



**ANGLICAN CHURCH
IN NORTH AMERICA**

MEMORANDUM

TO: 2026 ACNA Provincial Council Delegates
FROM: The Rev. Cn. Andrew M. Rowell, Esq.
Chair of the Governance Task Force and Director of Anglican Governance
Ministries, American Anglican Council
RE: Final Version of the Revision of Title IV of the ACNA Canons: An
Introduction and Summary
DATE: May 1, 2026

The Governance Task Force (GTF) of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) is honored to present to the ACNA these revised Title IV disciplinary canons. These comprehensive revisions to our disciplinary processes represent over three years of labor and are presented to the province with the unanimous vote and approval of the GTF. It is our hope that these will be approved at Provincial Council and ratified by Provincial Assembly in June 2026.

History of these revisions

In 2023, under the direction of our former archbishop, the Rt. Rev. Foley Beach, the GTF was charged to review and suggest improvements to the disciplinary systems of the province. Accordingly, in the summer of 2023, two subcommittees were formed under the auspices of the GTF. The Title I subcommittee worked on how dioceses must respond to reports of misconduct, while the Title IV subcommittee developed a full revision to the provincial disciplinary canons. Each subcommittee's work was closely reviewed and approved by the GTF for release to the province for comment and input.

Finalized Title I revisions were adopted by Provincial Council 2024 and immediately ratified thereafter by Provincial Assembly.

The Title IV revisions released today have gone through the most extensive period of comment and revision ever undertaken by the ACNA, including the receipt of hundreds of written comments, three public townhalls, and many direct meetings with stakeholder groups, including chancellors, bishops, clergy groups, and victim advocacy groups.

After the initial two years of work within the GTF, a full year of public feedback occurred as follows:

- Version 1.0 was released for public feedback on July 29, 2025;
- Version 2.0 was released for public feedback on October 28, 2025;
- Version 3.0 was released for public feedback on February 2, 2026; and
- Version 3.1 was released for public feedback on February 16, 2026.

The GTF is immensely grateful for the tremendous amount of feedback received and for the earnest engagement in the process from every corner of the ACNA. This revision has improved at each iteration because of such engagement and will continue to be refined going forward by the same commitment.

Today's release

Today, May 1, 2026, the GTF releases the following:

- A final version of revised Title IV for consideration at Provincial Council 2026;
- A final version of revised Title IV with extensive comments providing an overview of how each canon will operate;
- A version of the final revision to Title IV with brief comments explaining the rationale for revisions between Version 3.1 and the final version;
- A redline comparing Version 3.1 with the final version; and
- Several flow charts and historical documents.

The need for reform

The current Title IV canons describe the offenses, disciplinary processes, and sentences for bishops and for presbyters and deacons. And while our current canons do have strengths (including a robust set of provincial courts, procedural protections, and the requirement that dioceses have officers to investigate and adjudicate allegations of misconduct), there are also grave inadequacies in the status quo. This revision to Title IV rests on the premise that the current disciplinary processes, though well-intentioned, have fundamental deficiencies, particularly in the case of our disciplinary process for bishops.

The GTF unanimously concluded that the shortfalls in the current disciplinary canons include the following:

- A commitment to “minimalism” that has not served the province well, such that fundamental aspects of the disciplinary process for bishops—including basic aspects of an investigation—are left unspecified by the current canons. That lack of detail has meant an overreliance on ad hoc committees and teams, with processes being designed on the fly. The predictable result is mistrust on all sides, with feelings of vulnerability and exploitation both by those who bring accusations and by those who are accused.

- Delay and expense caused in part by an overreliance on adversarial elements and presuppositions that are more appropriate to U.S. civil litigation than to canon law, which should instead have a more inquiry-based approach. That means, among other things, that in canon law the formulation of presentments and the gathering of evidence should not be controlled by parties and their lawyers, but rather by bodies who serve the church in the search for the truth of a matter.
- An inadequately designed on-ramp for the discipline of bishops. The current canons have a highly burdensome requirement for an initial accusation against a bishop (sworn statements from three other bishops or ten other people). The archbishop is improperly designated as the intake officer. There is a cart-before-the-horse choice to have presentments before any investigation has been done. And there is an automatic path from a presentment to the seating of a Board of Inquiry before any analysis of the merits of the presentment have been undertaken. A Board of Inquiry must be uniquely created for each investigation, which generates more delay and prevents any development of expertise, as each Board of Inquiry is “one and done.”
- Inadequately designed judicial structures, such as having seven judges sitting to hear a matter. This also reflects an inattention to the institutional capacity of the province, which has a relatively small number of knowledgeable canon lawyers and limited infrastructure to support such an unusually large trial body.
- A discipline process for presbyters and deacons that makes bishops a bottleneck, especially at the beginning. Under the current system, bishops are supposed to meet with an accuser to make an initial credibility determination before there has even been an investigation. This is an impossible task for anyone.

We have strived to address all these concerns in the revised Title IV, with refinements and clarifications for every part of the disciplinary process. The overarching purpose of these revisions can be summarized in the following chart:

A Turn From...

A commitment to brevity and simplicity that leaves core aspects of the disciplinary process unspecified

Attorney-driven procedures that produce complexity and delay

"One and done" decision-making bodies that can cause delay and overreliance on lawyers and experts and prevent the development of expertise

A Turn to...

Clear processes laid out in advance so everyone knows what to do

The tribunal, not the parties, controls what happens

Stable decision-making bodies that develop expertise over time and can act quickly

Brief analysis of the new revision

The revised Title IV has thirteen canons. Here is a brief overview with a much more extensive canon-by-canon analysis available in one of the versions released today.

Canon 1 is called "General Principles." It lays a foundation for Title IV that is both theological and practical and outlines the need for pastoral care, reconciliation, confidentiality, and the need to see disciplinary processes as "fact finding" endeavors by tribunals, rather than adversarial clashes between accuser and accused.

Canon 2 is "Definitions." Including these seeks to avoid ambiguities.

Canon 3 is "Offenses." This canon grounds the offenses in an affirmative vision of the Christian ministry. It groups the offenses into several categories, with illustrations of each one. The effect is both more specificity and a more logical organization.

Canon 4 describes the "Judicial Disciplinary Bodies of the Province," such as the Disciplinary Tribunal for a Bishop (a body replacing the Court for the Trial of a Bishop) and the Provincial Tribunal.

Canon 5 is on the "Other Disciplinary Bodies of the Province." This canon has three important innovations. First, there are Reports Administrators, who are intake officers for reports of misconduct by a bishop. Second, the Reports Investigation Committee is the body that conducts investigations. Unlike the status quo—where a Board of Inquiry must be established for each case and is then disbanded—the Reports Investigation Committee is a permanent standing body. That means it can act expeditiously, and it can develop expertise over time. Finally, there is now a Victim Advocate who will serve as a point of contact for reporting parties.

Canon 6 describes the "Discipline of Bishops." This canon is described here in more detail, because it is at the heart of this vital revision. There is a straightforward through-line in this revised process:

report > investigation > trial > appeal

It is important to note that not every case will go through that full process. To use a highway metaphor, there are many off-ramps before an allegation goes to a hearing before a Disciplinary Tribunal for a Bishop. The primary off-ramps in the revised Title IV are:

- The Report is dismissed after having several parties review it, because it discloses no reasonable grounds for believing an offense was committed.
- The Report is resolved pastorally, because it is one for which pastoral resolution is appropriate and possible.
- After investigating, the Reports Investigation Committee finds no “prima facie case.” (This term is defined.)
- The bishop concerned submits to the discipline of the Church (“pleads guilty”) by means of a “consent order.” (This term is also defined.)

In order to get to the complexity of a hearing, it must be the case that none of those things happens—that is, there *are* reasonable grounds, pastoral resolution is *not* possible nor appropriate, the investigation *does* result in the finding that a prima facie case exists, and the bishop concerned does *not* submit to discipline. But if those conditions are met, the case will go to a hearing before a tribunal expeditiously. Importantly, how such a trial is to be conducted is described in detail in order to reduce confusion, reduce delay, and build trust.

The revised canon on the discipline of bishops has the following features (among others) that distinguish it from the discipline of bishops under the current canons:

- The revised Title IV gives far more guidance to each decision maker about what to do and what the options are at each stage. This does entail more length, so the canons are longer, and more things are set in the canons and so are harder to amend. The GTF has opted to sacrifice some flexibility of revision for more predictability, accountability, and transparency.
- Under the revised Title IV, it is easier to start the process— anyone may make a Report—but the offramps are many and, notably, the first step is not to automatically present and seat a Board of Inquiry. This is a decidedly different way of balancing the competing concerns than how the current Title IV process begins, which has a high barrier to filing a Presentment but then an automatic path to a Board of Inquiry.
- In the revised Title IV, the process starts with a Report, rather than with a Presentment. The Presentment is formulated later, after an investigation is performed, and it is not drafted by the parties but rather by the investigation committee itself.
- Under the revised Title IV, the Archbishop is not burdened with being the intake officer and picking a Board of Inquiry. Instead, he is given the tasks for

which the Archbishop of the province is uniquely necessary, namely, pastoral resolution of a controversy involving a bishop and a decision to admonish or inhibit a bishop.

- In the revised Title IV, the Reporting Party does not control the Presentment nor the presentation of evidence during the investigation. Instead, the investigation is conducted by the Reports Investigation Committee, a partially-appointed and partially-elected body that will be a recurring participant in investigations (thus developing further experience and expertise).
- There is a clearer process for decision-making about whether the case will go to the Disciplinary Tribunal for a Bishop, including what input the bishop concerned has in the process. And, crucially, it is the tribunal, and only the tribunal, that determines which issues and how such issues will be considered. Put another way, most of the trial process will be conducted in written form as the parties (through proctors) respond in written form with the full argument each wishes the tribunal to take into account in hearing a Presentment. While witnesses and documentary evidence are a crucial part of the process of deciding whether a canonical offense has occurred, the process is shifted from attorneys arguing before a neutral court to an affirmative, inquiring court that seeks truth.
- Motions practice and attorney-driven decisions will no longer control the flow of trial. This is the move from a purely “adversarial system” to a more “inquisitorial system” that is a hallmark of the new Title IV. Put another way, because so little about procedures is specified in our current Title IV, procedures largely emerge ad hoc from U.S. civil litigation practices. One way of thinking about this is to imagine the downtown courthouse area of every U.S. city. With grand buildings and clerks of court and complex filing systems, it still produces a grossly inefficient and expensive system of justice. With none of those resources, the ACNA disciplinary system has still defaulted to civil litigation patterns. The revised Title IV moves away from this practice and moves towards a more traditional process for ecclesiastical tribunals – inquiry setting the stage for a limited adversarial process that helps the tribunal sort out the truth.
- Several aspects of the revised Title IV are likely to reduce delay. First, there is a dedicated intake officer. Second, a Board of Inquiry does not need to be created anew for every case, but instead investigations are conducted by a sitting body. Third, Presentments are formulated by that body, which will have experience in formulating them. Finally, a Presentment is heard by a panel of three judges, not by the entire Disciplinary Tribunal for a Bishop, which allows for greater expediency.

Canon 7 is “Discipline of Presbyters and Deacons.” While not as lengthy as Canon 6, it nevertheless lays out a disciplinary process for use within a diocese. This simplified version of the process for discipline of a bishop is commended to the various dioceses for

adaptation and use at the diocesan level. A diocese may choose to adopt this process or instead use its own process, provided it certifies that it is equally robust.

Canon 8 is on “Sentences.” These are clarified, and the requirements for notice of a sentence are made more robust.

Canon 9 is “Appeals.” This canon provides more detail about the appeals process, including the grounds for an appeal and the standards to be used.

Canon 10 is on “Admonitions and Inhibitions.” It retains procedural protections found in the current Title IV. Admonitions are more clearly described as pastoral in nature.

Canon 11 is called “Norms for Disciplinary Bodies of the Province.” It prohibits pressure on investigators and members of tribunals, and it has rules about public notice, confidentiality, recusal, and public hearings. Importantly, it also lays out how tribunals may avoid the many pitfalls of the U.S. civil justice system by managing hearings actively and not allowing modern motions practice to bog down proceedings.

Canon 12 is called “Disciplinary Records.” It encourages transparency by establishing a “register” of orders and making publicly available the “provincial list” of disciplined clergy.

Canon 13 is “Other Provisions.” It includes transitional provisions that allow a transition period at the provincial level and for dioceses. The transitional provisions also ensure that the revised Title IV is not retroactively applied in ways that are inconsistent with due process.

Conclusion

If a reader compares the revised Title IV with the status quo, it will be obvious that the revision offers far more detail. That has tradeoffs.

More detail means that more things are settled and fixed rules can’t be immediately updated or adjusted from case to case. There is also some loss of flexibility and nimble adjustment and less ability to learn from a case that just happened and immediately make changes to the process.

But there are also important gains from including more detail. When clear rules are laid down in advance, there is more guidance. Everyone can know and follow them. And clear rules, known in advance and observable by all, can build trust.

If the canons do not provide clear guidance about the disciplinary process, what will fill the void? It will often be the norms and habits of

U.S. civil litigation, which is almost universally criticized for its extravagant cost and delay. And U.S. civil litigation is not a model for the care and concern that our Lord calls us to show for all people, not least for those whom the church itself has failed and hurt. Indeed, as multiple disciplinary proceedings in the province have dragged on for years, it is these deficits—the lack of guidance, the erosion of trust, and the intrusion of the norms of U.S. civil litigation in the life of the church—that have become ever more salient.

The revised Title IV reflects a deliberate choice to give up some flexibility and to favor clarity and specificity. The canons should be clear at every stage about who is making a decision. The canons should be clear about what the inputs for that decision are, and about what standard will be used. The canons should state the possible outcomes.

To be sure, there are other ways to resolve the tradeoffs between flexibility and guidance. But how to resolve these tradeoffs is not ultimately a question for the Governance Task Force to decide. That is a question that ultimately must be decided by the bishops, clergy, and laity of the province. As one of the most fundamental maxims of the canon law puts it, “What touches all should be approved by all.”

Acknowledgements

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For the Title IV committee, Prof. Samuel Bray (Chair, Anglican Diocese of the Living Word), the Rev. Dcn. Dr. Mary Baker (Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh), the Rev. William Barto (Diocese of the Central States), Ms. Rebekah Borah (Anglican Diocese of Christ Our Hope), the Rt. Rev. John Guernsey (Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic), the Rev. Kimberly Pfeiler (Churches for the Sake of Others), the Rev. James Sweeney (Anglican Diocese of San Joaquin), and Mr. Scott Ward (then Provincial Chancellor, Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic).

The GTF as of May 1, 2026, is comprised of the following:

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