An Open Letter to the College of Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church

and Canon Anne Dyer Bishop elect of Aberdeen & Orkney.

January 5, 2018

Dear Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church,

We the undersigned, clerical and lay members of the United Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney, who hold a wide variety of views on the current matters of concern within the Church, wish to protest over the process by which the Episcopal Synod of the Church appointed a Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney. We acknowledge that Canon Dyer was not herself involved in the decision to appoint her simply accepting the Bishops' invitation. Our protest is not in any way personally directed at Canon Anne and should not be construed in that way.

The protest, which we make regretting its necessity, centres on the actions of the four Scottish Bishops currently in office in making an appointment which directly goes against the established wishes of the Diocese on the views it would hope that our new Bishop would hold, and minister to us from the perspective of them. The Bishops chose to ignore the opinion of the Diocesan Synod in a process that the Synod (later meeting as an Electoral Synod) was informed was designed to take account of the views of the Diocese. There has been a further failure by the Bishops to meet with the Standing Committee or Cathedral Chapter and give any explanation. All the Committee and Chapter know of the incoming Bishop is in one Press release and the Bishop-elect's Christmas letter to the Diocese. We believe that the action of the Episcopal Synod in making this appointment is divisive and also disrespectful of the Diocese as it goes against its wishes as expressed through the Diocesan Synod of March 2017.

Because this process and appointment is causing disquiet and division within the Diocese, senior clergy and members of the Diocesan Standing Committee requested an early meeting with the Bishop Elect - both to make her acquaintance and also to address this and other concerns. Such a meeting was refused, with Canon Anne saying that she looks forward to meeting the senior clergy, the Standing Committee, and many others in the Diocese, after she comes to Aberdeen and Orkney. The senior clergy and members of the Standing Committee remain willing to have a meeting with Canon Anne, and now re-iterate their urgent request for one.

The earliest indication of the level of disquiet in Aberdeen and Orkney Diocese came with the resignation of both the Dean of the Diocese and a Chapter Canon because of their unhappiness concerning the process. Others are considering similar action. There is a clear possibility that the actions of the Bishops will, among other things, have an impact on the recruitment of new clergy to a Diocese now so unsettled and which currently has a considerable number of vacant parish posts.

We understand that Canon Anne is not a car driver and this adds to the disquiet. She may have a plan as to how she will travel around the Diocese but, if so, we do not know of anyone within the Diocese who has been informed of it. The Diocese is largely rural and, in addition

to the City of Aberdeen, covers almost all of Aberdeenshire and parts of Moray as well as the many islands of Orkney and Shetland.

Whilst Canon 4 does empower the Bishops to make an appointment where the Preparatory Committee has not found the required number of candidates to present to the Electoral Synod of a Diocese, such appointments go directly against the tradition of our Church since the Aberdeen election of Bishop Archibald Campbell in 1721. It has long been our proud claim that a Scottish Diocese elects it's own bishop.   Therefore, although we recognise that it is not essential under the present Canon 4, we would ask that - even at this late stage - consent is sought for Canon Anne's appointment from the Electoral Synod of the Diocese. If this is not deemed to be a canonically possible action, then we would ask that Canon Anne consider withdrawing her acceptance. Such happened recently in the Church of England when the Suffragan Bishop of Burnley withdrew from his appointment as Bishop of Sheffield because of concerns that his ministry would be divisive.

For the future, we would hope that Electoral Synods in each Diocese will succeed in their task, but in the event of any appointment coming to the Bishops we would ask that – either formally through a change to Canon 4 or informally through agreement among the Bishops - the candidate proposed by them should be approved by the Electoral Synod of the Diocese. We will seek to have this issue discussed at the next General Synod as the action of the bishops in our case have caused unnecessary anguish and distress in a Diocese which had been largely united in its hopes and aspirations for the years ahead.

We write this letter with great sadness.

Stipendiary Clergy:

Revd Captain Gerry Bowyer   Mission Priest at Caf4e Missional Community

Revd David Dawson   Rector St Olaf's Kirkwall

Revd Ian Ferguson   Rector Westhill Community Church Aberdeen

Revd Alastair MacDonald   Rector St Drostane's Insch and All Saints Fyvie

The Rev'd Canon Dr Alexander E Nimmo, Rector of St Margaret of Scotland, Gallowgate.

Revd Richard O'Sullivan   Rector St Peter's, Peterhead, St John's Longside and St Drostan's Old Deer

Revd Canon John Walker   Synod Clerk, Rector the Donside Churches Group,

Other clergy:

Revd John Duthie   Assistant Honorary Priest, St Margaret of Scotland, Gallowgate.

Revd Carole Fox   Assistant Priest in Charge St Mary's Ellon

Revd Dr Duncan Heddle   Priest in Charge St Matthew's Bucksburn   University Chaplain

Revd Anne James   Recently retired from St Andrew's Alford

Revd Bob Spencer   Priest in Charge St Matthew's , Oldmeldrum

Revd Sylvia Spencer   Interim Priest in Charge, St Mary's Ellon

Revd David Wright   Assistant Honorary Priest, St Margaret of Scotland, Gallowgate.

Dr Hugh Dawson   Diocesan Standing Committee

Anne Harper   Diocesan Standing Committee

Avril Hern   Diocesan Warden of Lay Readers

Professor Alan MacInnes   Emeritus Professor of History, University of Strathclyde