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MICHIGAN: First Orthodox Parish leaves Liberal Diocese

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LIVONIA, MI (1/8/2006)--The priest and parishioners of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Michigan, got thrown out of their property, when the bishop, the Rt. Rev. Wendell N. Gibbs, Jr., told the Rev. Allen Kannapell, 36, on Saturday, that he had to vacate his church before Sunday morning services.

This is the first orthodox parish in the Diocese to leave the Episcopal Church over biblical authority and moral relativism. The priest said he was looking for alternative episcopal oversight, but the bishop rejected the idea.

When asked what prompted him to leave the Episcopal Church, Fr. Kannapell said it was the prevailing issues of Biblical authority, the gospel of transformation not inclusion; repentance and new life rather than blessing the old life.

Fr. Kannapell told VirtueOnline that he got a call on Friday afternoon from the bishop and was told to meet him on Saturday in his office to discuss his situation.

"He said he would inhibit me if I didn't come." Kannapell prayed about it and then went down "not out of fear but a chance to talk." He took with him his wife, a lawyer and his senior warden.

"Bishop Gibbs gave me a chance to renounce my orders. I refused. I told him I was made a priest, and still a priest, but I can't be under your authority. He said if you don't renounce your orders I will inhibit you immediately. I refused. He then signed a letter of inhibition."

Kannapell said he that when his attorney asked the bishop by what canon the vestry being dismissed. "The bishop cited canon but the canon appeared not to have the consequence he imposed."

We asked if we could negotiate for the property, but the bishop said no, Kannapell told VirtueOnline.

"Basically I was inhibited for seeking adequate episcopal oversight. We had discussed Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO) and the bishop had offered it, but we deemed it inadequate because the bishop retained spiritual leadership and authority over the parish. It was not personal, he had everything to do with his leadership."

Asked if he expected to be thrown out of the property in less than 24 hours, Fr. Kannapell said yes, but he knew it was inevitable.

On Sunday morning the parishioners of St. Andrew's met at a local Holiday Inn. Some 190 of the church's 400 parishioners showed up. Average Sunday attendance is about 200, Fr. Kannapell told VirtueOnline.

Kannapell said that a handful had shown up at the two Sunday services at the old church where Fr. John Henry had been sent in by the bishop to serve and preach.

The priest said he and his vestry had not yet decided what ecclesiastical authority they would come under, and they were keeping their options open. "We remain Anglican and we will come under some specific authority, in time," he said.

Asked why he did not fight to keep the property, Fr. Kannapell said that under Michigan law, the Dennis Canon would have prevailed. He didn't see how he could win. "We walked away rather than fight," he said.

The priest told VirtueOnline that he felt blessed to give up something for the Lord.

Fr. Kannapell said the majority of the church and vestry was unanimous in leaving. The priest had been at the church over three years. Fr. Kannapell has a wife and three small children they are home-schooling.

Their new website can be found at: www.standrewsministry.org.

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