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# THE CHURCH OF THE ADVENT

BOSTON • MASSACHUSETTS

## From the Wardens

Dear fellow members of The Advent,

As most of you are probably aware, for the past two years the Diocese of Massachusetts has been engaged in a disciplinary proceeding against our Rector, Fr Douglas Anderson. We write to update you on the status of this proceeding, which relates to a complaint received by the Diocese of Massachusetts in late 2021 concerning his time in Texarkana, before coming to the Advent. The Diocese made the Vestry and Wardens of the Advent aware of this complaint five months later in May of 2022. At the start of last year, three formal charges were filed by the Diocese against Fr. Anderson ([link here](#)), in response to which Fr. Anderson maintained his innocence ([link here](#)):

- Sexual Misconduct (Title IV, Canon 4.1(h)(1))
- Dishonesty, Fraud, Deceit, or Misrepresentation (Title IV, Canon 4.1(h)(6))
- Conduct Unbecoming a Member of the Clergy (Title IV, Canon 4.1(h)(9))

Our understanding is that the appropriate penalties for such serious charges, should they be proved or admitted in this case, would range from a seven-year suspension of ministry to defrocking.

### Resolution of Charges

The announcement of these formal charges set us as a Parish down the path of waiting for an expected ecclesiastical trial (called a Hearing Panel in official church disciplinary process parlance) to adjudicate those charges. We were told to expect the trial to begin on February 1, 2024, a full year after the charges had been announced and more than two years after the initial complaint was received.

In the last few weeks, Fr. Anderson and Bishop Gates engaged in a mediated discussion of the charges and the various possibilities for their resolution. As a result of that mediation, the Diocese of Massachusetts announced today that Bishop Gates and Fr. Anderson have reached an Accord (which is to say, an agreement) in this disciplinary matter. This agreement officially and canonically settles the disciplinary matter once and for all. We append a link here for you to read on the Diocesan website the notice that such an Accord has been reached: [link here](#).

The formal Accord has not been shared with us and has not been made available publicly. However, last Thursday, the Bishop shared with us some of the provisions the Accord contains, which we now communicate to you. Of the three charges Fr. Anderson faced, two were dismissed.

- Sexual Misconduct (Title IV, Canon 4.1(h)(1))
- Dishonesty, Fraud, Deceit, or Misrepresentation (Title IV, Canon 4.1(h)(6))

It is our understanding that both these charges were dismissed “with prejudice”, which, as in civil and criminal law, means that these charges cannot be brought again in the future.

In the Accord, Fr. Anderson has admitted to the third charge of:

- Conduct Unbecoming a Member of the Clergy (Title IV, Canon 4.1(h)(9))

According to the Accord, Fr. Anderson’s punishment for the single agreed-upon charge of “Conduct Unbecoming a Member of the Clergy” is effectively the time he has already served under suspension during this two-year process.

Most importantly for our Parish, and though it is not mentioned in the text of the public release on the Diocesan website, while Fr. Anderson remains the Rector of the Church of The Advent for the present, the Bishop has told us that the Accord calls for him to resign his Rectorate on June 10, 2024. It is our conjecture that this date may have been chosen because it is on or about the date on which he is eligible to retire and collect his pension at the full benefit rate, after thirty years of service. He will be allowed no return or contact with The Advent in the meanwhile or afterwards, though in our understanding the Accord suggests that there will be no material barriers to his continuing his priestly ministry in the Episcopal Church.

As your wardens attempting to perform our duties of leadership to the Advent, we believe that it is incumbent upon us to share this information with you in the interest of being as disclosive as possible. Ultimately, the discussion underlying the Accord was entirely private between Bishop Gates, Fr. Anderson, and a professional mediator, and thus we have no certain knowledge and do not anticipate we will ever have knowledge of how and why each of them saw signing this agreement to be in the best interest of settling this matter and why this mutual settlement differs so greatly in severity from the previously announced charges and related penalties.

### **Looking Forward**

It is frustrating to contemplate how much of our Parish’s time, talent, and treasure this process has absorbed over the past two years – instead of allowing for that time, talent and treasure to be focused where it belongs: on the life and ministry of the Church of the Advent, on worshiping our Lord, on sharing the Gospel, on feeding the poor and lifting up the poor in spirit. The Diocese has managed this disciplinary process badly from the beginning. There is nothing in the Canons – the “rule book” governing the Episcopal Church – that suggests this process should have taken more than some number of months. Instead it has taken two years and has resulted in thousands of hours of time and talent wasted, endless distraction from the good work of the Church, and monetary cost to our Parish approaching one million dollars.

The most important fact about this settlement for our life together as a Parish is that it brings us much longed-for clarity on our path forward – a path which in the fullness of time no longer has Fr. Anderson as our Rector. To do the Lord’s work most effectively, this parish family needs a strong and wise Rector in place. Therefore, our next course of action as a Vestry will be to take up and embark upon a search process to find one. If it feels to you like we just had a search process, you are right. We spent eighteen months, culminating at the end of 2019, engaged in a search for a new Rector. We then had two years of Covid, followed almost immediately by a clergy disciplinary process that proceeded at a less than desirable pace. For all intents and purposes, we’ve had five years of an “interim” situation following Fr Warren’s retirement at Epiphany 2019. So, please stay tuned for an update once the Vestry has had a chance to digest this information and consider how we plan to move this Parish forward.

And yet, as we come to this moment, we cannot help but marvel at God’s providence during this five-year interim phase in our Parish life. Over these past five years, as the rest of our Diocese shrunk by perhaps a third, our congregation has grown in both attendance and membership, and we have grown more youthful and vibrant yet (though some of us have simply grown five years older!). Our last five years stand as a testament to the power of orthodox Catholic doctrine and worship, lived out in confidence and clarity, to draw souls to our Lord and bring those souls into a deeper relationship with Him.

This providential bounty in our Parish life has been made manifest in the world by the great work of God’s many devoted and loving servants in our midst. There is not enough ink to express our deep gratitude to all who have worked tirelessly and quietly these last five years to be the hands of God at The Advent. We must say to our fellow Vestry members that we have been greatly blessed by your support and tireless work. To our Clergy, we say thank you for living out the call of your Priesthood so boldly and truthfully and lovingly in the face of great uncertainty. We know what all of you, Vestry and Clergy, have sacrificed. And to all of you, our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, we thank you for your love, support, trust, understanding, patience, and prayers through this most trying period.

We continue to ask all of you for your prayers, and especially for the gifts of discernment, wisdom, and fortitude, as we attempt to lead this Parish forward into the next phase of her life.

Yours in Christ,

Meg Nelson and Thatcher Gearhart, Churchwardens

We append a pastoral letter from Bishop Gates here:  
[January 26, 2024 Letter from Bishop Gates](#)