

28 May 2021

From: Matthew Townsend, editor, *Anglican Journal*

To: Joseph Vecsi

CC: Archbishop Linda Nicholls; Michael Valpy; Archdeacon Alan Perry

Dear Joe,

Please accept this letter as my notice of resignation, effective June 11, 2021. This is not a decision I make lightly; I have no plans for alternative work at the moment and do not wish to be unemployed. However, I find myself no longer able to carry out my duties as outlined in my position description and our editorial policy.

Recent events surrounding the *Anglican Journal* and a story about sexual misconduct have led me to the conclusion that my work as a journalist is no longer compatible with the operations of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. I must be plain and say that my resignation comes as a protest against actions that were taken while I was on parental leave that have potentially exposed the identities—and thus increased the vulnerability—of confidential sources of the *Journal*. A draft story about sexual misconduct was circulated by General Synod leadership to the institutions accused, anonymously, of mishandling said misconduct. Our confidential sources—victims of sexual misconduct in church contexts—had not yet reviewed this early draft for accuracy and anonymity. This happened without consent of the acting editor or the responsible writer, with no communication at the time to ensure such an action was safe or ethical. In fact, my staff had previously been told that a draft would not be sent to external parties.

I have communicated my extreme concern over this situation, with support from Editorial Board Chair Michael Valpy. While I have seen some positive steps taken—a commitment to an inquiry into the events and a note of apology for the sources—I am not convinced that General Synod's leadership appreciates the depth of pain these events have created for our sources and for my staff. The harm from this is real and it is serious. While an inquiry could help prevent such incidents in the future, it cannot undo the damage done to our sources, to our staff, and to me. I do not exaggerate when I say this series of events has made our staff ill. This has been awful.

I do not believe these decisions were made with any intent to harm, but perhaps were made out of innocuous incompetence. However, these events have placed me in a position in which I feel I can no longer execute my job description. In the editorial policy of the *Anglican Journal*, adopted by General Synod 2019, the *Journal* is charged with being:

“a journalistic enterprise, and as such is expected to adhere to the highest standards of journalistic responsibility, accuracy, fairness, accountability and transparency. Its journalism is fact-based, fact-checked and in-depth, tackling important issues, asking and answering difficult questions.”

Journalistic responsibility is, therefore, the first duty of the editor of the *Anglican Journal*. I have done my best to uphold this in my tenure, which hasn't always been easy. The *Journal* is called to integrity, but it is not editorially independent. I am charged with journalistic responsibility but I must answer to people who are not journalists and, thus, may not be fully aware of the consequences of their actions. Given this latest incident, in which journalists were effectively used to communicate confidential information to those who would benefit from that information, I can no longer distinguish whether I am in the church's employ as a journalist or as a spy. I therefore don't see how I can continue to carry out my job as described. Resignation seems my only logical option.

This catastrophe indicates that reconsideration of this editorial policy is desperately and urgently needed. I strongly recommend that leaders in the Anglican Church of Canada consider altering the policy and mandate to one that may be more compatible with its own mission and priorities. But perhaps, instead, the church could further align its mission and priorities with some of the central tenets of journalism, especially transparency, open discussion, and fearlessness. Lately, I've thought a lot about Matthew 25:35-40. We hear this piece of the gospel cited quite a bit, though it's rarely adapted to our present circumstances as church—to the things that most haunt the church, across denominations and even faiths. Perhaps Jesus might say, today:

I was abused and you believed me,
I was raped and you punished my rapist,
I was ignored and you heard me,
I was helpless and you were my advocate,
My ancestors were property of yours, and you made me your leader,
Your people took everything from mine, so you gave it all back.
Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

In my inaugural editorial for the *Anglican Journal*, I wrote that I saw it as my duty to be a good friend of the church—to support it, but to also tell it when something is amiss. In too many places, in too many ways, it is obsessed with its preservation and its image. I never felt free to say this in the course of my work, so I say it here. The church must change. In the meantime, though, I must regretfully depart. I will spend my final two weeks helping with important matters related to transition, as well as ensuring that our sources get as much help as possible in remediating their confidentiality breach.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Townsend', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Matthew Townsend
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia