



An open letter to Archbishop Foley Beach

*from #ACNAtoo abuse survivors and advocates in response to his
July 10, 2021 letter to the Anglican Church in North America
concerning the Diocese of the Upper Midwest*



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07/15/2021

Archbishop Beach,

We were encouraged to [read](#) that Bp. Ruch is now on leave from his episcopal duties in light of credible allegations that he and various leaders under him mishandled abuse allegations in the Upper Midwest Diocese for over two years.

We are also encouraged that the Provincial office of the ACNA has reached out to survivors directly and agreed to work with them going forward. Invoking this invitation, this letter is written to you from UMD survivors and the body of advocates they have assembled.

This letter addresses our most pressing considerations at this time; it is not an exhaustive statement. It contains five sections detailing separate but interrelated concerns, each of which concludes with action steps. The letter ends with important information about how we wish to communicate with the Province going forward.

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Section 1. Bp. Stewart Ruch

While we are encouraged that Bp. Ruch is now on leave, we are concerned that [your letter's](#) announcement of this “temporary leave of absence” fails to convey to survivors, ACNA members, the Church, and the general public that the Province understands the full gravity of the allegations against Bp. Ruch. These include, but are not limited to, covering up a failure in mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, allowing those involved to continue in their positions of leadership which risked further negligence and abuse, and not informing his diocese of the abuse in a timely manner (which has been credibly documented by survivors and the mishandling of which he has since [admitted](#)).

Action Steps

- 1. We ask that the Bishops commit to remove Bp. Ruch permanently from office should an independent, third party investigation substantiate the allegations against him (see section 5). Further, we ask that the Bishops unequivocally denounce such behavior and promise that any ACNA Bishop who conducts himself in such a manner will be removed from office and barred from any future service as clergy in the ACNA.**
- 2. We further ask that it is publicly clarified whether Bp. Ruch's leave of absence is paid or unpaid.**



Section 2 | Bishop's Council

[Your letter](#) indicates that an interim Bishop (as yet unnamed) will be chosen to govern the UMD together with the current Bishop's Council. We further understand that the Bishop's Council will have no role in this investigation going forward, because the Province will now be handling those matters, for which we are glad.

However, we are gravely concerned that the Bishop's Council tasked to help run the UMD is the same Bishop's Council that ["highly supported"](#) Bp. Ruch when he launched an investigation and issued a statement regarding it in direct disregard of the clearly stated (and frequently repeated) [objections](#) of survivors and advocates.

We must conclude either:

A) Bp. Ruch did not, as he [claimed](#), honestly apprise the Bishop's Council of his decisions (which disregard survivors in virtually every respect) or B) Bp. Ruch did apprise the Council of the steps he was taking, and they agreed that steamrolling the concerns of abuse survivors while presenting a false pretense to the public of working with and respecting those survivors was, in fact, a workable plan in accordance with conducting themselves "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

If A, then Bp. Ruch deliberately deceived his own Council, providing yet more evidence that he should be permanently removed from any future leadership in the ACNA. If B, then the Bishop's Council is complicit in the egregious mishandling of survivors' allegations. In which case, leaving the Council to run the diocese while Bp. Ruch is on leave for the same actions fails to, as 1 Thess. 5 advises us, "abstain from all appearance of evil."

Action Steps

1. We ask that the Bishop's Council be immediately suspended from ongoing oversight of and decision-making for the Upper Midwest Diocese until their actions and involvement in this matter have been reviewed by an independent, third party investigator (see section 5).
2. We ask that the [requested](#) review of UMD leadership structures specifically include the UMD Constitution and Canons, which [deviate](#) from Anglican norms and provide no real accountability or checks on the Bishop's power as would a traditional, elected Standing Committee.



Section 3 | Extreme Subsidiarity

Your [letter](#) is the first public response survivors received from the Province, after you joined the Bishop's Council for two months (according to Bp. Ruch) in being "highly supportive of all the decisions" Bp. Ruch described in his [statement](#).

Again, it would seem that either Bp. Ruch deceived you or you did, in fact, agree that his decision to disregard survivors and lie to the public about it was the best course of action. We extend you the benefit of the doubt and assume Bp. Ruch did not provide you with the full story. A third possibility, which is strongly implied in your letter, is that you knew Bp. Ruch was handling this matter poorly (including publicly [misrepresenting](#) your support) but [determined](#) you could not intervene "due to the Anglican Church in North America's governance principle of subsidiarity."

In other words, your hands were tied to intervene until Bp. Ruch himself formally requested leave. Thus even in the case of a diocese mishandling multiple credible sexual abuse allegations at every level of governance, the Province still interprets subsidiarity so strictly that a de facto step in addressing mishandled abuse allegations is that survivors themselves must conjure the capacity, initiative, and will to launch a social media campaign which in turn precipitates a public shaming thorough enough to drive the Bishop in question to step down.

We must conclude there is a dangerous, fundamental flaw in a hierarchy that waits for an errant Bishop to put himself on leave after publicly [admitting](#) he made "regrettable errors" going back two years in his handling of serious sexual abuse allegations, even to the point that the Bishop is permitted to libel the Province by falsely [stating](#) it supports his misdeeds.

Action Steps

- 1. We ask that the ACNA commits to no longer utilizing subsidiarity as the guiding principle in cases of abuse prevention or allegations. While this structure can work well in some areas, it opens up a huge potential for negligence in cases of abuse.**
- 2. To this end, we ask that consistent standards of abuse prevention and response be standardized across the ACNA and that dioceses are required to hold to a universal minimum standard of training established at the Provincial level.**



Section 4 | Other Disciplinary Actions

While the entire UMD leadership and structure needs exhaustive investigation by an independent third party (see section 5), in the short term we ask for only two of those leaders to be placed on immediate leave: Diocesan Chancellor Charles Philbrick and Spiritual Formation Pastor Deacon Valerie McIntyre. Additionally, we request clarification as to the current disciplinary status of the Rev. Rand York, former rector at Christ Our Light Anglican.

As survivors have demonstrated, Chancellor Philbrick's legal counsel ranged from anti-Christian to alleged legal malpractice. This includes, but is not limited to, [advising](#) COLA leadership to disregard mandatory reporting policies (advice [utilized](#) to pressure Cherin not to report her daughter's abuse), [assisting](#) a credibly accused child molestor to find a private defense attorney at a discounted rate, and providing counsel to Bp. Ruch as he decided to override survivors' requests (as noted both in Bp. Ruch's [statement](#) and in the informal FAQ on July 4, 2021). Any of these actions should be sufficient for the Province to take immediate action to ensure Mr. Philbrick no longer provides legal advice in any capacity to anyone in the ACNA hierarchy.

Deacon Valerie McIntyre neglected, as Spiritual Formation Pastor at Church of the Resurrection, to exhort the Diocese to protect the vulnerable populations entrusted to her care. Despite Cherin bringing multiple credible sexual abuse allegations to her attention, Deacon McIntyre failed to call upon Bp. Ruch to inform the congregation of these allegations and order an investigation that would find and help other victims. Deacon McIntyre has also been [implicated](#) in a range of grossly negligent failures of pastoral care, as well as numerous severe pastoral confidentiality violations with relation to other congregants which have not been publicly reported by our team, but some of which Cherin reported to Bp. Ruch in a May 4, 2021 email.

The Rev. Rand York failed in his position as priest of Christ Our Light Anglican Church when he [allowed](#) allegations of child sexual abuse to be ignored and/or minimized within his parish, [failed to report](#) these allegations to the appropriate authorities as required by law as a mandated reporter, further permitted his Senior Warden not to report child sexual abuse, allowed the victim's mother to be [pressured not to report](#) these same allegations, and continued to provide Communion to a man credibly accused of child molestation and rape who was as yet unrepentant (in direct violation of ACNA directives regarding Discipline at Holy Communion, [BCP 2019, pg. 143](#)).



Any or all of these allegations against the Rev. York are just causes for ecclesiastical discipline under Canon 7, Section 5 of the [UMD Constitution and Canons](#). Relevant survivors have yet to be informed as to whether he remains a priest in good standing or whether he has been defrocked, as his gross dereliction of priestly office demands.

Action Steps

- 1. We ask that the Province place Chancellor Philbrick and Deacon McIntyre on leave from their respective duties until the survivors' credible allegations have been investigated by an independent third party (see section 5).**
- 2. We ask that the Province provide clarity as to whether the Rev. Rand York has been disciplined by the UMD for his gross mismanagement of allegations within his parish or whether he remains a priest in good standing.**



Section 5 | Investigation of the Upper Midwest Diocese

While [your letter](#) is vague on this point, our understanding from Rev. Hawkins is that the current investigation under Grand River Solutions will be halted permanently and a new investigation enlisted under the oversight of the Provisional Response Team you mention in your letter. If this is correct, we commend you on ending the GRS investigation. Thank you for hearing our concerns and taking decisive action.

Our primary concern going forward is for this investigation to be done right. To this end we are asking you to commit to these few crucial items:

Action Steps

- 1. In the interest of transparency, we ask that you publish the full names and credentials of every member of the new Provincial Response Team who will “take up oversight of the investigation” going forward, as soon as this team is selected.**
- 2. We ask that you commit publicly not to hire an investigative firm until the #ACNAtoo survivors and their advocacy team have approved both the firm, scope, and parameters of the investigation.**
 - Likewise, we ask to be given the opportunity to correct any public statements made about the investigation before they are published.**
- 3. We ask you to commit publicly to enlisting a full-scale, independent third party investigation into the UMD, including:**
 - Sexual abuse allegations against any current or former leadership, staff, volunteers, or contracted employees in the UMD.**
 - Emotional, physical, or spiritual abuse allegations against the same.**
 - Any alleged enabling of abuse, covering up of abuse, or mishandling of abuse allegations of any kind by the same.**
 - Any complaints regarding processes, practices, culture, structures, or any aspect of UMD operations that relates to the perpetuation of abuse.**



- **A detailed final report and set of recommendations, compiled by the investigator, which the investigator will publish in full (without prior review or input from the Province), in order to provide a comprehensive accounting of abuse and the mishandling of abuse allegations in the UMD, as well as guidance going forward regarding necessary measures to transform the ACNA into a culture that is safe for vulnerable people and hostile to predators.**



About Communications Going Forward

[Your letter](#) promises that the Provincial Response Team in charge of overseeing the investigation will “continue to engage with the survivors throughout the investigation and to conduct this investigation with transparency and integrity.”

UMD survivors have now undergone years of profound trauma at three subsequent levels:

1. Primary abuse at the hands of an ACNA leader and alleged sexual predator (Mark Rivera).
2. Secondary abuse at the hands of the ACNA church leadership (COLA) that dismissed them and continued to protect that alleged predator.
3. Tertiary abuse at a diocesan level (UMD), where leaders professed empathy and care but ultimately cast survivors aside and then deceived the public into thinking this was not the case.

Those survivors and advocates are exhausted and cannot risk re-traumatization at a fourth, Provincial level. Given this reality, we appreciate Rev. Hawkins’ offer to “hear from you in whatever way you are comfortable and get your thoughts and feedback on what we will be doing going forward.”

Our reply to Rev. Hawkins, and to the Province, is that the survivors, along with their chosen advocates, are only comfortable sharing our thoughts and feedback in a public forum, given how much compounded hurt has come from keeping these conversations shrouded in darkness. Per our process going forward, we have released this statement publicly simultaneously with sending it to Rev. Hawkins personally.

We are asking that you and the Task Force take time to consider what we have written here and reply to us in the same way we have responded to you: publicly, with openness and honesty, and a true desire to move forward in justice.



The #ACNAtoo Advocacy Team *(alphabetical by last name)*

Heather & Paul Griffin, ACNA members

Whitney Evans Harrison, ACNA member

Jenna & John Perrine, former Church of the Resurrection church planting residents

Joanna Rudenborg, #ACNAtoo survivor

B.H.S., survivor, ACNA member, original #ACNAtoo advocacy team

The following victims of former ACNA Catechist Mark Rivera are signing on to support this statement, while protecting their necessary privacy:

A.D., #ACNAtoo survivor

H.M., #ACNAtoo survivor

A.V., #ACNAtoo survivor

(If you are an ACNA clergy or lay person who would like to sign on in support, please visit [ACNAtoo.org](https://acnatoos.org) or tweet/DM your name, role, and church to [@ACNAtoo](https://twitter.com/ACNAtoo).)



Dedication

The #ACNAtoo Advocacy Team dedicates our ongoing efforts to all #ACNAtoo survivors, those listed and not listed here, with a special dedication to Cherin and her daughter.

Cherin's daughter was the first of Mark Rivera's victims to come forward. She did so in May 2019, at age 9. This little girl's bravery is the true origin of #ACNAtoo. Cherin went on to advocate with ACNA leadership for over two years on behalf of her daughter and other victims of Mark Rivera who came forward to her with their own abuse stories in the wake of her daughter's disclosure.

Cherin and her family are exhausted from this struggle and unable to put themselves through yet another round of negotiations within the ACNA hierarchy.

We, the #ACNAtoo survivors and advocates, have promised them we will continue fighting for justice for all #ACNAtoo victims, known and unknown, in their honor, with deepest respect to the trauma they have endured and the hard work they never should have had to do, and without which this movement would never have been launched.