

## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH THE GENERAL CONVENTION

BONNIE ANDERSON, D.D.  
PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF DEPUTIES

September 1, 2010

To Bennison Trial Witnesses:

Julia Alexis, Episcopal Diocese of El Camino Real

Martha Alexis, Western Diocese, Anglican Church in North America

Andy Alexis, Catholic Diocese of Sacramento

Maggie Thompson, Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

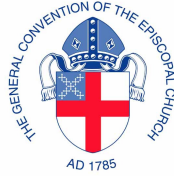
Rev. Margo Maris, pastor, advocate and editor, Episcopal Diocese of Oregon

I was moved by your letter expressing your pain and frustration over the recent ruling by the Episcopal Church's Court of Review which has made it possible for the Rt. Rev. Charles Bennison to resume the position of Bishop of Pennsylvania. Good people can disagree about how the court interpreted our canons. I believe that most Episcopalians who have followed this case agree that Bishop Bennison's choice to resume his episcopacy presents significant problems for the Diocese of Pennsylvania and for the wider Church.

I want you to know that I share your hope that the Episcopal Church can be, "a guiding beacon to all people everywhere who are affected in some way by clergy sexual abuse." I also share your frustration that in your case, and in others, our churches were not "safe sanctuaries" for vulnerable people. And I share your outrage that individuals in positions of authority have been complicit in maintaining a climate of silence and denial that has inhibited our efforts to end sexual abuse within our church.

Like the Diocese of Pennsylvania's Standing Committee, and many diocesan clergy and laity, I wish that Bishop Bennison had the wisdom and generosity of spirit to resign. As bishop he is more likely to deepen divisions and discredit the church than he is to bring healing or advance our common mission. I join the Court of Review in its assessment that Charles Bennison's handling of the sexual abuse charges against his brother John was "totally wrong." Bishop Bennison's lack of remorse about his handling of this situation, and his solipsistic view of what is at stake, concern me deeply.

I have spoken recently with Bishop Bennison, whom I have known for many years. I have also spoken with members of the Standing Committee. I wish I could say that I can imagine a just and speedy resolution to this situation, or for that matter, a satisfying outcome following a protracted campaign, but I do not. It is my prayer that the Bishops of The Episcopal Church, when they are together this month in Arizona, will prayerfully consider this matter and either prevail upon Bishop Bennison to resign, or undertake other measures that lead to Bishop Bennison's removal from office.



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As a result of your letter and those of numerous others, I have turned my attention to considering the steps that our Church might take to prevent this kind of injustice from happening again. In the wake of this decision, it seems essential to address a deficiency in the structures of our Church, namely that there is no means of dissolving the relationship between a bishop and a diocese that find themselves in untenable circumstances. I am also considering the calls coming from many Episcopalians to amend our canons to include clergy and laity on the Court of Review.

In preparation for General Convention, a review of the canons relevant to these concerns is in order. I am presently in consultation with members of my council of advice, deputies and others with particular interest and knowledge in these matters to determine the most expedient and efficient way to proceed in this review.

I wish there were more that I could offer you in gratitude for your bravery in the face of all that you have endured at the hands of our Church. It grieves me to be another person telling you that my hands are tied, and I know the potential remedies that I am proposing may serve the church in the long-term but do nothing to right the wrongs inflicted upon you.

But within our polity, this is what is within my power to do. Please know that I will pursue these issues seriously and actively, and with the support and counsel of others in the church who also find this situation unacceptable.

All of you, and all the people of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, remain in my prayers.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bonnie Anderson".

Bonnie Anderson, D.D.  
President, The House of Deputies

Cc: The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori  
Deputies and First Alternates  
The Standing Committee, Diocese of Pennsylvania  
The Rt. Rev. Charles Bennison