

Episcopal Diocese of Washington

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit Unanimously Affirms Bishop Jane Holmes Dixon's Actions as the Ecclesiastical Authority for the Episcopal Diocese of Washington

May 22, 2002 - The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit unanimously affirmed today the earlier decision of the U.S. District Court recognizing the authority of Bishop Jane Holmes Dixon. In *Jane Holmes Dixon v. Samuel L. Edwards*; the Vestry of St. John's Parish, the Court of Appeals ruled:

- "Our examination of this record, and our study of the organization and operation of the Episcopal Church, compels the determination that the court was correct in both its analysis and in its conclusion: The Episcopal Church is hierarchical."
- "In the Episcopal Church, the priests and the laity of a diocese are subject to the authority of their bishop."
- "Because the highest ecclesiastical authority of the Diocese, Bishop Dixon, has determined that the Vestry's interpretation of the Canons is incorrect, this challenge to the injunction is without merit."
- Bishop Dixon's ... "decision is therefore final and binding, and it must be recognized as such by a civil court."

"I continue to rejoice in the theological and biblical diversity of the Diocese of Washington. It has been my privilege to safeguard the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church as affirmed in this decision," said Bishop Dixon. "My prayer for all the people of Christ Church and St. John's Parish, Accokeek is that they can once again come together to do the vital work that we are called to do as Christians, to preach and live the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

In June 2001, Bishop Dixon filed a complaint in U.S. District Court to affirm her authority as Bishop and, in that capacity, her right to function as rector of Christ Church, Accokeek. The Rev. Samuel Edwards had refused to recognize Bishop Dixon's authority, to agree to abide by Canon law, and to affirm his ordination vows. As such, Bishop Dixon did not approve him as rector of Christ Church. When he and the vestry of Christ Church refused to accept her decision and barred her from performing her ministry at Christ Church, and after many months of efforts toward reconciliation, Bishop Dixon was left with no alternative but to seek relief from the courts.

"With this decision, all parties involved have a tremendous opportunity to begin a very hopeful, healing process," said the Very Rev. John Bryson Chane, who will be installed as the Eighth Bishop of Washington on June 1. "This healing will enable not only the members of Christ Church Accokeek, but also the Episcopal Church at large, to refocus our energies where they should be, affirming the mission of the church. That mission is to live into our unity as the body of Jesus Christ. I look forward, as the next Bishop of Washington, to this important work and welcome the opportunities for continuing this work of healing."

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