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Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission

A Letter from The Consultation

TO: Bishops and Standing Committees of the Episcopal Church

RE: Bishop Elect Charles Holt, Diocese of Florida

June 2022

Executive Summary:

The Consultation appeals to diocesan Standing Committees and bishops to make careful discernment before voting to consent to the consecration of Charles Holt as Bishop Coadjutor of the Diocese of Florida. Please review his statements, actions, and affiliations as reported below.

Asking that you absorb this information before making a decision, The Consultation raises essential questions in three distinct and related areas:

1. **Truth-telling and reckoning on racism:** *Is the bishop-elect prepared to be a leader in our church's priority work of becoming Beloved Community?*
2. **Building a church in which there are no outcasts:** *Is the bishop-elect prepared to welcome LGBTQI members of the church in his diocese?*
3. **Full participation in the life of the whole church:** *Is the bishop-elect prepared to support the life and work of The Episcopal Church by paying the full diocesan assessment?*

We ask that you carefully consider your responses to these questions, in light of the text and linked information provided below. We pray for your work.

Peace and Blessings to you,

The Consultation joins our organizations with others who question the election of Charles Holt on May 14, 2022, as Bishop Coadjutor of the Diocese of Florida. We understand an objection to the election process has been filed. We will leave that objection to other bodies within the Church.

We ask instead that you review what Fr. Holt has stated, publicly, and his past affiliations, and then make an informed decision about your consent to his election. Please remember that Article II.2 of the Constitution of the Episcopal Church puts no restrictions on a Standing Committee's decision to consent or withhold consent for a bishop-elect.

As we stand in solidarity we are concerned, not just for the Diocese of Florida, but for the wider Church because of his election. We understand the desire to allow elections to stand, but in these times of rising white nationalism, attacks on vulnerable groups, and on democracy itself, does that desire outweigh racism or homophobia? When do we say we can no longer tolerate an election that tears at the fabric of our beliefs?

We would ask you to review and ask questions on three important issues:

1. Truth-telling and reckoning on racism: Is the bishop-elect prepared to be a leader in our church's priority work of becoming Beloved Community?

The following statements and writings offered by Fr. Holt raise serious issues:

- These videos from the bishop search walkabouts, found [here](#) and [here](#), show a surface-level and individualized understanding of racism rather than a deeper understanding or even acknowledgement of the systems of racial domination
- this letter to clergy in the Diocese of Central Florida objecting to local Black pastors meeting as a group (the African American Ministerial Association), posted a few days after the horrific white supremacy massacre at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston:

"It has been brought to my attention my words (quoted below), comparing black pastors to the dwarves in the Last Battle has caused offence to some. I said:

'As I have worked on racial reconciliation after Trayvon Martin's shooting. I have seen a lot. I want to be reconciled with all of my brothers and sisters in Christ. To me the main thing that prevents us from be united is the fact that we find our identity in the things of the flesh. In so many of our discussions with the black pastors, I have felt that they were like the dwarves in CS Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia: Last Battle: "We haven't let anyone take us in. The dwarves are for the dwarves! (Lewis 185) The dwarves cannot see that they are surrounded by freedom and a new world, but they do not want to be controlled and used. So, Aslan says "They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out." (Lewis 155-156). The defensiveness about the confederate flag has that feel to me too! Whether it is Episcopalians are for the Episcopalians, blacks are for the blacks, southerners are for the southerners, or Americans are for the Americans! All of these identities are to be counted as rubbish in order that we might gain Christ and be found in him.'

.... But my point is that the deep mistrust and suspicion is a major part of the problem. We will forever be locked in our safe huddles, if we are not willing to leave them. We cannot

continue to run others through racially biased grids of hurt and betrayal, otherwise every slight or disagreement can and will be perceived as racist and prejudiced as evidenced by the way this listserv discussion has devolved.”

[from a letter sent by Fr. Holt, June 26, 2015 to a listserv for the clergy of Central Florida; a portion of the letter was later reproduced on his [blog](#).]

- Fr. Holt’s statements regarding the Trayvon Martin murder:
 - that he did not feel comfortable fully participating in a rally because a sign called it a “lynching”
 - his objection to Black pastors meeting in Black-only spaces
 - his idea that to solve racism, we need to “encourage all of our congregations to build strong Christian ties with their nearest Black congregation neighbors in other Christian denominations”

All miss the mark. Of course, building relationships across differences including race, ethnicity, and class is good and necessary for us to do as Christians. But all of these statements fail to recognize the reality of systems of domination over hundreds of years in which nations and individuals grew wealthy through a system of racialized chattel slavery. These systems then continued to enforce a racial system of domination through Jim Crow and the mass terror campaign we call lynching that was allowed and even encouraged by police and state forces. That system is perpetuated through racialized mass incarceration and police violence even today.

To suggest that the murder of an unarmed Black child cannot or should not be understood in the historical context of lynching is naive. To suggest an equivalence between white groups defending the Confederate flag and Black pastors meeting together in solidarity is to misunderstand the dynamics of power and domination. To suggest that the path forward is for Episcopalians to reach out to Black churches of other denominations is to assume that to be Episcopalian is to be white; do we not have Black congregations in our church? And why should Black churches shoulder the first responsibility of teaching others about racism?

As our House of Bishops Theology Committee said so well in its recent report entitled [White Supremacy, the Beloved Community, and Learning to Listen](#):

“We wish to address the fact that ours is a culture that, both structurally and ideologically, privileges whiteness in virtually all facets of society. Privileging whiteness is a sin (Acts 10.34) and in talking about this as sin, we mean to underscore both its intimate, individual nature and its larger, structural power. Our collective corruption is deep. In order to purge it, we will need both sustained human effort and divine assistance.”

We would like to be assured that all our diocesan bishops, as our primary teachers and pastors, have a better-than-average understanding of this theological teaching if we are to live into our church’s stated commitment to become Beloved Community. Generally, in our church we don’t want to offend with hard questions; but whether a bishop can lead and teach on the issue of racism really matters. [The Presiding Officers’ Working Group on Truth-Telling, Reckoning, and Healing](#) is calling us into deeper work that will mean examining our church’s historic complicity in

racism. We need leaders who are to lead us into this examination and into the future. Digging deeper into Fr. Holt's understanding and teaching is not offensive.

2. Building a church in which there are no outcasts: Is the bishop-elect prepared to welcome LGBTQI members of the church in his diocese?

Fr. Holt's position on this question is addressed in the [questions raised](#) by the LGBTQI Deputy Caucus on the question of upholding 2018-B012 (allowing same-sex weddings in the diocese) as well as including queer people fully in the life of the diocese:

"While Fr. Holt has agreed to uphold General Convention Resolution 2018-B012 in his diocese, which is a minimum requirement, this does nothing to ensure even a base level of acceptable treatment for most LGBTQ+ Episcopalians and our allies. Would a Bishop Holt stymie the clergy of his diocese who were in favor of officiating same-sex weddings? Would he prohibit congregations from hiring an LGBTQ+ clergy or layperson? These forms of discrimination are the current reality in some dioceses that only meet the minimum requirements of 2018-B012. In 2009, Fr. Holt condemned the decision of the General Convention to uphold LGBTQ+ ordination, [stating publicly](#), "We are damaging the Body of Christ...This is not a faithful witness of the Gospel." At the 2012 General Convention, he opposed adding gender identity and expression to the non-discrimination canons. Would he uphold these canons now and champion LGBTQ+ people under his care?"

Fr. Holt was a founding director of the American Anglican Council in the 2000s when they were actively seeking to remove the Episcopal Church from membership in the Anglican Communion. A number of his co-directors have since joined breakaway churches. He has not stated whether he believes a bishop can legitimately lead a diocese out of the Episcopal Church.

Our concern about Fr. Holt's election is not that he expresses a more theologically conservative perspective, or that he cannot personally endorse same-sex marriage. As B012 states, "this Church continue[s] to honor theological diversity in regard to matters of human sexuality." The question we raise is not "does he share our theology?" but "will he abide by our shared polity?"

We would also ask: will he respect the dignity of every human being? Fr. Holt said in the walkabouts about LGBTQI Christians and their concerns about inclusion in the church:

"and by singularly focusing on one thing, we actually are a little off. And so it's not to say that those are not important, or those people that are represented by the letters are not important. They are super important. They are children of God who need to be welcomed into the life of our church. We have something to give to them and they have things and gifts to give to us. Don't hear me wrong. But if that is the only thing that we ever talk about all the time – which, sometimes it feels like it is – then we're a little sick. Because you can't talk about sex all the time. That's not healthy. It's not healthy for the LGBTQIA people for us to focus on them all the time."

He continued, when discussing LGBTQI church members:

“It’s not a commitment that says, ‘I can come in the doors, and you have to receive me and accept me just the way I am. And I’m never going to change,’” he said. “I had to give up a lot of things when I became a Christian. I was a frat boy at the University of Florida. And I was not living a godly lifestyle ... Over time, God dealt with the various things in my life that needed to be changed.”

The Episcopal Church has made clear, starting tentatively in 1979 and moving progressively over the years into more fulsome statements, the welcome to be extended to LGBTQI people as full members of the church. Yet in Fr. Holt’s statements we hear a normative “us” who are not LGBTQI versus “them” who are, in his view, focused mainly on talking about sex—a position far removed from our church’s long debates and clear statements on our full inclusion of queer Christians as whole people and full members of our body. Would LGBTQI members of his diocese be made welcome under this leadership? Would they be included in the councils and programs of the church?

3. Full participation in the life of the whole church: Is the bishop-elect prepared to support the life and work of The Episcopal Church by paying the full diocesan assessment?

In the walkabouts, Fr. Holt was asked this question:

“As of 2018, the national church requires an assessment of 15% of diocesan income. The Diocese of Florida currently gives a tithe 10% to the national church. Some are concerned that not paying the required 15% has negative consequences for the diocese. Others maintain that 10% is more than enough. What is your position on this?”

He responded:

“Well, I like 10%. I mean 10% is like the tithe and the Bible. So that’s a good number. I recognize that you know, being a team player and giving to the national church is good. I am of a philosophy that the closer that you can get the spending of the dollars to the renewed hearts of the Christians, that the more effective those dollars will be used for the kingdom of God. And so I’m generally kind of not a person that likes to see a lot of money go up to national things, whether it’s the federal government or the I want to drive dollars down into the grassroots of the people...”

We know that for many years, the payment of diocesan assessments to sustain the mission and life of the whole church has been, at times, politicized. That politicization resulted in dioceses that had no claim to financial hardship withholding all or some funds in protest against ordination of women or inclusion of LGBTQI members. As we move out of the years of intense theological and political debate that led some bishops and members to walk away from the church, it is important that we rebuild a sense of unity of purpose in which we are all invested. That commitment starts with paying our fair share, which has recently been reset to a more sustainable 15% to address diocesan requests that more money be kept available for local efforts.

We would regret standing committees and bishops consenting to the consecration of a bishop only to discover that the new bishop refuses to participate fully in the life and full unity of our church.

The questions raised here are not easy to address. We know Fr. Holt as a priest and a fellow human being, as a brother in Christ. We don't seek to attack him as a person. We do ask you to seriously consider his own statements, and our concerns, in terms of his potential leadership as a bishop of our church in these very challenging times. We ask that you seek further clarification and understanding, and prayerfully discern your consent to his election.

We pray for your work.

In Christ,

Members of the Steering Committee of The Consultation:

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About The Consultation:

The Consultation is a collaboration of progressive organizations (not individual members) within The Episcopal Church working to reveal God’s love for all people and to proclaim God’s promise of an abundant life. As a network of organizations, we facilitate social justice work both within and outside the church. Our mission stems from our commitment to live in and through Jesus Christ, in whom all things came into being (John 1:3). Through the witness of the Incarnate Christ, we are called to participate in God’s love and redeeming action for the world. This sets the scope of our work to all matters of justice—economic, political, social, and racial—pertaining to human existence and fullness of life for all creation.

As Jesus Christ came to bring good news to the poor and to let the oppressed go free (Luke 4:18-19), we embrace a preferential option with and for those who live at the margins of society. This calls us toward a stance of solidarity with and among those who have been excluded from church and society because of their race, ethnic origin, economic status, sex, ability, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, ordination status, and/or immigration status.

For more information on The Consultation, please visit our website at <https://www.theconsultation.org/>.

*Please note: In writing this letter, the Steering Committee of The Consultation excluded our current Chair, Deputy Laura A. Russell, Esq. (Diocese of Newark; Episcopal Network for Economic Justice), from discussion on this matter due to her role on the Ecclesiastical Court of Review, which will be addressing a procedural objection to the election filed by 37 clerical and lay deputies to the Diocese of Florida special convention. Deputy Russell is neither signatory nor party to this letter.

Links offered in this document

- Videos from bishop search walk-about:
All videos link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-kBIL4AVE1o6H9R59h7xVA>
 - [Charlie Holt – Questions on Race](#)
 - [Charlie Holt – Question on Human Sexuality](#)
 - [Charlie Holt – All Meet & Greet Answers](#)
- Fr. Holt's blog: <https://revcharlieholt.com/the-banner-of-christ-alone-2/>
- Bishops' Theology Committee report: *White Supremacy, the Beloved Community, and Learning to Listen*: https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/bbc_hob_theo_cmte_report_on_white_supremacy.pdf
- Presiding Officers' Working Group on Truth-Telling, Reckoning, and Healing: <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/31499>
- Questions raised by LGBTQI Deputy Caucus: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1udC5sIZ5C2yxysQgd1FK0Bu4KqoVejZOxEAuf6rrnFs/edit>
- Fr. Holt's statement condemning LGBTQI ordination: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/majority-of-episcopalians-favor-scrapping-ban-on-gay-ordination.html>