Response to the 2026 Proposed Canonical Amendment on Transfer and Permission to Serve

Bishop Alan Hawkins
September 12, 2026

Re: the Proposed Amendment Concerning Licensure

Dear brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Christ Our Hope,

In our canonical amendments review process, we are at the stage in which the Diocesan Council, along with the Bishop Ordinary, are weighing in on the proposed amendments.

As Anglicans, we are episcopally led and synodically governed. Therefore, along with the Colleges of Presbyters, Deacons, and Laity, the Diocesan Council, and the Constitution and Canons Committee, I am offering my input on our canonical amendments in anticipation of our Synod meeting. We have a canonical voting process at Synod, where each proposed amendment can be discussed, and each delegate can vote according to their beliefs and conscience. This is a healthy process that I fully expect and respect, accepting the conciliar voice and vote of the Synod on all canonical amendments.

I want to begin my response by thanking those who submitted the proposed amendment concerning licensure in the Diocese of Christ Our Hope. I know them well, and I am grateful for their commitment to truth, to the churches they serve, and to this diocese. I have also appreciated their respectful and thoughtful discussion of this matter with me. Though I am not in favor of the proposed amendment, I receive it with seriousness and want to address it thoughtfully, clearly, and pastorally.

In addition, I want to state my own convictions plainly. I firmly and wholeheartedly endorse the diocesan position that both men and women may serve as deacons in this diocese. I also wholeheartedly endorse both men and women, lay and ordained, preaching and teaching under proper authority. Additionally, I was present and participated in the foundational period of our diocesan formation, including the writing and approval of our canons.
My purpose in writing is to address the proposed amendment and remind us to remain faithful to the scriptures, our diocesan convictions, our canons, and our common life in the Anglican Church in North America.

I would hope, desire, and prefer that all our churches enthusiastically endorse our stated policy. The truth is that we do not have that kind of unity. Some churches endorse the stated position of our diocese, which dates from our founding, while other churches and clergy embrace a more traditional view regarding holy orders. There are also a number of churches that are thoroughly submitted to

the diocesan position but would prefer a less restrictive approach to holy orders for our sisters in ministry.

I urge the Synod of 2026 not to pass this amendment, which would prevent us from licensing female presbyters from other dioceses to serve in our diocese. I shall make my case for retaining this allowance.

Oaths of Conformity and Obedience

It is important to revisit and gain perspective on our oaths as clergy. The Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) has recognized diocesan freedom, responsibility, and authority to choose convictions and practices concerning the ordination of men and women to the diaconate and priesthood, while also affirming that only men can be consecrated as bishops in the ACNA. I am canonically subscribed by oath and without reservation to the Constitution and Canons of the ACNA. While I may not agree with every practice allowed across the province, those disagreements do not prevent me from staying in full communion with our province. For example, I am able to receive the Eucharist from any Priest validly ordained and/or received in the ACNA, regardless of their gender. However, this does not compromise my position on holy orders, as described in our Canons and practiced in our diocese.

I do not believe that diocesan choice is a fellowship-breaking issue within the ACNA, though it is certainly a matter of real tension. I have served in the Episcopal Church, AMiA, PEAR-USA, and the ACNA dating back to 1995. I have worked at all levels: the local church, the diocese, the province, and GAFCON. This tension has existed for decades in orthodox North American Anglicanism, as well as around the globe.

At ordination, clergy make solemn vows in the Oaths of Conformity and Canonical Obedience. It is important to clearly distinguish the intention and weight of these vows.

Before the vows are made, the Bishop addresses those being ordained as follows:

> *The Canons require that no one may be ordained a Deacon in the Church before* ***subscribing without reservation to the Oath of Conformity****. It is also required that each Ordinand* ***subscribe without reservation to the Oath of Canonical Obedience****. In the presence of this Congregation, I now charge you to make your solemn declaration of these oaths (BCP pg. 473 and 484).*

Then those being ordained make their vows, first saying the Oath of Conformity, which is in reference to the Church (the Anglican Church in North America). It states:

> *I, N.N., do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and to contain all things necessary to salvation, and I consequently hold myself bound to conform my life and ministry thereto, and therefore I do solemnly engage to conform to the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of Christ as* ***this Church*** *has received them (BCP pg. 473 and 484).*

By vowing to "conform to the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of Christ as this Church (the ACNA) has received them," and in response to the Bishop's charge, one subscribes without reservation to the Constitution and Canons of the Province, which govern the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the ACNA. Therefore, we should soberly recognize that in taking this oath, we are subscribing to a provincial order that permits diocesan choice concerning ordination to holy orders.

Following the Oath of Conformity, ordinands also make the required Oath of Canonical Obedience, by which they submit to the diocesan bishop and the canons of the diocese in which they are canonically resident.

The ordinal states:

> *And I do promise, here in the presence of Almighty God and of the Church, that I will pay true and* ***canonical obedience in all things lawful and honest*** *to the Bishop of _____, and his successors, so help me God (BCP pg. 474 and 485).*

By vowing to "pay true and canonical obedience in all things lawful and honest to the Bishop [of the diocese]," again in response to the Bishop's charge, one is to be submitted to the bishop and the canons of the diocese, which the Bishop is dutifully required to uphold.

Consequently, clergy of ACNA dioceses are to submit to the Constitution and Canons of their diocese. I fully accept that clergy may disagree with our Constitution and Canons, but their voluntary and willing submission is an admirable expression of life under spiritual and canonical authority. This means clergy should refrain from subversion or attempts to undermine the canons, from inauthentic posturing that hides or obscures their position while they remain submitted to the diocesan position, and from acting in an adversarial manner toward those within or outside the diocese over this matter.

It is worth restating that our Canons do not require agreement with our diocesan position – they require submission to it.

If there are those who believe the Provincial position on diocesan choice should be changed, there is a provincial constitutional amendment process available to pursue that change. However, I do not feel led to dedicate the requisite time and energy to that process.

I exhort all clergy in this diocese who have made ordination vows to revisit their understanding of provincial subscription and diocesan submission regarding holy orders. Moving forward, I also plan to strengthen and reinforce our teaching on this matter before ordination.

The Rector's Authority and Local Pastoral Discretion

I teach and uphold that the rector is the spiritual leader of the local church and is authorized to establish its theological direction, including second-order practices, customs, expressions, and local pastoral judgments, within the bounds of Scripture, the formularies, and the canons of the Church. Some matters simply require freedom in doctrine and practice at the local-church level. I am committed to discussing diocesan minimums, but my general posture is to allow substantial flexibility at the local level.

Correspondingly, the rector sets the tone and direction regarding licensure for ministry, as well as who is endorsed for ordination. I want to vigorously defend the rector, including his local authority and responsibility. For that reason, I believe the rector of a local church in our diocese should be able, where the canons permit and appropriate pastoral clarity has been provided, to limit ordination in that church to men or to limit preaching to presbyters. Conversely, where the canons permit and appropriate pastoral clarity has been provided, I believe the rector of a local church should also be able to receive a priest or deacon licensed from another diocese—including a female presbyter—to serve in that local church. The proposed amendment on licensure seeks to prohibit female priests in

other ACNA dioceses from being licensed to serve as priests, thereby limiting the Bishop Ordinary's ability to exercise episcopal accommodation for the varying practices within our diocese. The canons are clear about whom the Ordinary may ordain. I am asserting that the Ordinary should be able to license presbyters to serve in this diocese because licensure is a local, pastoral, and canonical accommodation. I desire the ability to exercise that discretion and, as articulated in this response, I will use it responsibly and thoughtfully for each situation.

Teaching the Diocesan Position While Honoring Local Practice

I will wholeheartedly teach our diocesan position on holy orders, and I expect our clergy to teach it as well. If DCOH sought to change its position on holy orders by either restricting ordination to one gender in the diaconate or requiring the ordination of both genders to the presbyterate, my ability to serve the diocese in good conscience would be hindered, and I would need to consider retiring from episcopal office in DCOH. Such a change would not be a mere pastoral accommodation; it would alter the established theological stance of this diocese.

However, my position is that the rector exercises a high degree of spiritual leadership in the local church. Therefore, a rector has the freedom, for example, to reach a biblical determination supporting the ordination of women as deacons while not allowing any deacons to preach. In another instance, a rector may determine that laypeople should not preach. In yet another case, a rector may reach a biblical determination supporting the ordination of women to the presbyterate and therefore choose to welcome a licensed female presbyter from another ACNA diocese. In all cases, the rector currently has the authority to maintain that local practice, provided it is exercised pastorally and within the bounds of the canons. In each case, the rector must understand that his position varies from the consensually established diocesan practice.

However, if a rector believes that female presbyters should be canonically resident in this diocese, he and the church he serves will need to consider whether they should remain canonically resident in this diocese or transfer elsewhere. If a transfer is desired, that would not be a matter of conflict or tension for me as the Bishop Ordinary. I would send them with my blessing.

A Proposed Alternative

If the canons of the Diocese of Christ Our Hope do not restrict the Bishop Ordinary's prerogative on the licensure of female presbyters canonically resident in other ACNA dioceses to serve in this diocese, my intent would be to allow such licensure with care and discernment. Since my tenure as Bishop Ordinary, I have consistently made it clear that I support female presbyters from other dioceses serving as licensed presbyters in our diocese. My position has not changed.

Some might make the case that I am attempting to change our official diocesan position on holy orders, but that is not the case. As I mentioned above, I am firmly subscribed to our diocesan position on holy orders. This would not change the diocesan position, but provide a limited, local, pastoral accommodation under the authority of the rector and within the boundaries established by the bishop and the canons.

While our canons are clear about who the Ordinary may ordain, they are ambiguous regarding who the Ordinary may license. Thus, I agree with the need for clarity on this matter, but I disagree with the proposed amendment as the way to achieve said clarity.

If the synod rejects this amendment, my intent would be to propose a canonical amendment next year to clarify and preserve the Ordinary's prerogative to license female presbyters from other dioceses to serve in this diocese. I would require the local church to undertake a full and thorough process of discussion so that the congregation understands the decision, the reasons for it, and its limits. I desire that anyone serving in this way feel genuinely welcome as a fellow Christian while serving within a clear framework of healthy boundaries. It is important to understand what our current licensure policy stipulates.

- Licenses for clergy canonically resident in other dioceses are granted only for service at a specific, local church under the authority of that church's rector.
- A licensed priest cannot serve as rector in this diocese unless that priest transfers canonically into the Diocese of Christ Our Hope and is otherwise eligible under the Constitution and Canons of this diocese (Title I.7.1.1). This provision does not authorize the canonical transfer of female presbyters into this diocese as presbyters. If a female presbyter transfers into DCOH, she would be required to accept canonical residence as a deacon.
- A licensed member of the clergy is not admitted to the respective college by virtue of licensure.
- Licensed clergy must renew their licensure annually by submitting an application and ministry report to the Bishop Ordinary, with the rector's support. The Bishop Ordinary must approve the renewal.
- Licensed clergy remain canonically resident in their originating diocese. Though there is shared episcopal oversight between their bishop and myself, they ultimately belong to another diocese. This is how I safeguard my own convictions on this matter.

Articulated Concerns

Objection 1: Allowing the licensure of female presbyters will confuse people in the pews. We belong to a Province that permits diocesan choice. Admittedly, that reality creates a measure of confusion, and it is important that we work toward clarity. Nevertheless, by clearly stipulating the framework, limits, and boundaries of our diocesan position and licensure policy, I believe we can increase understanding and unity rather than diminish them. We can reduce confusion by teaching clear principles, including our diocesan position, while conveying generosity in our posture. This teaching can occur through vestry orientations, local membership classes, diocesan onboarding, educational platforms, and events.

Objection 2: It is disingenuous to serve in a diocese with a clear conviction while desiring something different. As stated above, while I may not agree with every practice permitted across the Province, those disagreements do not prevent me from remaining in full communion within the ACNA. I do not desire a different position on holy orders, and my position on licensure does not require such a change. Rather, I desire that we remain firmly established in our current diocesan position on holy orders while adopting a posture on licensure that recognizes the broader Province in which we reside. Such a posture would provide pastoral and local exceptions that honor the rector's position, embrace the church and her people as valued members of the diocese, and clearly communicate the boundaries of licensure.

Objection 3: This is a first-order, fellowship-breaking act of disobedience. I recognize that some colleagues may feel this way. However, I respectfully disagree. I do not believe it to be a first-

order, fellowship-breaking act of disobedience. As addressed above, all ACNA clergy must subscribe without reservation to the Constitution and Canons of the ACNA, which allow diocesan choice concerning the ordination of women. By coming under the authority of this Province, clergy agree that this is not a first-order issue and vow to remain in fellowship with those who disagree with them.

Objection 4: This amendment will affect churches, jobs, and relationships. This is true, but I believe that will be the case regardless of whether the amendment passes. In either scenario, churches, jobs, and relationships will be affected. Therefore, I appeal to everyone in this diocese to seek a peaceful and gracious way to remain together within clear boundaries, honoring one another's convictions while providing pastorally sensitive options for local practice. I believe this framework gives our diocese the best opportunity to remain fully together, speak forthrightly, and continue our kingdom work.

Objection 5: Couldn't this be resolved if rectors were not given so much authority on this matter?
Yes, or at least it would reduce the tension within our diocese. However, revoking that authority from rectors is not something I would entertain. I am firmly committed to the exercise of episcopal spiritual and ecclesiastical authority as defined by *bene esse*, which describes the episcopacy as beneficial to the Church but not essential. In addition, I fully support the godly freedom implicit in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888, which affirms a commitment to the historic episcopacy while allowing it to be locally adapted. That is a key aspect of Anglican orders. The Quadrilateral recognizes that even episcopal ministry must be locally adapted.

It is in this same spirit and ecclesiastical construct that I believe it best to extend a similar form of governance to the local church and its rector, under the authority of Scripture, the formularies, and the canons of the Church.

Conclusion
My desire is for clarity without coercion, conviction without fracture, and faithfulness to our canons without division. I desire that we remain honest about our theological convictions while also making room, within proper canonical limits, for pastoral sensitivity and local discernment.

I ask all of us to speak charitably, listen carefully, and seek the peace and edification of the Church. May the Lord give us wisdom, humility, and courage as we discern how best to walk together in truth and love.

I request that the Bishop Ordinary retain prerogative over licensure, thereby allowing churches to exercise their local preferences regarding licensed clergy within the clear boundaries of the Canons and diocesan practice.

Bishop Alan