

Inhibited North Florida Priests Will Continue Their Ministries

From the Anglican Alliance of North Florida
Contact information: The Rev. Neil Lebhar
redemerrector@bellsouth.net (904) 642-8803
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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On Wednesday, January 11th, seven priests in the Anglican Alliance received notice from the Bishop of Florida that they had been “inhibited from officiating in the Diocese of Florida” under Canon IV.10 of the diocese. The inhibitions followed the recommendations of the Diocesan Standing Committee. The reason given was “abandonment of communion of this church.” The priests inhibited were: the Rev. Neil Lebhar, Church of the Redeemer, Jacksonville; the Rev. Samuel Pascoe, Grace Church, Orange Park; the Rev. C. Alexander Farmer, Servants of Christ, Gainesville; the Rev. James Needham, St. Luke’s Community of Life, Tallahassee; the Rev. James McCaslin, All Souls, Jacksonville; the Rev. David Sandifer, Calvary, Jacksonville; and the Rev. Robert Sanders, Jacksonville Anglican Fellowship, Jacksonville.

The priests concerned are saddened and perplexed by this unnecessary and unhelpful action taken by the Bishop and the Standing Committee. Each of them has continued to serve as a priest in the Anglican Communion since disassociating from the Diocese of Florida and the Episcopal Church, and has made it clear that they were not resigning from Holy Orders. Their hope had been to simply be canonically transferred to the Anglican provinces under which they now serve, as had been requested of Bishop Howard in a December 12 letter, and as has been done in several other dioceses of the Episcopal Church.

The inhibitions are clearly a misapplication and abuse of canon law, here used punitively against priests who have disassociated with the Episcopal Church as a matter of conscience because of its actions at General Convention 2003. The canon in question is intended as an administrative procedure for priests who leave the Episcopal Church for another denomination or religion, a step usually accompanied by a renunciation of their Episcopal ordination vows.

It is ironic that the charge brought against the seven priests is “abandonment of communion,” since one of the major reasons they felt they had no choice but to separate from the Episcopal Church was to stay in communion with the vast majority of the world’s 80 million Anglicans who have condemned the Episcopal Church USA’s unbiblical actions. In a letter to his congregation, the Rev. Neil Lebhar, whose church has come under the Province of Uganda, wrote that “by inhibiting me, I believe that the Bishop and Standing Committee have effectively agreed that they are not in communion with Uganda, one of the largest provinces of the Anglican Communion” (the full text of the Rev. Lebhar’s letter is available at anglicanalliancenf.org).

The priests will continue their ministries in the congregations where they now serve, since these congregations have been received into other provinces of the Anglican Communion and are no longer part of the Diocese of Florida. Their prayerful hope is that the Bishop and Standing Committee will reconsider their action and recognize that it only exacerbates existing differences and further isolates them from the rest of the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican Alliance of North Florida will continue to support the ministries of these seven priests and work toward growing a vital and Biblically faithful Anglican presence in North Florida, in partnership with Anglicans in the United States and throughout the world.

The Anglican Alliance of North Florida was formed in the fall of 2005 as a way to begin gathering together Biblically faithful congregations in the Anglican tradition. It includes fifteen member congregations and thirty-five clergy in the North Florida area.