
Diocese expels Roanoke priest

Episcopalian seen as too conservative

By Julia Duin
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A Roanoke Episcopal priest whose parish has been charged with being too conservative has been formally ejected from the Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Virginia, he was informed yesterday.

In a letter faxed to the Rev. Quigg Lawrence, 40, pastor of the Church of the Holy Spirit, diocesan Bishop Neff Powell informed the priest he had been "inhibited" as of May 19 from performing priestly functions such as weddings, funerals, confirmations, confessions and baptisms.

After six months, the bishop said, Mr. Lawrence would be "deposed," or defrocked.

"I expected it," Mr. Lawrence said yesterday. Comparing himself to the newly retired Bishop John Shelby Spong of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, N.J., he added, "I'm disgusted."

"I'm particularly perplexed they'd allow a man who disavows the entire [Nicene] Creed to remain a bishop in good standing in the church and they kick me out and I believe in every part of the Creed."

Bishop Spong, in many books and lectures, has denied cardinal Christian doctrines, such as the Resurrection and the Virgin Birth.

Bishop Powell could not be reached for comment yesterday, but relations between him and Church of the Holy Spirit have been frosty ever since the church voted March 2 to leave the southwestern Virginia diocese and join a more compatible one based in Rwanda.

Bishop Powell's fax charged Mr. Lawrence with "abandoning the communion" of the Episcopal Church. Mr. Lawrence says he asked to be released to the Episcopal Province of Rwanda, but the bishop refused permission. It is not clear whether the priest will be subject to an ecclesiastical trial.

Culture, et cetera