

**A PATH FORWARD**  
Metropolitan Determination and Path Forward  
from Misconduct Complaints  
against the Bishop of Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits  
by the Former Dean of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist

13 June 2025

Introduction

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## **Introduction**

Twenty weeks have passed since John Organ, bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits, revoked the license for ministry of Catherine Short, dean of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, Corner Brook. That act, and the way Bishop Organ explained his decision in remarks that became widely shared, set off a chain of unhappy consequences. It has brought grief to the bishop and the dean, divided the Cathedral family, and impaired the unity and Christian witness of the wider diocesan community.

In March Dean Short ("the dean") lodged a four-part complaint against Bishop Organ ("the bishop") under the Misconduct Policy of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada. The Province of Canada (its name is historical) is a loose grouping of the seven easternmost Anglican dioceses. Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits is one of them. As the most senior ("metropolitan") among its diocesan bishops, I am the Province's titular head.

Mr Jack Walsworth, the Province's Misconduct Officer (who is also its Safe Church Officer) thought the dean's complaints fell under its Misconduct Policy and I authorized him to investigate. In doing so I weighed two questions. One was whether the bishop was more fittingly investigated under his own diocese's Safe Church Charter. Such an eventuality is provided for in other dioceses and

would have been appropriate here. However, Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits's lengthy Charter consists of worthy generalizations and thoughtful discussions but is deficient on the nuts and bolts of investigation. It cannot be applied practically without some future amending. The Provincial Misconduct Policy is more detailed in that regard. Specifically, a misconduct investigation is to be conducted by a committee. That committee would prepare a report and pass it to the Misconduct Complaints Officer (Mr Walsworth) for review and assessment. The Misconduct Complaints Officer would offer written recommendations for resolution of the complaint, based on the findings presented in the report, to the metropolitan for the metropolitan's determination of resolution of the complaint. Unfortunately, the Province of Canada has not populated the committee in question, and calling together a large council to cure such a detail would have delayed things unreasonably. Accordingly, to avoid further delay and scandal I asked Mr Walsworth to undertake the investigation and report back to me directly.

Mr Walsworth invested great diligence in bringing to light relevant facts in order to do justice to the complaints and in the hope that good might come of it for the dean, bishop, Cathedral and Diocese. Documents telling the central story of the dispute are few and undisputed: the bishop's letter of revocation, emails exchanged between dean and bishop in the letter's immediate aftermath, and the bishop's recorded address of explanation, made a few days later to the Cathedral congregation. All of these were appended to the dean's complaints, though the prepared text of the bishop's Cathedral remarks was added by him. The resulting Walsworth report runs to 129 pages. In the course of that investigation:

"Thirty-two people were interviewed, some of them twice. The complainant and the respondent were interviewed four times each. Over 3,200 minutes elapsed in interview time. ... Interviewing is an activity known to help people heal from emotional trauma caused by a situation. Many hours were spent listening, probing, empathizing and caring."

I record my deep gratitude to Jack Walsworth and to all who participated in this process.

As metropolitan, my role under the Misconduct Policy is to consider the investigation of facts and reach a determination on the resolution of the dean's complaints against the bishop. Following this I will add what I believe should be done for the good of the Anglican witness in Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits.

### **Metropolitan's Determination of Misconduct Complaints**

On the complaint that the bishop committed economic misconduct towards the dean, I find that the complaint was not substantiated.

On the complaint that the bishop committed discriminatory practice towards the dean in relation to her employment status, I find that the complaint was clearly substantiated.

On the complaint that the bishop committed emotional misconduct towards the dean, I find that the complaint was clearly substantiated.

On the complaint that the bishop bullied the dean, I find that the complaint was clearly substantiated.

### **Metropolitan's Path Forward**

These twenty weeks have been most difficult for the two parties, for the Diocese of Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits and for the wider Church. There are strained "bonds of affection" within the Cathedral and diocesan communities. Much humble, prayerful work will be needed to heal the wounds. My own fervent prayer is that all involved accept the path towards reconciliation that I am pointing out here. Its elements will be familiar to the bishop and the dean.

For the promotion of Christian reconciliation and healing, I have determined that the following actions should be taken.

1. That on or before 30 June 2025 the bishop re-license the dean for ministry as dean and rector/incumbent of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, with all corresponding responsibilities, privileges, remuneration and employment benefits.
2. That the intermediary between bishop and dean, to the extent one may be useful, be the senior cleric formerly agreed.

3. That the bishop, having already tendered to the Metropolitan his resignation effective 1 October 2025, and the Metropolitan having accepted it, complete the final three months of his episcopate while on sabbatical leave.
4. That the bishop provide apologies to the dean, the Cathedral congregation and his Diocese for the grief and distraction his hasty actions brought.
5. That, should there come a point when the vestry of the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist or the Diocesan Synod executive thinks it helpful, Mr Jack Walsworth visit to share his perspective on the larger truths and contributing factors discerned in his interviews.

### **Some Lessons Learned in Navigating the Complaints**

1. The Diocese of Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits has a Safe Church Charter addressing the prevention and redress of misconduct arising in a Church context. However, this document provides no process for investigation of complaints. I suggest the Diocesan Synod consider adapting and adopting the model Safe Church Regulation and its model Misconduct Policy as found on the website of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada. It and its predecessor have been available for use since 2013. One of its merits is allowing for investigation of complaints against a diocesan bishop him/herself. When adopted, it should be placed on the diocesan website.
2. A misconduct/safe church policy is of limited value without periodic, compulsory training for license-holders and the volunteers in leadership roles. Most Canadian dioceses have access to a valuable on-line training course developed by their insurance provider. The Diocese of Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits should seek access to such a convenient program.
3. This episode in the life of the Church has revealed how unaware even senior, long-serving clerics can be as to (1) the interaction of canons of the diocesan, provincial and national synods, and (2) the interaction of diocesan-level misconduct policies with the various canons of church discipline. Lay people are even less likely to be able to navigate their way. Further, there is essentially no one whose role it is to explain things; church lawyers (chancellors) are volunteers who advise leaders but not

people in general. For this reason, the General Synod's website should host a written guide explaining how the jurisdictions of the Anglican Church's three levels of governance interact, particularly in discipline. Such a church-discipline-for-dummies guide would be of value to many.

4. Similarly, governance of Corner Brook's Cathedral of St John the Evangelist as between bishop, dean and vestry is understood imperfectly and may need review. Even a policy document on roles, duties and authorities of clergy and senior lay leaders would help clarify expectations of the diocesan bishop and prevent awkward tensions and disagreements.

### **Summary of Facts and Analysis**

Before summarizing the main events and lines of reasoning underpinning my determination of the dean's misconduct complaints, I offer three observations.

1. In a strict sense am I writing for the two parties most closely involved. However, as this determination may become read in the broader diocesan community, I am mentioning or explaining things of which the bishop and the dean themselves need no reminding.
2. Every Anglican engaged in public ministry, whether lay or ordained, may do so only by permission of the relevant diocesan bishop. Permission takes the form of a license. A diocesan bishop may revoke that license at any time for any reason. No one has authority to overturn that decision. The sole exception to this revocability is where the reason for revocation is that the license-holder has committed a disciplinable ecclesiastical offence under Canon XVIII of the General Synod. (In such a case the license-holder must be charged, tried and convicted before the license is removed.) In the present case, the bishop had no disciplinary intention in revoking the dean's license. Accordingly, only he or a successor could re-license the dean. A misconduct complaint process has no authority to make it otherwise.
3. Some people suggested that Mr Walsworth investigate the bishop's dealings with license-holders over the course of his whole episcopate. The idea was that clerics had left the diocese because of their treatment by the bishop or in reaction against his "tight ship" style of administration. As a long-serving bishop myself, I know that clerics move from one diocese to

another for a wide variety of vocational and personal reasons. No data exist to show that, all things considered, this happens more often in Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits than elsewhere. Such an inquiry would be beyond the capacity of a single investigator in a time-limited process.

#### Events in January 2025

The bishop's episcopate in Western Newfoundland and Labrador Straits began in 2018. By the time of events giving rise to these misconduct complaints he was an experienced bishop. In 2019 he appointed the dean to lead the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist. At that point she was only about three years ordained, and soon her life was overtaken by a situation requiring long-term leave. Nevertheless, her pastoral gifts were rated highly.

The bishop was less satisfied with the dean's team-leading skills in relation to her senior Cathedral colleagues. Documentary evidence illustrated his concern. His own relations with the dean also caused dissatisfaction. He found her defensive in discussing perceived problems and, as he would tell her Cathedral congregation, passive-aggressive in their dealings.

For her part, the dean's estimation of the bishop suffered when, while she was recovering from a serious illness and facing further treatment that would necessitate leave, he pressured her into returning to work. That was in 2020, but her good opinion of him never recovered. The dean also found the bishop too ready to interfere in her administration of the Cathedral. Any diocesan bishop is apt to have a special relationship with his or her own cathedral, but in this case the sense that the bishop was too close for comfort, and too willing to get involved in management decisions that were rightly the dean's, was likely magnified by his office (and the dean's) being close by and in the same building.

On Tuesday 14 January 2025 the Cathedral "vestry" came together at the bishop's request for the purpose of familiarizing people with the diocese's Safe Church Charter and to talk about a healthy model for conflict and disagreement resolution. Meeting minutes show the bishop referring to the Cathedral's "toxic culture". When pressed, he declined to be specific and, as several who were present recalled, threatened legal action, though it is unclear what about. The dean felt triggered by a different comment, as it reminded her of an aspect of her

own medical leave situation of some years earlier. She left the meeting prematurely and upset. To the bishop, the dean's withdrawal was another instance of her tendency to avoid conflict rather than discuss matters. In reflecting on this incident and their entire history, the bishop concluded that he and the dean were unable to work together constructively.

The following day the Cathedral vestry met privately and resolved to seek a clarifying meeting with the bishop. It was likely on this same day that the bishop advised the metropolitan that he was thinking of, or going to, revoke his dean's license for ministry. The metropolitan reminded him of the relevant General Synod canon. At 10:43 the next morning (16 January) the bishop sent his diocesan chancellor the draft of a letter to the dean revoking her license for ministry. When the chancellor had not responded by 2:45 pm he sent the dean his letter of revocation anyway, expressing deep sadness. The letter was brief. Its essence was: "I have come to the difficult decision of revoking your license to exercise ministry in the Diocese of Western Newfoundland, effective January 16, 2025. This is a painful but necessary decision."

Following the dean's receipt of the bishop's letter a number of emailed messages passed between them. The dean was startled and angry, tending towards unresponsiveness as time passed (as her friends started making their own views known). The bishop's stance evolved from the absolute cast of his original letter to, within an hour, willingness to work again with the dean if she would change. He continued in this vein (the dean was unreceptive), and early the next morning he re-emphasized that there was a window of opportunity for them to reconcile and that his door for that was open: "If you are willing to go forward in a more constructive way, I am here. I am available today. After today, my removal of license will be final." The dean let this deadline pass, so early the next morning (Saturday 18 January) the bishop made a further "window of opportunity" offer. He would withdraw his revocation on the understanding "that you agree to work with me and the model available to us, so that all of us together can create a culture at the cathedral that ensures conflict resolution".

Then came Sunday 19 January at the Cathedral in Corner Brook. Typically, congregations view loss of their priest as unwelcome news, but here the bishop faced acknowledging that the dean had not been reposted elsewhere but had her

ministry terminated. He came to morning service with prepared remarks outlining his dissatisfactions with the dean but offering to re-license her if she would work on her conflict resolution skills and anger management. These remarks began with mention of the negative role social media often play. He spoke knowing that his 16 minutes of prepared text and, as it turned out, seven minutes of reluctant back-and-forth with congregants would be broadcast live on the Cathedral's Facebook page as part of a Sunday service. In the few days that posting was up, it attracted more than twelve thousand views. Regrettably, a privately-recorded version remains available publicly on the internet.

When the bishop's remarks became viewable by the whole diocese, discord became more pronounced. The Cathedral vestry resigned and the dean's sympathizers staged public demonstrations in central Corner Brook, gave media interviews and wrote the acting primate, metropolitan, national House of Bishops and many others calling for the bishop himself to be investigated, disciplined, suspended or removed from office. In March the dean asked the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada to investigate the bishop for misconduct.

#### The Misconduct Charges

The dean complained that the bishop had violated the Provincial Misconduct Policy in relation to her in four ways:

1. Economic Misconduct
2. Discriminatory Practice: Employment Status
3. Emotional Misconduct
4. Bullying

Mr Jack Walsworth investigated and concluded that there was no evidence of Economic Misconduct but found convincing evidence of the other three as they are defined in the Misconduct Policy. I agree with his finding regarding Economic Misconduct.

**DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICE: EMPLOYMENT STATUS** Earlier I mentioned that anyone engaged in Anglican ministry must be licensed for that work by the relevant diocesan bishop, that the bishop can withdraw that license at any time for any non-disciplinary reason, and that no one has authority to overrule a



bishop who does so. That said, Canon XVII of the General Synod requires a bishop, prior to withdrawing a license, to take certain steps:

- Meet the licensee to share the reasons for the projected revocation, consider alternatives and, if possible, agree on financial compensation.
- If the licensee did not agree on the proposed compensation during the meeting with the bishop and the bishop still intends to revoke, the bishop establishes a “commission” to consider the circumstances of the proposed revocation, confer with bishop and licensee and give its advice to both.
- If the licensee continues to reject the proposed compensation, the financial question goes to arbitration, though the revocation itself cannot be challenged.

These steps serve several good purposes. Foremost among them is slowing down the process so that bishops think, and think again, about whether the revocation should go forward. They exist to prevent bishops acting rashly. Canon XVII makes them obligatory.

The bishop’s letter of revocation to the dean shows awareness of Canon XVII; it quotes part of it. However, the bishop took none of the required pre-revocation procedural steps. He did what was permitted but not in the way permitted. Mr Walsworth saw the bishop’s denying the dean her limited Canon XVII rights as acting towards her in a discriminatory manner on a basic employment matter. Clearly, this was so.

**EMOTIONAL MISCONDUCT**      The Misconduct Policy defines emotional misconduct as an abuse of authority wherein one person behaves unacceptably in a manner that diminishes another person’s identity, personal dignity and/or self worth. Abrupt dismissal from a senior and visible position in the Church, and by extension in the community, would diminish most people’s sense of personal dignity and self-worth. Whatever the impact on the dean of her sudden termination, the terms in which the bishop accounted for his decision to the Cathedral’s congregation and, indirectly, to anyone with access to the internet, compounded the harm greatly.

Whether there was validity in the bishop’s assessment of the dean’s administrative record at the Cathedral or of their own strained working

relationship is not the issue: the bishop's review -- in what was essentially a public setting -- of her perceived managerial lapses and personality traits was simply wrong. His words were not chance comments blurted out under provocation but part of a prepared text. Mr Walsworth writes:

"Aspects of his commentary were sensitive and personal to the complainant in both nature and content. A reasonable person would view this public outpouring by the respondent, whether intentional or not, to seriously diminish the complainant's reputation and her personal dignity. ... [I]t is the opinion of this author that there is sufficient evidence the complainant did experience emotional trauma because of actions and words by the respondent, specifically on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Also, it is the opinion of this author that a reasonable person would experience emotional trauma should s/he find her/himself in a similar situation as the complainant."

I agree with him that the dean's complaint of emotional abuse is established clearly.

**BULLYING** The Misconduct Policy defines bullying as repeated incidents of negative behaviours by one person towards another person or persons so as to cause physical, sexual, economic, social, emotional or psychological harm.

In complaining that the bishop bullied her, the dean was in effect alleging that his conduct towards her in the period between the Safe Church Charter meeting and the pastoral statement at the Cathedral caused her emotional and/or psychological harm. That would be a typical human response to what happened, and the dean's correspondence with the bishop in the wake of his revocation letter shows this. But does the bishop's behaviour towards the dean amount to "repeated" incidents of negative conduct? Mr Walsworth thought so. I agree with this conclusion, though not with every aspect of his analysis. The episode of 2020, in which the bishop brought pressure on the dean to (as she saw it) return to work prematurely, seems too far in the past to fall into the category of "repeated", given that all other incidents cited are from 2025. The Misconduct Policy's limitation period is twelve months.

Turning to those more recent developments:

1. The central events of January began with a vestry meeting in which the bishop characterized as “toxic” the climate in the Cathedral in a way people understood as a negative reflection on the dean.
2. Then came his hasty letter of revocation, with life-changing impact for its recipient and her family.
3. It was followed by a number of offers to restore her license and livelihood on the “understanding” (that is, on the condition) that the dean try to make desired changes in manner and take anger management counselling. In one emailed message (15 January) she was advised that she must agree to his terms that same day or the revocation would become truly “final”.
4. The bishop’s pastoral statement at the Cathedral repeated many times that the door was open to the dean’s readmission. However, now he spoke publicly of several occasions when what he saw as the dean’s personal ways, and in particular what he described as her “anger” problem, had prevented satisfactory outcomes.

I see occasions 1 and 2 as clear incidents of the bishop’s negative behaviour towards the dean, causing her foreseeable emotional or psychological harm. In particular, the revocation letter was drastically harmful in taking away her position and livelihood in a moment, without affording her the careful process obligated by General Synod Canon XVII.

Occasions 3 and 4 – the repeated but conditional offers to reappoint -- are more complex. If the bishop wanted the dean back, albeit on his own terms, was he not entitled to tell her that via multiple emails and in a public appeal? Reasonable people, characterizing these communications as a whole, might reach differing conclusions. In my view, two specific features fall within the pattern of bullying: telling a startled dean that she might have her license back only if she accepted his terms that very day; and discussing her alleged managerial lapses and perceived problematic personality in a public forum.

I conclude that the bishop bullied the dean through repeated negative acts. Those were on occasions 1 and 2 as identified above and in aspects of occasions 3 and 4.

David, Canada