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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The “vote” being taken this week by the secessionist group that now illegally occupies Grace and Saint Stephen’s Church in Colorado Springs has no legal validity or bearing on the current efforts by The Diocese of Colorado to regain rightful control of its property.

Because The Episcopal Church is a hierarchical church, parishes are not established by the vote of a congregation but only by actions taken by a diocesan convention and ecclesiastical authority. Conversely, no vote taken by a congregation or by its vestry can dissolve a parish or change its affiliation to another religious body. For that reason, neither the “vote” taken by the secessionist vestry on March 26 nor the “vote” currently being taken this secessionist group has any legal grounding or effect.

In fact, the secessionist group has not been clear or consistent about what the actions of May 20 and the coming days actually represent. On March 26, the secessionist vestry voted that "Grace Church and St. Stephen’s Parish will leave the Episcopal Church" effective immediately. In a press release that same day, they stated that members of the parish had no choice with regard to this action but would merely “be given the opportunity to affirm” their decision to affiliate with the Church of Nigeria.

The seizing of property rightfully belonging to the Episcopal Church is nothing more than a sadly misguided effort to restore to a position of public trust a priest who is currently under ecclesiastical indictment for the misappropriation of church funds. The diocese has been investigating allegations against the Rev. Donald Armstrong involving serious financial misconduct for more than a year, and in March, the Diocesan Review Committee issued a Presentment of charges – similar to an indictment – against Armstrong on the same day the former vestry of Grace and St. Stephen’s announced their decision to secede.

Last week, the Bishop and Diocese of Colorado filed an answer and counterclaim in response to the complaint filed in El Paso County by a secessionist congregation on

Good Friday (April 6). The response asserts that the real property of Grace and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church belongs to the loyalist Episcopal congregation, and that the secessionist congregation has "wrongfully taken steps to take possession of and exercise control over the Property." It cites the long history of the parish in the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Colorado, and the established legal precedent that Grace Church and St. Stephen's holds legal title of record to the property for the mission of, and in trust for the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado and The Episcopal Church.

The parish of Grace and St. Stephen's is one of 114 congregations in the Diocese of Colorado. Currently, at least 200 – 400 members of that congregation who wish to remain part of the Episcopal Church are worshiping at nearby First Christian Church until they can be restored to their property. The vestry of the Episcopal congregation has encouraged members not to take part in the invalid vote organized by the secessionist group. Prior to the move to secede from the Episcopal Church, Grace and St. Stephen's had a reported average Sunday attendance of 800 people. St. John's Cathedral in Denver reports a similar average Sunday attendance.

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