

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF UPPER SOUTH CAROLINA

July 18, 2010

Trinity Cathedral
1100 Sumter Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear People of Trinity Cathedral,

I know that today you find yourselves in a state of shock over the suspension from ministry this week of your Dean, Philip Linder. I, too, am deeply saddened and acutely aware of the pain many of you feel in response to this news.

Those of you who are puzzled or angered by my decision to suspend the Dean are asking many questions, some of which can only be answered with replies we are unable to give you for privacy reasons. What must firmly be said, however, is that your wardens and chancellor came to me with a call for a special vestry meeting, signed by themselves and 16 vestry members, to consider the dissolution of the pastoral relationship between the Cathedral and Philip Linder. That the level of support was so high indicated to me that there was an acutely strained relationship between the Dean and his lay leadership.

My role as bishop is to receive such documents and supporting information and to make a judgment on next steps. In that capacity and in light of the supporting documentation, I judged it critical that Philip refrain from contact with staff or parishioners until the concerns could be presented at vestry with Philip present. I issued what is known as a Pastoral Directive to enforce that principle. For clergy under the authority of a bishop, such directives are mandatory, with specific canonical provisions and consequences for non-compliance. All clergy make a solemn and holy vow to abide by this authority at their ordinations. My goal in this case was to create a space for mediating a resolution that would benefit both Philip and the Cathedral. Philip's breach of that pastoral directive by numerous contacts with parishioners and staff, with and through his wife, Ellen, has put the health and wholeness of the Cathedral community at great risk.

These breaches left me no alternative but to pursue other means—in this case, suspension—in order to gain time to address the vestry's concerns. Because of the nature of this situation, the suspension must remain in effect until the process set in motion by Philip's behavior has run its course. That process precludes any contact between Philip and staff or members of the church.

Once again, this is not the path any of us would have wished, least of all me, but it is the path Philip has chosen.

As I have prayed the Lord's Prayer over the course of these events, I find myself praying it more and more slowly—recognizing that I and all involved are humbled before the words “your will be done” as we move through the process that is now unfolding. “Forgive us our sins” applies to all of us who make decisions of consequence to others, and most of all to those of us who might be tempted make such decisions lightly or unadvisedly. The road ahead is now rockier than it should have been, and I am deeply sorry that we have to walk this particular road together.

I do however trust that other “demand” we make of our Lord when we say, “Give us today our daily bread.” I trust that God will truly provide for us even as we walk uncharted, painful paths and that he will lead us to health and wholeness. And—dare I say it—even joy.

Two things in closing: First, I want to articulate my confidence in the wardens and vestry leadership of this parish—who have undertaken these difficult matters with great courage, prayer and intention for the health of the Cathedral community—and also my confidence in the Trinity staff. You have gifted, thoughtful and faithfully motivated leadership.

Second, I want to ask for your prayers to be lifted up to God for all of us to open our hands, eyes and ears to God's call for us to be one even in the midst of our disagreements, confusion and hurt. I ask for your prayers for Philip and Ellen and their family. For myself, I will continue to act as wisely and prayerfully as I know how and always with the long-term health and vitality of God's Church at the center of my being.

St. Paul calls us to “run with perseverance the race” set before us. Perseverance means that we press on towards the prize of the heavenly call in Christ Jesus even when the road presents challenges we neither understand nor know yet how to overcome.

However this current difficulty comes out, I know that this community will thrive. And I commit my prayers and my service to that end.

In the name of Jesus Christ,



The Rt. Rev. W. Andrew Waldo, Bishop
The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina