



Anglican Church in North America

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In the Matter of the Rt. Rev. Stewart Ruch, III
(Bishop, Diocese of the Upper Midwest)

FINAL ORDER

The Ecclesiastical Court for the Trial of a Bishop
Anglican Church in North America

APPEARANCES

For the Province:

Provincial Prosecutors: Thomas Crapps, Esq., and Frank Shaw, III, Esq., appearing.

Former Provincial Prosecutors: Chad Graham; C. Alan Runyan; Job Serebrov.

Special appearance of Provincial Chancellor, Scott J. Ward, Esq. on behalf of the Province.

For the Respondent: The Rt. Rev. Stewart Ruch III, appearing through counsel, Mr. Alec Smith, Esq.

Pursuant to the Canons of the Anglican Church in North America and the Rules of Court Promulgated by the ACNA Court for the Trial of a Bishop on April 13, 2021, the Undersigned empaneled Trial Court of a Bishop hereby enters the following ORDER:

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

This case arises out of a complex series of events within the Diocese of the Upper Midwest (“UMD”) and the Anglican Church in North America (“ACNA”), beginning with the grievous criminal misconduct of a lay catechist, Mark Rivera, and culminating years later in two Presentments against the Rt. Rev. Stewart E. Ruch III (“Bishop Ruch”). Serious wrongdoing undeniably occurred, including criminal sexual abuse. The question before this Court, however,

has always been narrower and more precise: whether *Bishop Ruch himself* committed any canonical offense under Title IV as alleged.

A. BACKGROUND CONCERNING BISHOP STEWART RUCH AND HIS MINISTRY

Bishop Stewart Ruch's ministry developed within a distinctively transitional and missionary period of Anglican realignment in North America, marked by ecclesial disaffiliation, institutional formation, and evolving structures of oversight.

Bishop Ruch was confirmed as an Anglican in 1991, having begun attending Church of the Resurrection (sometimes referred to as "Rez") in Wheaton, Illinois, several years earlier. At that time, Church of the Resurrection was a parish of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago. In 1993, the parish withdrew from that Diocese, citing what Bishop Ruch described as the emergence of unbiblical teaching within the Diocese of Chicago and beyond. From that point until approximately 2000, Church of the Resurrection functioned as an independent Anglican congregation without formal diocesan oversight.

In 1998, Bishop Ruch was ordained as a presbyter (priest) at Church of the Resurrection. That ordination occurred during a period in which the parish did not operate under the authority of a bishop exercising ordinary jurisdiction. Bishop Ruch testified that the ordination utilized the Anglican prayer book "for the most part," and that in 2000—following the formation of the Anglican Mission in America ("AMiA") and the consecration of Bishop John Rodgers—his ordination was subsequently regularized into recognized Anglican orders.

During the late 1990s, Church of the Resurrection became involved in emerging Anglican networks, including the Association of Anglican Congregations on Mission ("ACOM") in the Midwest and the First Promise movement, which had significant influence in the southeastern United States. Church of the Resurrection was among the founding congregations of the Anglican Mission in America in 2000.

Bishop Ruch described AMiA during this period as a pioneering, mission-driven movement emphasizing church planting, relational networks, and forward-looking growth, rather than institutional development. According to his testimony, AMiA did not operate with a constitution, formal canons, or diocesan structures comparable to those later adopted by the Anglican Church in North America. Instead, it functioned as a mission body that provided

resources and training—such as child protection materials—without mandating standardized policies or canonical compliance.

In 2009, upon the founding of the Anglican Church in North America, Church of the Resurrection entered the ACNA as part of AMiA. Bishop Ruch was personally present at the founding assembly in Fort Worth, Texas. In subsequent years, the congregations with which he was affiliated participated in the process of forming a new diocese within the ACNA. That process involved meeting numerical benchmarks, developing diocesan canons, and securing approval from the Provincial Council and the College of Bishops. The diocese was formally approved in 2013.

As part of the diocesan formation process, a nominating procedure for bishop was conducted. Two nominees were advanced, including Bishop Ruch. The election was conducted by the College of Bishops of the ACNA, resulting in Bishop Ruch's election and subsequent consecration. At the time he assumed episcopal office, Bishop Ruch testified that this was effectively his first experience ministering within a fully constituted Anglican diocese, apart from a brief period in the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago during his early twenties.

Bishop Ruch further testified that, at the time of his consecration, the ACNA—then approximately four years old—did not provide formal or structured training for newly consecrated bishops. He stated that he undertook proactive efforts to seek mentorship and guidance from senior bishops within the Province in order to gain institutional understanding and pastoral insight appropriate to his new role.

B. ALLEGATIONS AND SUBSEQUENT PROCEEDINGS

Against this backdrop of Bishop Ruch's formation, ministerial experience, and the evolving institutional structures of the Anglican Church in North America, the record next turns to the events giving rise to the present matter. The allegations arose over concerns of reported sexual misconduct by Mark Rivera and the actions taken by diocesan and parish leadership upon receipt of those allegations. The testimony established a defined temporal sequence beginning in mid-May 2019, when Bishop Ruch first became aware of the allegations, and continuing through the steps undertaken by diocesan officials in response. The following sections set forth that chronology as reflected in the evidentiary record. No sources were considered other than those

admitted into evidence as part of the record of this case, including the sworn testimony of witnesses under oath in the trial of this matter.

The immediate crisis began on Sunday, May 19, 2019. On that day, the mother of a minor child approached Deacon Margie Fawcett at Church of the Resurrection to report that her daughter had disclosed sexual abuse by Mark Rivera, a lay catechist at Christ Our Light Anglican Church (“COLA”), a Greenhouse congregation. At that time, Bishop Ruch was away on an episcopal visit in Minnesota.

The evidence showed that the sequence of events that followed was prompt and consistent with mandatory-reporting expectations. On May 20, 2019, the victim’s mother herself reported the allegations to civil authorities. Rivera was removed from ministry immediately, arrested shortly thereafter, and ultimately charged. As time went on, additional victims—including an adult survivor—came forward, and by November 2020, further misconduct involving the Rivera matter was disclosed.

The evidence at trial established that the Diocese’s initial response was fourfold: Rivera was promptly removed from ministry; the matter was immediately reported to law enforcement; pastoral care was offered at once to the victim’s family; and the Diocese cooperated fully with the Department of Children and Family Services (“DCFS”) and the police. No testimony indicated that anyone discouraged reporting. The only hesitation described in the record came from the victim’s mother, who briefly questioned whether her daughter had correctly identified the perpetrator. That hesitation was self-acknowledged, short-lived, and resolved when she proceeded to contact authorities. The mandated-reporter investigation by DCFS resulted in no finding of failure by any diocesan or parish actor.

Across all investigations and testimony, Rivera’s abuse was found to be outside formal church programs, not occurring on church property, not facilitated by any diocesan structure or action, and not reasonably foreseeable based on the information available at the time. No evidence established that any bishop, priest, deacon, or other clergy had prior warning of Rivera’s hidden criminal behavior.

Pastoral care began immediately and continued over a substantial period. COLA covered counseling costs for Jane Doe 1. Bishop Ruch authorized discretionary funds for the family. Deacon Valerie McIntyre met with the victim’s mother approximately eighteen times over eighteen months.

Many of the criticisms leveled against Bishop Stewart Ruch in the Presentments rest on mischaracterizations of decisions he made while attempting to minister to individuals in moments of acute crisis. Actions that were later framed as evidencing bias or impropriety were revealed through trial testimony to have arisen from pastoral judgment exercised in real time, without the benefit of hindsight and often without full appreciation of how those actions might later be perceived. One such example concerns Bishop Ruch's attendance at the bond hearing in the criminal matter involving Mark Rivera, an action that was heavily criticized in the Presentment but was placed in a more accurate and complete context through the evidence presented at trial.

The trial testimony establishes that Bishop Ruch attended the June 10, 2019, bond hearing as a spontaneous, pastoral decision made upon learning the hearing was occurring, believing that Rivera's wife would be present and wishing to offer support during what he understood to be a stressful proceeding. He testified unequivocally that he did not attend to support the accused, to signal belief in Rivera's innocence, or to influence the criminal process in any way, and that he did not at the time fully understand the nature of a bond hearing or how his presence might later be perceived. The testimony further reflects that Bishop Ruch did not anticipate the impact his attendance would have on [REDACTED] the mother of the alleged victim, and did not know it would later be experienced as hurtful or as creating an appearance of imbalance.

More than a year later, upon learning through correspondence that his attendance had caused her pain, Bishop Ruch immediately acknowledged the legitimacy of her feelings, expressed regret and embarrassment, offered an unqualified apology, and accepted responsibility for the impact of his actions. The record further establishes that he sought to make amends by requesting and receiving permission to attend a subsequent hearing in support of [REDACTED] which he did, describing that act as an important step in pastoral accountability and repair.

The Court finds that the nature of Bishop Ruch's response to that episode is not an aberration, but a representative example of how Bishop Ruch consistently responded to harsh criticism: not with defensiveness or deflection, but with humility, a posture of learning, and a demonstrated willingness to listen, repent where harm was caused, and adjust his conduct accordingly. Over a lengthy trial, the evidence demonstrated a pattern of leadership marked by a

shepherd's heart—one that seeks restoration, bears responsibility for unintended harm, and prioritizes care for those in pain over the protection of reputation or position.

C. THE DIOCESE, GREENHOUSE, AND STRUCTURAL CONTEXT

To understand how these events later evolved into multiple Presentments, it is necessary to set forth the distinctive structure of the Diocese of the Upper Midwest and its relationship to the Greenhouse Movement.

The Diocese comprised two overlapping realities: conventional parishes (such as Rez, the cathedral parish) and the Greenhouse Movement, a mission-oriented network that functioned both as a diocesan deanery and as an independent 501(c)(3) organization. This hybrid identity generated certain systemic vulnerabilities. Many Greenhouse congregations were led by lay catechists rather than ordained clergy. Greenhouse's internal policies did not operate under full diocesan control.

Rez had adopted written child-protection policies as early as 2005, and other parishes developed their own local safeguarding measures. The Diocese as a whole, however, did not adopt a single, uniform safeguarding policy until approximately 2021, in parallel with ACNA's still-developing provincial guidance.

The Diocese experienced rapid growth, especially through Greenhouse church plants and church plants launched from Church of the Resurrection. This rapid expansion produced strategic and policy fragmentation, which needed to be addressed. As expert witness Teresa Sidebotham testified during the trial, safeguarding policies in American churches generally only began to mature and standardize after the early 2000s, particularly in the wake of the Catholic sexual-abuse crisis. Institutions typically transition gradually toward unified safeguarding practices. Rapid-growth environments often lag in systematization without that lag constituting negligence.

Sidebotham, retained by the Province itself, expressly testified that she found no leadership culpability on the part of Bishop Ruch—not even under the civil “preponderance of the evidence” standard—let alone the more demanding standard used in ecclesiastical matters of clear and convincing evidence. Her investigative work showed that organizational growth was driving structural evolution; that diocesan safeguarding patterns reflected normal, not negligent,

institutional development; and that nothing she reviewed constituted a canonical violation by Bishop Ruch.

The evidence at trial showed that the hybrid Greenhouse structure contributed to the broader diocesan challenges by obscuring chains of authority, decentralizing training and oversight, and creating confusion about where responsibility lay. But structural vulnerability, by itself, does not constitute canonical misconduct. A determination of an alleged canonical violation occurs if it is proven by clear and convincing evidence that he knew of a risk and ignored it, abused his authority, or willfully neglected his duties. The evidence in this record, when taken as a whole, clearly demonstrated that none of those conditions existed.

D. SAFEGUARDING EVOLUTION AND INSTITUTIONAL GROWTH

As the Diocese expanded, safeguarding practices evolved at both parish and diocesan levels. Prior to 2021, safeguarding standards were implemented chiefly at the parish level, which reflected both the Diocese’s hybrid structure and the emerging character of ACNA-wide safeguarding norms. Church of the Resurrection had written child-protection policies in place as early as 2005. Other congregations within the Diocese developed local policies suited to their context. The Diocese itself later harmonized these efforts into a diocesan-level strategy as provincial guidance and requirements matured.

Expert testimony at trial established that such incremental development is common in rapidly growing ministries. Attorney and Provincial expert Teresa Sidebotham explained that national safeguarding norms did not become widely standardized until after the early 2000s; that churches often adopt policies gradually and unevenly; and that aspirational “best practices” are not equivalent to the legally and professionally recognized standard of care. Departures from best practices, in other words, do not automatically equate to misconduct.

In her independent review commissioned by the Province (the Telios report discussed later in this opinion), Sidebotham concluded that there was no leadership culpability on the part of Bishop Ruch, no substantiated allegations of misconduct or canonical violations, and no evidence that diocesan structures failed because of any action or omission by him. The Diocese’s trajectory—from parish-based safeguarding toward diocesan standardization—reflected normal institutional growth, not episcopal negligence.

The experts testifying at trial explained that rapid growth can and often does produce uneven implementation, a lag between policy refinement and structural adaptation, and inconsistent training across decentralized networks such as Greenhouse. These structural realities do not constitute a canonical violation unless it is shown by clear and convincing evidence that it is accompanied by willful neglect, disobedience, or abuse of authority. The evidence discloses no such accompaniment. The evidence before the Court overwhelmingly demonstrates that the safeguarding evolution within the Diocese represents institutional development, not dereliction of episcopal duty.

1. Escalation, Public Pressure, and Independent Review (2020–2021)

By late 2020 and into 2021, additional concerns surfaced relating to Rivera and the broader diocesan environment. Public scrutiny intensified, especially through online survivor-advocacy channels such as ACNAtoo. In this environment, Bishop Ruch and diocesan leaders sought an independent external review in order to clarify what had occurred, identify any additional victims, and learn from any missteps.

On April 30, 2021, after consultation with survivors and advocates, the diocese commissioned Grand River Solutions (“GRS”) to review diocesan handling of the Rivera disclosure, examine potential safeguarding gaps, determine whether additional victims existed, and assess whether diocesan or parish leaders knew or reasonably should have known of risks. This decision to invite an external review was voluntary and undertaken in good faith, as confirmed by the trial testimony.

On July 8, 2021, under mounting provincial and public pressure, Bishop Ruch took a voluntary leave of absence. His stated intent was to ensure transparency and avoid any appearance that he might influence the investigation’s outcome. The evidence showed that soon thereafter, the Province assumed extensive oversight of the investigations, expanded GRS’s scope, and by September–October 2021 had effectively taken full control of the process, displacing diocesan oversight. On October 4, 2021, GRS issued a Transition Report summarizing its work and formally passing the investigation to provincial control.

Provincial leaders expanded the scope of review to include culture and leadership concerns within Greenhouse, governance irregularities, and alleged patterns of leadership dysfunction. This expansion reflected institutional confusion about roles and responsibilities, not any proven misconduct. Testimony showed that the Diocese’s request for review was

cooperative and transparent; that no actionable findings of episcopal wrongdoing were produced during this period; and that Bishop Ruch remained on voluntary leave, fully submitting to the process.

What began as an internal diocesan review thus evolved into a Province-led, multi-track investigatory process, accompanied by intense public pressure, overlapping and sometimes incomplete investigatory scopes, and procedural irregularities. At no stage did any investigation, in any form, produce clear and convincing evidence that Bishop Ruch had violated the Canons under Title IV.

2. Proliferation of Provincial Investigations (2021–2023)

When the Province assumed control of the GRS investigation in late 2021, it set off a proliferation of overlapping and, at times, inconsistent inquiries. These inquiries increasingly shifted focus away from the original Rivera allegations toward broader questions about diocesan leadership, governance, and culture—particularly within Greenhouse. The result, as demonstrated at trial, created a fragmented and often confusing investigatory landscape that produced institutional fatigue and mistrust without substantive findings of episcopal wrongdoing.

After taking over the GRS investigation, the Province initiated additional reviews, including the retention of the Husch Blackwell litigation law firm (“HB”) to investigate the diocesan and provincial handling of allegations and communications. They also retained Telios Law to investigate patterns of leadership behavior, power dynamics, and alleged ecclesial dysfunction, and several informal internal reviews directed by provincial leaders without clearly defined, authorized parameters. Each investigation pursued different questions, with overlapping and inconsistent frameworks. The evidence demonstrated that witnesses often did not know which investigation they were participating in, and investigators occasionally lacked access to prior materials.

The record reveals a lack of coordination and a demonstrable procedural drift: unclear lines of authority, shifting investigatory goals, inconsistent communication with key participants, and no unified standard of evidence or methodology. Witnesses testified to confusion about who was leading the process (the Diocese, the Province, a task force, a Provincial Investigative Team (“PIT”) or one of the multiple outside law firms on retainer by the Province), what the purpose and scope of each investigation was, how findings might be used, and whether investigators were neutral fact-finders or serving a prosecutorial function. This confusion bred ambiguity and

mistrust, but it does not amount to misconduct by Bishop Ruch. Testimony at trial showed mounting bills into the hundreds of thousands of dollars without any centralized coordination. One bishop testified at trial that his diocese loaned the province \$250,000 to fund the continued investigation and that at least one other diocese had extended loans to the Province for the same purpose.

The trial testimony also established that the GRS Transition Report was withheld from Bishop Ruch after the Province took control; that elements of GRS's work were later invoked against him despite his being denied access to the full report; and that the HB and Telios reports, though completed under provincial oversight, were not shared transparently with diocesan leadership. None of these investigative bodies—GRS, HB, or Telios—found clear and convincing evidence of canonical wrongdoing by Bishop Ruch.

The cumulative effect of these multiple investigations was not evidentiary clarity but procedural confusion. Despite their number and breadth, not a single investigation demonstrated that Bishop Ruch had violated ACNA Canons.

3. Provincial Safeguarding Gaps and Rising Internal Tensions

The testimony at trial established that, during the period in which the Province pursued investigative and disciplinary action against Bishop Ruch, the Province itself lacked a comprehensive and enforceable safeguarding framework. Fr. James F. Sweeney, an attorney with extensive experience in Title IV matters, reviewed the investigative reports generated in this case. When asked, *“In your experience, since 2009, have you ever known of a bishop in the ACNA to be faced with a presentment on the issue of child protection development?”* Fr. Sweeney responded unequivocally, *“No.”* The ACNA had no standardized, enforceable safeguarding protocols across dioceses. Provincial expectations were largely aspirational and imprecise; bishops and dioceses interpreted obligations inconsistently; and Title IV processes were not originally designed with contemporary safeguarding frameworks in view. Expert testimony confirmed that this lack of provincial standardization created structural risk that was not attributable to any one bishop.

According to the evidence, by mid-2022, internal tensions and political pressures within the College of Bishops had grown. Bishops expressed divergent views on safeguarding expectations, diocesan autonomy, appropriate responses to advocacy groups, the role and conduct of independent investigations, and whether disciplinary action should be pursued before

investigations were complete. Some urged rapid, visible action against diocesan leadership based on perceptions, rumors, or public pressure. Others insisted that canonical due process must be preserved. This divergence produced friction within the College. Witnesses acknowledged feeling “pressured” or “swept up” by public narratives, while others emphasized their desire for impartial review.

Both Ms. Sidebotham and Fr. James Sweeney testified that safeguarding challenges within UMD were systemic rather than personal, were largely normal for a rapidly growing diocese, and were exacerbated by provincial structural gaps. Neither expert found evidence that Bishop Ruch disregarded safeguarding duties, ignored warnings, failed to act on known risks, or presided over conditions that would constitute canonical fault.

The Court concludes that institutional and provincial shortcomings—not episcopal misconduct—account for much of the tension and miscommunication during this period. Those shortcomings cannot form a valid basis for canonical charges against Bishop Ruch.

E. RUMOR, IMPRESSION, AND THE UNUSED CANONICAL MECHANISM

Between 2021 and 2022, impressions and concerns circulated within the College of Bishops regarding Bishop Ruch—none amounting to specific allegations of misconduct. The ACNA Canons provide a mechanism for addressing such situations: Canon IV.4.4, commonly referred to as the “rumor and innuendo” process.

Section 4 – Concerning the Process of Inquiry

The Board of Inquiry shall investigate such rumors, reports, or charges, as the case may be. In conducting the investigation, the Board shall hear the accusations and such proof as the accusers may produce, and shall determine whether, upon matters of law and fact, as presented to them, there are reasonable grounds to put the accused to trial.

The purpose of this process is to ensure that unfounded allegations may be investigated and resolved without resorting to the costly and lengthy presentment and trial procedures. With a social media narrative accelerating, rumors circulating widely, and Bishop Ruch in virtual isolation while the provincial leadership exercised full control over the investigation, there was an acute need to establish the actual facts and put to rest the rumors and innuendos. Accordingly, on October 13, 2022, several bishops submitted a formal request to Archbishop Foley Beach asking that the provisions of Title IV, Canon 4, Section 4 be invoked immediately to bring

resolution to what had become a narrative driven largely by social media. At trial, Bishop Dobbs and several other bishops testified on Bishop Ruch's behalf and confirmed the necessity of employing this canonical procedure.

In his sworn affidavit, Bishop Dobbs stated:

"I consented to join in a demand for investigation of rumor and innuendo that Bishop Stewart submitted to Archbishop Foley Beach on October 13, 2022, pursuant to Canon IV.4.2. The Rt. Rev. Eric Vawter Menees, Bishop of the Diocese of San Joaquin, the Rt. Rev. Ryan Reed, Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth, and the Rt. Rev. Clark W.P. Lowenfield, Bishop of the Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast also consented to the demand. I willingly joined in this demand because I was personally aware of significant rumor and innuendo within the College of Bishops and the Province about Bishop Stewart's leadership in his diocese. There was a canonical procedure to address those rumors, and I believed that procedure to be appropriate at the time."

Bishop Menees likewise testified under oath:

Alec Smith:

Are you a signatory to a demand for investigation of rumor and innuendo that was submitted to Archbishop Foley Beach?

Bp. Eric Menees:

I am a signatory to that, and I think ironically, it was at the suggestion of Archbishop Beach when things started. There was a long period of silence, and I kept reaching out to the archbishop to say, you need to reach out to him. Pastorally, he's sinking here. He's falling into a depression. He's been isolated and alone. You need to reach out to him. And I know that others were saying the same thing. He had a Zoom meeting with myself and Bishop Stewart and Bishop Clark, I think Bishop Reed was on that as well as Bishop Atwood, and we discussed different things about what's going on and how come nothing's happening. Nothing's moving forward. No one signed anything, etc., etc.

Alec Smith:

And so you did sign that in October of 2022, correct?

Bp. Eric Menees:

Yes.

Alec Smith:

And it was ultimately submitted to the archbishop?

Bp. Eric Menees:

Yes. But we never heard anything back. There was, I mean, to this day, I haven't heard anything back.

Despite the formal request, the rumors and allegations were never adequately addressed.

At trial, Bishops Reed, Menees, and Dobbs all testified that the request went unanswered. The evidence established that they never received a response; no Board of Inquiry contacted them; no investigation occurred; and the request remains unresolved. Meanwhile, Bishop Stewart Ruch—now in near-total isolation, cut off from information necessary to understand or respond to evolving allegations—was left without any canonical recourse. One bishop testified that he had been told the following:

The Board of Inquiry said it was without merit and they were going to just cancel it, which struck me as odd, since they didn't talk to as far as I'm aware, they didn't talk to any of us about anything. So how could they determine it was without merit without having had a discussion?

Remarkably, one day before numerous bishops submitted their demand for an inquiry into rumor and innuendo, the Telios report was delivered to the provincial leaders overseeing the investigation. That report exonerated Bishop Ruch, noting that “*Many of the attacks on Bishop Ruch appear to be born out of anger and frustration with his conservative theology and leadership style.*”

Nevertheless, with that exoneration in hand—and with no known action taken on the canonical “rumor and innuendo” request—the extra-canonical Provincial Investigative Team, over the objection of some of its members, obtained the signatures of three bishops on a presentment based on those same rumors and innuendo. This occurred approximately seventy days after the request and after the release of the Telios report. The signing bishops later acknowledged misgivings about the presentment and admitted they had no firsthand knowledge or basis for alleging canonical violations by Bishop Ruch.

The court also notes that the Province’s two principal witnesses—Bishop Guernsey and Theresa Sidebottom—gave testimony that further undercut the Province’s position. Bishop Guernsey testified that he was unaware of the Telios exoneration and had never received the report. He later stated that he was refraining from expressing a view on whether Bishop Ruch violated any standards. The Provincial prosecutor’s own expert, Ms. Sidebotham, similarly

testified that they found no culpability by Bishop Ruch even under the lesser preponderance-of-the-evidence standard. Nevertheless, the pursuit of a presentment against Bishop Ruch continued unabated based on what the Court found by overwhelming testimony to be built on rumor, innuendo and a narrative driven by social media.

F. GROWING DOMINANCE OF ADVOCACY-DRIVEN NARRATIVE CAPTURE¹

In parallel with these structural deficiencies, the Court observed an increasing dominance of externally generated social and advocacy-driven narratives over the life of the investigation. This observation was not a finding bearing on the guilt or innocence of Bishop Ruch. Rather, it reflected an evidentiary concern going to the integrity and reliability of the fact-finding process itself. As testimony revealed a progressive displacement of firsthand inquiry and documentary substantiation by narrative momentum, the Court was compelled to engage in more searching and penetrating questioning of witnesses. That questioning was not advocacy, nor an expression of skepticism toward any party, but an exercise of the Court's duty to test the provenance, accuracy, and veracity of the allegations before it and to ensure that the record reflected evidence rather than repetition.

During the course of the province's oversight of the Presentment process, a group of concerned women leaders within the ACNA voiced their concerns to the College of Bishops regarding a distorted and increasingly pervasive public narrative, one that had devolved into what they described as a toxic public circus.

Until this point we have witnessed the ACNA's investigation of the Upper Midwest Diocese's handling of allegations against Mark Rivera in silence, believing that there was no good way to engage publicly. It is difficult enough to have experienced traumatizing behavior from Mark Rivera; it is additionally difficult to expose this trauma to public view. However, the direction that this process has taken is so deeply upsetting that we can no longer remain silent.

We know firsthand the damage that Mark Rivera has done. But we have watched in dismay and confusion as Mark's abusive behavior, and its devastating effects

¹ *Narrative capture* describes when the interpretive framework supplied by advocacy groups, social movements, media ecosystems, or institutional actors becomes so dominant that it effectively determines conclusions in advance, constraining or displacing independent fact-finding.

on victims, have been decentralized and the blame and the naming of evil has bizarrely shifted onto Bishop Stewart and the Diocese of the Upper Midwest [UMD].

The narrative has become distorted and unreasonable. Advocacy against Bp. Ruch, Church of the Resurrection, and the Upper Midwest Diocese has made flagrant use of omissions, misrepresentations, and even falsehoods that are related to our own lives and stories of abuse, while Mark's actions have been ludicrously framed as secondary symptoms. This is totally unacceptable. From our perspective, this framing is contrary to the truth.

It hurts us to see this behavior directed at people who have loved and served and honored us. It hurts us that we needed space to heal, and we have instead found ourselves at the center of a toxic public circus. We have endured almost a year of chaos and disruption in our church—and this is all being represented as support for us. TCB Exhibit #41.

Bishop Martyn Minns testified at trial that he perceived a growing and troubling shift in the provincial posture toward Bishop Ruch that he could not explain on evidentiary grounds. He stated that although Archbishop Foley Beach initially expressed affection for Bishop Ruch and hoped the matter would conclude without canonical action, that posture later reversed. Bishop Minns testified that provincial leadership involved in developing the presentment appeared increasingly influenced by advocacy pressure, becoming caught up with ACNA too actors and motivated by a perceived need to “give them something,” with Bishop Ruch becoming the focal point. He testified that this shift reflected a developing bias driven not by new factual findings, but by external advocacy pressure.

Bishop Minns further testified that a Telios report shared with him—but not publicly released—explicitly addressed the role of online and advocacy-driven narratives. He read into the record a passage stating that many allegations against Bishop Ruch were unreasonable, vindictive, or rooted in theological disagreement; that much of what was posted online was demonstrably false; and that some complainants appeared influenced by positions taken by advocacy groups rather than by firsthand experience. The report concluded that while there were areas for reconciliation, there was no evidence of abuse by Bishop Ruch, and that online narratives had significantly distorted perceptions of events.

Father Steve Williamson, Dean of the Cathedral, testified that many tensions he witnessed were relational or theological rather than disciplinary. He testified that public

narratives—including those circulating online—did not align with his firsthand knowledge of diocesan life or with the investigative materials he reviewed, and that the redacted Husch Blackwell report he read appeared to vindicate Bishop Ruch rather than substantiate claims of abuse of power.

Elizabeth Conkle and Lisa Schwandt, both members of the Provincial Investigative Team, testified that advocacy pressure—including from ACNAtoo—was a recognized factor during the investigative period. Deacon Schwandt testified that investigators were aware that some witnesses refused to participate based on advice from advocacy groups, that online accounts were often vague or unsupported by evidence, and that social “contamination” occurred as witnesses discussed allegations among themselves and within advocacy circles.

Ms. Conkle further testified that the presentment itself was not shared with PIT members and that she first encountered it through the ACNAtoo website, underscoring the degree to which advocacy platforms—not canonical structures—had become a primary source of information dissemination. She testified that she could not support presentment and believed no further process was warranted, implicitly rejecting conclusions shaped in part by advocacy pressure rather than investigation.

The testimony establishes a consistent theme: multiple witnesses—including provincial leaders, diocesan officials, dissenting PIT members, and the Court—recognized that social media platforms and advocacy groups exerted ongoing and distorting influence over the investigative life of the case. That influence was described not as peripheral but as shaping perceptions, participation, and institutional decision-making, often in the absence of substantiated firsthand evidence.

G. SUMMARY OF THE PATH TO PRESENTMENT

The evidence showed that the sequence of events that led to the Presentments reflects a long and complex chain of institutional miscommunication, investigative mismanagement, internal provincial tension, procedural irregularities, sustained public pressure, and the absence of consistent canonical process.

Across the entire timeline, from 2019 through 2023, no evidence demonstrated that Bishop Ruch willfully contravened canonical authority or habitually neglected episcopal

responsibilities. Multiple investigations and trial testimony provided no basis for a contrary conclusion. In fact, the factual record continued to vindicate Bishop Ruch.

The evidence further showed that many of the failures identified in this narrative arose from deficiencies in provincial systems, ambiguous safeguarding expectations, the hybrid and decentralized Greenhouse structure, and the Province’s own investigatory practices. These are institutional, not personal, failings.

Rumor, online advocacy, and social media narratives profoundly shaped perceptions of events, expectations of episcopal wrongdoing, and pressure on the Province to act. Yet none of these influences produced evidence or were grounded in firsthand knowledge.

By the end of 2023, the confluence of escalating rumors, institutional uncertainty, flawed investigative processes, and public pressure had produced two Presentments entirely unsupported by evidence. The Court concludes that the narrative foundation of both Presentments rested on misinterpretation, impression, assumption, and procedural error—not on facts that could satisfy the canonical burden of proof.

II. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The procedural posture of this case cannot be understood apart from the shifting and often irregular role of the Province in overseeing investigations into the Diocese of the Upper Midwest. After the initial referral of the Rivera matter to civil authorities in 2019, the Diocese sought to conduct a transparent and independent evaluation of its safeguarding practices. As public pressure intensified in 2020 and 2021, particularly through online advocacy, the Province gradually assumed full oversight of all related investigations. This transition, coupled with subsequent disciplinary efforts, produced the procedural history now before the Court.

A. PROVINCIAL BACKGROUND AND INVESTIGATIVE OVERSIGHT

In the early stages, the Diocese’s approach to the emerging safeguarding crisis was cooperative and proactive. When additional victims came forward in 2020, especially the adult survivor, diocesan leadership directed immediate reporting to civil authorities, offered pastoral care, initiated discussions about safeguarding improvements, and commissioned an external investigation by GRS to assess both the Rivera matter and the Diocese’s broader safeguarding culture.

The Court finds that Bishop Stewart Ruch deliberately initiated an independent third-party investigation as a means of institutional learning, transparency, and accountability in response to emerging disclosures and the increasing complexity of the circumstances confronting the Diocese. The testimony establishes that Bishop Ruch did not view a third-party investigation as a mechanism for self-exoneration or damage control, but as a structured process through which facts could be gathered, assessed, and understood beyond the confines of the criminal justice system and existing internal processes.

Witnesses testified that Bishop Ruch first became aware of ecclesial third-party investigative mechanisms in late 2020 and, upon understanding their function, increasingly regarded such an investigation as an appropriate and helpful step given the unprecedented scope of the matters facing the Diocese. He testified candidly that his initial reliance on the criminal justice process alone reflected a lack of familiarity with third-party investigative models, and that once he understood their distinct role, he acted to implement one, openly acknowledging this learning curve and doing so without defensiveness.

Critically, the Court finds that Bishop Ruch intentionally recused himself from the selection of the investigative firm in order to preserve the independence, credibility, and integrity of the process. Although he engaged in preliminary discussions regarding the need for an investigation and listened to input from complainants and their support persons, he deliberately stepped out of the decision as to which firm would be retained. That responsibility was delegated to the Chancellor of the Diocese and the Chief of Operations of Church of the Resurrection, both of whom possessed relevant professional expertise. This recusal was purposeful and designed to avoid even the appearance that Bishop Ruch might influence the scope, conduct, or conclusions of the investigation.

The Diocese thereafter retained Grand River Solutions, and Bishop Ruch promptly informed the Diocese of the engagement, clearly articulating the objectives of the investigation: to review how prior allegations had been handled, to provide a structured and independent avenue for additional information to be received, and to identify areas where institutional response could be better understood. The Court credits testimony that this decision was consistent with Bishop Ruch's broader leadership posture—marked by openness to evaluation, willingness to learn, and acceptance of external scrutiny.

The Court further finds, however, that the independent investigation initiated by the Diocese was later subsumed into an expanded provincial investigative process over which the Diocese no longer exercised control. Although the third-party investigation was completed, the Province thereafter assumed authority over the investigative trajectory and excluded Bishop Ruch from access to, participation in, or response to the findings. The record reflects that the report generated through this independent process was nonetheless utilized as a foundational component of a presentment subsequently advanced by members of the Provincial Investigative Team.

The testimony further establishes that the decision to proceed with that presentment was not unanimous within the PIT and that at least two members objected to its issuance. Notwithstanding those objections, the presentment was ultimately signed by three bishops who, according to the record, possessed no firsthand knowledge of the underlying facts, did not conduct direct inquiry of primary witnesses, and did not themselves participate in the original third-party investigation or its fact-gathering process.

Taken together, the evidence supports the conclusion that Bishop Ruch's initiation of an independent third-party investigation—and his deliberate withdrawal from the firm-selection process—reflected responsible episcopal leadership grounded in transparency and institutional learning. The subsequent use of that investigation by provincial authorities, without his participation and as the basis for a contested presentment signed by bishops lacking firsthand factual knowledge, does not undermine the integrity of his original actions. Rather, it underscores the extent to which a process initiated for independent review was later repurposed within an expanded investigative framework beyond his control.

By July 2021, however, the situation had grown increasingly contentious. Under mounting public scrutiny, including pressure from advocacy groups, Bishop Ruch took a voluntary leave of absence, and the Province assumed oversight of all pending investigations. This shift occurred rapidly and without a clear canonical structure. The evidence established that the Province did not issue a written directive defining its authority or the scope of its intervention; diocesan leaders were not informed how investigative decisions would henceforth be made; and GRS, which had been engaged by the Diocese, was instructed to report directly to provincial authorities rather than to diocesan leadership. During this period, GRS produced a Transition Report in October 2021. Although the Diocese, with the support of Bishop Ruch, had

commissioned the investigation, the Province subsequently withheld significant portions of that report from him and the Diocese.

Once oversight shifted to the Province, investigative authority became fragmented. Various actors—including provincial officials, external law firms such as Husch Blackwell, Telios Law, and internal task forces—undertook investigations or quasi-investigatory work. Trial testimony revealed a pervasive lack of clarity concerning who possessed final authority, confusion among witnesses about which specific investigation they were participating in at any given time, inconsistent instructions regarding confidentiality and scope, and shifting investigatory priorities influenced in part by external advocacy pressure. This fragmentation did not arise from diocesan conduct; it reflected structural gaps at the provincial level and an absence of codified investigatory procedures.

At trial, no witness testified that Bishop Ruch interfered with, hindered, or obstructed any investigation. Rather, the evidence showed that he remained on voluntary leave, cooperated fully with investigators, and repeatedly expressed a desire for transparency and resolution. The Province’s assumption of control contributed to procedural confusion, but it produced no evidence supporting disciplinary action against Bishop Ruch.

B. THE FIRST PRESENTMENT (DECEMBER 2022)

Against a background of institutional strain and unresolved investigatory processes, the first formal disciplinary instrument in this matter—the bishops’ Presentment—was filed in December 2022. It was submitted by three bishops of the Anglican Church in North America, asserting that “*there are sufficient grounds to charge the Rt. Rev. Stewart Ruch III, Bishop of the Diocese of the Upper Midwest (‘UMW’), with offenses in violation of the Canons of the ACNA.*” The Presentment alleged violations of Canon IV.2.4 (conduct giving just cause for scandal or offense) and Canon IV.2.10 (habitual neglect of duties). It was framed largely around perceptions of safeguarding failure, alleged leadership dysfunction, and speculation concerning what Bishop Ruch “must have known” regarding the misconduct of Mark Rivera.

The evidentiary foundation for the Presentment was shown at trial to be insubstantial. Trial testimony was uncontroverted that the bishops who signed the Presentment did so under the misapprehension that filing a Presentment was the only means available to advance the matter or prompt further institutional action. The Testimony at trial suggested that their decision was

influenced by internal provincial communications, external advocacy narratives, public and online commentary, institutional anxiety, and the rapidly accelerating pace of events within the Province. None of the episcopal signers possessed firsthand knowledge of misconduct by Bishop Ruch, nor did any have a factual or evidentiary basis for alleging that he violated Canon IV.2.4, and Canon IV.2.10.

Rather than resting on substantiated facts, the Presentment relied heavily on assumptions, impressions, and inferences drawn from incomplete or inaccurate information. It referenced rumors and public narratives instead of documentary evidence and treated structural or systemic challenges within the diocese as personal misconduct by Bishop Ruch. Trial evidence demonstrated that the concerns characterized as safeguarding failures were not grounded in proof of episcopal neglect but were instead reflective of broader organizational and contextual complexities.

The process by which the bishops' Presentment was initiated was itself marked by irregularities. Testimony at trial indicated that exonerating information from the Telios report was not shared with the signing bishops at the time they signed the presentment. Multiple procedural safeguards contemplated by Title IV—including opportunities for clarification, internal pastoral engagement, and structured evidentiary evaluation, the circulation of the findings of investigative reports, investigation into rumors and innuendo Under Title IV—were bypassed. The testimony at trial suggests that the Presentment functioned less as the product of established canonical misconduct and more as a procedural and political inflection point driven by external pressure and institutional uncertainty.

Among the procedural irregularities was the Province's decision to withhold the bishops' Presentment from the Respondent even after it had been circulated among members of the College of Bishops and referenced publicly. Multiple witnesses confirmed that the Province treated the Presentment as "active" while simultaneously failing to disclose it to the Respondent. Public statements were made concerning the Presentment, and internal provincial communications referenced allegations that had never been shown to the Respondent. This withholding contravened fundamental principles of fairness, transparency, and notice that are essential to canonical due process.

The testimony at trial demonstrated that the escalation toward Presentment was significantly influenced by online advocacy campaigns, unverified claims circulating in

ACNA too-related materials, internal provincial emails extrapolating from incomplete or inaccurate information, and misinterpretations of ongoing investigations as having reached conclusions they had not, in fact, reached. This environment generated mounting pressure to act quickly and visibly, creating momentum to “do something” before proper canonical processes were followed or evidence was carefully evaluated.

In sum, the testimony when taken as a whole shows that the bishops’ Presentment did not arise from demonstrated violations of canon law supported by evidence, but from a convergence of institutional anxiety, public pressure, narrative-driven assumptions, and procedural shortcuts. Subsequent investigation and sworn testimony failed to substantiate its core allegations and instead demonstrated that the Presentment was filed without the factual, evidentiary, or canonical foundation required under Title IV.

C. THE BOARD OF INQUIRY, THE PROVINCIAL INVESTIGATIVE TEAM, AND THE BREAKDOWN OF THE COURT’S PRE-TRIAL ASSUMPTIONS

In the pre-trial phase of these proceedings, the Court considered and imposed limitations on the scope of inquiry it would entertain concerning the investigative process that preceded the presentment. Specifically, the Court stated on the record that it would not require the parties to litigate the propriety, mechanics, or wisdom of the pre-trial investigative process itself. This restraint was not an abdication of the Court’s responsibility, but a deliberate judicial choice grounded in a foundational assumption: that a canonically compliant, fully operational Board of Inquiry (“BOI”) existed, had been properly constituted, and had operated as the Canons contemplate, including the exercise of its investigative functions. On that understanding, the Court declined to scrutinize the extra-canonical role of a Provincial Investigative Team, treating it as collateral to a process presumed to be anchored in a legitimate canonical inquiry.

As trial testimony unfolded, however, the evidentiary foundation supporting that assumption steadily eroded. Although the Court has taken judicial notice of declarations asserting that a Board of Inquiry existed in name, the trial record does not establish that such a body functioned in any meaningful sense. No witness testified to the BOI’s formation, membership, mandate, procedures, evidentiary review, deliberations, or findings. No witness described interviews conducted by the BOI, evidence weighed by the BOI, or conclusions reached by the BOI. Most critically, no witness testified that the bishops who signed the

presentment relied upon the findings, recommendations, or conclusions of a Board of Inquiry when doing so. Instead, the testimony demonstrated that the investigative and decisional process was effectively subsumed by the Provincial Investigative Team, a body not described in the ACNA Canons.

Witnesses testified that the Provincial Investigative Team was assembled at the provincial level and operated as the primary mechanism through which information was gathered, filtered, and transmitted. Paradoxically, the testimony also established that members of the team were expressly instructed not to investigate anything. Credible testimony at trial described a Zoom meeting involving members of the Provincial Investigative Team during which counsel acting on behalf of the Province instructed the team that it was not functioning as an investigative body. The evidence establishes that the team was directed to limit its work strictly to reviewing a defined set of preexisting reports monitored by the PIT and prohibiting members on the team from seeking, soliciting, or considering information beyond those materials.

Credible testimony further described that when members of the team identified contradictions or omissions within those reports—particularly concerning the existence and enforcement of child protection policies in the Diocese of the Upper Midwest—and attempted to obtain clarification through diocesan records or direct inquiry, they were admonished for doing so. The Court further finds that a team member who contacted diocesan personnel for factual clarification was reprimanded and that diocesan staff who attempted to respond to such inquiries were instructed not to do so.

These directives effectively foreclosed independent fact-finding by the Provincial Investigative Team and materially constrained the scope of its deliberations, thereby shaping both the process and the conclusions that followed. Notwithstanding these express limitations, the Provincial Investigative Team nonetheless functioned as the de facto investigative conduit. It was upon information received through that team—rather than through any functioning Board of Inquiry—that the bishops acted in signing the presentment.

The evidentiary deficiencies deepened further with testimony from Bishop Ruch and multiple members of his diocesan staff, who stated unequivocally and without contradiction that at no time did anyone associated with the Provincial Investigative Team, nor anyone purporting to act on behalf of or in association with a Board of Inquiry, seek information from individuals

with firsthand knowledge of the facts underlying the allegations. This testimony was unrebutted. The failure to consult primary witnesses is not a minor procedural irregularity; it is an anomaly of the highest order. Even the most informal investigative process ordinarily includes direct inquiry of those with firsthand knowledge. The absence of such inquiry here underscores that the process was not merely extra-canonical, but fundamentally non-investigative.

The record also reflects the existence of an internal provincial “morning team,” a small group that met regularly over an extended period—approximately one year—and exercised ongoing strategic influence concerning the pursuit of a Presentment against Bishop Ruch. The testimony does not establish that this group was part of the Board of Inquiry, subordinate to it, or accountable to it. Nor does the record clarify whether the Board of Inquiry, if it existed in practice, exercised any supervisory authority over this group. What the testimony does suggest is that real decision-making authority resided within a multilayered provincial structure rather than within a canonically constituted body.

In sum, the trial evidence demonstrates a stark divergence between the process the Court assumed existed at the pre-trial stage and the process the testimony revealed at trial. The Court’s earlier reluctance to scrutinize the Provincial Investigative Team rested on the belief that a functioning Board of Inquiry satisfied canonical requirements and supplied the necessary procedural safeguards. The testimony, taken as a whole, undermines that premise. It supports the conclusion that while a Board of Inquiry may have existed nominally or declaratively, the investigative function was in fact absorbed and controlled by a provincial group operating without direct fact-finding, without engagement of firsthand witnesses, and without any demonstrated canonical structure. This collapse of the assumed process into a highly fragmented assemblage of extra-canonical voices—comprised of multiple third-party investigative actors, provincial staff, an internal morning team, and an extra-canonical provincial investigative mechanism, among others—bears directly on the integrity, legitimacy, and evidentiary reliability of the proceedings that culminated in the presentment and cannot be dismissed as collateral or immaterial.

D. THE PROVINCIAL TRIBUNAL STAY AND CALL FOR A DECLARATION

Bishop Stewart Ruch initially sought a Declaration from the Provincial Tribunal concerning the validity of the Presentment on the ground that the three presenting bishops had

not sworn to it, as required by Canon IV.4.1. The Addendum attached to the Presentment only confirmed the bishops' uncertainty, as they themselves identified "potential problems" in the document, disclaimed any presumption of guilt, and stated that they had not been asked to render any judgment concerning wrongdoing. Thus, at the outset, the bishops' Presentment consisted of an unsworn charging instrument accompanied by an Addendum in which the presenting bishops expressed serious doubts about the sufficiency of the allegations they had been asked to sign.

While the matter was pending before the Provincial Tribunal, the presenting bishops subsequently executed sworn signatures at a meeting in Plano. This produced a sequence of conflicting documents: (1) an unsworn Presentment, (2) an Addendum signaling that the bishops believed the Presentment had substantive deficiencies, and (3) a sworn signature page attesting to the truth of the very allegations they had previously declined to swear to. In short, the record contained a charging document disclaimed in writing by its signatories, immediately followed by their oath affirming the truth of the same allegations. It is this presentment upon which the province rests its prosecution against Bishop Ruch.

Although the Plano sworn signature page was not admitted into evidence before this Court, the Court nonetheless takes judicial notice of its existence for the *limited purpose* of highlighting the resulting contradiction. Judicial notice is not taken to cure any defect in the Presentment, but solely to underscore the tension between the sworn signature page and the Addendum's clear statements of doubt. As the Provincial Tribunal succinctly observed, "*you cannot have it both ways.*"

The Provincial Tribunal, by a majority, concluded that the Plano signatures superseded the Addendum. However, the overwhelming and uncontroverted testimony at trial established that the three presenting bishops had no firsthand knowledge, no factual basis, and no substantive grounds to sign the Presentment—sworn or unsworn.

Both the Provincial Tribunal and this Court further note the bishops' repeated refusal to offer clarity, either before the Provincial Tribunal or when directly asked by Respondent's Counsel in these proceedings. Their silence leaves the evidentiary record unrebutted: the presenting bishops did not possess the requisite foundation to swear to the truth of the allegations, and the Addendum's expressions of doubt remain consistent with the trial record.

E. THE SECOND PRESENTMENT AND SUBSEQUENT PROCEEDINGS (2023)

After the Provincial Tribunal’s ruling and in the midst of continued procedural uncertainty about the bishop’s Presentment, a second Presentment—this time submitted by clergy and lay persons—was filed in 2023 (“Second Presentment”) and purported to proceed under the alternative mechanism for charging a bishop set forth in the Canons. The Second Presentment arose amid internal debate over the canonical validity of the bishops’ Presentment, public pressure for disciplinary action, widespread misunderstanding of the Tribunal’s June 2023 ruling, and confusion about the Bishop Ruch’s conduct due to incomplete or misinterpreted investigatory information. The signers of the Second Presentment had not participated in diocesan leadership, had no firsthand knowledge of the events underlying their allegations, and relied primarily on public commentary, summaries of investigations, and online narratives.

Canon IV.2, Section 1, provides that a bishop may be charged either “by three Bishops of this Church with jurisdiction, or by not fewer than ten Presbyters, Deacons, or adult baptized members of this Church in good standing, of whom at least two shall be Presbyters.” The Canon further requires that “[o]ne Presbyter and not fewer than six lay persons shall belong either to the Diocese in which the alleged offense was committed or to the Diocese in which the Bishop is canonically resident,” and that all charges be “in writing, signed and sworn to by all the accusers,” with the grounds of accusation set forth “with reasonable certainty of time, place and circumstance,” before referral to the Board of Inquiry.

The Second Presentment was advanced pursuant to this latter provision. Its emergence occurred during a period of heightened institutional confusion and contention, marked by unresolved disputes over the canonical validity of the bishops’ Presentment, sustained public pressure for disciplinary action, widespread misunderstanding of the Tribunal’s prior rulings, and incomplete or inaccurate public understanding of the scope and conclusions of ongoing investigations.

The record establishes that the Second Presentment did not arise from newly discovered facts or firsthand knowledge of episcopal misconduct. Instead, it developed in a climate shaped by public commentary, advocacy efforts, and circulating narratives that frequently conflated allegations, investigatory processes, and conclusions. The signers of the Second Presentment had not participated in diocesan leadership, had no direct involvement in the events underlying their allegations, and possessed no personal knowledge of Bishop Ruch’s conduct. Their

understanding was derived primarily from public summaries of investigations, media reporting, online discourse, and second- or third-hand accounts, rather than from documentary evidence or eyewitness testimony.

Substantively, the Second Presentment largely reiterated the themes advanced in the bishops' Presentment. These included generalized claims of safeguarding failures, assertions of cultural or pastoral dysfunction within the diocese, and allegations concerning episcopal leadership and judgment. As with the bishops' Presentment, the Second Presentment failed to supply a factual foundation sufficient to support these claims. No documentary evidence was submitted to substantiate misconduct, and no witness was identified who could link the bishop to any specific act or omission constituting a canonical violation, or who could establish the "reasonable certainty of time, place and circumstance" required by the Canon.

The evidentiary deficiencies of the Second Presentment became more pronounced during trial. None of the three bishops who had signed the bishops' Presentment appeared to testify, despite requests that they do so under oath. Of the signers of the Second Presentment, only two testified. Their testimony confirmed the absence of firsthand knowledge, revealed reliance on secondary sources and personal impressions rather than evidence, and failed to establish any factual basis for the allegations advanced. Considered collectively, the evidence offered fell well short of the minimal threshold required for referral for trial, let alone the clear and convincing standard required for a finding of culpability.

The filing of the Second Presentment also precipitated a series of additional procedural disputes that further complicated the matter. These included questions concerning prosecutorial authority, efforts to consolidate the First and Second Presentments, motions alleging conflicts of interest, disagreements regarding oversight responsibilities, and challenges to the role and conduct of the Provincial Prosecutor. During this period, additional public statements were made, that reflected fundamental misunderstandings of Bishop Ruch's conduct, the evidentiary record, and the findings of completed investigations. The record reflects instances in which premature conclusions were publicly expressed, investigatory findings were mischaracterized, and procedural irregularities exacerbated rather than resolving confusion within the Province.

Despite these compounding difficulties, the matter was ultimately referred to this Ecclesiastical Court for trial. By the time of referral, the Telios investigation had already concluded that no leadership culpability existed; no investigation had produced evidence

supporting canonical charges against the bishop; and many of the concerns articulated in both Presentments had been shown to rest on rumor, inference, or misinterpretation. Trial thus represented the first—and only—forum in which all allegations were subjected to evidentiary testing under applicable canonical standards, through sworn testimony, documentary review, and adversarial examination.

F. REFERRAL TO THE TRIAL COURT AND INITIAL STAY

Following the submission of the Second Presentment, disciplinary proceedings were formally referred to this Trial Court under Title IV. Although the referral process itself reflected ongoing irregularities, it ultimately placed the matter in the proper judicial forum with authority to evaluate evidence, assess credibility, and apply canonical standards. In the wake of the Provincial Tribunal’s June 6, 2023, ruling, both Presentments were referred to the Trial Court despite the continuing uncertainty surrounding their canonical validity, to a duly constituted ecclesiastical court. This referral occurred amid ongoing disputes concerning the role of the Provincial Prosecutor and a divided Provincial Tribunal over the procedural deficiencies previously identified by the Provincial Tribunal.

G. MOTION TO DISQUALIFY THE PROVINCIAL PROSECUTOR

On May 4, 2024, the Respondent filed a Motion to Disqualify the Provincial Prosecutor, Mr. Runyan. The motion advanced three principal grounds: first, that a material conflict of interest existed; second, that Mr. Runyan was a necessary fact witness by virtue of his participation in the Provincial Investigative Team deliberations; and third, that structural concerns arose from the extra-canonical nature of the PIT itself. The Respondent contended that Mr. Runyan’s access to, and participation in, internal PIT discussions as a member of the PIT—including reported disagreements over whether sufficient evidence existed to support charges—rendered him unable to serve as a neutral prosecuting officer in these proceedings.

The Province argued that the ACNA Canons impose no prohibition on a former investigator later serving as prosecutor and further maintained that the PIT possessed no adjudicatory authority such that its prior work would compromise the neutrality of the prosecutorial function.

The Court conducted a hearing on the motion on May 28, 2024. After consideration of the written submissions and the arguments presented at that hearing, the Court issued an Order on June 30, 2024, denying the Motion to Disqualify. The Court concluded that the grounds asserted—whether premised on alleged conflict of interest, claimed fact-witness status, or structural objections to the PIT—did not warrant removal of the Provincial Prosecutor.

It later emerged in the course of these proceedings that the Presentment had been prepared and advanced by the Provincial Investigative Team (PIT) and circulated to certain bishops for signature even after the Telios investigation—commissioned at substantial expense to the Province—had concluded with findings exonerating Bishop Ruch of safeguarding misconduct. In an addendum signed by the presenting bishops, they acknowledged:

Regarding the nine-page Presentment based upon the PIT's recommendation that was presented to us, we believe the process of adjudication should continue, even though we think there are some potential problems in the Presentment. We simply assert that the canonical process should continue.

The Court found credible and compelling the testimony that these episcopal signatories lacked firsthand knowledge of the factual basis for the charges, did not fully appreciate the canonical gravity or consequences of endorsing a Presentment, and relied almost entirely on summaries or representations provided to them rather than on any independent examination of underlying evidence. The record further established that, once the substantive deficiencies and evidentiary weaknesses of the Presentment became clearer, the same bishops executed an addendum expressing significant misgivings regarding both the Presentment and its foundations. That addendum, however, was later withdrawn following deliberations within the College of Bishops.

This sequence of events reveals serious procedural irregularities in the initiation and advancement of the Presentment and demonstrates a material lack of informed consent among several of its signatories. The Court also notes—as a matter of particular significance—that the Provincial leadership then in place under Archbishop Foley Beach, which supervised both the takeover of the investigative process and the promotion of the Presentment, declined to testify at trial despite its central role in the events at issue. That absence, in light of the procedural concerns identified above, further underscores the irregular and deficient manner in which the Presentment was brought forward.

H. CONSOLIDATION OF THE TWO PRESENTMENTS

In light of the existence of both a bishops' Presentment and a Second Presentment, the Province moved to consolidate the matters for clarity and efficiency. Consolidation was sought because both Presentments alleged similar canonical violations, both relied on the same factual narrative, the bishops' Presentment—though canonically defective—had influenced public perception, and a single trial would avoid duplication and further confusion.

Some opposed consolidation, arguing that the bishops' Presentment was void and should be dismissed outright, that consolidation might inadvertently revive a defective Presentment, and that only the Second Presentment should proceed. The Court held that consolidation was appropriate for purposes of judicial efficiency and in light of the June 2023 Ruling of the Provincial Tribunal lifting its stay on proceeding with the bishop's Presentment. Consolidation would not cure any defects of the bishops' Presentment; rather, both Presentments would be considered together only insofar as they alleged overlapping canonical violations, and the Court would evaluate each count strictly on the basis of the evidence presented at trial. Consolidation provided a unified procedural framework, clarity regarding evidentiary relevance, a single comprehensive adjudication, and assurances that no allegation would be considered twice or in an inconsistent manner.

I. PRE-TRIAL EVIDENTIARY FRAMEWORK AND TRIAL CONDUCT

Before trial began, the Court issued orders establishing the evidentiary rules governing the proceedings. It reaffirmed that the standard of proof for canonical violations is clear and convincing evidence, that expert testimony must meet criteria analogous to Federal Rules of Evidence Rule 702, and that rumor, impression, or assumption would not be treated as evidence. Each count would require proof of its specific canonical elements.

The Court determined that certain categories of material would be excluded or given limited weight, including public commentary from advocacy groups and social media narratives. This framework ensured that the trial remained grounded in only admissible evidence rather than public pressure. The Court also applied confidentiality orders to protect the integrity of the trial, the privacy of witnesses, the sanctity of the proceedings, and the Church's obligation to prevent scandal or undue harm.

The Court received, reviewed, and evaluated an extensive evidentiary record consisting of more than 7,000 pages of exhibits, including correspondence, affidavits, internal communications, policies, memoranda, and other documentary submissions. This substantial documentary record formed a significant portion of the materials considered during the Court's deliberations.

The Court convened a full trial spanning ten days, including three evening sessions, and totaling more than seventy-five hours in session. Over the course of the proceedings, testimony was taken from thirty-seven witnesses, comprising six bishops—one called by the Province and five by the Respondent—eleven priests, fifteen additional clergy and lay witnesses, and two qualified expert witnesses, one presented by each party. In total, the Province presented eleven witnesses, while the Respondent presented twenty-six. Numerous witnesses testified that the courtroom—under oath and before impartial adjudicators—was the first setting in which they felt secure and free to offer a full account of their experiences.

The Respondent likewise participated fully in the proceedings. He submitted voluntarily to a three-and-a-half-hour deposition and thereafter provided more than fourteen hours of sworn testimony at trial, including direct testimony, cross-examination, and extensive questioning by the Court.

J. BASIS OF COURT'S JUDGMENT

Following the close of evidence, the Court undertook a detailed analysis of the canonical charges, the evidentiary record, witness credibility, the findings of external investigations, expert testimony, and the legal standards under Title IV. In evaluating each count, the Court applied the clear and convincing evidence standard, required proof of specific elements, rejected speculation or inference unsupported by evidence, and considered systemic or structural issues only insofar as they related to Bishop Ruch's personal conduct.

The evidence presented by the provincial prosecutor failed to demonstrate under the standard of clear and convincing evidence any act by Bishop Ruch that constituted a violation of ordination vows; any conduct giving just cause for scandal; any willful disobedience to canonical authority; or any habitual neglect of episcopal duties. No witness established firsthand knowledge of canonical wrongdoing. Not a single document demonstrated under the standard of clear and convincing evidence the claims set forth in the consolidated Presentments.

All three major investigations—GRS, Husch Blackwell, and Telios Law—found no leadership culpability in violation of Title IV by the bishop, that the Presentments were unsupported by clear and convincing evidence, that procedural irregularities contributed to misperceptions and escalation, and that the Respondent did not commit any canonical offense.

III. ALLEGED TITLE IV VIOLATIONS

The Presentments in this matter alleged violations of four provisions of Title IV: Canon IV.2.3 (violation of ordination vows), Canon IV.2.4 (conduct giving just cause for scandal or offense), Canon IV.2.9 (disobedience or willful contravention), and Canon IV.2.10 (habitual neglect of duties). Each canon imposes a specific and demanding standard. In every instance, the Province bore the burden of proving its allegations by clear and convincing evidence.

A. CANON IV.2.3 — ALLEGED VIOLATION OF ORDINATION VOWS

Canon IV.2.3 provides that a bishop violates Title IV if he “transgresses the vows made at ordination or consecration.” Those vows include commitments to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church; to maintain purity of life and doctrine; to exercise pastoral care with diligence; to protect the flock entrusted to him; and to obey the Constitution and Canons of the Anglican Church in North America. The Presentments alleged that Bishop Ruch violated these vows by mishandling safeguarding duties, by failing to act upon known risks, and by permitting a culture or environment in which misconduct occurred. At trial, no evidence was presented that substantiated these claims.

To establish a violation of Canon IV.2.3, the Province was required to prove, by clear and convincing evidence, that the Respondent knowingly violated an ordination vow; that he did so through an act or omission constituting a breach of episcopal duty; that he engaged in misconduct that was personal, intentional, or a direct failure to perform a mandated obligation; and that such breach caused harm or scandal. This is a high evidentiary threshold. It demands more than disagreement with leadership decisions, more than structural deficiencies in diocesan organization, and more than misunderstandings about safeguarding systems. It requires evidence of a conscious, personal, wrongful act that contradicts the vows made at consecration. Violations of ordination vows, in other words, require a personal breach of solemn ecclesiastical obligations.

B. CANON IV.2.4 — CONDUCT GIVING JUST CAUSE FOR SCANDAL OR OFFENSE

Canon IV.2.4 addresses acts by a bishop that “give just cause for scandal or offense” to the Church. It imposes an objective standard requiring the Province to demonstrate, by clear and convincing evidence, that the bishop engaged in conduct personally attributable to him, that such conduct reasonably and directly provided just cause for scandal or offense, and that the scandal arises from wrongful behavior rather than from misunderstanding, rumor, or disagreement. The allegations under this canon asserted that Bishop Ruch’s leadership during the safeguarding crisis, his management of diocesan structures, and his responses to allegations created scandal within the Church. The evidence at trial did not substantiate these claims.

Under established canon law principles, “scandal” requires an objectively wrongful act, attributable to the accused, which causes others to believe that the Church tolerates sin or misconduct, or which damages the witness of the Church through personal wrongdoing. Scandal does not include misinterpretations of fact, institutional or structural shortcomings, disagreements with leadership decisions, public outcry based on misinformation, or perceptions created by incomplete investigations. Canonical scandal requires wrongful episcopal behavior, not mere miscommunication or institutional confusion.

C. CANON IV.2.9 — DISOBEDIENCE OR WILLFUL CONTRAVENTION

Canon IV.2.9 concerns a bishop who “disobeys or willfully contravenes the Constitution or Canons of this Church, or any lawful authority acting thereunder.” To prove a violation of this canon, the Province was required to establish, by clear and convincing evidence, that the Respondent was subject to a lawful canonical requirement or directive, that he knew of that requirement, that he intentionally disobeyed or willfully contravened it, and that the disobedience was not accidental, not based on misunderstanding, and not attributable to procedural ambiguity. The canon requires proof of a willful act—that is, purposeful, intentional, and conscious refusal to obey authority.

D. CANON IV.2.10 — HABITUAL NEGLECT OF DUTIES

Canon IV.2.10 concerns a bishop who “habitually neglects the duties of his office.” To prove a violation of this canon, the Province was required to establish a pattern of repeated

omissions; that those omissions related directly to core episcopal duties; that the conduct was habitual, rather than isolated; and that the omissions rose to the level of canonical neglect rather than mere administrative imperfection. Habitual neglect is a high canonical bar, requiring repeated failures, identifiable omissions, and a direct linkage to episcopal obligations.

IV. THE STANDARD OF PROOF

In ecclesiastical disciplinary proceedings convened under Title IV, the governing standard of proof is that of *clear and convincing evidence*. This standard applies to every canonical charge presented in the matter before the Court. It requires that the tribunal be persuaded that the truth of the allegations is highly probable, such that, upon review of the entire record, no substantial doubt remains.

Clear and convincing evidence constitutes a heightened evidentiary threshold: it is more demanding than the civil standard of a preponderance of the evidence, yet it remains less stringent than proof beyond a reasonable doubt, which is reserved for criminal proceedings. Title IV requires that this standard be applied uniformly to all alleged violations.

For a Presentment to be sustained, the Court must find that:

- (1) the factual predicate of the charge is established with clarity;
- (2) the evidence demonstrates personal misconduct by the bishop; and
- (3) the proof rises above speculation, inference, rumor, or subjective impression.

Accordingly, the Court must draw sharp distinctions between evidence and assumption; between verified fact and rumor; between testimony grounded in firsthand knowledge and testimony derived from second-hand belief; and between legitimate safeguarding concerns and allegations of canonical wrongdoing.

The Province bears the burden of proof. The Respondent bears no burden to disprove the allegations brought against him. Where the Province fails to meet its burden, and clear and convincing evidence is absent, the Canons require acquittal.

V. USE OF EXPERT WITNESSES IN ECCLESIASTICAL PROCEEDINGS

A. APPROPRIATENESS OF EXPERT TESTIMONY

Although ecclesiastical courts differ in purpose and scope from their civil counterparts, they nonetheless confront complex factual, organizational, and professional questions that

require specialized knowledge. Title IV anticipates such complexity and permits the Court to consider expert testimony when the issues presented exceed ordinary experience; when evaluation of technical or professional standards is required; when interpretation of organizational practices demands subject-matter expertise; or when safeguarding norms and leadership standards must be applied to historical events.

In this matter, the allegations concerned safeguarding practices, standards of episcopal leadership, organizational behavior, and the development of policies within a rapidly expanding diocese—subjects which are, by their nature, highly specialized. The Court determined that expert testimony was not only appropriate but necessary to understand evolving safeguarding norms, to evaluate Bishop Ruch’s conduct in light of accepted standards, to distinguish aspirational “best practices” from the operative standard of care, to assess claims of leadership dysfunction, and to differentiate structural weaknesses from personal misconduct.

Absent expert guidance, the Court risked falling prey to hindsight bias, unrealistic safeguarding expectations, or the conflation of institutional evolution with neglect. Expert testimony therefore served to anchor the Court’s analysis within objective and professionally recognized frameworks.

B. CRITERIA FOR ADMITTING AND WEIGHING EXPERTS

Ecclesiastical courts do not operate with a formal evidentiary rule comparable to Rule 702 of the Federal Rules of Evidence (“Rule 702”); however, courts have long looked to that rule as a persuasive framework for assessing expert reliability and relevance. Here, the Court adopted four criteria analogous to Rule 702: (1) Qualification; (2) Helpfulness to the Court; (3) Reliability of Method; and (4) Application to the Case Facts. These criteria ensure that expert testimony assists the tribunal, rests on sound methodology, is grounded in professional competence, and is appropriately tethered to the issues at hand.

1. Qualification

To be considered an expert, a witness must possess specialized knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education in the pertinent field. In matters involving safeguarding investigations, leadership analysis, church organizational structures, and standards of pastoral care, such qualifications may include investigative experience, academic credentials, safeguarding training, prior work with ecclesiastical bodies, or expertise in institutional

assessment. The Court’s task is not to determine whether an expert is ideal, but whether the witness possesses sufficient specialized competence to provide meaningful assistance.

2. Helpfulness to the Court

Expert testimony must “assist the trier of fact.” It does so by clarifying technical issues, explaining specialized standards, distinguishing best practices from the minimum standard of care, contextualizing leadership or safeguarding behavior, or interpreting complex structures or policies. Where subject matter lies outside the typical experience of bishops or laypersons—as safeguarding often does—the helpfulness criterion is readily satisfied.

In this case, expert testimony proved indispensable for evaluating safeguarding norms, organizational growth dynamics, crisis leadership behavior, the development of diocesan policies, and the reasonable expectations placed upon a bishop.

3. Reliability of Method

The reliability inquiry concerns the methods and reasoning by which the expert reached conclusions. Relevant factors include the use of recognized professional methods, consistency with standards of the field, reliance on robust data or interviews, transparency of reasoning, acceptance of methodologies within the field, and professional independence. An expert who applies safeguarding standards consistently, employs accepted investigative techniques, evaluates culture and leadership using recognized frameworks, or relies upon institutional best-practices models satisfies the reliability requirement.

Conversely, conclusions grounded in subjective impressions or unverified accounts would fail that standard.

4. Application to Case Facts

Expert testimony, however well-supported, must be tied directly to the facts of the case. This requires accurate understanding of diocesan structures, engagement with timelines, review of relevant communications, attention to safeguarding reports, and careful application of professional standards to the bishop’s actions. The Court therefore scrutinizes whether experts applied general safeguarding principles to the specific events of UMD; whether they distinguished institutional weaknesses from personal misconduct; and whether they evaluated Bishop Ruch’s decisions based on what he knew at the time, free of hindsight bias.

Only through such application can expert testimony illuminate rather than distort the factual record.

The Court now applies the Rule-702–analogous criteria to the expert testimony offered by both parties.

5. Qualification

Both experts were amply qualified in their respective areas of competence.

a. Province’s Expert — Theresa Sidebotham

Theresa Sidebotham is a Colorado-based attorney with extensive expertise in ministry employment law, child safeguarding, and institutional investigations. She earned a Literature degree from Wheaton College *summa cum laude* and a Juris Doctor from the University of Denver College of Law in 2005, graduating first in her class, and thereafter clerked for four years with the Colorado Court of Appeals. After practicing with Roth Gerber, Johnson & Lyons, she became a principal at Telios Law, where her work focuses on child protection and safeguarding, sexual and spiritual abuse, clergy and church misconduct, and workplace investigations within ministry contexts.

Ms. Sidebotham chaired the expert panel that developed the Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention’s initial child safeguarding standards, oversees training through the Telios Teaches learning management system, and has written and spoken extensively on child protection and church investigations since at least 2009, with earlier work in the field dating to the 1990s, and has testified in an ecclesiastical proceeding concerning church misconduct.

b. Respondent’s Expert — Fr. James F. Sweeney

Fr. James F. Sweeney is an ordained Anglican priest and former attorney with approximately thirty-five years of legal practice, including more than twenty-five years devoted almost exclusively to church law, religious institutions, and nonprofit corporations law. He served for approximately eighteen years as General Counsel to the California Catholic Conference, representing the Catholic dioceses of California in state and federal matters and coordinating policy and legal response to clergy sexual abuse, including oversight of abuse-related and insurance coverage litigation from 2002 to 2015. He was critically involved in drafting the 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and in developing youth protection and misconduct response policies.

Fr. Sweeney has testified as an expert in civil proceedings on church governance and administration. He has led or overseen hundreds of ecclesiastical investigations over roughly fifteen years in the Roman Catholic Church and an additional ten years advising Anglican

bishops, drawing on earlier prosecutorial experience that included grand jury and public integrity investigations. He holds dual undergraduate degrees awarded *summa cum laude*, a Juris Doctor, a master's degree in theological studies, and is completing a Doctor of Ministry degree, and he has been formally recognized as an expert in church law, ecclesiastical governance, ecclesiastical investigations and clergy discipline, and child protection and misconduct response policies and training.

c. Court's Conclusion on Qualification

The Court finds both experts well-qualified. Nothing in their backgrounds suggested any deficiency in competence. Each demonstrated deep familiarity with the subject matter of their testimony.

6. Helpfulness to the Court

The central question is whether the expert testimony materially aided the Court in understanding complex matters beyond ordinary experience. Both experts satisfied this requirement.

a. Areas in Which Expert Testimony Was Helpful

The testimony helped the Court distinguish best practices from minimum standards of care; understand the evolution of safeguarding norms between 2000 and 2020; determine whether diocesan structures resembled those typical of mission-oriented growth; assess reasonable episcopal expectations in rapidly expanding environments; differentiate organizational dysfunction from personal misconduct; and comprehend the unique complexity of Greenhouse's hybrid structure.

Neither witness was tasked to opine on guilt or innocence. Each provided frameworks and standards, leaving their application to the Court.

b. Sidebotham's Particularly Helpful Clarifications

Sidebotham clarified the distinction between best practice and the standard of care; explained the typical development of institutional safeguarding policies; demonstrated why the Diocese's safeguarding evolution conformed to expected patterns; outlined how Telios assesses leadership culpability; and testified that no conduct by Bishop Ruch fell below the standard of care. Her testimony prevented the Court from conflating imperfection with negligence.

c. Sweeney's Particularly Helpful Clarifications

Sweeney illuminated how bishops reasonably manage large, complex dioceses; the impossibility of omniscience regarding safeguarding risks; the distinction between episcopal oversight and micromanagement; the meaning of habitual neglect in ecclesiastical context; and the ordinary pathways by which clergy communicate safeguarding concerns. His testimony grounded the Court's analysis in real-world pastoral administration.

d. Conclusion on Helpfulness

Both experts materially assisted the Court. Their testimony was highly probative and central to determining whether alleged failures constituted canonical violations.

7. Reliability of Method

Both experts employed sound and professionally recognized methodologies.

a. Reliability of Sidebotham's Methods

Sidebotham reviewed diocesan policies, communications, and investigative records; interviewed witnesses and leaders; applied nationally recognized safeguarding standards; utilized trauma-informed protocols; distinguished factual findings from evaluative judgments; and employed a widely used Telios model. Her methodology was transparent, consistent, and grounded in accepted safeguarding practices.

b. Reliability of Sweeney's Methods

Sweeney analyzed diocesan structures through his clerical and administrative experience; reviewed communications and parish interactions; identified patterns indicative of mission-driven dioceses; applied ecclesial and pastoral standards rather than abstract ideals; and distinguished theoretical ideals from operational realities. His approach reflected real-world ecclesiastical practice.

c. Absence of Methodological Defects

The Court identified no evidence of bias, improper assumptions, reliance on unreliable sources, or methodological shortcuts. Both experts exceeded the reliability threshold.

8. Application to Case Facts

Expert testimony is useful only insofar as it is tied to the specific facts, and both experts successfully applied their expertise to the record.

a. Sidebotham's Application

Sidebotham concluded that diocesan safeguarding practices met the standard of care; that no actions by Bishop Ruch constituted a breach in the standard of care; that diocesan

vulnerabilities were structural rather than personal; that none of the allegations met even a preponderance standard; and that the clear-and-convincing threshold could not be satisfied. Her conclusions aligned with documentary evidence and clergy testimony.

b. Sweeney's Application

Sweeney found that Bishop Ruch exercised care and discernment; that no pattern of habitual neglect existed; that diocesan complexity did not imply misconduct; and that episcopal oversight comported with ACNA norms. His conclusions cohered with the factual record of diocesan life.

c. Convergence of Expert Application

Despite differing professional backgrounds, both experts reached the same ultimate conclusions: Bishop Ruch met safeguarding expectations; diocesan development followed a normal trajectory; the Presentments lacked factual foundation; and no canonical duty was breached.

d. Conclusion on Application

Both experts applied their expertise reliably and appropriately to the facts, providing testimony that was highly probative.

C. LIMITED BUT IMPORTANT ROLE OF EXPERTS

While expert testimony is valuable, it does not supplant the court's responsibility to interpret and apply the Canons of the ACNA. Experts provide context—standards of care, safeguarding norms, leadership expectations, and institutional behavior—but guilt or innocence is for the Court alone to determine.

1. Experts Provide Context, Not Conclusions

Experts supply professional insight into diocesan growth, safeguarding benchmarks, leadership behavior, and institutional frameworks. They do not opine on canonical guilt, judge character, define ecclesiastical duties beyond their expertise, or replace judicial discernment. The Court retains exclusive authority to weigh evidence, assess credibility, interpret the Canons, and determine whether the burden of proof has been met.

2. Proper Weight Given to Expert Testimony

The testimony of both experts was highly relevant, methodologically sound, grounded in professional standards, and of substantial assistance to the Court. Their analysis played a

significant role in evaluating safeguarding norms, determining whether alleged omissions constituted misconduct, assessing whether Bishop Ruch's actions fell below professional expectations, and distinguishing structural issues from personal misconduct. In every respect, the testimony of both experts reinforced the conclusion that the Presentments lacked factual and canonical merit.

3. Importance of Convergence

The convergence of Sidebotham's and Sweeney's independent assessments provided powerful corroboration. Both found that Bishop Ruch met safeguarding expectations; that diocesan vulnerabilities were structural rather than personal; that no leadership negligence occurred; that no episcopal act or omission constituted misconduct; and that the Presentments lacked evidentiary support.

4. Expert Testimony Highlights the Gap Between Allegation and Proof

Expert analysis revealed the fundamental weakness of the Province's case: the allegations rested on assumptions of negligence or culpability drawn from outcomes or perceptions, rather than demonstrable misconduct. Professional evaluation demonstrated that Bishop Ruch's safeguarding and leadership behavior aligned with normative expectations; that imperfections in diocesan processes did not constitute misconduct; and that no allegation rose to the level of canonical violation. Expert testimony thus underscored the absence of clear and convincing evidence.

5. Expert Testimony Confirmed the Proper Interpretation of Title IV

Finally, expert testimony supported the Court's understanding that Title IV requires proof of personal misconduct, not structural imperfection; that safeguarding failures must be personal, willful, or negligent; that standards of care must be applied based on what was known at the time, not with hindsight; and that Bishop Ruch consistently acted within the requirements of safeguarding norms. The experts' testimony, therefore, strengthened the Court's determination that no canonical charge could be sustained.

VI. FINDINGS OF FACT & CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

A. FINDINGS REGARDING THE TWO PRESENTMENT SIGNER WITNESSES

Two signers of the Second Presentment testified at trial. Considered together, their testimony revealed no firsthand knowledge, no evidentiary support for the allegations, and no

basis for concluding that the Presentment satisfied even the minimal threshold for referral, much less the clear and convincing standard required for conviction. The Court finds that neither witness provided any competent evidence linking the Respondent to any canonical violation.

1. Lack Of Firsthand Knowledge

Both Presentment signers acknowledged under oath that they possessed no firsthand knowledge of any canonical wrongdoing by Bishop Ruch; that they had never observed him engaging in misconduct; that they had never communicated directly with Bishop Ruch regarding the allegations; and that they relied entirely on secondary or third-hand accounts, summaries, or online materials. Testimony at trial showed the signatories of the bishops' Presentment were likewise deficient in firsthand knowledge, having no actual basis in fact or law to alleged canonical violations against Bishop Ruch.

The Court received no evidence from the Province that the signors of either Presentment had any basis for alleging violation of ordination vows, scandal or offense, willful contravention, or habitual neglect. The overwhelming testimony was that the allegations of canonical violations were rooted not in evidence but in impressions shaped by public discourse narratives and selective summaries circulated online.

2. No Questions Asked By Prosecutor On Allegations

During direct examination by the Provincial Prosecutor, neither of the two witnesses who signed the Second Presentment was asked what specific actions by Bishop Ruch they believed constituted canonical violations; whether they could identify any canonical element of the charges; or what facts, documents, or communications led them to sign the Presentment. The Prosecutor did not attempt to elicit substantive testimony on knowledge, intent, willfulness, habituality, or any other canonical element.

This omission is telling. If the witnesses had possessed relevant factual knowledge, the Prosecutor would reasonably have sought to establish it through their testimony. The absence of such questioning suggests that the Prosecutor knew no such knowledge existed, that the witnesses lacked evidentiary value, and that the Presentment was not grounded in factual substance. Cross-examination confirmed these inferences.

3. Total Failure To Provide Supporting Evidence

The Court finds that no clear and convincing evidence of misconduct was presented by either witness; that the Presentment's allegations were speculative; and that their testimony does

not meet any standard of proof, much less the standard of clear and convincing evidence. Based on the evidence proffered at trial, the testimony demonstrates that the Second Presentment was unsupported by facts, not vetted, and not grounded in firsthand knowledge.

B. FINDINGS REGARDING TESTIMONY OF BISHOP JOHN GUERNSEY

Bishop John Guernsey testified as a witness for the Province. His testimony, while sincere and offered with evident pastoral concern, failed to establish any factual basis for the canonical allegations. Indeed, the Court finds that his testimony underscored structural misunderstandings and revealed significant limitations in his own knowledge of the events at issue.

1. No Conclusions On Respondent's Conduct

Under both direct and cross-examination, Bishop Guernsey acknowledged that he reached no personal conclusion that Bishop Ruch engaged in misconduct; that he possessed no firsthand knowledge of any safeguarding failure; that he had never seen evidence that Bishop Ruch knew of Rivera's behavior before May 2019; and that he did not believe Bishop Ruch intentionally harmed anyone. His concerns were largely pastoral in nature, shaped by public pressure, influenced by reports he did not author and did not personally verify, and rooted in general perceptions rather than specific facts. He did not testify that Bishop Ruch violated any specific canon.

2. Substantial Gaps In Knowledge

Bishop Guernsey further conceded that he did not participate in Greenhouse governance; did not oversee diocesan safeguarding structures; was not involved in diocesan leadership meetings where safeguarding decisions were made; had no knowledge of what Bishop Ruch knew or did not know at critical times; and lacked direct awareness of the Diocese's internal processes. His testimony relied heavily on summary statements, impressions, and incomplete information obtained after the fact. Such testimony cannot meet the standard of clear and convincing evidence, or indeed any recognized evidentiary standard for establishing canonical misconduct.

3. Inconsistencies With Investigative Findings (Telios)

The concerns expressed by Bishop Guernsey stood in tension with the findings of Telios Law, GRS, and Husch Blackwell. None of the Reports demonstrated clear evidence of episcopal

misconduct. When confronted with these findings, Bishop Guernsey did not dispute them; he merely maintained that his role was not to determine the guilt or innocence of Bishop Ruch related to the alleged canonical violations.

4. Testimony Insufficient To Prove Any Charge

Ultimately, the Court finds that Bishop Guernsey's testimony identified no act or omission constituting a canonical offense; rested on incomplete or second-hand information; did not establish any element of Canon IV.2.3, IV.2.4, IV.2.9, or IV.2.10; provided no documentary support; and did not contradict the independent investigative findings. While his sincerity is not questioned, his ability to provide probative evidence is. The Court accordingly assigns minimal weight to his testimony on canonical questions, as it lacked specificity, firsthand knowledge, and evidentiary grounding.

C. FINDINGS REGARDING REMAINING PROVINCIAL WITNESSES

The Province called additional witnesses in support of the Presentments. The Court finds that these witnesses exhibited similar evidentiary deficiencies: they had no firsthand knowledge; no direct communication with the bishop about concerns; no documentation demonstrating warnings or red flags; and no evidence of episcopal misconduct.

1. No Witness Informed Bishop Of Misconduct

Across all Provincial witnesses, not one testified to warning Bishop Ruch about Rivera before 2019; not one described communicating safeguarding concerns that Bishop Ruch ignored; not one reported that Bishop Ruch refused to act on information; and not one suggested that Bishop Ruch discouraged reporting or transparency. This absence of notice or warning is probative to any allegation of neglect or willful contravention.

2. No Documentary Evidence Of Notice

Out of thousands of pages of documentary evidence admitted in this case, the Court found no documentary evidence was introduced showing that emails, reports, communications, memoranda, or meetings conveyed information to Bishop Ruch that he then failed to act upon. The absence of documentary notice is especially significant in the context of Title IV charges, which require proof of personal knowledge or willful omission.

3. Subjective Assumptions Rejected

Several witnesses, when examined, admitted that their beliefs rested on assumptions that “someone must have known,” impressions shaped by a crisis atmosphere, interpretations of diocesan culture, feelings that “something was wrong,” and extrapolations from outcomes rather than from facts. These assumptions lack probative value, fail to satisfy any evidentiary standard, and cannot establish canonical guilt. The Court rejects such subjective inference as a foundation for adjudicating misconduct.

4. Failure To Meet Clear & Convincing Standard

None of the Provincial witnesses offered evidence that Bishop Ruch violated ordination vows, caused scandal through wrongful conduct, willfully contravened authority, or habitually neglected duties. Instead, their testimony confirmed that he had acted promptly upon disclosures; that structural issues were misunderstood as personal failures; that misconceptions arose from incomplete information; and that large-scale diocesan complexities were misinterpreted as neglect. The Province did not come close to meeting the clear and convincing standard; indeed, it failed to meet even a minimal evidentiary threshold.

D. FINDINGS REGARDING THE EXPERT TESTIMONY

Expert testimony proved essential in assessing safeguarding expectations, leadership standards, diocesan structures, and the relationship between alleged failures and actual canonical obligations. Both experts—one called by the Province and one by the Respondent—provided highly relevant, professionally grounded analyses. Their conclusions significantly informed the Court’s assessment of the evidence.

1. Expert For Province — Theresa Sidebotham

a. Qualification of Expert Theresa Sidebotham

The Court finds that Theresa Sidebotham is a nationally recognized safeguarding and institutional-investigation professional. Her qualifications include decades of experience conducting investigations for ministries and ecclesiastical bodies; deep knowledge of trauma-informed practices and standards of care; extensive work evaluating leadership culture and organizational risk; and authorship of established methodologies for assessing safeguarding systems. Her credentials as a safeguarding expert were not contested and exceeded what is typically required in ecclesiastical proceedings.

b. Standard Of Care Vs. Best Practices

Attorney Sidebotham testified emphatically that “best practices” are not synonymous with the “standard of care.” In safeguarding matters, best practices represent aspirational norms—ideal models often difficult for rapidly growing ministries to fully implement—whereas the standard of care reflects what is reasonably expected of leaders and institutions given their size, resources, and developmental stage. She clarified that the Diocese’s safeguarding processes were comparable to those of many growing ministries; that structural decentralization within Greenhouse explained inconsistencies in practice; and that none of these inconsistencies amounted to leadership culpability in violation of Title IV of the Canons. Her testimony prevented the Court from conflating imperfect practices with canonical misconduct.

c. Application Of The Standard Of Proof

Provincial expert Sidebotham further testified that, based on her professional findings, no leadership culpability existed; no act or omission by Bishop Ruch violated the standard of care; diocesan weaknesses were structural and developmental, not personal; and the allegations in the Presentments would not meet even the civil standard of preponderance of the evidence. Accordingly, in her professional judgment, they could not possibly satisfy the clear and convincing standard required by Title IV.

d. Findings Regarding Bishop Ruch

Sidebotham concluded that Bishop Ruch acted appropriately when disclosures arose; that he exercised reasonable pastoral and administrative judgment; that he neither knew nor should have known about Rivera’s misconduct prior to May 2019; and that his responses were timely, transparent, and aligned with safeguarding norms. The Court notes that nothing in her testimony supported any canonical charge.

2. Expert For Respondent — Fr. James F. Sweeney

a. Qualifications of Expert Fr. James Sweeney

Fr. James F. Sweeney is an experienced priest and diocesan administrator, a teacher of ecclesial leadership, and a pastor with decades of direct oversight of clergy and congregations. He is knowledgeable in ACNA polity and episcopal responsibilities. The Court finds that his qualifications uniquely equipped him to evaluate leadership standards within an Anglican ecclesiastical context.

b. Standard Of Care vs. Best Practices

Echoing Sidebotham, Sweeney testified that the Diocese's practices were normal for a rapidly expanding diocese; that variation in safeguarding standards across parishes is typical in young dioceses; that episcopal oversight necessarily relies on clergy and lay leaders rather than on episcopal omniscience; and that diagnosing misconduct based on hindsight is improper. He stressed that episcopal leadership must be measured according to reasonable contemporaneous expectations, not retrospective critique.

c. Findings Regarding Diocese And Bishop

Sweeney concluded that no habitual neglect existed; that no willful contravention occurred; that safeguarding systems, though imperfect, were not the result of episcopal misconduct; and that Bishop Ruch's actions were consistent with pastoral responsibility and episcopal norms. He found no deviation from canonical obligations.

3. Convergence Of Expert Testimony

Despite their distinct disciplines—safeguarding law on the one hand and pastoral/administrative leadership on the other—the two experts independently converged in their conclusions: there was no evidence of leadership misconduct by Bishop Ruch; no safeguarding failure attributable personally to Bishop Ruch; no violation of the standard of care in any safeguarding action; no canonical neglect, habitual or otherwise; and no basis for the Presentments, even under a lower evidentiary standard.

The Court considers this convergence highly probative. It confirms that, across professional frameworks, the Respondent's conduct met or exceeded what would reasonably be expected of a bishop under the circumstances.

4. Application Of Expert Testimony To Alleged Canonical Charges

The expert testimony decisively informed the Court's application of canonical standards. With respect to Canon IV.2.3 (violation of ordination vows), the experts found no vow violated, no neglect of pastoral duty, and no culpability. With respect to Canon IV.2.4 (scandal or abuse of power), they found no conduct by Bishop Ruch that would cause scandal through wrongful action. With respect to Canon IV.2.9 (willful contravention), they identified no willful disobedience to any directive and no act resembling contravention. With respect to Canon IV.2.10 (habitual neglect), they testified that episcopal practices were normal, consistent, diligent, and not negligent.

In short, expert testimony affirmatively disproved each canonical charge; the methods employed were reliable and professionally sound; the conclusions aligned with independent investigative findings; and nothing in the expert record supported any element of any Presentment. Expert testimony thus overwhelmingly favored the Respondent.

E. FINDINGS OF TESTIMONY OF BISHOPS SUPPORTING RESPONDENT

Numerous bishops testified on behalf of the Respondent. The Court finds their testimony consistent, credible, and grounded in firsthand pastoral and collegial experience. These episcopal witnesses, all with extensive ministry backgrounds and knowledge of diocesan life, affirmed the Respondent's integrity, pastoral character, responsiveness, and diligence. Their testimony provided significant insight into Bishop Ruch's conduct, particularly in areas where the Presentments alleged canonical violations, and is both persuasive and corroborative of the independent investigative findings.

1. Canon IV.2.3 – No Violation Of Ordination Vows

Supporting bishops testified that the Respondent faithfully exercised pastoral oversight; devoted himself to the well-being of his flock; acted in accordance with safeguarding expectations during the Rivera crisis; and conducted himself in a manner reflective of episcopal responsibility and devotion, not breach of vows. No bishop identified any action suggesting violation of vows to uphold discipline, guard the Church, or care for the vulnerable.

2. Canon IV.2.4 – No Scandal Or Abuse Of Power

These witnesses further testified that they observed no conduct giving just cause for scandal; that the Respondent did not misuse authority; that he consistently demonstrated humility, transparency, and pastoral care; and that any scandal that arose was rooted in public confusion and misinformation rather than in episcopal wrongdoing. Their firsthand witness undermines any claim of scandal grounded in Bishop Ruch's conduct.

3. Canon IV.2.9 – No Willful Contravention

Supporting bishops testified that the Respondent submitted to provincial oversight; took leave voluntarily; supported independent investigation; and cooperated fully with all authorities. No witness identified any directive Bishop Ruch disobeyed. On the contrary, his conduct demonstrated compliance rather than contravention.

4. Canon IV.2.10 – No Habitual Neglect

The bishops described a leader deeply involved in diocesan life; exercising diligent pastoral care; communicating regularly and transparently with clergy; and not exhibiting patterns of neglect or inattentiveness. Their testimony confirmed that any structural safeguarding gaps were institutional rather than personal and did not amount to habitual neglect.

5. Collective Evidentiary Weight

The Court finds that the testimony of these supporting bishops is credible and grounded in firsthand knowledge; aligns with external investigative findings; directly contradicts the allegations in the Presentments; and strongly supports the conclusion that Bishop Ruch fulfilled his vows faithfully. Their voices carry significant weight precisely because they are episcopal peers, involved in diocesan ministry, familiar with safeguarding expectations, and capable of assessing episcopal conduct from within the ecclesial context.

F. FINDINGS REGARDING THE PRIESTS TESTIFYING FOR RESPONDENT

A series of priests who served directly under the Respondent testified on his behalf. Their testimony provided detailed, firsthand insight into the Respondent's character, leadership, safeguarding responses, pastoral care, and administrative behavior. The Court finds their testimony credible, consistent, and highly probative.

These priests served in a variety of contexts across the Diocese—parishes, church plants, staff leadership, and pastoral ministries. Collectively, they presented a coherent portrait of a bishop who acted decisively in safeguarding matters; cared deeply for victims and survivors; was transparent with clergy; supported parish leaders; and did not exhibit any pattern of neglect or misconduct.

1. Rev. Matt Woodley

Rev. Matt Woodley testified to the bishop's consistent pastoral attentiveness, his responsiveness to crises, his deep investment in clergy well-being, and his integrity and humility. Woodley emphasized that Bishop Ruch took safeguarding concerns seriously, followed through on necessary actions, and encouraged transparency and truth-seeking. Nothing in his testimony suggested negligence or misconduct.

2. Rev. Will Chester

Rev. Will Chester testified that Bishop Ruch was engaged, present, and attentive to diocesan needs; that he exercised pastoral judgment carefully and responsibly; that he demonstrated consistent concern for the vulnerable; and that he did not dismiss or ignore any safeguarding issues brought to him. Chester's testimony affirmed Bishop Ruch's diligence and pastoral character.

3. Rev. Trevor McMacken

Rev. Trevor McMacken testified that Bishop Ruch encouraged safeguarding improvements within parishes; that he was a steady pastoral presence; that he responded appropriately and promptly during crises; and that his leadership reflected humility and prayerfulness. McMacken testified that he witnessed no wrongdoing or neglect.

4. Rev. Stephen Williamson

Rev. Stephen Williamson provided a detailed account of Bishop Ruch's pastoral involvement, describing his careful oversight of clergy and affirming his good character and integrity. Williamson identified no failures or omissions that would amount to a canonical offense.

5. Rev. Eric Snyder

Rev. Eric Snyder testified that the bishop was a faithful pastor to clergy and laity; that he was attentive to parish realities; that he did not overlook concerns or complaints; and that he exercised episcopal oversight responsibly. Snyder's testimony aligned fully with that of the other clergy witnesses.

6. Court's Assessment Of Priestly Testimony

Across all clergy witnesses, no evidence of misconduct emerged; no canonical element of any charge was satisfied; and testimony consistently supported Bishop Ruch's faithful performance of duties. These witnesses contradicted rumors or assumptions underlying the Presentments and did so on the basis of direct observation, in contrast to much of the Province's evidence, which rested on second-hand impressions or assumptions.

Taken together, the testimony of clergy who served under the Respondent presents a unified and credible account of pastoral faithfulness, safeguarding diligence, integrity of character, administrative engagement, and a sharp contrast with the Presentments' allegations.

First, with respect to pastoral faithfulness, Bishop Ruch consistently fulfilled his pastoral responsibilities, supported clergy, tended congregations, and exercised care for the vulnerable. Second, with respect to safeguarding diligence, he responded promptly and appropriately to disclosures; encouraged robust safeguarding even before diocesan policies were formalized; and exhibited no pattern of negligence or disregard.

Third, in terms of integrity and character, clergy repeatedly described Bishop Ruch as trustworthy, honest, humble, and prayerful, and none observed behavior suggestive of canonical violation. Fourth, with respect to administrative engagement, Bishop Ruch was active and present across the Diocese and his leadership was engaged rather than neglectful.

Finally, when contrasted with the Presentments allegations, clergy testimony directly contradicts claims of habitual neglect, scandal, or willful disobedience. No priest observed or experienced any conduct consistent with the Presentments' claims.

In light of all the foregoing, the Court finds that the clergy testimony—credible, firsthand, consistent, and corroborative—strongly supports the conclusion that the Respondent committed no canonical violation; that none of the charges meet the clear and convincing standard; and that the narrative underlying the Presentments was unsupported by fact.

The Court further notes that a substantial number of witnesses testified on behalf of Bishop Ruch, including deacons, canons, parish clergy, and laypersons. A number of these witnesses were female leaders, including deacons, a female standing committee member, a female executive/family pastor, female lay canon and female lay witnesses, all with close personal knowledge of the material facts. These witnesses, many of whom possessed direct, contemporaneous knowledge of the events at issue and an opportunity for many years of detailed observation of Bishop Ruch's ministry, provided extensive, detailed, and mutually corroborating testimony. Their accounts consistently portrayed a bishop who acted with pastoral diligence, integrity, transparency, and care.

The Court finds that this body of testimony—credible in demeanor, consistent across witnesses, and supported by documentary and investigative evidence—stood in stark contrast to the allegations set forth in the Presentments. Whereas the Presentments rested on assumptions,

inferences, and secondhand impressions, the testimony presented at trial supplied concrete factual detail that squarely refuted the claims advanced by the Province. The weight of this testimony substantially reinforced the Court’s unanimous conclusion that the Province failed to meet its burden of proof under the clear-and-convincing evidence standard.

G. FINDINGS CONCERNING SAFEGUARDING PRACTICES IN THE DIOCESE OF THE UPPER MIDWEST

The evidence establishes that safeguarding within the Diocese of the Upper Midwest did not arise in response to later allegations, provincial mandates, or external pressure, but instead reflects a sustained and intentional trajectory of development extending back nearly two decades. That trajectory began at the parish level well before the formal existence of either the Diocese or the Anglican Church in North America.

As early as 2005, Church of the Resurrection—then under the leadership of Rector Stewart Ruch—implemented a comprehensive child protection policy accompanied by mandatory training and procedural safeguards. The testimony demonstrates that this policy was not symbolic or aspirational. Rather, it was operationalized through background checks, defined protocols, and active training of staff and volunteers engaged in children’s ministry. The Court credits testimony that Janet Williamson, an experienced children’s ministry leader, was hired with explicit responsibility for developing and implementing these safeguards and that she did so under Rector Ruch’s direct oversight. These measures predated any diocesan or provincial requirement and were instituted as a matter of pastoral responsibility and prudential leadership.

As Church of the Resurrection planted additional congregations in subsequent years, safeguarding expectations accompanied those church plants. The record reflects that individual parishes maintained their own child protection policies, adapted to their local ministry contexts, while remaining aligned with core safeguarding principles established at the originating parish. These policies were actively enforced and formed part of the ordinary governance of parish life, particularly within children’s ministry. The Court finds that safeguarding during this period functioned as a baseline expectation rather than an exception.

Over the following decade, as congregations expanded and organizational structures matured, safeguarding practices continued to evolve. Testimony established that diocesan and parish leaders made use of recognized child protection training resources, reviewed policies

periodically, and refined procedures in response to ministry experience and emerging best practices. The Court finds that this period reflects continuity rather than stasis: safeguarding was treated as an ongoing responsibility requiring vigilance and adaptation rather than a one-time compliance exercise.

As circumstances grew more complex and disclosures expanded in the years that followed, diocesan leadership sought additional mechanisms for institutional learning and accountability, including independent review tools, consistent with its established safeguarding ethos. During this period, provincial sample policies and guidance began to emerge.

In 2024, the Anglican Church in North America adopted revised canons requiring each diocese to certify the existence of diocesan child protection and adult misconduct response policies. The evidence establishes that the Diocese of the Upper Midwest complied with these requirements on or before the prescribed deadlines. Testimony further established that these were the first formal canonical mandates imposed at the provincial level in this area, and that diocesan compliance reflected the formalization of practices long in place rather than a novel undertaking.

Taken as a whole, the record supports the conclusion that safeguarding within the Diocese of the Upper Midwest is the product of a long-standing and continuous process that began at the parish level in 2005, matured through diocesan formation, and culminated in formal provincial certification nearly two decades later. The evidence demonstrates vigilance, intentionality, and leadership over time, rather than reactive compliance or episodic attention, and reflects a consistent commitment to the protection of children and the integrity of ministry across changing institutional contexts.

H. FINDINGS CONCERNING THE RIVERA MATTER

The Presentments placed considerable weight upon several individual matters—most notably those involving Mark Rivera, Joshua Moon, Chris Lapeyre, and Joel Gerrard—and upon the structural dynamics of Greenhouse Ministries, as well as the conclusions of multiple independent investigations. Because these matters formed the core factual predicates for the canonical charges brought against the Respondent, the Court addresses each in turn and sets forth its findings in narrative form.

The Court begins with the Rivera matter, which the prosecution repeatedly portrayed as the central example of episcopal neglect. The evidence, however, established without

contradiction that the Respondent had no prior knowledge of Rivera's abusive behavior before the disclosure made in May 2019. Rivera had served as a lay catechist at Christ Our Light Anglican Church, within the Greenhouse network, without any disciplinary history or safeguarding concern ever being communicated to diocesan or parish leadership. Clergy and lay witnesses alike testified that no warning signs were known or reasonably knowable before the minor's disclosure. Independent investigators reached the same conclusion.

When the disclosure was made to parish leadership on May 19, 2019—while the Respondent was traveling on episcopal visitation—the matter was reported to civil authorities the very next day. Rivera was immediately removed from ministry, and parish staff cooperated fully with law enforcement. The Respondent, upon receiving word of the disclosure, affirmed the requirement of mandatory reporting, supported the decisions made by parish staff, and ensured that pastoral care was provided to the victim's family. He later attended several court proceedings. No testimony suggested any delay, omission, or obstruction by the Respondent. Indeed, the Department of Children and Family Services found no failure to report by any diocesan personnel. The Court finds that the Respondent fulfilled all safeguarding and pastoral obligations and that nothing in the Rivera matter supports any inference of episcopal misconduct.

I. FINDINGS CONCERNING THE MOON MATTER

The record establishes that Joshua Moon's entrance into ordained ministry occurred only after a deliberate, multi-year, and carefully supervised process of disclosure, pastoral formation, and monitored healing, all under the oversight of Bishop Stewart Ruch. Moon voluntarily disclosed at the outset his history of personal victimization and a 2013 misdemeanor conviction for solicitation during a sting operation. This transparency initiated a prolonged season of discernment in which Moon was neither recommended nor advanced hastily toward ordination. Rather, he was placed within a structured pastoral environment involving regular oversight, accountability meetings, and participation in recovery programs such as Sexaholics Anonymous.

Multiple witnesses testified that Bishop Ruch's general ordination practices reflected a pattern of caution, often delaying or declining to advance candidates until appropriate maturity and readiness were demonstrated.

The evidence further shows that Bishop Ruch took Moon's past with full seriousness. His approach reflected an attempt to balance pastoral compassion for a repentant believer seeking

restoration with the Church's obligation to safeguard its people. Throughout the discernment period, Moon was subject to accountability structures designed to monitor progress, promote healing, and ensure that any movement toward ministry occurred only with careful supervision. When post-ordination misconduct occurred—specifically, crossing inappropriate boundaries with a deacon—disciplinary authorities acted immediately. A full canonical investigation was undertaken, and Moon was permanently inhibited from ministry within the ACNA. This decisive response demonstrates that vigilance did not cease once ordination had taken place.

In retrospect, and with the benefit of subsequent growth and experience, Bishop Ruch testified that he would not today support Moon's ordination. The Court finds that this acknowledgment does not signify imprudence at the time, but instead reflects the maturation of pastoral judgment that naturally develops over a bishop's ministry.

The Court, having heard the testimony and reviewed the evidence, finds that—as with every bishop—judgment and decision-making mature over time, and that such maturation reflects humility to learn from experience rather than any deficiency of diligence or character. Those most familiar with Bishop Ruch's ministry—bishops, priests, clergy, and laity—consistently testified to patterns of absolute seriousness in his placement of individuals in ministry and his long-standing commitment to careful, disciplined formation. His ministry reflected the difficult and imperfect work of assisting fallen men and women who sought vocational calling, always through processes of extended discipleship that, by their nature, could never provide absolute certainty regarding future conduct.

When analyzed as a whole, the evidence reveals no pattern of negligence, indifference, or disregard for safeguarding responsibilities. To the contrary, the Court finds no testimony—let alone clear and convincing evidence—demonstrating that any of Bishop Ruch's actions rose to the level of a canonical violation. The outcome of Moon's ministry, while grievous and contrary to the hopes invested in him, does not negate the thoughtful, conscientious, and vigilant approach Bishop Ruch employed with the information available at the time.

J. FINDINGS CONCERNING THE LAPEYRE MATTER

The Lapeyre matter, too, was presented as grounds for concluding that the Respondent had failed in safeguarding oversight. The events of 2015, however, involved only limited and ambiguous information that did not indicate abuse, did not trigger mandatory reporting

obligations, and did not alert diocesan authorities to any potential risk. Years later, when credible information regarding misconduct did arise, the Respondent acted promptly, removing Lapeyre from ministry, initiating investigation, and ensuring pastoral response. No witness testified to any inaction or negligence by the Respondent at any point. Thus, nothing in this matter supports any canonical charge.

K. FINDINGS CONCERNING THE JOEL GERARD MATTER

There is no dispute in the record that [REDACTED] suffered grave harm as a result of sexual abuse committed by Joel Gerard. Her testimony was credible as to the fact of abuse and the profound personal impact it had on her. The abuse itself was undisputed and was expressly acknowledged by Bishop Stewart Ruch. The question before the Court is not whether harm occurred, but whether Bishop Ruch violated any Canon, proven by clear and convincing evidence, in his handling of the Joel Gerard matter.

[REDACTED] did not allege that Bishop Ruch committed abuse, enabled the abuse, denied her credibility, or sought to protect Mr. Gerard from accountability. Rather, her concern, as presented through the Provincial Prosecutor, focused on the adequacy and clarity of the Church's institutional and pastoral response following her disclosure. The evidence establishes that Bishop Ruch understood her disclosure to be serious and credible and responded appropriately based on the information available to him at the relevant times.

Both on direct examination and on cross-examination, [REDACTED] testified that Bishop Ruch immediately believed her, expressed pastoral concern, and treated her disclosure with gravity. She confirmed that Bishop Ruch promptly confronted Mr. Gerard, obtained a confession corroborating her account, and re-engaged with her to discuss next steps. On cross-examination, she further acknowledged that Bishop Ruch raised the possibility of reporting to law enforcement and that, at the time, she herself was uncertain whether she wished to pursue that course. An interim approach was adopted with her knowledge and consent, focused on accountability, counseling, and pastoral oversight.

As information became clearer and more fully available, Bishop Ruch's actions remained consistent with his pastoral and canonical responsibilities. Contemporaneous correspondence introduced at trial demonstrated ongoing communication, expressions of care, confirmation of Mr. Gerard's confession, assignment of pastoral support, and openness to continued engagement.

Where follow-up became complicated, diocesan staff acted within appropriate ethical and confidentiality boundaries. The record does not reflect indifference, concealment, or neglect.

Most significantly, the victim's own testimony—particularly as clarified on cross-examination—illustrates the care, attention, and seriousness with which Bishop Ruch responded to her disclosure. While [REDACTED] later expressed disappointment, such sentiments do not establish a canonical violation and do not satisfy the required evidentiary standard.

The Court emphasizes that its findings, based solely on the evidence before it, neither diminish the pain and suffering endured by [REDACTED] nor suggest that there are not important lessons to be learned or improvements to be made in parish or diocesan procedures. The obligation to evaluate, strengthen, and refine every leader's response to abuse is a continuing one. The evidence in this record demonstrates that Bishop Ruch takes that obligation seriously and has engaged it with intent and care.

The Court finds no evidence—much less clear and convincing evidence—that Bishop Ruch violated any Canon or applicable standard of care. The Province's case rests on dissatisfaction with institutional processes that were, at the time, underdeveloped or evolving. Canonical liability requires proof of a knowing or negligent violation of a specific canonical duty. The record contains no such proof.

Accordingly, the Court concludes that, given what Bishop Ruch knew at each relevant stage, he acted reasonably, pastorally, and within the bounds of his canonical authority. The Province has failed to establish by clear and convincing evidence that Bishop Ruch violated any Canon in connection with the Joel Gerard matter.

L. FINDINGS CONCERNING GREENHOUSE MINISTRY MATTER

The narrative advanced in the Presentments also relied heavily on problems said to exist within Greenhouse Ministries. The evidence revealed that Greenhouse operated as a structurally unique and semi-autonomous mission agency, characterized by informality, decentralized leadership, unclear lines of authority, and inconsistent internal communication. These structural features were longstanding, predated many diocesan systems, and were not created by the Respondent. Canon William Beasley exercised substantial functional authority over Greenhouse operations, and the testimony demonstrated that problems within the organization often did not reach the Respondent until they had become acute. Witnesses repeatedly stated that concerns

were not communicated to him and that no report brought to his attention was ever ignored. When issues did emerge, the Respondent sought clarification, encouraged structural reform, requested reviews, and promoted the strengthening of safeguarding practices. His actions reflected diligence, not neglect.

A related allegation concerned the handling of issues regarding Greenhouse pastor Keith Hartsell. The testimony showed that concerns arose within Greenhouse itself, were not promptly or clearly communicated to the Respondent, and did not involve abuse or criminal behavior. Once these matters were brought to his attention, the Respondent acted responsibly, offering pastoral oversight and guidance. No evidence in this area suggests canonical violation.

The Court gives substantial weight to the three major independent investigations—conducted by Grand River Solutions, Husch Blackwell, and Telios Law—which collectively reviewed safeguarding practices, leadership culture, organizational structures, and diocesan responses. Though differing in scope and methodology, each reached the same essential conclusion: the Respondent was not found to have violated the Canons under Title IV as alleged in the Presentment. Telios Law, in particular, concluded that even under a mere preponderance-of-evidence standard—which is far lower than the required clear-and-convincing standard—no basis existed to find that the Respondent violated safeguarding norms.

One of the more troubling procedural features of this case concerns the handling of the GRS report. The Respondent himself commissioned GRS to conduct an independent review of the Rivera matter in order to ensure transparency and accountability. However, once completed, the Province assumed exclusive control over the report, denied the Respondent access to it, and provided no canonical rationale for withholding it. Despite being barred from reviewing the findings, the Respondent was later faulted for not acting upon them. Portions of the report were referenced in ways that implied negligence, even though the Respondent never saw the report and actively sought to obtain it. Witness testimony suggested that political pressures, public narratives, and internal anxieties within the Province contributed to this mishandling. While the Court does not make formal findings regarding motive, the sequence of events created an inequitable evidentiary environment that distorted the factual record and contributed to the unfounded Presentments.

After reviewing all testimony, documentary evidence, and expert findings, the Court concludes that none of the matters cited in the Presentments—whether Rivera, Moon, Lapeyre,

Greenhouse Ministries, or the investigative reports—provide any factual or legal basis for canonical discipline. The evidence establishes no misconduct by the Respondent, no failure of safeguarding, and no breach of canonical duty. The Presentments rest not on evidence but on misunderstanding, assumption, rumor, and the withholding and misinterpretation of exculpatory material. Accordingly, Section VI demonstrates a complete failure of proof.

M. FINDINGS RELATED TO INVESTIGATIVE REPORTS

The Court turns next to the investigative reports that appear in the evidentiary record. Over several years, three separate organizations—Grand River Solutions, Husch Blackwell, and Telios Law—conducted inquiries into matters relating to diocesan safeguarding practices, Greenhouse Ministries structures, leadership culture, and the conduct of the Respondent. Although all three reports were received as exhibits, the Province failed to support two of them with the competent testimony required to establish admissibility and evidentiary weight. Only the Telios Report was properly authenticated and subjected to the adversarial process.

1. Investigation Report Evidence Before the Court

The Court received three investigative reports submitted by the Province: (1) the Telios Law Report, (2) the Grand River Solutions Report, and (3) the Husch Blackwell Report. Although all three documents were admitted into evidence, only the Telios Report was accompanied by the type of evidentiary support and witness testimony ordinarily required to render such reports reliable and probative, rather than mere hearsay. The remaining reports lacked supporting witnesses subject to examination and therefore were not afforded comparable evidentiary weight. The Province produced a single witness to prove up a report—Ms. Teresa Sidebotham—who, together with her team, authored the Telios Report. Her testimony allowed the Court to examine the report’s methodology, sources, investigative techniques, and conclusions. Crucially, she was available for cross-examination, enabling the Respondent and the Court to test the reliability and thoroughness of her findings. This adversarial examination transformed the Telios Report from mere hearsay into admissible evidence that the Court could meaningfully weigh.

By contrast, the Province presented no author, investigator, custodian, or knowledgeable witness for either the GRS or HB investigations. No individual with personal knowledge of those reports appeared to authenticate the documents, explain their methods, or defend their

conclusions. These reports were simply placed before the Court without any evidentiary foundation.

This failure is not a technicality—it strikes at the center of the judicial truth-seeking process. Investigative reports constitute hearsay unless accompanied by a competent witness who can explain their creation and submit to cross-examination. Cross-examination is not an optional procedural formality; it is the primary engine of truth in an adversarial system. It allows the Court to:

- probe for bias or misinterpretation,
- assess investigative rigor,
- identify untested assumptions,
- explore weaknesses or contradictions, and
- determine the credibility and weight of the conclusions.

A report without a witness is a conclusion without accountability.

The Province’s omission deprived both the Respondent and the Court of the opportunity to ask fundamental questions about the GRS and HB reports: *What evidence was considered? What evidence was rejected? What conflicts were reconciled? What methodological limits applied?* Without this ability to test and scrutinize the reports, they cannot carry meaningful evidentiary weight.

Attempts by the Provincial Prosecutor to offer his own characterizations or summaries of these unsupported reports do not remedy the deficiency. Counsel’s arguments are not evidence, and unsworn interpretations cannot substitute for the sworn testimony of a knowledgeable investigator.

Accordingly, because the Province failed to establish any evidentiary foundation for the Grand River Solutions and Husch Blackwell reports, the Court assigns minimal evidentiary value to both. Only the Telios Report—supported by credible witness testimony and subjected to full adversarial testing—is entitled to significant weight in this Court’s analysis.

2. Findings Regarding Each Investigative Report

A. The Grand River Solutions Report

The GRS investigation, undertaken at the Respondent’s own initiative, examined the handling of the Rivera matter and found no evidence of negligence, misconduct, or delayed reporting attributable to the Respondent in violation of the Canons under Title IV. Its conclusions

align with the broader evidentiary record.

However, because no author or custodian was presented to testify, the Court could not authenticate the report or assess the reliability of its investigative process. As a result, the GRS Report's probative value is limited.

B. The Husch Blackwell Report

The Province retained Husch Blackwell to conduct a broader review. Although HB concluded—consistent with GRS—that there was no basis to attribute safeguarding failures to the Respondent, the Province called no witness capable of supporting or defending the report. Without testimony, the Court cannot evaluate its methodology, accuracy, or conclusions. Thus, the HB Report also carries minimal evidentiary weight.

C. The Telios Law Report

The Telios Law investigation was the most comprehensive in scope, evaluating leadership culture, safeguarding practices, diocesan polity, Greenhouse structures, and organizational systems. Unlike the other two reports, the Telios Report was fully supported by competent evidence. Its author, Ms. Sidebotham, testified under oath, explained the investigative process, and submitted to extensive questioning and cross-examination. Only this report was properly authenticated and subjected to the evidentiary tests required for reliability.

Telios concluded that the Respondent did not engage in safeguarding negligence, did not violate any standard of care, and did not commit leadership misconduct. Telios also stated that even under the lesser civil preponderance-of-the-evidence standard, no finding of culpability would be supported—let alone under the clear-and-convincing burden required in canonical proceedings. Because it is the only report meeting evidentiary requirements, the Telios Report carries substantial weight.

3. Withholding of the Grand River Solutions Report

The Court must also address the troubling handling of the GRS Report. The Respondent commissioned the investigation in pursuit of transparency and accountability, yet the Province withheld the report from him once it was completed. Despite repeated requests, he was denied access. No canonical justification was provided.

This withholding created a scenario in which exculpatory material was concealed from the very bishop whose actions had been investigated. Moreover, portions of the withheld report were later cited by the Province to escalate disciplinary measures, even though the Respondent

had been prevented from seeing or responding to it. A party cannot be faulted for failing to act upon information that was deliberately withheld, nor may the prosecution benefit from blocking a Respondent's access to exculpatory evidence.

4. Overall Assessment

Despite procedural irregularities surrounding two of the reports, the conclusions reached across all three investigations—whether or not properly admissible—are strikingly consistent. No investigative body found that Bishop Ruch had violated any Canon under Article IV.

When restricted to properly admitted and reliable evidence—as the Court must—the Telios Report stands alone as the only investigative document entitled to substantial weight. Its findings confirm what the broader record makes clear: the Presentments rest on misunderstanding, speculation, and untested narrative rather than evidence. The other reports were admitted into evidence and considered by the Court, but were accorded weight commensurate with the deficiencies attending their admission.

Accordingly, the Court concludes that the investigative materials, even when viewed collectively, do not establish any factual foundation for a canonical charge against the Respondent.

VII. AUTHORITY OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL COURT AND THE INTEGRITY OF ITS ORDERS

The Ecclesiastical Trial Court of a Bishop is a court of law, duly constituted under the Constitution and Canons of the Anglican Church in North America. It exists to hear sworn testimony, safeguard fairness, protect the vulnerable, and render binding judgments—judgments that rest not on public sentiment or factional narratives but on evidence subjected to the discipline of cross-examination. To fulfill this mandate, the Court must possess and exercise the authority necessary to regulate its proceedings. This includes the issuance of orders preserving confidentiality, restricting disclosure of sensitive material, and protecting the dignity of those who appear before it.

Confidentiality orders are not instruments of secrecy; they are indispensable tools of justice. They ensure that evidence is evaluated where it belongs—before the Court, under oath—rather than on social media or in the commentaries of self-appointed advocates. These orders shield vulnerable witnesses from exploitation, prevent distortion of testimony, and ensure that

judgment is rendered on the basis of truth rather than spectacle. They preserve a process designed not to advantage any party, but to protect the weak and uphold the integrity of the Church's judicial system.

Attorneys appearing before this Court are not free agents seeking tactical gain. They are officers of the Court, bound by fidelity to its orders, candor toward its judges, and respect for the orderly administration of justice. They may challenge or seek modification of the Court's directives through recognized procedures, but they may not disregard or undermine them. When an attorney—especially one entrusted with a public, quasi-criminal prosecutorial role—rejects these obligations, the injury is not confined to a single case. It strikes at the very foundation of ecclesiastical justice.

These principles govern the Court's assessment of the conduct of the former Provincial Prosecutor, Mr. Alan Runyan. Mr. Runyan accepted an office requiring diligence, impartiality, and adherence to this Court's directives. Yet near the close of the prosecutor's case in chief—immediately after the Province's own expert testified that no canon had been violated—Mr. Runyan abruptly abandoned his duties. He filed no motion to withdraw, offered no explanation to the Court, and provided no transition of responsibilities. He simply ceased to act in the role he had been appointed to fulfill.

His departure left the Province, the Court and the Respondent in a compromised and chaotic position. Volunteers, witnesses, and Court members were forced to shoulder responsibilities he had vacated, at significant cost of time, effort, and emotional labor. The integrity of the proceedings—the expectation that each party will responsibly prosecute or defend its case—was gravely damaged. The record offers no justification for this abdication.

The harm was then compounded. Despite explicit confidentiality orders—and despite the Province's expenditure of substantial funds on an investigation whose materials were protected by those orders—Mr. Runyan caused confidential, personal, and sensitive information from these proceedings to be provided to a media outlet. This was a direct, knowing, and flagrant violation of this Court's instructions. It was an act of self-authorization taken outside the judicial process and in contempt of the obligations that bind every officer of this Court.

Such conduct is not mere negligence. It is a repudiation of professional ethics, a rejection of canonical duty, and a dismantling of the discipline that makes adjudication possible. If tolerated, it would reduce ecclesiastical justice to a stage on which confidentiality orders are

optional, testimony is mined for public consumption, and outcomes are influenced not by the evidence but by whoever can most effectively manipulate the public narrative.

In addition to abandoning his responsibilities and violating Court orders, Mr. Runyan publicly complained about the questioning conducted by members of this Court—an assertion he raised not during the proceedings, where he had full opportunity to object, but only afterward, in extra-judicial settings. Because these public remarks have been used to malign the integrity of this Court, they must be addressed.

Judges in ecclesiastical courts are not passive observers. They bear a duty to probe testimony, clarify ambiguities, and ensure a complete and reliable record. Questioning by the Court is not only permissible—it is essential to the pursuit of truth. When counsel objects to a question, the Canons of the ACNA provide orderly mechanisms: objections may be raised; answers may be moved to be stricken; rulings may be sought; and, when necessary, appeals may be taken to the Provincial Tribunal. These avenues are designed to resolve concerns within the judicial process.

Mr. Runyan invoked none of them. He did not object. He did not move to strike. He did not request a ruling. He raised no contemporaneous concern that any line of inquiry exceeded the bounds of propriety or fairness. Only after abandoning his post and violating confidentiality orders did he publicly claim that Court questioning had been improper—fully aware that this Court, bound by its own confidentiality obligations, could not respond.

In doing so, he exploited the Court's integrity for his own purposes. He accused members of this Court of misconduct while depriving them of any canonical means of reply. He slandered the bench. He inflicted reputational harm on the Court and the ecclesiastical judicial system it represents. And he did so in defiance of the very orders he had sworn to respect.

Such conduct is intolerable. No judicial system—civil or ecclesiastical—can function if its officers claim the right to disregard its directives, abandon their responsibilities without notice, manipulate public perception through extra-judicial disclosures, and then malign the very Court before which they have appeared. These actions corrode trust, invite factional manipulation, and convince the faithful that justice is not found through evidence and canonical process but through public pressure and social media campaigns.

This Court therefore condemns, in the strongest and clearest terms, the former Prosecutor's abandonment of his duties, his violation of confidentiality orders, his refusal to

employ appropriate procedural remedies, his public misrepresentations, and his slander of this Court. Such flagrant contempt for ecclesiastical justice should not be tolerated. The Anglican Church in North America’s judicial system—grounded in Scripture, tradition, and the rule of law—cannot function if its officers treat its authority as optional.

The Court further observes that the conduct of the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor under the leadership of Mr. Alan Runyan created circumstances that opened the door to additional breaches of this Court’s confidentiality orders by members of his assisting team during the trial. Such failures in supervision and enforcement of confidentiality obligations further undermined the integrity of these proceedings and the authority of this Court.

In light of the disclosures and breaches of confidentiality committed by members of the Provincial prosecution team while under Mr. Runyan’s supervision and direction, the Court is compelled to reaffirm its solemn duty to uphold and enforce its lawful orders. This Court will defend the integrity of its proceedings, the dignity of its members, and the sacred trust placed in it by the Church. The authority of this Court is real, necessary, and binding, and it shall be exercised without hesitation to preserve the faithful administration of justice. Such authority exists not for its own sake, but for the protection of the Church, the care of its people, and the unwavering pursuit of the truth it is charged to serve.

VIII. VERDICT AND FINAL LEGAL FINDINGS

The Court begins this final section by acknowledging the profound weight of the matters placed before it. Throughout these proceedings, the testimony and evidence have illuminated the devastating suffering endured by survivors of abuse within the Diocese and the deep wounds borne by their families and communities. The Court recognizes the gravity of this harm and affirms without reservation that such suffering stands as a sobering reminder of the Church’s sacred duty to protect the vulnerable and to embody the compassion and justice of Jesus Christ.

The Court further emphasizes that ecclesiastical leaders within the Anglican Church in North America—including the College of Bishops—retain an ongoing and solemn responsibility to minister faithfully to survivors, to engage in diligent safeguarding reform, and to examine humbly the systems and cultures that allowed such pain to persist. Nothing in this verdict should be construed as diminishing that obligation. Rather, the Court urges that the work of healing, repentance, and renewal continue with earnestness and resolve.

It is therefore with great difficulty, and with deep pastoral awareness, that the Court must now distinguish between two realities that, while closely intertwined in human experience, must remain separate in a judicial inquiry: the profound suffering of victims on the one hand, and the question of the Respondent's canonical culpability on the other. The Court's responsibility is not to render judgment on the tragedy itself, nor on the anguish rightly felt by many, but to determine whether the Respondent, Bishop Stewart Ruch, violated the Canons of the Church under the required standard of clear and convincing evidence.

The Court stresses that the acknowledgment of victims' suffering is not inconsistent with a judicial finding of no culpability on the part of the Respondent. A verdict of not guilty under our Canons does not erase the harm endured, nor does it excuse systemic deficiencies, failures of perception, or areas in which the Church must grow. The evidence presented revealed circumstances in which mistakes occurred, in which systems proved inadequate, and in which assumptions and miscommunications caused additional pain. These realities exist independently of the canonical question.

Indeed, the Court believes that Bishop Ruch—whose humility, openness to correction, and pastoral devotion were repeatedly attested to during trial—is positioned to lead continued reform with integrity and seriousness. Nothing in this verdict implies that the Church should relent in its commitment to safeguarding reforms or to the care of survivors. Rather, it reflects only the Court's obligation to render a judgment grounded solely in evidence and law.

Within this solemn framework, the Court must also evaluate the evidence concerning the Respondent's character and ministry, for this evidence forms part of the factual record upon which the Court's legal determinations rest. The Court is mindful that acknowledging the Respondent's character does not diminish the suffering endured by survivors or the need for institutional reform. Instead, it reflects the Court's obligation to consider the full evidentiary portrait presented at trial.

The testimony of clergy, lay leaders, expert witnesses, and documentary records offered a consistent and compelling depiction of a bishop whose ministry has been marked by pastoral fidelity, humility, and integrity. Witnesses described a leader who responded with compassion and steadiness during moments of crisis, who accompanied congregations through grief and confusion, and who offered sincere support to victims and their families. His conduct reflected transparency and a commitment to truth, demonstrated most clearly by his voluntary

commissioning of independent investigations to ensure accountability and to strengthen safeguarding practices.

Many witnesses emphasized the Respondent's humility and openness to growth. They recounted his willingness to listen, to receive correction, and to address deficiencies within diocesan systems. Documentary evidence reinforced this portrayal, depicting a bishop motivated not by defensiveness but by genuine pastoral concern and a desire to serve faithfully.

Independent experts—including those retained by the Province—corroborated these character assessments. Their evaluations revealed no acts or omissions constituting a breach of canonical duty. Expert testimony affirmed that the Respondent's conduct met or exceeded professional expectations for ecclesial safeguarding and oversight.

The Court recognizes that none of these findings negate the reality that mistakes were made or that the Diocese and Province must continue to reform their safeguarding structures. These lapses, however, were systemic and not the result of intentional or wrongful conduct by the Respondent. Rather, the evidence portrays a bishop who earnestly sought to strengthen systems, who acted diligently when disclosures arose, and who demonstrated consistent pastoral commitment.

Taken together, the evidence concerning the Respondent's character supports and reinforces the Court's legal conclusions. Nothing in the record suggests a character inconsistent with the vows of episcopal office; on the contrary, the evidence affirms the Respondent's conscientious exercise of the responsibilities entrusted to him. This acknowledgment stands alongside—and does not diminish—the Court's deep recognition of the suffering of survivors of abuse and the necessity of ongoing institutional reform.

With these considerations fully in view, the Court turns now to its analysis of the canonical charges.

IX. FINAL FINDINGS AND VERDICT OF THE COURT

In assessing the canonical charges presented in this matter, the Court has applied the governing standard of *clear and convincing evidence*, mindful at every stage of its obligation to distinguish between the profound suffering of survivors—whose pain the Court continues to acknowledge with gravity—and the specific legal question of whether the Respondent violated the Canons of the Church. Against that evidentiary standard, and upon full review of the

testimonial record, the investigative findings, and the arguments of counsel, the Court renders the following determinations.

With respect to **Canon IV.2.3**, concerning violation of the vows made at ordination, the Court finds no basis for concluding that the Respondent transgressed his solemn commitments. These vows require a bishop to safeguard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church; to maintain purity of life and doctrine; to exercise pastoral care diligently; and to obey the Constitution and Canons. The Province contended that the Respondent violated these obligations by mishandling safeguarding responsibilities. To sustain such a charge, however, the Province was required to show a personal, intentional breach of duty—a conscious act or omission inconsistent with episcopal vows. No such evidence was produced.

The record contains no indication that the Respondent possessed prior knowledge of Mark Rivera’s misconduct; no witness testified to having warned him; and no document or investigative report suggested that he had access to any information that could have put him on notice of risk. The structural and organizational complexities within the Diocese, while real, do not equate to personal or knowing wrongdoing. Once disclosures occurred, the Respondent acted promptly and appropriately: he removed Rivera from ministry, ensured mandatory reporting to civil authorities, provided pastoral care to affected families, and commissioned an independent investigation. These actions align squarely with episcopal vows and demonstrate pastoral diligence. Accordingly, the charge under Canon IV.2.3 is not proven.

Turning to **Canon IV.2.4**, which concerns conduct giving just cause for scandal or offense, the Court again finds the evidence insufficient. Scandal in the canonical sense requires an objectively wrongful act by the Respondent that reasonably leads others to believe that the Church tolerates misconduct. The Province presented no evidence that the Respondent engaged in any act capable of producing such canonical scandal. To the contrary, the evidence revealed consistent cooperation with law enforcement and investigators, proactive engagement with victims, voluntary transparency, and no wrongful conduct attributable to him.

The record demonstrates that any “scandal” perceived within the Province arose from misinformation, shifting online narratives, procedural irregularities, and public statements made by others—not from episcopal misconduct. Independent investigations confirmed this conclusion. Therefore, the charge under Canon IV.2.4 is not proven.

The Province's claim under **Canon IV.2.9**, alleging willful contravention of lawful authority, fares no better. This canon requires identification of a specific directive issued to Bishop Ruch, proof that he was aware of the directive, and evidence that he intentionally disobeyed it. The Province identified no such directive. The record instead shows consistent cooperation with civil, diocesan, and provincial authorities; voluntary commissioning of independent review; and submission to oversight throughout the process.

No investigative body found any act of obstruction or refusal to comply with lawful authority. Thus, the charge under Canon IV.2.9 is not proven.

Finally, the Court addresses **Canon IV.2.10**, which concerns habitual neglect of the duties of episcopal office. This canon requires proof of repeated omissions that reflect chronic inattentiveness to core responsibilities. The Province presented no evidence of such a pattern. On the contrary, the record reflects that the Respondent was attentive, pastoral, and engaged. His conduct during the Rivera matter—prompt reporting to civil authorities, provision of pastoral care, cooperation with investigators, and initiation of independent review—demonstrates vigilance, not neglect. Clergy testimony reinforced this understanding, consistently describing a bishop who was present, responsive, and committed to strengthening diocesan life. Telios Law expressly concluded that no habitual neglect occurred. Accordingly, the charge under Canon IV.2.10 is not proven.

The Court further certifies that these proceedings were conducted in accordance with canonical and procedural requirements, that only admissible evidence was considered, and that the clear and convincing standard was faithfully applied. The Court observes that the nature and course of this prosecution were marked by shifting theories, reliance on rumor and online narratives, inconsistent framing of allegations, and attempts to retrofit unverified assumptions into canonical categories.

The failure of proof in this case is complete. The Province did not establish any act or omission constituting misconduct, any prior knowledge of abuse, any willful disobedience, any habitual neglect, any corroborating documentation, or any eyewitness testimony. Each of the independent investigations contradicted the Presentments and confirmed the absence of culpability.

The Court also notes significant structural and procedural irregularities at the provincial level—including the withholding of the GRS report, inconsistent communication within the

College of Bishops, and procedural confusion—that materially distorted the trajectory of this matter. None of these failures are attributable to the Respondent, yet they contributed to the escalation of suspicion and misunderstanding.

In rendering this verdict, the Court reiterates its recognition of the profound suffering experienced by victims of abuse and the pressing need for institutional reform within the Diocese and the Province. These truths stand in full view and must shape the Church’s future safeguarding efforts. But under the Canons of the ACNA, and based on the evidence presented, the Respondent has not been shown to have committed any canonical offense.

For these reasons, and because the Court unanimously concludes that the Province failed to meet its burden of proving any canonical violation by clear and convincing evidence, the Court unanimously finds the Respondent **NOT GUILTY** on every count set forth in the Presentments.


ACCORDINGLY, JUDGMENT IS ENTERED IN FAVOR OF THE RESPONDENT ON ALL CHARGES.

IT IS SO ORDERED and ENTERED this 16th day of December, 2025.

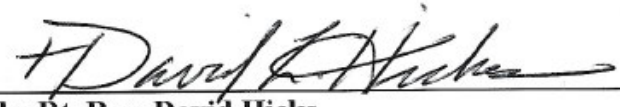
Ecclesiastical Court for the Trial of a Bishop.

By: 
The Rt. Rev. David Bryan, President of the Court

Date: 12/16/2025

By: 
The Rev. Canon Jeff Weber, Esq., Presiding Officer

Date: 12/16/2025

By: 
The Rt. Rev. David Hicks

Date: 12/16/2025

By: + R Quigg Lawrence Date: 12/16/25
The Rt. Rev. Quigg Lawrence

By: J. N. Millard + Date: 12/16/25
The Rev. Canon Jonathan Millard, Barrister-at-law

By: Katherine Grosskopf Date: 12/16/2025
Ms. Katherine Grosskopf, Esq.

By: Larry Doyle Date: 12/16/2025
Mr. Larry Doyle

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