



October 17, 2006

Feast of Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop and Martyr

To the Bishops of The Episcopal Church:

As you know, you and your fellow bishops, along with each diocese's standing committee, 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 this church, I am writing to urge your careful consideration before you 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 whole church. Before a vote is taken in your Standing Committee, I would respectfully encourage you to consider the enclosed essay by Dr. Lionel Deimel setting forth a case against consent. This carefully reasoned discussion, including sources, is also available on the Web at http://deimel.org/church_resources/no_consents.htm.

Dr. Deimel makes a compelling argument that Fr. Lawrence's episcopacy would represent a threat to the unity of our church and to the cohesion of the Diocese of South Carolina. This 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 these circumstances, it is difficult to see how Fr. Lawrence could be asked or expected to take the vow required of each bishop in The Episcopal Church to "guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church" (BCP page 517). Indeed his current diocesan leader and your colleague, 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 bishops and Standing Committees will be asked to give consent to a man who has openly endorsed such separation from the Episcopal Church, is extraordinary. The requirement for church-wide 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. Not the least reason why is to enable the church to handle cases such as this.

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, along with your standing committee members, may well find that such impediment exists.

We trust that the Holy Spirit will guide those who take counsel together as a diocese and as The Episcopal Church in the election of a bishop. This is grace we seek, not just in the diocesan process itself, but in that in which the whole church engages afterwards to determine its consent. May that grace continue be with you as you make your decision in this matter.

Yours in Christ,

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

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