

DATE: April 22, 2009

On February 21, a special convention of the Diocese of Northern Michigan elected the Rev. Kevin Thew Forrester to serve as diocesan bishop. The canons of the Episcopal Church require that consents be obtained within 120 days from a majority of diocesan bishops and standing committees. His election has raised significant concerns around the Church for a variety of reasons. Following is a letter from Bishop Lillibridge and the West Texas Standing Committee regarding their decisions to withhold consent.

## **A Letter to the Clergy and People of West Texas From Bishop Lillibridge and the Standing Committee**

**April 16, 2009**

Dear Clergy and People of West Texas,

This is to inform you that we have withheld consent to the election of the Rev. Kevin Thew Forrester as bishop of the Diocese of Northern Michigan. In the Standing Committee's case, this decision was unanimous. Because withholding consent is unusual, we wanted to offer you our reasons, briefly, for doing so.

We did not come to this decision lightly or easily, but only after much discussion, prayer and study. We are deeply mindful that each diocese is entitled to elect its own bishops. But we know also that bishops are called to serve the whole Church, and that a bishop's words and actions in one diocese can affect, for good or ill, life in other dioceses. Hence, the canonical requirement that bishops-elect receive consents from both a majority of diocesan bishops and a majority of standing committees.

The election of Kevin Thew Forrester in Northern Michigan has caused serious concern among clergy and laity across the wider Church for several reasons.

First, his was the only name put forward by the diocesan "Episcopal Ministry Discernment Team" (i.e., nominating committee). This team reported that the Rev. Thew Forrester was one of the leaders of the "first few sessions" held by them. Strictly speaking, his election does not violate the canons because the canons give wide latitude to dioceses in conducting Episcopal elections. However, a nominating process that presents only one candidate to the people of a diocese stretches the definition of "election."

Second, the Rev. Thew Forrester's embrace of Zen Buddhist meditation practices and his "lay ordination" into Buddhism are troubling to us. While many Christians adopt spiritual practices from other faith traditions to deepen their prayer life, the Rev. Thew Forrester seems to have gone beyond this, melding Buddhist belief and Christian belief in an untenable syncretism. His published writings and sermons reveal this syncretism in which the Trinity, sin and

redemption, and the Person and work of Jesus Christ are significantly diminished.

Finally, the Rev. Thew Forrester has rewritten baptismal and Eucharistic liturgies and used them in public worship. His revised liturgies again omit or obscure what are, for us, non-negotiable Christian beliefs. Further, priests and bishops, on their own, are not free to change the Church's liturgy.

Bishops (as do all clergy) vow to conform to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Church. They publicly profess that the Holy Scriptures are "the Word of God, and do contain all things necessary for salvation." They are called to "guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church." (Prayer Book, pp. 513-518) Based on his own words and actions, we are left with serious reservations about the Rev. Thew Forrester's ability and willingness to do these things. Therefore, we are withholding consent to his election.

We find no satisfaction in doing this. We understand that, if he fails to gain the necessary consents, it will hurt a diocese that is already struggling. But we have a larger responsibility to the whole Church, and we are convinced that his consecration would further weaken the Episcopal Church's unity and mission.

We are grateful for your prayers, and ask that you pray for Kevin Thew Forrester and the people of Northern Michigan.

Faithfully yours in Christ,  
The Rt. Rev. Gary Lillibridge

The Standing Committee

The Rev. John Hardie, President  
The Rev. Ram Lopez  
The Rev. David Read  
Mrs. Betty Mosty  
Mrs. Helen Schnelzer  
Mr. Ron Tribo