



April 3, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I want to share with you what will be unfolding over the next week at St. John's Episcopal Church in Fallbrook. As a preface to this, permit me to provide a bit of background.

In July of 2007, the rector, wardens, and Vestry of St. John's Episcopal Church made a decision which was affirmed by more than half the members of the church to leave the Episcopal Church. They believed that it was in their right to do this not simply as individuals but as a parish and as a religious corporation. These actions were contrary to the ordination vows of the clergy and the canons of the church. I have consistently affirmed the rights of individuals to leave the Episcopal Church, but maintained that parishes are a creation of the diocese and cannot unilaterally take leave of that affiliation. For that reason, I acknowledged that the lay and ordained leadership of St. John's Episcopal Church had abandoned their office. Because of their failure to relinquish the parish, a lawsuit was required to assert the rights of new Vestry of St. John's Episcopal Church.

Judgment has now been entered in favor of the Vestry of St. John's Episcopal Church, and on Thursday, April 2nd, Canon Smith and Vice Chancellor Getz met with representatives of the dissident group. At that time, they took possession of the parish and corporation. While this is a significant moment in the life of this parish, it is equally important for the whole diocesan community. Because of the faithfulness and dedication of the Episcopalians in Fallbrook, St. John's Episcopal Church will continue to rebuild its ministry to a place of vibrancy and life.

At this particular time, they deserve not only our thanks but our support. With the encouragement of Dean Richardson, I am departing from my custom of celebrating Easter at our Cathedral and instead will be at St. John's Episcopal Church as they celebrate the return to their historic worship place and renew their ministry.

I ask that each congregation of the diocese send representatives to join in this Easter moment. The service will be at 10:00 a.m. St. John's Episcopal Church is located at 434 Iowa Street, in Fallbrook. Please be intentional about building these teams and email Canon Smith at canonsmith@edsd.org to let us know of your presence. It is our plan to recognize participating congregations on the day and in future communications.

Finally, a word about those in Fallbrook who have chosen to remain outside of our fellowship: I am sure that this is a very challenging time for these individuals. Regrettably, they based their decisions on flawed legal positions and indeed a great deal of misinformation about the Episcopal Church. My continued prayer for them is two-fold. I pray that they will join with us in repairing the church. And in all cases, I pray that they have a Christ-filled and generous spiritual life.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James R. Mathes".

The Rt. Rev. James R. Mathes
Bishop