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A statement from the Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas

December 19, 2006

The Episcopal Diocese of Kansas is well-acquainted with the pain caused by disagreement and schism. A person being ordained as a bishop of the Episcopal Church is asked if they would "conform to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church" and "guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church." Consent to a person becoming a bishop in our church should focus on the candidate's willingness to live by these ordination vows. We find that the statements by the Very Reverend Mark Lawrence raise serious questions about his willingness to remain in the Episcopal Church and thus his ability to guard the faith and unity of the Episcopal Church.

Father Lawrence refused to answer the question of what he would do if the Diocese of South Carolina voted to leave the Episcopal Church. A bishop who vows to guard the unity of the Episcopal Church must be expected to remain in the Episcopal Church and make every effort to keep his or her diocese within the Episcopal Church. Father Lawrence stated only that he will work at least as hard at keeping the Diocese of South Carolina in the Episcopal Church as his fellow bishops work at keeping the Episcopal Church in covenanted relationship with the worldwide Anglican communion.

In other words, Father Lawrence refuses to commit to keeping his diocese within the Episcopal Church unless the Episcopal Church surrenders its autonomy with its "ethos of democracy" and the "heresy" of a national church and conforms to the decisions of the primates of the Anglican Communion. A vow to conform to the doctrine and guard the faith and unity of the Episcopal Church cannot be conditioned by a candidate for bishop on doing so only if the Episcopal Church conforms to his beliefs concerning church governance or church doctrine. A bishop is certainly free to advocate for changes in church governance or doctrine, but he or she must be willing to conform to the decision of the Episcopal Church once that decision has been made by the church.

We also are deeply disturbed by his statement that the Presiding Bishop would not be welcome at his consecration. One cannot vow to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the church and at the same time state that the Presiding Bishop would not be welcome to attend his consecration. A bishop of the Episcopal Church cannot precondition his or her acceptance of the authority of the Presiding Bishop on whether the Presiding Bishop conforms to certain beliefs of that bishop.

It is with deep regret that we must withhold our consent to the ordination of Father Lawrence as Bishop of South Carolina because, for the reasons set forth above, we are not satisfied that he will "conform to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church" and "guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church."

Note: According to Article V the Constitution of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas, the Council of Trustees constitutes the Standing Committee for the diocese. In accordance with national Canon III.11.4, a majority of standing committees of the Episcopal Church, and a majority of bishops with jurisdiction, must consent to the ordination of a bishop-elect before that person can be ordained and consecrated.

Bishop Wolfe will issue a statement on his vote after the first of the year.

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