



October 17, 2006

Feast of Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop and Martyr

Dear President and Members of Diocesan Standing Committees of The Episcopal Church:

As a member of a diocesan Standing Committee, you will be called upon to give or withhold consent to the election of the Rev. Mark Lawrence as the next bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina. On behalf of Via Media USA and for the sake of The Episcopal Church, I am writing to urge your careful consideration before giving consent to this election.

Our polity requires consents from a majority of the church's dioceses because a bishop is not only bishop of her or his diocese, but also for the entire church. Before a vote is taken in your Standing Committee, I encourage you to read the enclosed essay by Lionel Deimel setting forth the case against consent. This carefully reasoned discussion is also available on the Web at http://deimel.org/church_resources/no_consents.htm, where embedded links provide access to the essay's sources.

Fr. Lawrence's episcopacy would represent a threat to the unity of our church and to the cohesion of the Diocese of South Carolina. The case against consenting to Fr. Lawrence's election is not based on his theology or personal beliefs, but on the way these are likely to affect the polity, and hence the unity and integrity, of this church. Fr. Lawrence has endorsed separating the Diocese of South Carolina from the Episcopal Church, and has advocated that the authority of the General Convention be surrendered to the primates of the Anglican Communion. Under the circumstances, it is difficult to see how Fr. Lawrence could be asked or expected to take the required vow to "guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church," (BCP page 517). Indeed his current diocesan leader, the Rt. Rev. John-David Schofield, Bishop of San Joaquin, who supports the episcopacy of Fr. Lawrence, has proposed that the Diocese of San Joaquin separate from The Episcopal Church.

This case, in which Standing Committees will be asked to give consent to a man who has openly endorsed such separation from the Episcopal Church, is extraordinary. As you know, the requirement for Standing Committee consent of those elected as bishops dates to this church's first constitution and canons and was intended as a substantive decision, not simply a *pro forma* action. When a standing committee votes to consent to the election of a bishop, a majority of its members must "in the presence of Almighty God, testify that we know of no impediment on account of which the [name of priest] ought not to be ordained to that Holy Order [of bishops]" (Canon 16.4(b) of Title III). I believe that, after reading Dr. Deimel's essay and considering Fr. Lawrence's words, you may well find that such impediment exists. May God's grace be with you as you make your decision.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christopher Wilkins".

Christopher Wilkins, Ph.D., Facilitator
Via Media USA