



## **Diocese of Western Anglicans**

### **A Statement on Holy Orders**

**March 11, 2023**

When the Anglican Church in North America was established in 2009, the signatories on the originating documents were divided on the question, 'Who may be ordained in the church?' Some clergy believe that only men may be ordained as deacons and priests. Other clergy believe that men and women may be ordained as deacons but believe that only men may be ordained as priests. Still other clergy believe that men and women may be ordained as deacons and priests. Where there was consensus among the clergy in regard to the episcopate, whereby only men would be consecrated as bishops, the differences on the diaconate and presbyterate were allowed to remain. This negotiated agreement was stipulated in the Constitution and Canons of the province. For the orders of deacons and priests, it was also agreed that each diocese would have the freedom to follow its own conscience and convictions on this matter, permitting or restricting access to Holy Orders as they deem right and good to do. In effecting this agreement, it was also agreed among some that the province would enter into a study of Holy Orders in the hope that greater theological clarity might be given and, perhaps, greater agreement might be effected, as a result.

The Diocese of Western Anglicans was formed primarily from a process of gathering former Episcopal Church congregations that had left The Episcopal Church to continue their life under the oversight of overseas provinces that served to provide care for these congregations until a biblically orthodox province might be re-established in the United States. Each of these overseas provinces had their own view of the permissibility of women serving as deacons and priests, so there was no uniformity on this matter to be drawn upon in the formation of the diocese. As the Diocese of Western Anglicans was formally organized, congregations with women deacons and priests came into fellowship together and the diocese elected its first bishop. During his episcopate, our first bishop led conversations with the clergy and explained his views about women in the presbyterate, but these discussions, while clarifying the bishop's personal convictions, did not result in any canons being established to articulate diocesan policy. They also generated a good deal of hurt, especially among the clergy of the diocese. The bishop retired after 5 years of episcopal service due to health concerns.

When the diocese was required to elect a new bishop, the work at the provincial level on Holy Orders was imminent. It was determined by the new bishop-elect that to stipulate a policy in advance of the Report on Holy Orders would only introduce needless confusion and potential conflict, especially if the new bishop's position was found to be in conflict with the recommendations later made by the Report on Holy Orders. In short, the bishop's stated intention was to:



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- a. lead in concert with the posture taken by the province and
- b. agree to the position produced by the report as affirmed by the College of Bishops.

This approach was and continues to be implemented in order to promote unity and ensure that the College of Bishops receives the appropriate support in their ministry as Bishops when meeting in Council on behalf of the church. In order to allow the province the time it had needed to produce its work on Holy Orders, the bishop established a policy in 2015 that was intended to serve the diocese by maintaining unity in an environment where people held different and often opposing positions on the ordination of women presbyters. Simply stated:

1. The province is in a season described as one of 'reception', which means that the ordination of women presbyters was sufficiently recent that the whole church has not had the time to determine its effect and discern if it was/is indeed the mind of the Holy Spirit to ordain women as presbyters. Given that the province has taken the position that each diocese would make its own determination on the ordination of women to the presbyterate, this delegation of episcopal authority establishes ordination as an area of ongoing concern, discussion, tension and potential conflict in the province. Over time, this season has been salted with disagreements and decisions which negatively impact our unity as a province, as individual dioceses continue to identify distinctives that foster differing approaches on Holy Orders. To add to the difficulty of this season, the ACNA as an ecclesiastical child of GAFCON, seeks to live in communion with the biblically orthodox provinces of the Anglican Communion.
2. The diocese is comprised of congregations with clergy and/or lay leaders who differ in their views on the acceptability of women in presbyteral orders.
3. The diocese is in an overlapping relationship with other dioceses that have already developed clear and strong positions on women in presbyteral orders often concretized in diocesan canons, a de-stabilizing reality produced by overlap with an added canonical impetus that encourages Local Churches and, especially their clergy, to make decisions on this matter alone. In a diocese that respects the missional value of close proximity of churches geographically, departures over this issue are painful, time-consuming, costly and retard the development of missional region in our deaneries.
4. Local Churches were given the authority by the current bishop to make the decision as to whether they would receive a woman presbyter for ministry among them, so as to protect anyone from being required to violate their personal convictions on this matter. This has been stated and re-stated while also being concretized in the Rector's



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- Search Manual. The bishop has ensured that the convictions of the Local Church would be respected.
5. All diocesan gatherings of clergy, including deanery clergy and congregation gatherings, ensure that the Bishop, Dean or a male presbyter appointed by them serve as the Celebrant during celebrations of the Holy Eucharist. Women serving at the altar serve in roles that deacons and lay people are also authorized to exercise in eucharistic celebrations.
  6. In the ordination processes of the diocese, the focus and emphasis has been placed on discerning the 'call' of the person. Inherent in this view is that every person (discerning individual, Rector, Dean, Bishop) and overseeing entity (Vestry, Deanery CFT) would practice discernment by listening for God's voice and His purpose at all levels of the church—personally and communally. In order for this approach to work effectively, it became necessary to make 'call' and 'vocation primary, which required everyone to make 'sex' or 'gender' secondary in this process. If a call is discerned by the person, the Local Church, the Deanery and the Diocese, each and every one of us must trust the Holy Spirit's work of 'calling' the future clergy into ordained ministry.
  7. All clergy were and are expected to honor one another and affirm the ministry of one another as presbyters and deacons without regard to one's personal views on the matter of women in presbyteral orders.

The Report on Holy Orders was produced for use by the College of Bishops who then met in Conclave in Victoria, British Columbia in September of 2017 to discuss it and work toward a position from which the province might be able to move forward in mission and ministry. The Conclave produced the following statement, in addition to a Preamble and Statement of Commitment:

*“COLLEGE OF BISHOPS STATEMENT ON HOLY ORDERS*

*September 7, 2017*

*Having gratefully received and thoroughly considered the five-year study by the Theological Task Force on Holy Orders, we acknowledge that there are differing principles of ecclesiology and hermeneutics that are acceptable within Anglicanism that may lead to divergent conclusions regarding women's ordination to the priesthood. However, we also acknowledge that this practice is a recent innovation to Apostolic Tradition and Catholic Order. We agree that there is insufficient scriptural warrant to accept women's ordination to the priesthood as standard practice throughout the province.*



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*However, we continue to acknowledge that individual dioceses have constitutional authority to ordain women to the priesthood."*

The acknowledgement in the statement that we hold differing principles and hermeneutics theologically, while permissible in Anglicanism, also contributes to clergy and congregations selecting dioceses on the basis of their views regarding this issue alone. After many years of this reality, there is increasing unrest in the province and greater debate over how we might find greater unity.

The Report on Holy Orders (RHO) illuminates, at least, some of the necessary components that combine to establish ecclesial authority to make change in matters of church governance, oversight and stewardship.

#### **Point 1: Change is possible and recognized as necessary.**

##### Drawing upon our Evangelical Roots-

1. "...there are matters in the life of the Church, in which the Church is free to make changes or eliminate; however. There are other matters which the Church is not free to modify or abolish (Article XX)" RHO P. 17
2. "...there are two traditions and ceremonies that are accepted as clearly and directly being ordained by Christ and therefore are not able to be changed substantially or abolished: these are Baptism and Holy Communion." RHO P. 18 "...the Church may only change or eliminate those traditions and ceremonies which are not based on the instructions of Scripture. The Church may do nothing that circumvents or supersedes the Word of God." RHO P. 18
3. "In matters of ceremony and polity, the Church has the liberty to adapt customs to suit present requirements, provided that these adaptations be "not contrary" to the Word of God." RHO P. 92
4. "Reviewing the ecclesiology of the English Reformation, we can see that the Tudor Reformers emphasized several important propositions...  
(1) ...Some polity and some form of ecclesiastical discipline were assumed to be necessary, but their precise shape did not lie at the heart of the Church's identity. The Church's polity was an *adiaphoron*." RHO P. 58

##### Drawing upon our Catholic roots-

1. "Within the Church, however, the doctrines of the faith and the administration of the sacraments have been revealed by God and are unchangeable. There are, however, a



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number of ‘things that are necessary hereunto,’ including ‘ceremonies’ (that is, such external rites as are usually annexed unto Church actions), as well as, ‘matters of government’. These, not being revealed from God, lie under the authority of the Church.” RHO P. 134

2. “The necessity of a polity which upholds the dignity of the Church is not the necessity of a particular polity, and indeed, if any law were to cease to fulfill its ends, it should be changed. Such a change is not the province of individual opinions or consciences, which are unreliable, but should be made by lawful authority.” RHO P. 135

Consequently, changes that are not contrary to Holy Scripture and which lie in arenas not generally defined as the ‘faith of the Church’ (Jerusalem Declaration Articles 3, 4), which includes areas covered by the Church’s Creeds, may be made by those who have ‘lawful authority’ to do so in its efforts to provide ‘godly order’ (Jerusalem Declaration Article 7) for its life and ministry.

**Point 2: Changes are made in councils of church leaders who have recognized and ‘lawful authority’ to act. The lawful authority is defined in the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution and Canons of the Church. [see BCP 2019 p. 506 “Grant to this your servant...” and C & C p. 6 Article X, 1, 2 and p. 25 Title III, Canon 8, Section 2]**

1. “When changes are made, they are done in a conciliar manner.” RHO P. 18

**Point 3: Bishops defend the faith and guide the ordering of the Church’s ministry.**

1. “Bishops: Symbol of Unity in Christ’s One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” RHO P. 18
2. “They are chief missionaries and chief pastors, guardians and teachers of doctrine, and administrators of godly discipline and governance.” C & C, Title III, Canon 8, Section 2 P. 25

The document before us that has been referenced was prepared for the College of Bishops, so that they, as the lawful authority of the church, might meet in council to address the matters regarding the ordering of the church’s ministry which have served to impede the unity of the church. Its meeting in September of 2017 to receive the report offered the statement that acknowledged the reality of our situation, but offered little to no guidance for how it may be addressed other than to allow each diocese to address the ordering of the ministry on its own. In practical terms, this simply reflects the position taken in 2009 at the Constitutional Convention for the formation of the Anglican Church in North America.





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We are now in a position where those given 'lawful authority' are not inclined to 'meet in council' to alleviate this distress by their leadership as the College of Bishops, the result of which is increasingly leading us to division as dioceses harden their positions on these matters. This frustrates our calling as bishops to serve as 'symbols of unity in Christ's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church'.

My position has been to pray and create the space for the Holy Spirit to move us in the province and in the diocese toward unity, while waiting for the College of Bishops to address the challenge of women in the ministry of the Presbyterate. This posture has been insufficient to convince some of our clergy who want a higher level of security than the bishop's promises. In August 2021, Western Anglicans transferred the Rev. Greg Peters and released Epiphany Anglican Church to the care of the Reformed Episcopal Church, which makes no provision for women to be ordained. In August 2022, Western Anglicans is scheduled to transfer Deacon Chandler Wiley and release Emmaus Anglican Church to the Diocese of the Rocky Mountains, which has a canon restricting the ordination of women to the diaconate. The effect of this kind of sorting along the lines of 'those who do' and 'those who don't' produces distinctives in each diocese that has the effect of separating us from one another in ways that hinder our fellowship and mission. These kinds of movements tear at the fabric of our fellowship as clergy and members of the same diocese, as well. Monitoring and managing this situation requires a great deal of time as we work through the issues, robbing time from our focus on mission and ministry. Moreover, by making this issue of 'order' an exercise of decision for the clergy and people of the diocese, we depart from historic practices where bishops determine these matters in council. This distortion disrupts and deters us, raising the likelihood that others in our midst may avail themselves of an opportunity to transition to another diocese, further weakening our common mission to reach people in the western United States with a demonstrated unity.