

Washington, D. C.  
November 14, 1974

The Right Reverend William F. Creighton, D.D., L.H.D.  
Bishop of Washington  
Mount St. Alban  
Washington, D.C. 20016

Dear Bishop Creighton:

The undersigned, Priests of the Diocese of Washington, Acting under the provisions of Canon 41, Section 2, of the Diocese of Washington, request that you initiate an inquiry into the facts attending the service held at the Church of St. Stephen and The Incarnation, Washington, on Sunday, November 10, 1974, at 10 A.M. and to determine whether or not its rector, The Reverend William A. Wendt, S.T.D., is guilty of offense or offenses under Title IV, Canon 1, of the Canons of the General Convention.

It is not our intention to make any judgment on Father Wendt's integrity nor to question his belief that his action was right. It is only possible to object to the action, however, by making a charge against him personally. It is not our intention to argue either the principle or the desirability of the ordination of women to the priesthood or the episcopate. The present situation is our concern: The House of Bishops has expressed its opinion that the service in Philadelphia on July 29, 1974 at which was claimed that the Reverend Allison Cheek and ten other women Deacons were ordained to the priesthood did not possess those factors which made it a valid ordination. While the canonical force of this opinion may be questioned, it has been implemented in the case of Mrs. Cheek by the Bishop of Virginia, in whose diocese she was ordained Deacon, and who has ordered her not to officiate as a Priest. She is canonically inhibited, therefore, from such a ministry in the Diocese of Virginia and everywhere in the Church. Father Wendt was aware of all these facts when he invited her to officiate in the parish of which he is rector and when he welcomed her there to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. Both you and Father Wendt report that he consulted with you and that you refused to give your consent. We presume that this was a "godly

admonition" in the sense in which this term is used in the Ordinal and to which he gave his assent at the time of ordination.

We would charge, therefore, a violation of the ordination vows (Title IV, Canon 1 (6)). . . An ordinand is required to promise conformity to the "doctrine, discipline, and worship of this Church." We believe that its discipline is ignored when a Priest refuses the direction of his Bishop in a matter of this importance. This duty of acceptance of the Bishop's judgments is further stated in Title III, Canon 30, Sec. 1(a), which is designed to insure to a rector the control of the worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of the parish. This right, however, is subject to conditions: obedience to the rubrics, the Canons, and "the godly counsel of the Bishop." Father Wendt used his authority as rector of the Church of St. Stephen and the Incarnation to welcome Mrs. Cheek to that parish while he refused to observe a condition to that authority.

We would also call your attention to Title III, Canon 24, which states, "No Minister in charge of any Congregation . . . shall permit any person to officiate therein without sufficient evidence of his being duly licensed and ordained to minister in this Church." Father Wendt had more than sufficient evidence to the contrary. He knew that Mrs. Cheek was not licensed as a Priest in the Diocese of Virginia and he was well aware of the opinion of the House of Bishops as to the invalidity of her ordination.

We ask you to present these matters to the Board of Presenters because we believe that responsible government in the Episcopal Church requires that action be taken. (It is) not probable that the reason the Presiding Bishop called the special meeting of the House of Bishops in August was to safeguard the Church from apparent acceptance of a unilateral action by four Bishops? We believe that the Church in this Diocese has a similar responsibility in this instance, not only to the members of this Diocese but, in the unique circumstance and with the widespread publicity, to the whole of the Church. If we condone the action of one rector in this case, we appear to say to the Church that it is all right for a rector to ignore the lawful orders of

his Bishop and the good order in the life of the Church.

The signatores to this letter have made no effort to solicit other clergy to join them. Although the sentence of a trial court if any, is not within our province, we do not seek any extreme penalties. We do not plan to seek publicity with this letter, but we would hope that if any discipline is decided it might be made public within the Church for the benefit of its members.

Faithfully yours,

The Rev. Daniel Mericle

The Rev. Edward C. Raffetto.

William E. McNew

James R. Daughtry (LAPR)

Kenneth J. Sharp

C. Leslie Glenn

J. Shelton Pollen, Jr. (LAPR)

Harold T. Lewis (LAPR)

William C. Noble (LAPR)

Richard C. Martin +  
J. Arthur Taylor (LAPR)

Thomas Richards  
Claude E. Bonbrant (LAPR)

Elynd D. Brown

La Paul Roser

August H. Peters (LAPR)

A. Nelson Daunt (LAPR)

Richard E. Downing