

My dear friends in the Parish of Morrisburg – Iroquois – Riverside Heights,

It is with a heavy heart that I report that today I relinquished my license to Bishop John Chapman of the Diocese of Ottawa. This means that as of today I am no longer your rector, nor am I licensed to perform any priestly or diaconal duties within the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa or in the Anglican Church of Canada (ACoC). Instead, I have been licensed as a priest within the Anglican Network in Canada (ANiC). I know that this comes as an enormous shock to most of you, to say the least. I asked Bishop Chapman permission to address the parish this Sunday to explain myself and to say ‘farewell’, but that request was denied. I am not allowed back in the church buildings (except for the rectory, which our family will vacate by Oct 14). So, I thought it best to write this note to help address some of the likely questions that must be emerging as you receive this news.

1) Was I fired?

No. I need to be clear on this. Bishop Chapman did not fire me, nor was I coerced into relinquishment. This was a voluntary act, that I was forced by conscience to make. I could no longer serve under Bishop Chapman’s episcopal oversight, nor alongside so many colleagues who have abandoned the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). More on those heresies in a moment. This was an agonizing decision that was not taken lightly (though the bishop tells me I need my head examined, literally) and one that I am still pained by. When we came to this parish we came with the full intention of staying long term. We quickly fell in love with this place and with you. But, as we got more involved with diocesan life we were horrified by how far off the rails the bishop and diocesan synod were taking us. Sure there are many within this parish who share those same liberal sentiments, but, nevertheless, my conflict is with the bishop and diocesan synod, not with you.

2) But surely I could have ignored the diocesan “heresies” and simply kept on doing my faithful work in this parish?

No longer. For the nine years that I have served within the ACoC, I’ve watched these heresies eat away at the faithful and add even more confusion to the lost. And this apostasy (i.e. the abandonment of the faith) means ultimately that people are being led away from salvation by a “different gospel...that is not gospel at all” (Gal 1:6-7). I can no longer work within and support an institution that is leading people away from Gospel. Though the local rector has a fair amount of autonomy on what they preach and practice, our episcopal structure binds us to the bishop and the diocese. We are not congregationalists, who can ignore what others are doing, but rather we are episcopalians, who are legally and morally bound tightly together. As a bishop will say in the licensing of a rector, “receive this ministry which is mine and yours.” If I am correct in seeing this bishop as an apostate, then the whole of the diocese is touched by that apostasy.

3) But isn’t this just all about homosexuality?

Not at all. It is unfortunate that much of what the average person hears about the current shakeup within Anglicanism is that it is only about whether “we accept or reject homosexuals.” As a priest, I have never rejected anyone on the basis of their sins. What is at stake is the question of whether homosexuality is a godly lifestyle for Christians to engage in. But even this is not the REAL issue at all, but rather the symptom. The REAL issue is the rejection of the Gospel of repentance, forgiveness, and new life offered in Jesus Christ. It is also a rejection of

the authority of the Bible. If the culture deems something as permissible, then the liberal church quickly baptizes it regardless of what the Bible says. But what if the biblical vice lists (e.g. 1Cor 6:9) are, in fact, still valid? That the sins that scripture catalogues (including homosexuality) are the ways in which we are a fallen people who need the grace of salvation and forgiveness in Jesus? Then will we not be inflicting enormous harm by telling people that God is okay with these sins when he really isn't? At the heart of this issue is the question, 'do we really need a Saviour, or are we mostly okay on our own?' It seems to me that the bishop and synod of the Diocese of Ottawa have opted for the latter. Where they have gone I can go no longer.

4) Do I think that everyone who remains in the Anglican Church of Canada is apostate?

Absolutely NOT! The Lord alone is judge. I have friends across the country who have chosen to stay and fight for faithfulness within the ACoC. And I know that there are people within this parish who love Jesus passionately and hold the Bible as authoritative. My hope – and the hope of all of us who realign with ANiC – is that the true church, made up of all different brands of faithful Christians, can eventually experience the unity envisioned in Jesus' high priestly prayer, "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:11). Certainly not all within the ACoC have bowed the knee to Baal (see 1Kings 19:18; Rom 11:4) yet each of us does need to test the spirits of the churches of which we are members (1Jn 4:1).

5) Have I ceased to be a priest or an Anglican?

Not in the slightest. I relinquished my license, not my ordination as a deacon and priest in the Church of God. Bishop Donald Harvey of the Anglican Network in Canada recognized my holy orders today in writing and therefore my ordination remains valid and I continue to faithfully hold to my vows. As far as being Anglican is concerned, it is argued that between 70-80% of Anglicans worldwide agree with the theological conservatives. As my new Primate, Archbishop Gregory Venables has said, "Far from being dissidents, these people [i.e. in ANiC] are classic Anglicans."

6) Am I putting my family out on the street by this decision?

No, but thanks for caring about our needs. Though it is hard to leave this parish, we are blessed to have been offered a new position within ANiC that will provide us with a comparable income and a venue to continue to minister. If individuals would like to know more about my new ministry, please email me and I will be glad to chat about it.

In closing, let me say that though this action may seem to say otherwise, I very much do love the people of this parish, and I am going to miss you terribly. Forgive me if it seems a bit over the top to quote Martin Luther here, but his words, when he was on trial for standing up to a church that had lost its way, resonate with me deeply:

Unless you prove to me by Scripture and plain reason that I am wrong, I cannot and will not recant. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.

With love and prayers in Christ Jesus,
The Reverend Paul Donison
Anglican Network in Canada