

Beloved in the Lord,

In 2003, the Diocese of New Hampshire asked the Episcopal Church, “Don’t we have the right to elect the bishop of our own choosing?” and the church’s answer was “Yes, you do.” Now, nearly twenty years later, we are asking you to extend the same generosity by offering your consent to the will of the majority of the Diocese of Florida.

Twice now the Diocese of Florida has elected the Rev. Charlie Holt to be Bishop Coadjutor. We are excited that, in him, the Holy Spirit has raised up a faithful servant who is called and particularly equipped to lead the Diocese of Florida towards Christian unity. He is a peacemaker, a collaborator, a reconciler, and a man who has demonstrated a willingness to listen to and learn from those with different views and backgrounds. He is committed to building close bonds within the wider church. He is committed to following the canons of the church and letting individual congregations lead according to their consciences with regard to human sexuality.

Despite allegations made by agitators outside our diocese, Bishop-Elect Holt has a strong track record of working to dismantle systemic racism. Although he was advised to stay quiet by some of his white colleagues, he stood with Black Christian communities after the murder of Trayvon Martin and worked with them to get the local chief of police removed. In Houston, he spearheaded an English-as-a-Second-Language program that supported participants from more than 40 countries as they prepared for employment and life in the United States and welcomed them into the life of that historically white parish.

Today, the Rev. Holt is helping to organize a listening process in the Diocese of Florida with the help of Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves, vice-president of the House of Bishops and a trained mediator. Many in our diocese feel a need for healing, and he is eager to help us achieve that goal. With your consent, the Rev. Charlie Holt will lead the Diocese of Florida forward into the future to which God is calling us.

We have prepared an extensive response to the report of the Court of Review that raised questions about our November 19 election of the Rev. Holt. [You can read it online in the pages that follow](#). But realizing that you are receiving hundreds of pages of reading material with this request for consent, we want to assure you here of several key points:

- Our November 19 election was procedurally fair and valid. We put extraordinary safeguards in place to protect the electoral process; you can find the details on page 8, [below](#). The Court did not find irregularities in the electoral process, which is the extent of their canonical scope under Canon III.11.8. The Court rejected three of the objections that were filed against the election. In response to the other two, the Court raised speculative questions about who was allowed to vote. Those questions have clear answers.
- The objectors claimed that certain clergy were denied a vote, but none of the clergy they named qualify for canonical residence in the Diocese of Florida—not because of their sexual orientation, their theology of marriage or their views on human sexuality, but because they have moved to the diocese without cure or because they are part-time assistant clergy. None of them have ever presented letters dimissory to our diocese as required by canon. Our standards for canonical residence, detailed in our full response, are the same as or similar to those in many of your dioceses. You can [find them detailed on page 4](#) of our complete response.

We regret that the Court of Review refused our request to respond to their allegations that three clergy were denied a vote in our November 19 election. We could have clarified the status of the clergy in question and made it clear they were not entitled to residency, nor to a vote. We could also have clarified that while the

Rev. Holt won the first-ballot election by a single vote in the clergy order, there was another candidate who holds conservative views on marriage in the field, and the likelihood of the Rev. Holt prevailing on a subsequent ballot was high.

- The allegations leveled by the Court of Review against Bishop John Howard are based largely on anonymous and undated reports to which neither he nor the Standing Committee were given the opportunity to respond during the Court's deliberations. The Court's mandate to review the election process, outlined in Title III.11.8, does not extend to a review of Bishop Howard's 19-year episcopacy. These allegations of discrimination against him, which the Standing Committee does not support, are an attempt to advance Title IV allegations in the court of public opinion without following the Title IV process. We believe they represent a misuse of the Court's authority and a precedent that could put any bishop and any future bishop election at risk.
- The Court's claim that duly elected lay delegates were disenfranchised is unfounded and is particularly puzzling because it criticizes procedural changes that resulted only from the Standing Committee's determination to follow the guidance provided by the Court in its review of our first bishop election in May 2022. In fact, the Court was unable to state that the absence of these delegates had any impact on the outcome of the election.

During the Court's proceedings, we several times sought the opportunity to meet with its members directly and to provide evidence that would answer any allegations being made against us. We were denied that opportunity each time. In the detailed response that follows, we have outlined for you the ways in which the Court's process lacked fundamental fairness and objectivity, and failed to acknowledge the faithfulness, goodwill, and competence of our diocese's leaders during an extraordinarily difficult time.

We want to help our diocese be a place where everyone comes together with mutual respect in the name of Christ. Where it is not, we seek to bridge the divisions and gaps of understanding among us with conversation, acceptance, and grace. And so we are particularly alarmed that, following the logic of the Court's report, it was never possible for the Diocese of Florida to hold any election for bishop that meets the Court's standards, because those standards are based in large measure on an evaluation of the lengthy tenure of our outgoing bishop rather than in the election process itself. For the Diocese of Florida to be caught in this bind in any subsequent elections would be disastrous for our ministry and mission and would greatly deepen the divisions that are already being sown among us.

With humility and hope for our future, we ask you to pray and to offer consent to the election of the Rev. Charlie Holt. We have chosen him to lead us and to help us move forward into God's future. Your consent to our election will bear witness that Episcopalians can be reconciled to one another even in the most difficult times and share in the love and worship of our Lord.

In the Spirit of Christian Collegiality,
The Standing Committee of the Diocese of Florida

The Rev. Joe Gibbes, President	Mr. Ben Hill
The Rev. Teresa Seagle	Mr. Arthur Crofton
The Rev. Sarah Minton	Ms. Jackie Jones

Response to the Report of the Court of Review by the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Florida

The Court of Review did not uphold Objections 1, 4 or 5 presented to them by objectors to our November 19, 2022, election. Below you will find our responses to the Court's findings on Objections 2 and 3.

Objection 2 – The Court finds that LGBTQ+ clergy and their theological allies have been systematically disenfranchised and unjustly denied Canonical Residency.

The Standing Committee disagrees with this finding, and asserts that the climate of the diocese cannot be a factor in determining the legitimacy of the election.

The first thing we want you to know is that there are many clergy serving in the Diocese of Florida, perhaps even most, who do not share the Bishop's traditional views on human sexuality. These are clergy who have been ordained by Bishop Howard, or admitted into the diocese by him, and many are canons, cardinal rectors, and committee chairs.

Additionally, a wide variety of laity who hold more progressive views have been appointed or elected to leadership positions, such as Diocesan Council Vice-Chair, University of the South Trustee, Diocesan Finance Directors, and many, many more. In fact, it was not long ago that a gay man received Bishop Howard's highest award before the annual Diocesan Convention, the Bishop's Cross Award, for his excellent work in the community. Frankly, the very existence of this objection, made by duly qualified electors with progressive views, is evidence that Bishop Howard's aim has never been to fence off the diocese from those with progressive views.

We also want you to know that Bishop Howard is loved and admired by a wide majority of the Diocese of Florida. Many people here remember vividly that after becoming Bishop Diocesan in January 2004, he held the line against enormous conservative pressure and prevented the Diocese of Florida from leaving the Episcopal Church. Nor is it forgotten that he was repeatedly reviled by the right during that difficult season.

This context, which has not been acknowledged by the objectors, makes it more difficult to view the Diocese of Florida as an unjust place. It also makes us wonder why objecting to the process of an episcopal election has become an opportunity for a small group to hold a referendum on our bishop, who turns 72 later this year and is planning to retire in just a few months.

The Court of Review could not find that Bishop Howard's decisions around canonical residency *did* influence the outcome of the election, but *only speculated that it might have*. **In a court of law, this would amount to an acquittal.**

Additionally, if Objection 2 were regarded as legitimate, it would make it impossible for the Standing Committee to execute an episcopal election. **Carried to its logical conclusion, it would**

mean that there was never any possibility of holding a fair and valid election, regardless of how diligently the Standing Committee worked to follow the canons. Yet, this complaint about canonical residency was only brought to the Standing Committee after the May election, 16 months after Bishop Howard had called for the election of a bishop coadjutor.

The Standing Committee of any diocese is the canonical authority charged with the administration of the election. Even if the charges against Bishop Howard were credible – and we do not believe they are – would any Standing Committee feel it should be constrained from fulfilling its charge by the patterns of the bishop? More to the point, is there any way that the Canons suggest that this is a possibility? We do not think so.

Finally, most distressing to us and most important for the integrity of the Episcopal Church, the Court of Review, beyond its clear and limited mandate articulated by III.11.8(a), is **attempting to allege Title IV charges through this Title III process**, which ought to be related solely to the episcopal election.

With all of this in mind, we submit to you:

- **Bishop Howard’s criterion for determining when to grant Canonical Residency is entirely within the mainstream of episcopal practice throughout the Episcopal Church.**
 - It is, by canon III.9.4(d), the responsibility of clergy to present Letters Dimissory to the Bishop.
 - The Bishop has historically and with very rare exception granted canonical residency to all who request it:
 - Canonical residency was consistently granted to rectors shortly after presentation of letters dimissory, in keeping with Canon III.9.4(d).
 - Canonical residency was consistently granted to vicars or priests-in-charge who presented letters dimissory.
 - Canonical residency was granted to associate clergy in full-time paid positions after a year; this is a very common practice throughout the wider church.
 - Canonical residency was not granted to clergy (retired or otherwise) who moved to the area without cure unless they had served in the diocese previously and also requested canonical residence.
 - Canonical residency was not granted to clergy who did not request it.

Every Bishop and Standing Committee knows that there are many factors that a Bishop considers when a request is made for Canonical Residency. That a Bishop would use his or her discretion in these matters is implicit, as long as this discretion is within the bounds of the canons. The Diocese of Florida emphatically denies that any clergyperson’s sexual identity or theology regarding sexual identity has been a determining factor for granting or denying Canonical Residency. Because the Diocese’s Canon 21, which predates Bishop Howard, require that clergy abstain from sexual relations outside of marriage, it may be possible that partnered gay clergy or ordinands

were turned away before General Convention approved same-sex marriage in 2015. But it is not accurate to assume that views about sexuality could be the only reason for a bishop's discernment about such an important matter as Canonical Residency.

- In response to these concerns about clergy eligibility, the Standing Committee worked diligently to ensure that all eligible clergy had voting rights on November 19, 2022. Everyone who felt they should have voting rights and canonical residency were expressly invited to contact the bishop directly in a [video from the Standing Committee on September 16, 2022](#) (at the 8:15 mark), and again in a diocesan-wide email on October 3, 2022. **Not a single clergyperson responded to these invitations by presenting the bishop with Letters Dimissory.**
- Additionally, the Standing Committee went to great lengths to investigate the situations of 18 clergy whose names were given to them by May election objectors and others dissatisfied with the May election process. We sought names diligently so that we might address the concerns raised to us and investigated the situation of every name we received. Five of the names on Exhibit 9 were never given to the Standing Committee – we still do not know where the Court's list originated.
 - For each of the 18, we confirmed that there was a clear reason why Canonical Residence had not been granted: such as membership in the House of Bishops, disciplinary matters in another diocese, limited time spent as an Associate Priest, or, principally, an absence of Letters Dimissory.
 - Despite our due diligence, the Court of Review raised doubts about the efficacy, sincerity, or reliability of the Standing Committee's research into the 18 clergy without Canonical Residency because we did not produce a written report or hire a third-party auditor. The Court did not request either of these items, **yet admonished the Standing Committee for its failure to provide them.** The Standing Committee would gladly have provided these at the Court's request.
 - In doing so, the Court implied that the Standing Committee is not to be trusted to act capably and independently to carry out its canonically appointed charge. This is an alarming assumption that we believe should put all Standing Committees on notice.
 - As part of its investigation, the Court requested that the diocese provide the names of all clergy who requested Letters Dimissory in the two years prior to the Election. This information was promptly provided by the diocesan staff, and showed that each of the clergy who requested Canonical Residency in the two years prior to the election was granted their request. This information is available in the Court's report as Exhibit 13.
- The phrasing of the complaint implies that the clergy in question have been unjustly denied their requests for Canonical Residency based on their sexual orientation or theological position. It also implies that all of these priests are upset about their canonical status. **In reality, the bishop never spoke with these or any other priest**

about either of these matters, and none of these priests have ever presented Letters Dimissory. Many of those listed in Exhibit 9 are priests in good relationship with the bishop, resident elsewhere, who have not requested Canonical Residence.

- The Court’s response indicates that its members did little or no research into the situations of the 12 clergy named in Exhibit 9:
 - The first priest on the list, the Rev. Mark Anderson, is canonically resident in the Diocese of Florida, and was present and voted in the November 19, 2022 election.
 - Two priests, the Rev. William Trexler and the Rev. Kent Thompson, are ELCA pastors, and therefore cannot vote in Episcopal conventions.
 - The Rev. Phoebe McFarlin is from a diocese in Australia that does not utilize Letters Dimissory; she has been offered the opportunity to be received.
 - The Rev. Ted Voorhees resigned his post prior to the election and moved to Colorado. Contrary to his testimony to the Court, [the Rev. Voorhees’ letter](#) to the bishop in 2008 requested licensure, not Canonical Residency.
 - The Rt. Rev. Jay Lambert understands himself to be resident in the House of Bishops; he wrote to the Standing Committee, saying, “my canonical residency, if I have one, is in the House of Bishops.” He was present at the Convention as the Chaplain, and the preacher during the Eucharist.
 - **None of the other priests**, the Rev. Eric Kahl, the Rev. Richard Lindsey, the Rev. Al Stefanik, the Rev. Andrew Zeman, the Rev. Elyse Gustafson, or the Rev. Rachel McElwee, **ever presented Letters Dimissory, as is required by Canon III.11.4** in order to be eligible to vote.

- The Court sought no clarification of the Standing Committee’s report, nor gave it any credence. Instead, it built much of its case about the alleged pattern of discrimination in our diocese on the testimony and investigative work of the Rev. Elyse Gustafson, a part-time bi-vocational priest not resident in the Diocese of Florida who has long opposed Bishop Howard.
 - The Standing Committee remains deeply concerned that the Court would take the testimony of an unhappy priest at face value without giving the diocese a chance to respond.
 - The report of the Court was the first time the Diocesan leadership ever heard about these complaints of discrimination. The Diocesan Chancellor, Mr. Fred Isaac, asked for the opportunity to see and respond to all evidence presented by the accusers. Ms. Laura Russell, President of the Court of Review, declined this request, saying that the Court is not required by canon to share evidence. This defies any reasonable sense of fairness or justice.
 - The Rev. Gustafson’s witnesses are all anonymous and undated, and therefore the Diocese is unable to respond to the accusations made against it. In particular, because these allegations are anonymous and undated, it is impossible in most cases to determine if the alleged instances happened before or after the marriage canons changed in 2015.

- Several of the anonymous witnesses claim they were forced to take a vow of celibacy. **Bishop Howard has repeatedly denied to the Standing Committee that he has ever required or even mentioned such a vow.** He has stated that over the years there have on occasion been pastoral conversations, sought by clergy or candidates for ordination, in which he encouraged sexual relationships being reserved for marriage; this is a call to chastity, not celibacy, and is consistent with canonical standards for all clergypersons.
- The Court did not ask if any who disagree with the Bishop's positions *have* been granted Canonical Residency – **there are many.** The Court also neglected to ask if there are any who agree with Bishop Howard's position on sexuality who have been denied residency.
 - In fact, in one example, the Rev. Burt Froehlich holds a traditional position on marriage and sexuality. The Rev. Froehlich was helping out at a parish, and his rector asked the Bishop whether he could be granted residency. The Bishop responded that he could not, because the Rev. Froehlich was retired from another diocese and did not have cure in the Diocese of Florida. This position is consistent with Bishop Howard's stated criterion outlined above.

Conclusion: The Court of Review has leveled Title IV allegations through a Title III process against a bishop who has endeavored to lead the Diocese of Florida consistency and in good faith for 19 years. In these 19 years, he has cultivated a diverse diocese with a variety of theological opinions on a range of topics, including human sexuality. He has abided by the canons faithfully, even as the canons have changed over the years. He applies the diocese's criteria for canonical residency, which are in the mainstream of episcopal practice, consistently and fairly. Not only are these allegations untrue, or at best based on incomplete evidence and testimony, but they are irrelevant to the question of whether the election of November 19, 2022, was procedurally sound.

Objection 3 – The Court is uncertain whether procedural changes in the selection of lay delegates denied seat, voice, and vote to certain lay delegates.

The Standing Committee wants you to know that we endeavored to follow churchwide and Diocesan canons as closely as possible in every aspect of the November election. The Court's concern in this portion of its report is that we did not use the same procedures for the selection of lay delegates in the November election as we had in the May election. This is because, upon review, we found the May procedures to be canonically insufficient. Given that the Court of Review declared the first election null and void, there is no way that the May election could have been the Standing Committee's standard for the November election. Our insistence on following the canons precisely in the November election is what is being called "change" by the Court.

- For the May gathering, the Standing Committee allowed pre-Covid parochial numbers as a pastoral accommodation to allow for the inclusion of as many as possible.

- After the Court of Review sanctioned the Standing Committee for its failure to follow a number of its own rules, the Standing Committee endeavored to follow all the rules to the letter for the November election.
- The Canons of the Diocese of Florida called for the use of the 2021 Parochial numbers (see [Canon 1.3.b](#)); this was agreed upon by the Chancellor and by our independent Parliamentarian.
- The President of the Standing Committee, the Rev. Joe Gibbes, received the following email from the Rev. Kurt Dunkle, now twice an objector, on September 18, 2022:

Will you be doing the same thing for the lay delegates? I understand there are some churches which may have an excess number of delegates (and some may not have enough) based on consistent parochial report counting. I have not looked at that issue, but know some folks have and you should be aware it is an issue to address head-on.

- **This leads us to believe that regardless of how we ruled on this issue, an objection still would have been raised to further stall the election process.**
- We followed the diocesan canons ([Canon 2, Section 4](#)) on lay delegate participation. We consulted the Chancellor, of course, but also our independent consultants – the professional Parliamentarian and an adjunct Professor of Canon Law. All were in agreement that the decision to follow the rules strictly was canonically sound and required by the situation and the scrutiny we were under.
- About a month before the election, a few parishes began to ask what to do if their delegates and alternates had died or moved away. Because the diocesan canons are silent on replacement of delegates, the Chancellor referred to Robert’s Rules of Order as the canons call for ([see Canon 29](#)); he further consulted the independent expert Parliamentarian. It was determined, according to those rules, that the vestry can serve as the parish meeting between the parish meetings and elect a delegate to fill a vacancy.
- These decisions were debated in Convention according to parliamentary procedure under the supervision of the independent Parliamentarian. The Convention upheld the Standing Committee’s procedure by a wide margin.
- To say that the Convention vote does not cure the objection is to deny the very tenets of Parliamentary procedure. We invite you to look at the [Parliamentarian’s CV](#) and his response to the Objection, which is included in the Court’s report as Exhibit 7. (We encourage you to look over his whole report, but his response to Objection 3 begins at the bottom of page 83 of the Court’s Report.)

The Court of Review states (p.24) that “While the Court understands that the approach to determining who was qualified for seats as lay congregational delegates was an attempt to adhere more closely to the Canons, the approach of not allowing all selected lay delegates to attend did the opposite.” Obviously, the Standing Committee disagrees with this assessment. However, we appeal to our fellow Standing Committees, asking if there is anything more a Standing Committee can do to run a clean election than to consult the 30-year Diocesan Chancellor, independent expert Parliamentarian, and adjunct Professor of Canon Law? There is

no canon that outlines, articulates, or even holds us to local precedent as the Court of Review suggests. The Standing Committee's communications with the Diocese were both timely and clear. Everyone was held to the same standards, and no one was confused about what was expected.

Ultimately, the objection is irrelevant, as this ruling of the Chancellor and Standing Committee made no impact upon the outcome of the election. The Rev. Charlie Holt would have won in the lay order on the first ballot, even if all the parishes had been allowed to have their pre-Covid number of delegates.

- There were 67 Laity required to elect; the Rev. Holt received 79 votes.
- If the 11 "lost" delegates had been present, the number to elect within the lay house would have been 72.
- Even if all 11 delegates had been present and had voted for a different candidate, Holt still would have won the election.
- Therefore, the point of objection is irrelevant to the outcome of the election.
- The Court of Review found that it could "not state conclusively whether the addition of these 11 delegates would have changed the outcome of the election." **That is a mathematically inaccurate statement**, as Rev. Holt won the lay order by 7 more votes than would have been required if the 11 additional lay delegates had been included. We are troubled that the Court would raise speculative questions to cast doubt on our election, but fail to do the math!

Conclusion: The objectors would have made an objection about numbers of lay delegates whether or not we had followed the canons closely. The Court of Review is using a standard for our procedures that they previously declared "null and void." The math conclusively demonstrates that Charlie Holt would have won the lay order on the first ballot either way.

The Leadership of the Diocese of Florida Shares Deep Concern About the Reach and the Process of the Court of Review

Under Canon III.11.8, the Court of Review has a clear and limited mandate. The Court is to "investigate the complaint." The "complaint" is identified as "written objections to the election process" which must set "forth in detail all alleged irregularities [in the election process]." The Court's review and its finding are therefore limited to the "alleged irregularities" in the election process which have been identified in the complaint.

We contend that the Court of Review exceeded its canonical mandate by investigating matters unrelated to the electoral process. We have made the case throughout this response that the allegations levied by the Court to Objection 2 constitute Title IV charges. Not only are such attempts irregular, but the **Title III canons are not designed to handle such complaints**. There is no proper intake process. The Court has no canonical guidelines about witness testimony or the sharing of evidence. The Court has no canonical accountability against its own inherent biases, and in this case went to great lengths to seek information in support of the objectors without commensurate effort to hear any response from the accused diocese. Anonymous

witnesses, whose testimony cannot be substantiated or even dated according to changing canons, presented testimony under no affidavit and were given every credence, while elected and appointed Diocesan officials testifying under affidavit were discredited as unreliable.

The orders of each Diocese in Convention are by canon invested with the power of choosing their own leaders, with very narrow limitations. The Diocese of Florida respectfully submits that the present Court of Review, by seeking to assume to itself powers that it does not have by Canon, operated outside of its narrow, limited role. In doing so, it operated as a general court of review of Diocesan activities reaching back many years, activities which had no direct effect on the “election process.”

Failure to Disclose Conflict of Interest

In the cover letter of the Diocese’s official response to the Objection, dated December 23, 2022, the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor asked:

“We respectfully request that any member of the Court who has made or joined statements in opposition to the Diocese of Florida, these elections, Bishop Howard or the Rev. Holt, or to the ordination or consecration of clergy of bishops who hold traditional views on marriage (or has connection or affiliation now or in the past 3 years with any group that has made such), should disclose this.”

The Court made no response to the Diocese’s request. This is troubling, because the President of the Court of Review, Ms. Laura Russell, serves as the convener of The Consultation. This group has issued a disparaging letter maligning the fitness of the Rev. Holt to serve as a bishop.

We acknowledge that a footnote on the letter states that Ms. Russell was not party to the letter. This is not how recusal works. One does not withdraw from a group’s statement so that one can judge; one withdraws from judging because of one’s association with the group making the statement. This constitutes a direct and material conflict of interest which was not disclosed to the Diocese of Florida.

Denial of Request to Present Evidence

In this same letter, the Diocese requested an open meeting:

“we respectfully request that the Court of Review consider conducting at least one open session at which the Diocese of Florida’s representatives are in attendance and given voice to present the Diocese’s responses to the Objections.”

We did not receive a response. The Diocesan legal team was eager to work with the Court, but instead, we were denied the request to present our case to the Court. We, of course, wrote and submitted a long response to the objection, but **this response was not included by the Court of Review as an exhibit for your review**. You can read it [here](#). However, it was our desire to have the opportunity to engage the Court, to clarify, to answer and ask questions, as anyone would expect in the course of a normal court proceeding.

Canonical mistake of releasing the report.

In the late afternoon of Wednesday, February 15, the Presiding Bishop's office transmitted the report of the Court of Review to the Bishop, Chancellor, Standing Committee and Secretary of Convention, as prescribed in Canon III.11.8.a. Under this canon, the Court of Review is bound only to give the report to the office of the Presiding Bishop.

However, within twenty-four hours, the report was in the hands of bishops, clergy, and laypersons around the wider church because the President of the Court of Review posted the report on the Court's website. She has claimed that this was an honest mistake and the result of a misunderstanding between herself and the Presiding Bishop's Chancellor. Even if it was a mistake, this action was a clear violation of the canon that Ms. Russell stewards, and it led to a rush to judgment against the Diocesan leadership before we could issue a response, or even digest their lengthy report.

Additional Points of Concern

- We do not need to recount in detail here the Court's use of the Rev. Elyse Gustafson as a private investigator. We have detailed this already in our response to Objection 2. We do take this opportunity to remind you that the Court is regarding the undeniably biased and anonymous testimony she solicited as verified without giving the Diocese a chance to respond. The Diocese simply wanted the chance to be heard fairly and objectively by the Court, believing that such an opportunity would lead to exoneration on every point of objection related to the November 19 election.
- The Court of Review has demonstrated that it was gathering evidence to support the Objections, but never sought evidence from those supporting the election. It often ignored evidence contrary to its final report. In so doing, the Court acted with bias and forfeited its role as a neutral institution. This precedent should be a concern to every bishop and diocese in the church.

In Conclusion

The issue before Bishops and Standing Committees is whether the Diocese of Florida conducted a fair and valid election. The issue is not whether Bishop Howard, who is scheduled to retire later this year, has or has not been biased against a particular group. That issue, important as it may be, is not proper to this procedure.

As the Diocese has maintained all along, the second election, held on November 19, 2022, was conducted with diligence and extreme care to ensure that the electoral process was fair to all parties and canonically valid. To this end, we invited robust monitoring by independent expert advisors.

The Court of Review did not come to any decisive conclusions that any actions of the Standing Committee or other Diocesan leadership negatively or unfairly impacted the November election. They raised speculative questions; with the facts before us, we assert that these questions were raised simply to facilitate your doubt about our election.

The Diocese of Florida has people hurting on all sides. We acknowledge readily that some feel marginalized by what they perceive as a lack of inclusion; it is also true that many others feel hurt and angry by the objections and the Court's responses. Most are just discouraged that the church has become divided rather than a place of peace, and some of these are looking elsewhere for a place to worship. God has raised up a faithful priest to lead us back to unity and health, the Rev. Charlie Holt. He has repeatedly stated his intention to stay in the Episcopal Church, to follow the Canons, and to love all the people of this diocese faithfully. We ask you to consent to his election.

Your consent will hold the Diocese of Florida together, and will allow an intentional program of reconciliation to begin here in earnest.

The Diocese of Florida respectfully submits to all other Dioceses that action should be taken at an appropriate time and in an appropriate forum to articulate and confirm the duties and limitations on the Court of Review's scope. This review must see to it that fundamental notions of fairness are required in Title III matters in the same way that they are required in Title IV matters.

We thank you for your prayerful consideration. You are in our prayers, and we ask that you keep us in yours.