

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE RT REV'D CHARLES E. BENNISON, JR. AND THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA  
IN RESPONSE TO A REQUEST FOR A PROCESS OF MEDIATION**

**IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND:**

During the annual Convention of the Diocese of Pennsylvania which began on November 4, 2005, the following actions were reported:

- There were calls for the Bishop's resignation from the floor;
- The proposed budget failed necessitating a special convention;
- Persons elected to the Standing Committee support the call for resignation; and
- The Bishop in his annual address said, "If you feel I'm not leading you effectively, tell me, and if I feel it is God's will, I'll resign. I love my work, and far more do I love you with whom I work, but it's your Diocese, not mine. I'm with Paul; it is fine by me that death is at work in me, as long as there's life in you."

Between November 8<sup>th</sup> and December 13<sup>th</sup> the Deans offered repeatedly to assist the Bishop in creating a process for "listening" in response to the actions of Convention. This included a clergy gathering on November 16<sup>th</sup> at which the Bishop proceeded with his own design and defense of his actions.

The Diocesan Council held a meeting on January 12<sup>th</sup> that was described as "difficult" because 45 people identified as "Concerned Pennsylvania Episcopalians" presented a document entitled "Crisis in Confidence," which called for the Diocese, through its leadership, to begin a process of acknowledging and addressing the real and perceived concerns, rooted in fear, anxiety, and anger on behalf of many members within our community."

On January 17<sup>th</sup> the Deans presented a plan to the Bishop for outside consultation through either The Rt Rev'd F. Clayton Matthews of the Office of Pastoral Development or Ms. Pam Holliman, Executive Director of The Samaritan Counseling Center, to assist in creating a process of reconciliation. It was decided to contact Ms. Holliman so that the presenting issues would not become bigger and more public.

On January 24<sup>th</sup> the Standing Committee took a unanimous vote of no confidence and respectfully requested the Bishop to retire or resign by March 31, 2006. Previously, the Standing Committee said that it would not consent to the reappointment of Bill Bullitt as chancellor.

On January 25<sup>th</sup> the Bishop sent out to the clergy informing them of the Standing Committee's action, and said that he was "seriously praying about the Standing Committee's request."

On January 26<sup>th</sup> the Bishop wrote to the clergy, "I have come to the conclusion and decision that my resignation would not be a solution to the challenges we face. Rather, we need to pursue together a rigorous long-term process of addressing our problems. I pledge myself to participate in such a process, once created, and invite the Standing Committee and all of you to be part of it."

On January 31<sup>st</sup>, the Deans were informed that Ms. Pam Holliman had withdrawn from consideration for the work previously envisioned. At that meeting the Bishop gave permission for The Rt Rev'd F. Clayton Matthews of the Office of Pastoral Development to be invited to come and meet with the leadership as soon as possible. The Deans agreed to take a pastoral lead, and the Bishop acknowledged that he had to leave open the question about his staying or leaving in order for the process to work. The Standing Committee was contacted that evening, and support was offered to the idea.

On February 9<sup>th</sup>, the Diocesan Council met; and it has been reported that they voted 21/5 to not support the Standing Committee in their decision to call for the Bishop's resignation in favor of a process that might bring about reconciliation.

### **LONG TERM BACKGROUND:**

In **1998**, the Bishop called the Diocese into a long range vision process which involved several hundred leaders. In the middle of the process, a video was prepared and shown to all of the working groups which contained the Bishop revealing his vision for the Diocese. The resulting product from this process was the Bishop's vision, know then as the 3 C's which later became the 4 C's (Campus Ministry, The Cathedral, A Camp, and later Congregational Development). Many view the video as a form of manipulation by the Bishop, and the Bishop has indicated that he regrets the timing of the video in the process.

The Rev'd Louis Temme, President of the Standing Committee in **1999**, and Bishop Bennison called The Rev'd Patricia Carroll (now Patricia Hayes) of The Alban Institute to come to work with them on issues that existed between the Standing Committee and the Bishop. A summary from this report, received on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, says the following:

- Issues Identified
  - Feeling discounted by the Bishop
  - Not working collaboratively
  - Poor communication
  - Accumulation of differences and disagreements
  - Direction from the Presiding Bishop to work on relationship
  
- Recommendations
  - Focus on communications
  - Do process checks
  - Understand the system better
  - Examine the role of the Standing Committee
  - Live into that identity and purpose.

(See Attachment A)

It has been reported and confirmed that Mr. Temme did at the following Convention in **2000** refer to the Diocese as a "rudderless ship."

Mr. Allen L. Martineau of Barnes and Roche, Inc. was asked by the Bishop early in **2002** to help provide him with an assessment of the temperament of the leadership of the Diocese in preparation for a Capital Fund Drive. This work has been characterized as one that would present the truth to the Bishop. It has been reported that the information gained from these interviews was not encouraging to the Bishop. A summary of this report, received on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, gives no insightful information.

(See Attachment B)

Also, in the fall of **2002** a mediation process overseen by the Presiding Bishop's Office regarding the situation in Rosemont was discontinued due to the Bishop's lack of cooperation in the process.

The Trustee Leadership Development Group through Ms. Katherine Tyler Scott was invited by the Bishop to meet with nearly ninety Diocesan leaders in **2003** at Rehoboth Beach, Delaware for the purpose of preparing those assembled to provide leadership for change in preparation for a Capital Fund Campaign. This initiative was referred to as "Our Holy Experiment." There is information that indicates that a similar gathering, not with the leadership of Ms. Scott, was convened in 2002 as well. The summary report from this meeting indicates that much progress had been accomplished, and that there remained legitimate questions and concerns. 9 recommendations were made:

- Continue to foster a community of leaders;
- Improve communication in each initiative and of the whole vision (Those who've bought into the vision may have difficulty understanding the significant gap between what they've grasped and what others understand.)
- Keep initiatives connected under one vision (Perception has become reality in their minds. This perception [that it is the Bishop's vision] needs to be addressed.)
- Monitor the pace of the change and honor human limits;
- Reconnect and utilize your history;
- Be cognizant of leadership styles (The Bishop is a brilliant visionary with a pacesetter style....In some instances a pacesetter style can be overwhelming and can lead to distress and burnout.)
- Provide training in conflict management (Whenever change is introduced there will be conflict.)
- Continue to learn from failure; and
- Celebrate the small wins.

(See Attachment C)

Katherine Tyler Scott was invited back to meet with the same group of Diocesan leaders in **2004** at Rehoboth Beach to continue the work from the previous year, and this session was quite different by everyone's accounting. What had been planned as a celebration of a major initiative within the Diocese, ended with a response of little to no support for the current direction. A summary of this report, received on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, notes the following:

- Day one was designed to be an introduction to the retreat; however, issues identified by the participants were serious concerns about the management and reporting of Diocesan finances. “The previous archaic method and system of financial record keeping prior to Bishop Bennison were described as the primary reasons for current difficulties of the reporting.”
- Day two consisted of presentations on the 4C’s and a session on leadership. The group returned with more questions about finances. The day ended with a session by Beattie Friday, and Beattie was unable to complete the presentation because the “groups’ fatigue and frustration led to an abrupt closure.”
- Day three’s schedule was changed to deal with a number of complaints and concerns not being dealt with in the whole group in a more direct and constructive manner. “This indirect communication pattern is notable and needs to be broken if the diocese is to move toward successfully achieving its vision.

(See Attachment D)

Also, in May 2004 the Standing Committee failed by a vote of 5 to 4 with 1 abstention to seek an intervention process overseen by The Presiding Bishop’s Office.

#### **DESIGN FOR THE MEETING ON THE 21<sup>ST</sup>:**

The original design for the meeting was to invite The Concerned Pennsylvania Episcopalians (per the advice of the Bishop and the Standing Committee), The Council, The Standing Committee, and the Bishop with meetings to occur in this order followed by a summary meeting at the end of the day. (It turned out that the full Council was never invited to the meeting.)

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, the Bishop called to say that he had just met with the Deans, and he had a policy of not meeting with vestries about a priest unless the priest in question was present so he wanted to be present for all of the meetings. He was told that while this might be seen as intimidation on his part, the design would try to honor his request even though there would most likely be times when he would be asked to remove himself.

The President of the Standing Committee, The Rev’d Bill Wood, and The Spokesperson for the Deans, The Rev’d Ruth Kirk, were informed of this request, and each responded that it would be inappropriate for the Bishop to be present. All of this was done by email with copies to everyone including the Bishop. (The Bishop reported on the 21<sup>st</sup> that he had not received these emails, and it appears that his copies went to an incorrect email address.)

A new design which had the Bishop coming into each session at the end as an observer to hear a summary of the content of the meetings was put into place. At the end of each summary the following question was presented to all assembled, “Has anything new been said today that you have not already said to the Bishop before,” and the answer was always, “no.”

(See Attachment E)

## **WHO WE ARE:**

Ms. Woodriff (Woodi) Sprinkel, LCSW, is a former Senior Warden who is in private practice, and currently serves on the Title IV Task Force of The General Convention. She leads several clergy and bishop supervisory groups, and has worked with Bishop Matthews in over a dozen dioceses on a variety of subjects.

The Rt Rev'd F. Clayton Matthews has been the Bishop for The Office of Pastoral Development since June 1998, and prior to that he was Canon to the Ordinary (1987-1993) and Bishop Suffragan (1993-1998) in the Diocese of Virginia.

## **SUMMARY OF FEBRUARY 21<sup>ST</sup> MEETING:**

The meeting with the **Concerned Episcopalians** started late due to Bishop Bennison's initial refusal to cooperate with the design of the meetings to be held that day. Approximately 40 people representing diverse cultural, theological, social, geographic, and economic perspectives gave succinct examples of insensitivity, manipulation of finances, lack of trust, fear of retribution, and breaches of confidentiality on the part of the Bishop. Their stated purpose was to put a "human face" on the issues that are before the Diocese. They were well organized in their statements, and they spoke with considerable passion on the subjects being presented. Before the Bishop came into the room for the summary sessions several persons asked to be dismissed, because they did not want the Bishop to see them "as they feared reprisal from him." The Bishop joined the meeting as an observer, and listened to the summary of the content of the meeting.

(Attachment F)

**The Deans** met next and they were asked "how did they get into the position in which they now find themselves?" They explained that they became quite concerned when at a meeting following the Convention, the Bishop said that he thought it was the "best Convention ever"; and at that moment, they knew that something had to be done. While the Deans would have liked to be a reconciling agent, they also recognized that they held concerns regarding the Bishop's authoritarian and controlling style of leadership and his disenfranchising or discounting of their abilities. It was also recognized that the Bishop is a brilliant person, but it was alleged that he leads poorly, and has not read the culture of the Diocese well. Everyone recognized that one person did not create the situation in which the Diocese now finds itself, but the Bishop is the leader. When asked if the Bishop was capable of entering into a process without trying to control it, they unanimously said the probability was very low. When asked if the Bishop could change his previous pattern of behavior should some process be proposed, the answer was a unanimous, no. The bishop then joined the meeting as an observer while a summary of the contents of the meeting were reviewed.

A meeting with **The Standing Committee** then followed. The Rev'd Glenn Matis joined the meeting by speaker phone, and at least one member of the Committee was not present. The S.C. submitted two written documents: "How we arrived at this point and what options we considered"; and "Summary of key points related to financial matters."

Prior to January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006 the S.C. considered 3 options in the presence of the Chancellor:

- contact The Office of Pastoral Development (disposed of by the Chancellor who said that he had talked with the Presiding Bishop's Chancellor);
- contact the Attorney General regarding financial concerns (decided no); or
- pass a resolution calling for the Bishop's resignation following a vote of no confidence.

The report entitled, "How we arrived at this point..." contains the following headings:

- A Breakdown in Trust (this raises the question of a systematic dismantling of independent voices in financial matters, withholding of important information, and the Bishop's consistent refusal to consult with others on major actions that impact on the welfare of the Diocese;
- Withholding of Financial Information (not receiving vital information requested of the Bishop, reclassifying documents, manipulating reports, creating Diocesan indebtedness and the allocation of unrestricted net assets which the Bishop has failed to address with the S.C.);
- Failed Efforts (failed private meetings with the Bishop, especially a January 5<sup>th</sup> meeting regarding the "fiscal sanity," and stability of the Diocese;
- A Set Agenda in Spite of Input (the most recent example is the Bishop refusing to follow the decision of the Convention regarding the salaries of DCMM Clergy and repeated failure of the Bishop to communicate with the Diocesan Council regarding a document prepared by the S.C. for that purpose.)

(Attachments G)

The S.C. then brought up the issue of legal counsel, and they were told that in situations like this separate legal counsel was obtained by the S.C. at Diocesan expense.

The bishop then joined the meeting as an observer while the contents of the meeting were reviewed, and a copy of the 2 reports were given to the Bishop.

During lunch the Bishop met with the S.C., and the Deans ate together separately.

Following lunch, Woodi Sprinkel and Bishop Matthews met with Bishop Bennisson. When asked how he was feeling, he said that he was feeling "fine," a decidedly odd and seemingly inappropriate response given the circumstances. When asked on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being very bad, how he would rate the current situation in the Diocese, his response was a 9.5 or a 10. When the discrepancy between the seriousness of the problems he was facing and how he was feeling about them was pointed out, Bishop Bennisson appeared to have no real comprehension of the incongruity. He admitted that his passion was in development and building, and that he did

not often take into account the effects of his decisions on people. He acknowledged the legitimacy of the observation from the Deans that even though he was always courteous his style was authoritarian and dismissive. The Bishop had earlier given us a black and white copy of the March issue The Pennsylvania Episcopalian & Episcopal Life. We told him that the heading about Reconciliation being the theme of Convention was misleading at the very least and quite questionable in its accuracy. We suggested that he might want to pull that heading if at all possible. The Bishop told us that this was an independent publication, and he couldn't do that. We noted that the article in question was by the Diocesan Staff. He reiterated that he had no control over what was to be published. There were several times in this interview that the Bishop denied responsibility for certain concerns and issues; rather, explaining that they were the results of other's actions or decisions.

(Attachment H)

During this meeting we told Bishop Bennison that given his leadership preference, the unanimous response by the Deans that he, in their opinion, could not change and the unanimous request of the Standing Committee for his resignation, that we could not recommend any long term process for reconciliation. We also told him that if he persisted in this pattern of behavior, the issues before him and the Diocese would deteriorate into an ugly and unfortunate battle in which he would ultimately have to leave. Bishop Bennison was reminded again that, contrary to information already on the Diocesan Web site, no recommendation for any process of reconciliation would be made by us at this meeting. He was told that publicizing incorrect information is basically "false advertising."

The Standing Committee and Deans then joined us and a summary of the meeting with the Standing Committee was given to the Deans followed by a summary of the meeting with the Bishop without some of the personal details.

In concluding the day, we reported that given the circumstances of the divisions and the contents of the day's meetings, we could not recommend any process at that time. A commitment was made to be in touch with the Bishop and The Standing Committee within a week or two.

### **Conclusions:**

Given the depth of divisions that have been created over many years, the repeated leadership style preference of the Bishop, and the unanimous opinion that the Bishop is incapable of entering into any process without being in control of it; we cannot recommend any process of conciliation or any "rigorous long-term process for addressing problems."

If the Standing Committee and the Bishop still insist that some process be devised for them to address the issues that have been raised and/or to work on terms of separation through formal mediation, then the Presiding Bishop's Office will assist as long as the ground rules are defined

by outside persons to insure that neither party tries to control the process. The expense of this work would be solely that of the Diocese, and the choice of the mediation firm would be that of the Presiding Bishop's Office.

Respectfully submitted by The Rt Rev'd F. Clayton Matthews and Ms. Woodriff Sprinkel on March 7, 2006.