

Statement to the Diocese of Springfield

From

The Rt Rev'd Daniel H. Martins

I need to be clear that my intention in attaching my name to the *amicus* brief was in no way to affect the outcome of that case. As the Bishop of Springfield, it is no concern of mine how a property dispute in Texas is resolved. If my action has the effect of aiding one side or the other, that is, from my perspective, an immaterial consequence. Rather, I took the action I did with the best interests of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Springfield, as nearly as I can discern them, at heart. My principal concern was to not leave unchallenged the assertion that the Episcopal Church is a unitary hierarchical organism at all levels, and that the dioceses are entirely creatures of General Convention. I viewed signing the *amicus* brief as consistent with my vow to uphold the doctrine and discipline of the Episcopal Church.

I certainly signed on reluctantly and reservedly. As a matter of general principle, I am opposed to litigating church disputes in secular courts. Lots of scripture passages are challenging to interpret, but I don't think I Corinthians 10 is one of them. "Why not rather be defrauded?", St Paul says. Moreover, I realize how my action could be construed as one bishop interfering in the affairs of a fellow bishop's diocese, which is a big No-No. So I had to make a judgment call, and my judgment, after reflection and prayer, was that I had to join the intervention, because to allow such a false read of TEC polity to potentially help form legal precedent constitutes a danger that could bring harm to the church for decades to come, and resisting this outcome trumps my other concerns.

As an illuminating case in point, I would draw your attention to a resolution we will be considering next week in Indianapolis, A101, *Convene Consultation on Diocesan Effectiveness*. This resolution asks for a study of "the potential for re-aligning dioceses to maximize their effective witness and ministry." While this may be a relatively small thing in itself, and might actually make good sense, if the top-down (with General Convention as the "top") hierarchical model is accepted, then it sets in motion a potential chain of events that could end with General Convention imposing redrawn boundaries on dioceses without their consent. At a time when the Episcopal Church is shrinking, especially in more sparsely populated areas of the country, this is not idle speculation. If the interpretation of our polity offered by the attorneys for the Episcopal Church in Quincy and Fort Worth is allowed to prevail, there is nothing at all that could prevent such a scenario. It's one thing if two or more dioceses decide they want to shuffle and re-deal the

cards voluntarily. It's quite another for that to be imposed on them. It would not be anything that our forebears in this church would recognize.

I respect those who have a contrary understanding of our polity. While it is always possible that I could be mistaken—it has happened several times—I am at present confident in the correctness of the view I hold. I recognize that taking this discussion into the secular courts certainly escalates tension and raises the stakes, which is regrettable. My chief concern is that a very particular property dispute in Texas not become the vehicle for supporting an erroneous understanding of the polity of the church to which I am committed, the constitution and canons of which I have freely vowed to uphold, and to which my diocese freely accedes.