

A Letter to All Saints & the Deanery of Virginia

The Very Reverend Glenn M. Spencer

You may have heard or read about the events that have occurred over the past several days within the Anglican Province of America's Diocese of the West [DOW]. On September 4, 2008, Bishop Richard Boyce, long-time Diocesan Bishop of the DOW, announced to Bishop Grundorf his intent to leave the APA effective immediately, and to merge his entire diocese into the Reformed Episcopal Church [REC], subject to the REC's approval.

This action has been publicized on-line and has generated much discussion, not all of it fruitful or accurately presented. Based on the articles available on-line, one might conclude that the APA is splitting, or at least facing a significant crisis. I can tell you without hesitation that this is not the case. However, I would like to address these legitimate concerns, and to provide a more accurate explanation as to what is happening, why I believe it is happening, and where we at All Saints Anglican Church and within the APA's Deanery of Virginia stand.

What Has Happened Over the Past Several Days. By way of background, the APA is a canonical jurisdiction that consists of three dioceses: The Diocese of the Eastern United States [DEUS], the Diocese of Mid-America, and the Diocese of the West [DOW]. We in Virginia are a part of DEUS, and our Diocesan Bishop is Bishop Grundorf. In addition to his role as our Diocesan Bishop, Bishop Grundorf also serves as the Presiding Bishop of the APA.

On September 4, 2008, Bishop Boyce of DOW wrote a letter to Bishop Grundorf. Bishop Boyce stated that he intended immediately to leave the APA and to transfer not just himself individually, but his entire diocese, consisting of maybe twenty parishes, into the REC. Bishop Grundorf correctly responded to this letter by informing Bishop Boyce that an orderly and canonical procedure exists for any such transfer, and that Bishop Boyce had not followed that procedure. Based on the extraordinary circumstances with which he was faced, Bishop Grundorf, as provided by our canons and as shepherd of our church, immediately relieved Bishop Boyce of his position as Diocesan Bishop and appointed an interim administrator for the DOW. Further, he explained the mechanism whereby individual parishes and priests within the DOW, if they wished, could transfer into the REC. He reaffirmed that all DOW priests, clergy, and laity remain in good standing with the APA and have its full support.

While Bishop Grundorf is disappointed with Bishop Boyce's decision, he has not forbidden a transfer for those desiring it (contrary to what some on-line articles have suggested). Instead, he has insisted that proper procedure be followed for any parishes and priests of the DOW wishing to transfer to the REC. He has reiterated the canonical impermissibility of a bishop unilaterally removing his entire diocese from the APA's jurisdiction. His goal is an orderly transition in a charitable manner that does not bring scandal on the church.

Bishop Grundorf is absolutely correct in his response. Dioceses cannot, as a body, leave the jurisdiction of the APA. There is simply no canonical mechanism whereby that may occur. Instead, the canons allow for individual parishes, and individual priests, to transfer to another

jurisdiction based upon their individual requests for transfer, or “letters dimissory.” As the several articles on-line indicate, Bishop Boyce insists that canonically he retains the full right to move his diocese into another jurisdiction; he is simply incorrect in his reading of canon law. I would be happy to discuss this further with any one who wishes to discuss canon law in more detail.

Why Bishop Boyce has Taken This Action. While I cannot read into the heart of Bishop Boyce, I believe it is fair and appropriate for me to address why I believe he has attempted this maneuver. My impression is that two factors have contributed to his decision.

a. Common Cause Partnership. First, and perhaps most apparent, is Bishop Boyce’s stance, vis-à-vis Bishop Grundorf’s, on what our relationship should be with Common Cause Partnership [CCP]. As you may recall, in January 2008, Bishop Grundorf made the decision to adopt a “wait and see” approach to the APA’s possible affiliation with Common Cause Partnership. This decision was wise, pastoral, and correct. While we share many goals and beliefs with members of CCP, the majority of those jurisdictions who belong to CCP approve of women’s ordination and include women whom they believe to be validly ordained to the priesthood. The issue of women’s ordination goes to the heart of the priesthood and to the validity of the sacraments; it is a position with which we cannot in good faith align ourselves. This issue is still being sorted out within CCP, and Bishop Grundorf believes that the best approach is to let it become settled, and then make a final decision as to whether alliance with CCP is in his flock’s best interest. Further, while CCP currently is only an alliance of various Anglican jurisdictions, it has all appearances of the precursor to a jurisdiction. Many of its leaders have made clear their intent to make it one giant jurisdiction, the North American Anglican Province, under the oversight of the Global Anglican Fellowship Conference (GAFCON). Its members would thus lose their own identity, their individual canons and Constitution, and become a part of the jurisdiction of CCP. This is no small matter, particularly if that giant jurisdiction contains women “priests.” We all desire unity and a common cause with other Anglicans; the question is at what cost, and at what point do we slip into heterodoxy under the purported banner of “unity.”

Bishop Boyce, unlike Bishop Grundorf, has for years strongly supported alliance with CCP. Without question he believes that Bishop Grundorf made the wrong decision in adopting a wait-and-see approach. The REC, unlike the APA, is a member of the CCP. Therefore, one reason I believe that Bishop Boyce is attempting to merge into the REC is so that he can become a member of CCP.

b. Inability/Unwillingness to Comply with APA Canonical Requirements. At the most recent APA Synod, in July 2008, our national registrar, Fr. Bill Perkins, announced that he had never received from DOW the canonically-required credentials and documentations from the diocese’s priests, and from the bishop himself. Properly documented credentials are the prerequisite for a priest to minister within the APA; yet this diocese under Bishop Boyce’s leadership simply had never provided that information. At this past Synod, it was made clear to Bishop Boyce and to all clergymen in the APA, that no one will be permitted to continue as a clergyman-in-good-standing without presenting his required credentials and documentation to the registrar. Bishop Boyce’s inability or unwillingness to correct this disorder, as well as

several other irregular practices within the DOW, may have been another impetus for his action last week.

Where We Now Stand. First, the DOW has not left the APA. No canonical method exists for a diocese to leave our jurisdiction; it simply cannot by law occur. Instead, two bishops (Diocesan Bishop Boyce and Bishop Mott) have left the APA, and likely at least some of the DOW parishes will follow. Others will remain within the APA/DOW; several parishes have notified Bishop Grundorf that they have no intention of leaving the APA or the DOW and feel that they were left out of Bishop Boyce's decision-making process. For those that do depart, where they end up (the REC or another jurisdiction) remains to be seen, as the REC has not yet addressed Bishop Boyce's request. Only time will tell how this issue settles. Bishop Grundorf intends to give parishes adequate time to determine where they stand, then to call an extraordinary Synod to reorganize and elect the appropriate officers.

Second, Bishop Boyce's unfortunate action, while disrupting to some extent the peace of the church, has no palpable effect on All Saints or on the deanery of Virginia. We remain, as do all member of DEUS and the great majority of parishes within the APA, committed to our Presiding Bishop and to our church. We do not see this event as an emergency or as a crisis. It is, as I said, unfortunate; however, Bishop Boyce's departure, and the departure of any individual parishes and priests who may wish to request transfer, may in the end be better for all concerned. We do not count our strength or our success by numbers, but by our feasting on the sacraments, commitment to the creeds, and faithfulness to the Prayer Book. There will be times of numerical growth, and there will be times when our numbers may dip. This is a natural part of life in the Church, and nothing to fear. Our jurisdiction is not splitting or fracturing. Some parishes from DOW will request to transfer. But others will remain. The APA by God's grace is strong and solid; we are, and will be, fine.

Third, as many of you know, we are in communion with the REC. I do not know whether that will change, though I doubt that it will. Quite frankly, the REC has yet to comment or take action upon Bishop Boyce's request to join them. It is probable that they had no notice of his action ahead of time and, as several of Bishop Boyce's own parishes, were caught by surprise. Regardless, we remain in communion with the REC, and within a few days Bishop Grundorf will issue a joint statement with the REC concerning this matter. I will provide that to you when it is released.

Conclusion. While this matter has been presented on some websites as a crisis or a threat to the APA, it simply is not. It is unfortunate, but it will be resolved. I hope this letter has shed some light on these issues and has answered some of your questions. As always, I am available and would be happy to talk to any person or groups about this matter further. My new email address is frgmsspencer@gmail.com.

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