

*Dav*The Duties of the Laity: An Open Letter to Fellow Laity of the Anglican Church in North America

Dear Fellow ACNA laity:

Our concerns align with the [May 20, 2024 open letter to ACNA clergy](#), and we would like to invite the participation of our fellow ACNA laity. We suggest that the lack of transparency and clear communication regarding ecclesial disciplinary processes has limited our ability as laity to understand the deliberations of the church and to trust the procedures of the province to which we belong. We also are concerned for the well-being of survivors and other congregants who entrust themselves to the care of ACNA shepherds.

[ACNA Canon I.10.2](#) outlines the duties of the laity and reminds us that “**the effective ministry of the Church is the responsibility of the laity no less than it is the responsibility of Bishops and other Clergy.**” As members in the Anglican Church in North America, one of our canonical duties is “to observe [our] baptismal vows, to lead an upright and sober life, and not give scandal to the Church” ([I.10.2.4](#)) We regularly renew our baptismal vows and promise to “serve God faithfully in his one holy catholic and apostolic church” (BCP 194).

When someone is baptized, clergy and laity together extend this welcome:

We receive you into the fellowship of the Church. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in the royal priesthood of all his people (BCP 190).

We believe that in order for the laity to faithfully serve the brothers and sisters we joyfully welcome into our midst, we must pay attention to matters in our province, dioceses, and parishes. As we work to build trustworthy communities, we can request transparency in our ecclesial processes, including the provincial response to handling of the situation in the Diocese of the Upper Midwest.

We as laity have the unique privilege to exercise our voice freely and make our concerns known to the College of Bishops, the Court for the Trial of a Bishop, the Provincial Tribunal, the forthcoming Archbishop elect, and other provincial officials. We know firsthand that informed and active laity are essential to the well-being of our parishes, but we want to draw attention to ways our participation in *diocesan* and *provincial* processes is essential to the soundness of our ecclesial structures. This includes

educating ourselves about our constitution and canons, praying for and participating in communal gatherings such as the upcoming [Provincial Assembly](#), and paying attention to our trial courts and legal practices. Our active engagement not only contributes to the health of our own parishes but also reminds us that, as members of the province, we have a *right* and *responsibility* to be involved in provincial discussions.

Paying attention to the case in the Upper Midwest and the provincial response is part of what it means to participate in the growth and health of the unified Body of Christ (Eph 4). Furthermore, the matter of abuse warrants the ongoing attention of us all, because “*if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it* (1 Cor 12, emphasis added).” Given this, we believe that asking our leaders for transparency in these matters is in accord with our baptismal promises and duties as laity in the ACNA.

Our concerns align with those of the open letter to clergy, and we quote at length from it below (modifications for laity bolded) with permission.

#### “Transparency Matter #1 The Progress of the Case

In July of 2021 the province, at the request of the Diocese of the Upper Midwest, took over the investigation into the handling of the abuse allegations (later proven in court) against Mark Rivera. Following the province’s investigation, in late 2022, a majority of the [Provincial Investigative Team](#), “recommended a presentment be considered against Bishop Ruch.”

In December of 2022, three bishops signed a presentment against Bishop Ruch. This presentment was challenged as being canonically invalid by Bishop Ruch in January 2023.

This presentment and the challenge to it did not become public until June 2023. The challenge led to a canonical amendment also in June 2023 that allowed the case to proceed. In June of 2023, a second presentment was “submitted by priests and lay persons predominantly from within the [Diocese of the Upper Midwest](#).”

In August 2023, the Board of Inquiry made a “public declaration that, in the judgment of at least two-thirds of the Board of Inquiry, there is probable cause to present Bishop Stewart E. Ruch, III for trial for violations of Canon IV.2.3, Canon IV.2.4, and [Canon IV.2.9](#).”

As it relates to transparency we note the following:

- (1) The Husch Blackwell report (the result of the provincial investigation) was posted in September of 2022 and removed from the provincial website a few days later. It has never been reposted and an explanation of its absence has yet to be given.
- (2) The recommendation of the Investigative Team was not made public in a timely manner.
- (3) The recommendation of the Bishops for presentment was not made public in a timely manner.
- (4) Bishop Ruch's challenge to the Bishop's presentment was not made public in a timely manner
- (5) Six months have passed since the last substantial public update.

There are no canonical prohibitions, as far as we can tell, from making these matters of public record.

In secular courts, case proceedings are often matters of public record. Ecclesial cases should not be held to a lower standard. **This lack of information makes it difficult for laity to understand the matters at issue or to engage the process in ways that are helpful. Silence can instead fuel speculation, communicate a lack of concern to survivors and other congregants, and erode trust in our accountability structures.**

#### Transparency Issue # 2: The matter of Inhibitions

According to our canons, inhibitions are not commentaries on the guilt or innocence of the accused. An inhibition is defined below:

*“An Inhibition is a temporary suspension of a Presbyter or Deacon from the exercise of ministry, in whole or in part, when the Bishop believes that it is in the best interests of the accuser(s), the Church, and/or the accused to do so, pending an accusation, canonical investigation, presentment, trial or voluntary submission to discipline under these canons. An Inhibition may be used alone or in conjunction with a Godly Admonition (ACNA IV.2.12)”*

There are three parties to weigh in an inhibition. What is in the best interests of (1) the accusers; (2) the accused; and/or (3) church. The process of inhibiting Bishops is outlined below:

“In the case of the presentment of a Bishop of this Church (including the Archbishop), three of the five senior active diocesan members of the College of Bishops by date of consecration (exclusive of any bishop involved in the presentment or trial) may, by their affirmative vote, temporarily inhibit the Bishop from the exercise of ministry. Such inhibition shall be in writing, signed by those consenting to it.”

Given that the decision has been made *not to inhibit*, it appears that our five senior bishops have decided that it is not in the best interests of the church, the accused, and/or the accuser to inhibit Bishop Ruch.

A reasonable act of transparency would be to grant an explanation of why our leaders made this decision and its bearing on the accused, the accusers, and the church. This again is often the case in secular courts. Decisions are made and the rationale articulated.

Requests of our Bishops:

We humbly join our clergy to request the following:

- (1) Regular updates to the clergy **and laity** of the province and the survivors related to the progress of the trial in a spirit of transparency.
- (2) The creation of a timeline that allows us to know what to expect and when, alongside clarifications and explanations of any delays.
- (3) An update on the matter of the inhibition of Bishop Ruch and a clarification of the rationale of inhibitions more broadly.
- (4) **Clearly outlined and accessible procedures by which laypeople can register documented concerns and questions.”**

The above statements outline the issues without attributing intentional malice to provincial actions nor do they presume the outcome of the trial. We as ACNA laity are also concerned about the potential harm done through this process, which has been publicly lamented by many of the survivors. We, too, believe that the church can and should do better and **ask our lay and clergy delegates to address this at the 2024 Provincial Assembly.**

If any ACNA laity would like to support our requests and are in broad agreement with the sentiments outlined, please indicate your support by filling out the [form](#) which can be found at the link below:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeEHuqRtM-MfC1mYjI2ie9Z5Wls1I0aISksjY\\_9Y4H2sporWA/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeEHuqRtM-MfC1mYjI2ie9Z5Wls1I0aISksjY_9Y4H2sporWA/viewform?usp=sf_link)

*Our aim is to present this letter and its signatures to Bishops on the morning of June 17th. Those interested in signing up should do so by Midnight Eastern Time June 14th.*

Feast of Pentecost 2024

Marissa Franks Burt, Seattle, WA - Diocese of the Rocky Mountains

Monique Hernández - Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly)

Becky Castle Miller, Wheaton, IL - Diocese of C4SO

David R. Stewart, St. Paul, MN - Diocese of the Rocky Mountains

Rachel Wilhelm, Nashville, TN - Diocese of C4SO

### **Signatures**

Scott Bowles	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh
Megan Tucker	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
Audrey Luhmann	Diocese of C4SO
Andrew Luhmann	Diocese of C4SO
Craig French	Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes Toledo, OH
Alyssa Barringer	Diocese of C4SO Illinois
Heather Patton Griffin	Anglican Diocese of Christ Our Hope (formerly) Durham, NC
Denise Daniels	Diocese of C4SO Illinois
Tammy Wretlind	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh (formerly)

David Erickson	Diocese of C4SO Los Angeles, CA
Devin Brand	Diocese of the Upper Midwest
James Tucker	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
Kris McKnight	Diocese of C4SO
Samuel Bennett	Diocese of the Carolinas Charlotte, NC
Blade Barringer	Diocese of C4SO Illinois
Kenneth Medina	Anglican Diocese of the South Lawrenceville, GA
Jennifer Klich	Anglican Diocese of South Carolina Cottageville, SC
Emily Tuttle Valles	Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes
Victoria Nunez	Holland, MI All Saints Anglican
Michael R Kenfield	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
David McGaw	Diocese of C4SO San Francisco, CA
Andrew Wong	El Paso, TX St. Clement
Sam Lacy	Minneapolis, MN Restoration Anglican
Giles Schlehuber	Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes Holland, MI
Seth Prince	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN

Tai French	Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes Toledo, OH
Whitney Evans Harrison	Wheaton, IL Christ Our Advocate
John T. Valles II	Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes
Brian Maiers	Anglican Diocese of Christ Our Hope Durham, NC
Timothy Sedlacek	Diocese of C4SO Illinois
Peter Gross	Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes
Katie Hoiland	Diocese of Western Anglicans (formerly) Arizona
Amanda Weber	Diocese of C4SO Wheaton, IL
Kelley Goewey	Diocese of C4SO Illinois
Timothy Hoiland	Diocese of Western Anglicans (formerly) Arizona
Jared Stewart	Diocese of the Carolinas
Alicia Julienne Bradford	Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic Truro Anglican Church (formerly)
Anna Bruner	Anglican Diocese of South Carolina
Keri Geary	Diocese of the Carolinas
Patrick Roach	Diocese of the Upper Midwest Wheaton, IL Church of the Resurrection
Robin Capcara	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh Pittsburgh, PA
Kimberly Johnson	Diocese of the Upper Midwest

Marianne Kenfield	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
Annelise Wiens	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly)
Sarah Moore	Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic All Saints' Church
Jamie Lacy	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
John Davis	Anglican Diocese of the Southwest New Mexico St. James Parish
Andrea Palpant Dilley	Wheaton, IL All Souls Anglican Church
Elizabeth Warner	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly) Church of the Resurrection
Eric J. Rubio	Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic Arlington, Virginia Restoration Anglican Church
Jacob Rogers	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly) Immanuel Anglican
Joel Andrew Webber	Diocese of C4SO Chicago, IL
Caitlin Becton	Nashville, TN Good Shepherd Nashville
Susan Goforth	Diocese of C4SO Tulsa, OK
Anne Dreblow	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly)
Aaron Hill	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh Wheaton, IL
David LaBerge	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN



Lisa Enoch	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly) Wheaton, IL Church of the Resurrection
Will Enoch	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly) Wheaton, IL Church of the Resurrection
Jeremy McNeese	Diocese of C4SO Austin, TX Christ Church of Austin
Melody Villars	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly)
Joel Erickson	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh
Jennifer Pappenhagen	Diocese of C4SO Austin, TX
Kate Sanderson	Anglican Network in Canada Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Lynsey Stepan	Anglican Diocese of Cascadia St. Matthew's Anglican
Laura Howard	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh Wheaton, IL
Joshua Perkins	Diocese of Mid-America (REC) Houston, Texas Church of the Holy Trinity
Heather Matthews	Diocese of C4SO Wheaton, IL
Carolyn Honea	Diocese of the Carolinas Davidson, NC
Robin Stangland	Anglican Diocese of Cascadia (formerly)
Emunah Rankin	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly) St. Paul, MN
Marta Crilly	Diocese of Christ Our Hope Church of the Cross

Jennifer Verdery	Anglican Diocese of the South
Aleta Franks	Pacific Northwest Advent Anglican
Gary Franks	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Duvall, WA Advent Anglican
Katie Robichaud	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly) Wheaton, IL Church of the Resurrection
Betty Li-Simpson	Diocese of Christ Our Hope Charlottesville, VA
Joshua Li-Simpson	Diocese of Christ Our Hope Charlottesville, VA
John Lundgren	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh St. Paul, MN Church of the Redeemer
Catherine Miller	Gulf Atlantic Diocese Tallahassee, FL
Gretchen Spencer	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh St. Paul, MN
Janet McCuistion	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
Melody Schwarting	Wheaton, IL All Soul's Anglican Church
Preston Scott	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh
Krista Morris	Diocese of C4SO Tulsa, OK
Hayley Mullins	Diocese of Christ Our Hope Winston-Salem, NC
Daria Witte	Diocese of C4SO
Andrew Miller	Diocese of C4SO Atlanta, GA

Melinda Appenheimer	ANiC
David Tollefsen	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh Wheaton, IL
Chad Klopfenstein	Diocese of the Upper Midwest Wheaton, IL
B. Todd Granger	Diocese of Christ Our Hope Chapel Hill, NC
Cynthia Weathers	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains (formerly)
Angela Webster	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh (formerly) Wheaton, IL
Braxton Gately	Diocese of C4SO
Taylor Becker	Diocese of the Upper Midwest
Mary Niedermeyer	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
Kailey Dharam	Diocese of the Upper Midwest
Julia Petersen	Diocese of the Great Lakes
Laura Spaeth	Diocese of Quincy Waldo, WI St. Patrick's Anglican
Michael Rigas	Anglican Diocese of the South (formerly) Knoxville, TN Apostles Anglican Church (formerly)
Jessica Wood	Chicago, IL Immanuel Anglican Church
Lori L. Moore	Anglican Diocese of South Carolina Johns Island, SC
Jill Swanson	Diocese of the Upper Midwest (formerly)
Henny Leonard	Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh Wheaton, IL
Kate Vetter Tyler	Diocese of C4SO

Jennifer Duffy	Diocese of the Upper Midwest Church of the Resurrection (formerly) Wheaton, IL
Scot Schultz	Diocese of the Upper Midwest Church of the Resurrection Sioux Falls, SD
Joshua Bocanegra	Diocese of the Upper Midwest Kansas City, MO St. Aidan's Anglican Church
Jason A. Myers	Diocese of Christ Our Hope Greensboro, NC
Corey Hillman	Diocese of Christ Our Hope
Cathy Starr	Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic Arlington, VA
Russell Ausrin	Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic (formerly) Springfield, VA
Jason Fry	Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic (DOMA) Orange, VA
Hope LaBerge	Restoration Anglican
Haley Fry	Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic
Mary Cregger "Meg"	Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic (DOMA) Arlington, VA Restoration Anglican Church
Holly C. Willmarth	Diocese of Pittsburgh St. Paul, Minnesota
Benjamin Nicka	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
Hannah Sheu	Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Minneapolis, MN
Charlotte Savaloja	Diocese of the Upper Midwest Bloomington MN Resurrection Anglican

Shelley Hiller	Diocese of the Upper Midwest Aurora, IL
Rachel Sedlacek	Diocese of C4SO Oak Park, IL
Christopher Allison	Diocese of C4SO Chicago, IL
Seth Diehl	Oak Park, IL Christ Our Peace Anglican
Danielle Diehl	Oak Park, IL Christ Our Peace Anglican
Denis Haack	Minneapolis, MN Restoration Anglican
Margie Haack	Minneapolis, MN Restoration Anglican
Paige Rogers	The International Diocese
Ryan Ward	Diocese of Christ Our Hope Boston, MA
Madilyn Hood	Lexington, KY Apostles Anglican Church
Rachel Rizzo	Menomonie, WI Menomonie Alliance Church
Dave Ohlman	Columbia, SC Church of the Apostles