by the Network speaks for itself.

The Network has had a series of defeats in the courts in Canada. Recently our colleagues in the Diocese of Niagara received payment of \$20,000 from the Network for the costs of the legal action there. The Diocese of Niagara will be in court again in March and are asking for costs of over \$200,000, and I understand there is a reasonable probability that they will be awarded that amount. Donors to the legal fund of the Network should know that they are not only paying their lawyers’ fees, but those of the lawyers defending the dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Recent media releases by the Network in relation to St. Mary’s, Nanoose Bay have made much of my supposed “refusal to enter into negotiation.” The suggestion that I should have “negotiated” is based on a call for mediation at the recent Primates Meeting in Alexandria. Let me be very clear that I welcome the opportunity to sit down and discuss issues with representatives of the Network, but let me also be very clear that mediation is just that – a facilitated discussion – and that it is not the same as binding arbitration! Many mediation sessions result in agreements where the participants move from entrenched positions to a focus on interests. However, mediations may also result in situations where the parties agree only to

disagree. One cannot help but feel that the appeal to “mediation” by the Network is a weak attempt to portray the Diocese as being unreasonable.

In any case, the call for mediation mentioned in the Primates Meeting Communiqué <http://www.aco.org/acns/news.cfm/2009/2/5/ACNS4574> needs to be read in context, and that context is a lack of any consensus among the Primates of what to make of the entity proposed as a new province in North America by the Common Cause Partnership. In the absence of any agreement, the Primates asked the Archbishop of Canterbury “to initiate a professionally mediated conversation which engages all parties at the earliest opportunity.” This mediation seems to be something envisioned as happening at a much higher level of the church hierarchy than the local parish and diocesan level, and is not aimed at legal disputes.

It should be pointed out that the Primates unanimously endorsed the propositions that “It is not for individual groups to claim the terms on which they will relate to the Communion.” and “Any scheme developed would rely on an undertaking from the present partners to ACNA that they would not seek to recruit and expand their membership by means of proselytisation.” It would appear that the Anglican Network in Canada is precisely just such a group, redefining and rewriting ancient rules of organization and claiming a position within the Anglican Communion that is not justified by the facts. The Network has not hesitated to lobby hard within parishes of dioceses to get the leadership to subvert the authority of their bishops and act against the canons of the church.

I am pleased to report that St. Mary’s, Nanoose Bay has begun its recovery. On Sunday February 15<sup>th</sup> an afternoon service was held in the church, led by Archdeacon Brian Evans. Some twenty parishioners showed up, and they were joined by over fifty clergy and laity from neighbouring parishes. By all accounts it was a joyful service. The following Sunday the Rev. Ron Macluskie, the new Priest-in-Charge, led a service attended by some forty parishioners (not including visitors). While a small group, this is a good motivated core to rebuild the parish. Please pray for them and Ron as they step forward in faith.

The fundamental purpose for the existence of this Diocese, now marking 150 years of ministry, is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed. I expect that when the dust settles on this latest crisis the Diocese will be able to focus itself on doing the real work of Christ in these places.

Again, this has been a challenging time for me and the Officers of Synod as we consult and determine collectively how best to preserve the interests of the Diocese of British Columbia in carrying out its purpose. I thank you for your prayers and support. May this season of Lent, which is fundamentally a season of reconciliation and healing, and one in which we remind ourselves of who we are and whose we are, be a blessing to us all.

Yours in Christ,

Bruce +

The Venerable Bruce Bryant-Scott  
Commissary to the Bishop  
Diocesan Executive Officer & Diocesan Archdeacon