

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

~Psalm 46.¹⁻³

To All the Faithful of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina:

Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This past week news has broken about our Anglican Church—about many issues of alleged pastoral neglect by Bishop Ruch of the Upper Midwest Diocese; and, much closer to home, a piece regarding a Presentment (a legal charge) against Archbishop Steve Wood concerning allegations of pastoral abuse of former clergy, unwanted sexual advances towards a lay employee, and other issues, like plagiarism in sermons—in stories published by Ian Shapiro in *The Washington Post*.

It is important to say two things about the allegations against Archbishop Wood: first, the allegations come from credible sources. They must be taken seriously, and I am confident they will. Second, at this stage they remain allegations. The Presentment (the charges) must be validated, and, when validated, a Board of Inquiry will be established. If the Board of Inquiry determines there is probable cause to put the accused to trial, two things will happen: the nature of the charges will be made public—with care given to protect anonymity where needed, and then the case will proceed, with discovery, potential motions, and, ultimately, presentation of evidence and argument before the Court for the Trial of a Bishop. The Canons require expeditious handling in accordance with due principles of fairness, due process, and justice. Due to the nature of these proceedings, there will be times that, from our perspective, look like nothing is happening. Please be patient. Finally, like in American civil law, our Canonical Law holds the accused as innocent until proven guilty. And guilt must be established to the standard of clear and convincing evidence.

With these charges, we have entered a season of storms. Storms that seem to threaten the very foundations of our church, and we ask, what in the world is going on?

I want to try to give some perspective, to set these events in a context that, as I have prayed, with groaning in my soul too deep for words, through sleepless nights and challenging days, has helped me make some sense of it, and has been helpful to me in my prayers and in my work.

Years ago, I learned that organizations and institutions go through a series of steps as they grow. Those steps were described as forming, norming, storming, and performing. I thought of that as I prayed about the storms in which we find ourselves.

I recall being at Plano, Texas in 2009 when the ACNA was *formed*. I wish I had seen it then, but looking back I see clearly now. There was a troublesome spirit of pride at work as we Constituted the ACNA. Here was our sin: we were so focused on the evil outside of ourselves, that we couldn't see the sin within us. I'm thinking of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's famous line from *The Gulag Archipelago*: "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy

them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

In our *norming*, then, we were set to make some serious mistakes. I remember laughing about how the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church ran to the hundreds and hundreds of pages; we didn't need that, we were righteous, we were mission focused, we were on fire for the Lord! We failed to see that evil lurked within us, each and every one. Our disciplinary Canons were short, not too many details, lots of unanswered questions. Did we think we weren't going to need expansive Canons to guide us carefully through difficult situations toward just outcomes? While I don't believe anyone actually thought that consciously, I fear that was the effect of our formative pride: the bad guys were "out there," not "in here."

Those flaws in our *forming* and *norming* have resulted in the *storming* that we now face being much more intense than it might have been. I won't go into details about these storms, I'll only say that I think their magnitude serves as a judgment on all of us, especially those of us in leadership.

In these storms, is God winnowing, sifting, purging? It's hard for me not to think so; but I also remember that He chastens those He loves. He wants better from us, ultimately, he wants better for us. Those truths aren't just for the ACNA, they are for all His people.

I hear bandied about that these storms mark the end of the ACNA, that they are a death blow. Are they? I can't answer that with anymore certainty than anyone else possibly could. But here is what I do know—with certainty: God is calling us to repentance and reform. Not someone out there, us.

Another thing I do know with clear and certain conviction—we are not called to worry about our future. That is not for us, that is in God's hands. We are not called to make decisions to try to preserve ourselves. We are called to do what is right in this situation, in this moment, in this storm.

I do think, however, that there are real goods in our common life that, focusing on doing what is right, point toward us coming through these storms and into, at long last, a season of *performing*, or, in more biblical language, bearing fruit.

All around the ACNA—just like you all around our diocese—are strong, healthy, thriving parishes. Parishes served by good clergy. Our dioceses are led by bishops who love the Lord and are working hard to do what's right. We've made serious missteps in the past, but much has been learned and many changes have been made. Even now, we are making significant changes to our Canons.

In my conversations with my fellow bishops, the need for repentance and change (change being the mark of true repentance) is a shared commitment. We are working hard to weather these storms as we remember that God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Brothers and sisters, in this storm season, pray. Pray for the victims. They have endured much up to this point and will endure more as this process unfolds. Matters like this are fraught with difficulty. Pray for the Archbishop. Pray for the Church. Pray for repentance and change, wisdom and courage, and the fortitude to do what is right, no matter the cost.

Blessings,

+Chip