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**EPISCOPAL FORUM OF SOUTH CAROLINA**

**Joint Press Release From:**

Albany Via Media  
Concerned Episcopalians of the St. Lawrence Deanery  
Episcopal Forum of South Carolina  
Fort Worth Via Media  
Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh  
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Rio Grande Via Media

**EPISCOPAL VIA MEDIA GROUPS CALL FOR REPUDIATION OF AMERICAN ANGLICAN COUNCIL AND NETWORK**

Since Wednesday, January 14, when the Washington Post revealed the contents of a confidential letter from the Rev. Geoff Chapman of the American Anglican Council (AAC) Committee on Adequate Episcopal Oversight, the AAC and its members have been issuing one disingenuous statement after another, trying to create a smoke screen that would prevent people from seeing the clear meaning of the letter.

With the AAC handling arrangements for the organizational meeting this week of the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes (NACDP), the timing of the Post story could not have been worse for the AAC. The Chapman letter offers advice to parishes seeking to remove themselves from oversight by diocesan bishops who supported the decisions of the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, USA (ECUSA), and the subsequent consecration of V. Gene Robinson, a homosexual living in a committed same-sex relationship, as Bishop of New Hampshire. Primarily, the letter illuminates and addresses the AAC-affiliated parishes' overriding desire -- to keep their property and avoid any obligations to the national church.

Chapman advises a two-phased strategy by which parishes would request oversight from an AAC-approved bishop, join the NACDP and then seek to transfer their property and financial support to the diocese of the AAC-supplied Bishop. The letter also outlines a plan for clusters of parishes to leave the ECUSA and "realign" with the Network. Chapman confidently asserts that by the end of 2004, the heads (primates) of other regional churches in the Anglican Communion will recognize the NACDP as the Episcopal Church in the U.S. and negotiate property settlements between ECUSA and the Network parishes. If the primates fail to negotiate such settlements, then "disobedience of canon law on a widespread basis may be necessary."

Since the Post broke the news of the strategy, Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh, AAC Vice President, Chairman of the Network of Anglican Bishops, and the appointed Moderator of the NACDP; the Rev. David Anderson, President of the AAC; the Rev. Kendall Harmon, Diocese of South Carolina Canon Theologian; and the Rev. Dr. Ephraim Radner of the Anglican Institute, a conservative church think-tank in Colorado, all have claimed that there was "nothing new" in the

letter, and reiterated that they are working within the ECUSA to effect the changes they desire. Early reactions portrayed the letter as just about Episcopal oversight. But the reading public could see that the letter covered much more. The most recent "explanation," offered in a letter to AAC members by Anderson, tries to shift responsibility and blame to everyone but the AAC. It is notable, however, that none of those associated with the AAC or the organizers of the new Network (except for Bishop John W. Howe of Central Florida) have disassociated themselves from any of the plans laid out in the letter.

The letter speaks for itself. Property, not piety is keeping dissident parishes in the Episcopal Church. In the longer term, the AAC expects to use foreign intervention to trump American law and the Episcopal Church Constitution and Canons. Its leaders are assuring dissident parishes that the Anglican primates, a consultative body with no governing authority or standing in the United States, will ride to the rescue of Network parishes, negotiate property settlements and transfer the assets of 2.3-million-member church to a group representing perhaps a tenth of that body. The Chapman letter reveals the AAC's "realignment" for what it really is – the overthrow of the Episcopal Church by extra-legal means.

Delegations from several dioceses have been in Plano meeting behind closed doors to approve a structure for the NACDP. The closed doors are sadly symbolic of the participants' vision for the Episcopal Church. Oversight by an alternative bishop does not require a "network." The formation of the Network is essential to AAC plans because the Anglican Communion is structured around autonomous regional provinces (churches), not around individual dioceses or bishops. The AAC wants the Network to be recognized as the sole official Anglican body in the United States. Certainly, it wants to avoid the ecclesiastical limbo of dissident factions that have left the Episcopal Church over the years. The AAC expects its supporters among the foreign primates either to pressure the Archbishop of Canterbury to withdraw recognition from the Episcopal Church, or to use a recently appointed Anglican Communion commission to advocate radical reorganization of the communion by giving the primates coercive authority over national churches. The supporters of the AAC among the primates have frequently condemned the Episcopal Church for not heeding the non-binding resolution on human sexuality issued by the 1998 Lambeth Conference without acknowledging that the homophobic statements of some of their number are clearly contrary to the same resolution.

The AAC has justified its actions on the grounds that, by consecrating a homosexual as a bishop, the Episcopal Church has been unfaithful to church doctrine, thus violating its own constitution and canons. However, this is a disputable point in a church that embraces varying interpretations of Scripture and whose official statement of belief is the Nicene Creed. Meanwhile, the AAC plans for episcopal oversight are in clear violation of multiple sections of the Episcopal Church Constitution and Canons, which forbid the transfer of property between non-contiguous dioceses and require that bishops have the permission of the diocesan bishop before acting within that diocese. The plans are also contrary to a covenant passed overwhelmingly by the House of Bishops in 2002 that outlined a plan for "supplemental episcopal care," the plan now being implemented by the ECUSA to address the needs of dissident conservative parishes. Chillingly, the Chapman letter assures parishes that there are AAC bishops ready to ignore the canons.

Despite all of the efforts of the AAC to divide the Episcopal Church and polarize its membership, faithful Episcopalians are defending the treasured "via media," the middle ground of the church where multiple viewpoints and Biblical interpretations are respected. The organizations that have jointly issued this statement are representative of that middle ground. We call on loyal Episcopalians throughout the church to defend the traditional "middle way" by opposing any actions that advance the strategy outlined in the Chapman letter. We join with Bishop Don Johnson of West Tennessee in calling on Episcopalians to stop defending the AAC, to resign membership in that organization and to repudiate affiliation with the NACDP. We further call on Episcopalians to support and join the efforts of those individuals and organizations working for church unity.

**Attachments: The following letters are attached as references to sources only:**

- **Confidential Letter dated 12/28/03 by Geoff Chapman, Rector of St Stephens Church in Sewickley, Pa. (Diocese of Pittsburgh) on behalf of the American Anglican Communion** (PDF file).
- **A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Don Johnson of the Diocese of West TN** – as reported in the press Thursday, January 15, 2004
- **A Pastoral Letter from Bishop John W. Howe, Episcopal Bishop of Central Florida** - as reported in the press Thursday, January 15, 2004

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