

April 18th, 2009

Dear members of the Standing Committee of the Diocese of NW PA,

I am writing to ask you to reconsider your decision to withhold consent for the election of Bishop-Elect Kevin Forrester of Northern Michigan. I ask you to please read the attachments regarding the situation in Northern Michigan hoping that it may shed a new light for your discernment regarding Bishop- Elect Forrester.

I am concerned that the decision that you have made -- as well as decisions by other bishops and some standing committees -- points to a danger that TEC could face if we continue to focus in on some narrow issues which stifle the wondrous gift of our communion which attracts many people from other Christian traditions. We are a communion that has allowed for wonderful creativity and diversity. We are a communion that has allowed people to search for and inquire about God in a way that honours and celebrates different voices. To deny Bishop-elect Forrester election due to his not strictly adhering to the Eucharistic Prayers as found in BCP sets us on a path of conformity which is stifling and drains us of allowing the spirit of God to touch us in new and profound ways. We used the test of conformity to the prayer book to push out the Quakers, the Methodists and even in the present age we sometimes let the Lambeth Quadrilateral prevent us from moving forward into ecumenical ventures. We must let go of some of our elitism which so far has not led us to grow and prosper.

Some years ago I was struck by what the Most Rev. Njongonkulu Ndungane, the former Archbishop of Cape Town, preached at St. Bartholomew's, New York City, regarding our church's challenges:

One of the greatest sadnesses of the current disagreements within the Anglican Communion is the way the debate has become polarized into extreme either/or questions. So we are presented with destructive caricatures of liberal and conservative positions, as if these were the only options open to us....

[W]e have Scripture, Tradition and Reason, interwoven with Catholic and Reformed threads and that of intelligent cultural engagement. We need all of them, in a rich and dynamic interplay, to provide a space in which faith, with a considerable degree of legitimate diversity, may flourish. **Our experience is not either/or faith, it is definitely both/and.** [emphasis added]

In my paper [*Heartlands of Anglicanism*] I said this: It is indeed within the territory encompassed by these strands that I find my own experience and understanding of Christianity. These describe the rich heartlands of Anglicanism—the solid centre, focused on Jesus Christ, to which we are constantly drawn back by the counterbalancing pull of the other strands, if any one threatens to become disproportionately influential.

I have read some of Dr. Forrester's liturgies and sermons and can find nothing that does not meet the beauty and majesty of Anglicanism that Ndungane preached about at St. Bartholomew. My fear is that the current argument around Kevin Forrester is not allowing us to be full of the richness that Ndungane desires and longs for in our tradition.

I come from another tradition in the Anglican Communion, namely the Anglican Church of Canada. We owe a debt of gratitude to TEC for its Prayer Book of 1979, which strongly influenced the Book of Alternative Services 1985. Before coming to TEC in 2003, I was in the Diocese of Montreal where the authorized prayer books which a priest could use were as follows: the Canadian BCP. 1959, the BAS 1985, Supplementary Eucharistic Rites as approved by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, Common Worship of the Church of England, and the French version of the American BCP. As a priest in that Diocese, I relished the gift of being able to draw upon these sources which broadened and enriched the worship of the parish. We are in a global community so why insulate ourselves from the creative spirit which dwells within our wonderful communion?

In my opinion this is the heart of what Kevin Forrester is doing in his parish in Northern Michigan with much more skill than most of us can hope or imagine. He seems to me to be a person of deep spirituality with a deep love of God, a man who is committed to reaching out to his parishioners, enrich their faith, and lead them deeper into the mystery of God. Why he should be denied consent because he has drawn upon other Anglican sources, with great care and **with the approval of former bishops**, strikes me as constricting and limiting. I ask you to read the letter Louis Weil (attached), one of the foremost liturgists in TEC, who suggests that trying experimental liturgies at the local level actually could lead to further enrichment of the liturgical renewal within TEC

I find it in-credible when I read that some of the bishops withholding consent around the issue of not adhering strictly to the BCP are, as I know personally, adapting Enriching Our Worship because he does not like the Eucharistic liturgies contained therein. He has exacting standards and, in fact, his revisions are very good. So why deny another gifted and talented priest from exercising his gifts of leadership as a bishop when he is exercising great care and love for the liturgy of the church?

I'm also curious about Anglo-Catholic parishes that still use the 1928 Prayer Book and the 1951 American Missal and wonder whether bishops must insist that such parishes adhere to the 1979 BCP? Again one of Forrester's strongest detractors allows such diversity in his diocese. And what about parishes that feel strongly about inviting all, even the unbaptized, to the Eucharistic table? This happens all over the country and, shy of instituting a Liturgy Patrol, my guess is it will (and should) continue.

I have heard it said that the model of ministry being practiced and lived out in the Diocese of Northern Michigan is also a cause for some concern. This truly is disturbing. Our church is struggling to find new ways of being the church. What I find amazing is that one small diocese, completely faithful to TEC and having never considered leaving it, is being judged so harshly for its choice of bishop. Here is a man who loves TEC, loves his

diocese and is proud of his Anglican heritage and is now facing the possibility of not being able to live out the vision of his diocese which has been the model for dioceses in Scotland, Canada and other parts of TEC.

The former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, spoke at the Canadian Governor General's Conference on Leadership in 2004 about the richness and gifts we discover when we truly embrace diversity, and I will end with a quote from that speech:

Have you noted your fingers? They're different lengths, different shapes. If they were the same length, you would not be able to grasp. The hand is the wonderful sign of the kind of people you want to become. There are some who are tall, short, but each one of these enables this thing to be a hand. A hand that can hold because it has a thumb that is opposable. An orchestra is that precisely because it is not the same instruments that are played, it is different instruments contributing to the whole. If in the musical scale we had only one note, where would the music be? Where would the harmony be? And a great African ... of what was then the Gold Coast, Guyana, used the wonderful image of a piano keyboard. You might know the story. He says, "If you strike only the black notes on a piano keyboard, you can play music of some sort. If you strike only the white notes, you can play a tune of some sorts. If you really want music, if you want harmony, then you play both sets of notes, black and white together." ... God bless you.

Yours in Christ,

Father Geoffrey Howson
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Fairview

