



ANGLICAN PROVINCE
OF AMERICA

St. Alban's Anglican Cathedral

The Most Rev. Chandler Holder Jones, SSC, Presiding and Diocesan Bishop
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Dear Parishioners,

On Sunday, June 14, I received a letter expressing the support of a significant number of our parishioners in favor of moving the national flag from its present position in the narthex of our church to the nave, left of the pulpit. Whenever a concern affecting such a multitude of our parish family is expressed to the Rector, it is necessary that an open and thorough pastoral response be made in address of it. The following letter is intended to supply that response, which was formulated with the advice of both our diocesan ordinary (Bishop +Chandler Jones) and the regional Dean (Fr. Brian+ Oldfield).

I. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*

“The law of our prayer is the law of our belief.” St. Paul, in his first epistle to St. Timothy, admonishes the young bishop: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Tim. 2:1-3). Our Anglican mass refers to this appeal in the prayer for the whole state of Christ’s Church, which begins: “Almighty and everliving God, who by thy holy Apostle hast taught us to make prayers, and supplications, and to give thanks for all men.” Other prayers in the American Common Prayer make the concern and gratitude which Christians ought to practice with respect to our national polity more explicit. Such are the office prayers for the president and all in civil authority (BCP 17-18, 32), and the occasional prayers for congress, the state legislature, the courts of justice, and our country (BCP 35-36). To these are added prayers for the armed forces and a thanksgiving for those who have laid down their lives in service to our nation (BCP 41-42). Finally, the collect for Independence Day gratefully acknowledges God’s providence in the founding of our republic (BCP 263). There is, then, a pious duty of all Anglican churchmen which we can reasonably call Christian patriotism. This involves both thanks for the benefits we have received as citizens, and sustained care for the godliness and well-being of our nation. Those who have petitioned for the movement of the national flag to a place of prominence in the nave do so, I am convinced, out of a desire to express symbolically the principle of Christian patriotism as it is defined in the American-Anglican tradition of our Common Prayer.

II. *Adiaphora*

The Greek word, *adiaphora*, means “things indifferent.” It describes, in Christian theology, all those things (e.g., regional or local customs) which are not “load-bearing” in that they do not bear directly upon the substance of the faith. These are matters of Christian liberty, and Christians are free to adopt variable practices best suited to need and convenience regarding *adiaphora* so long as the rule of our faith remains inviolate. The placement of national symbols in or around the church belongs to this class, and a wide variety of practice is evident in this case, even within our own diocese. Some churches place the national flag within the chancel, adjacent to the altar. Many, as St. Alban’s does at present, display it in the narthex and/or outside the church. Some place it, as has been requested, in the nave. Some parishes within our diocese do not display the national colors. In none of our parishes would any fail to assert the duty of Christian patriotism as laid down in the rule of our Common Prayer. The manner of displaying (or not displaying) national symbols is determined by the Rector in accordance with Christian liberty and suited to the peculiar needs of the parish.

III. A stumbling-block

The meaning of symbols is inherently complex and cannot reasonably be divorced from consideration of the observer as well as that which is observed. We do not control symbolic significance according to some kind of rigid logic, regardless of context and participants. Many within our parish have expressed a desire for a more prominent placement of the national flag, out of desire to give expression to a pious Christian patriotism. So also have many expressed to me their profound discomfort at such a measure, on the principle that it would constitute an intrusion of earthly and transient things into a place reserved and consecrated for the celestial and eternal worship of God. In this objection, they are not without grounding in some fundamental truths of the Christian faith. St. Peter reminds us that we are strangers and sojourners in this world, and that while we pay due reverence and obedience to our governing authorities as established by God, the Church itself constitutes a holy nation (I Peter 2:9). St. Paul echoes this sentiment in his letter to the church at Philippi, claiming that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). The nave of the church, in this understanding, as symbolic of the Ark of Christ, ought to reflect the comprehensive reality of that heavenly citizenship, in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, Scythian, Barbarian, slave nor free, but Christ in all (Col. 3:11). For these reasons the placement of the national flag within the nave would be, for many of our parishioners, what St. Paul refers to as a “stumbling-block” (I Cor. 8:9). Those who are desirous of such a change do so from laudable motives perfectly consonant with Christian patriotism as described earlier, with no intention to offend the faith of their fellow believers. The question is: when faced by the possibility of giving unintended offence, what ought to be our attitude and practice? The apostolic tradition always moves us toward a sensitive charity.

IV. “Do no harm.”

“The physician,” wrote an ancient Greek author in the tradition of Hippocrates, “must have two special objects in view with regard to disease, namely, to do good or *to do no harm*. Though Christian pastoral care is distinct from medicine, a certain correlation of principles is at work in both. Those who have requested the moving of the national flag to the nave will no doubt feel that abiding by St. Alban’s current practice is an insufficient expression of our Christian patriotism, while to move the flag as requested would be interpreted by others as an offence to the special reverence and attention due to God in His sanctuary. Faced by a situation in which neither group of parishioners can be satisfied, as the spiritual physician of the parish it is my duty to pursue a course of harm-reduction; i.e., to avoid spiritual injury or impairment in as much as possible. This I attempt to do both by affirming the duties of Christian patriotism while also electing to continue our present practice (the display of the flag outside the church and in the narthex), as to move it would offend many in a way that more nearly touches the substance of the faith. In short, I would rather it be perceived that I fail in some degree of that honor and gratitude due to my nation, than that I trespass without due regard upon the honor due to Christ alone and with respect to the faith of those placed under my charge. I am aware that this decision cannot be perfectly satisfactory to all, but I ask that even those who disagree with my pastoral address of this issue should, in the final analysis, attend to the words of St. Paul: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:31-33).

Your servant in the bonds of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter Joslyn" with a small cross at the end of the line.

The Very Rev. Peter A. Joslyn
Cathedral Dean
St. Alban’s Cathedral
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity, 2026