

Statement to the Archbishop and the College of Bishops from Survivors of Mark Rivera

We are writing today to request consideration of the following matters by the College of Bishops, the Upper Midwest Diocese Bishop's Council, the Executive Committee and by Archbishop Foley Beach.

Until this point we have witnessed the ACNA's investigation of the Upper Midwest Diocese's handling of allegations against Mark Rivera in silence, believing that there was no good way to engage publicly. It is difficult enough to have experienced traumatizing behavior from Mark Rivera; it is additionally difficult to expose this trauma to public view. However, the direction that this process has taken is so deeply upsetting that we can no longer remain silent.

We know firsthand the damage that Mark Rivera has done. But we have watched in dismay and confusion as Mark's abusive behavior, and its devastating effects on victims, have been decentralized and the blame and the naming of evil has bizarrely shifted onto Bishop Stewart and the Diocese of the Upper Midwest [UMD].

The narrative has become distorted and unreasonable. Advocacy against Bp. Ruch, Church of the Resurrection, and the Upper Midwest Diocese has made flagrant use of omissions, misrepresentations, and even falsehoods that are related to our own lives and stories of abuse, while Mark's actions have been ludicrously framed as secondary symptoms. This is totally unacceptable. From our perspective, this framing is contrary to the truth.

It hurts us to see this behavior directed at people who have loved and served and honored us. It hurts us that we needed space to heal, and we have instead found ourselves at the center of a toxic public circus. We have endured almost a year of chaos and disruption in our church—and this is all being represented as support for us.

We want to make this clear: **Joanna Rudenbourg does not speak for us. ACNAtoo does not speak for us. We would like to be heard for ourselves.**

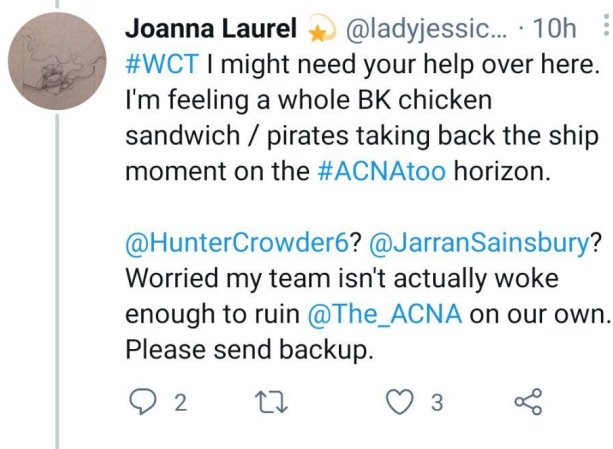
Joanna has taken on a role of victim advocate for the diocese through the ACNAtoo organization she helped to found. Her advocacy work has definitively shaped the public understanding of what happened in our diocese, and of what survivors want and need. It has also appeared to us that her advocacy attempted first to control and then to implicate Bishop Stewart and the UMD, and to shift this from a redemptive process to a punitive one.

We recognize that Joanna has been wronged and wounded by Mark, and we grieve what she has suffered. We recognize every victim's right to justice, and their right to speak for themselves and to tell their story. But still—we will not allow her to be our voice or to be our advocate.

We believe that Joanna is uniquely unfit for the role she has taken, for three reasons:

1. **Joanna provided material aid and abetted Mark Rivera in the abuse of a member of Church of the Resurrection** (one of the undersigned). When Joanna learned of Mark's pursuit of a victim who had recently turned 18, **Joanna Roudenbourg encouraged and enabled the relationship by providing her apartment for Mark to use for sexual encounters with this victim, and by coaching the victim that Mark's sexual relationship with her was good and acceptable.** In this victim's own words, "Joanna is second only to Mark in the damage she has caused." Now, through the work of ACNAtoo she continues to cause her further harm.

2. **Joanna has publicly expressed a desire to ruin the ACNA.** The following tweet was captured before it was deleted. ("Joanna Laurel" is Joanna Rudenbourg.) In this tweet she asks for backup help because her team isn't "woke enough to ruin the ACNA on our own."



3. **Joanna is one of Mark Rivera's survivors, but she is in no way part of the ACNA.**

Joanna has never been part of an ACNA church, her connection to Mark had nothing to do with the ACNA, and she has no right to dictate how we interact with our spiritual leaders.

It has been painful and frustrating to watch Joanna and ACNAtoo shape the interactions and control the narrative between the Province and Mark's victims. Someone who has voiced a desire to ruin our Province is representing herself as a victim advocate. **Joanna encouraged sexual abuse, yet has now taken the reins in shaping the way our church does its own investigation.**

We have experienced her involvement in this process as oppressive and deeply violating. We do not find it reasonable for her to jump from facilitating abuse to taking authority over the process for survivors of that abuse, and trying to take authority over a plethora of other things related to life in the church home of those survivors.

This bears repeating: Joanna has never had anything to do with our church previous to taking on this advocacy role, *but this church is the precious spiritual home and refuge of the woman*

Joanna helped to victimize. When she exerts control over the church's interactions with Mark's victims, that translates into her exercising power over that victim and increasing her suffering.

All of this makes us feel profoundly unsafe with Joanna's advocacy role. But because she has gone over our heads and exerted authority in our church, over our bishop, and in our Province, we do not have the option of saying no to her. If you allow Joanna to have power over our situation, there will be nothing that we can do. We truly have no inclination to judge or condemn, but we do assert that we have the right to space and freedom from Joanna's influence and authority.

It is important to emphasize that we do not condemn victims in other situations who have chosen to share their stories on ACNAtoo. We laud any efforts to let the truth be known. But in light of the facts surrounding Mark Rivera's abuse, Joanna's complicity, and her hostility towards our denomination, we ask for freedom from her control in order to focus on our own healing.

If there is any question about the primacy of the role Joanna has taken, please note the following paragraph **from ACNAtoo's website** which explains that Joanna Rudenbourg will be the only recipient of donations to ACNAtoo through their "support" tab, and reveals the fact that she has worked **full-time** in this inappropriate advocacy role:

For the past eight months, Joanna has been working on advocacy for CM, CM's daughter, the other unidentified and known survivors, and herself full time since. She has no income because she has been working eight-hour days pursuing justice and running up against all of the obstructions you have read about and seen documented in her statements... 100% of the donations from this GoFundMe will go to Joanna.

We have watched as ACNAtoo has crafted a narrative that skews the facts. Bp. Stewart did not "cover up" Mark's abuse. When Bp. Stewart was informed of the first allegations against Mark, the mother of the child had already reported the abuse to the authorities, and the DCFS had already opened the investigation against Mark. One of us was at the house when the DCFS arrived. When other allegations emerged that even came close to meeting mandatory reporting guidelines, Bp. Stewart immediately required those reports to be filed.

ACNAtoo has promoted the idea that Mark Rivera gained access to his victims through his activities in the church. This is a terrible mischaracterization of the truth. We can't explain this as clearly as we'd like, for the sake of protecting identities, but the reality is that **Mark lived on the same multiple-dwelling property as several of his victims, and every other victim known to us got to know him in the context of the community that gathered around the Rivera family on that property.** This was a close-knit community that shared meals, cars, childcare, holidays, community gardening, frequent parties and bonfires over many years. For most of the first years of this community's formation, Mark did not even attend Church of the Resurrection or any other Anglican church. Multiple

victims were related to people who lived on the property, and several other survivors were frequent overnight guests of the community. Joanna Rudenbourg also lived on the same property. She was not connected in any way with any church. None of this had anything to do with Bp. Stewart, and we refuse to allow our own stories to be manipulated to say otherwise.

The church was peripheral to Mark's abuse, yet the church has been scapegoated in the extreme, and we can no longer remain silent on this score. From our perspective, there is a ready-made and politically expedient narrative about how patriarchal church hierarchies foster abuse. Our own story of Mark's misconduct is being forced into that grid, despite the fact that the concrete realities of what happened do not fit into that narrative at all.

When ACNAtoo first made allegations against the church, our leadership, led by Bp. Stewart, considered it best to hire an external investigation in order to review its own structures and to discover any areas where the church could address or prevent further harm. Bp. Stewart did not participate in choosing the firm GRS, and the way it was chosen satisfied our desire for integrity in the investigative process. We were willing to cooperate with the first investigation. Our conversations with GRS investigators were uniformly sensitive, respectful, and honoring, and our understanding was that they did absolutely guarantee confidentiality. We were happy to work with them. But ACNAtoo was not satisfied and demanded a new firm.

Given the emotionally grueling hours we had already spent giving testimony to GRS, we were very upset that the first investigation was halted. Then, ACNAtoo also publicly denounced the second firm that was chosen, despite great efforts by the Province to listen to survivors and choose a firm that would be fair, competent, and objective. Contrary to what has been described by the victim advocates that resigned, during this time we felt heard, honored and deeply cared for in our interactions with the Province and the PRT. ACNAtoo's rejection of the second firm solidified our belief that no action taken by the Province will be satisfactory to ACNAtoo. We believe that by attempting to appease ACNAtoo, the Province is granting Joanna and ACNAtoo a position of authority that they should not have, and allowing untold delays in the timeframe for resolution.

It is a great sorrow that this delay has continued to forestall the justice that all those close to this situation deserve. It has robbed us of our bishop for months (who would have played an active role in shepherding us through this healing process), and has kept the truth of what happened from being fully and publicly known. **The protracted timeline has kept the good people of our congregation in a continuous state of uncertainty regarding the truth of what happened.** We are left in a vacuum of information in which no questions can be answered and the only voices publicly heard are distorted through ACNAtoo. This creates ongoing trauma on a much larger scale!

We respectfully assert that the leaders at the top of the ACNA have remained silent and have

made no attempt to correct the falsehoods that have been spoken against our bishop. There have been no statements from the ACNA to communicate that Stewart Ruch is a bishop in good standing, that no charges have been substantiated and no disciplinary action taken against him. Bp. Ruch has consistently cared for us with integrity and provided wise leadership for our church. It has hurt us to see him slandered, with so little truth and clarity being spoken into this situation.

In addition to this, **we have been disgusted and grieved to watch as others have opportunistically used the very real pain of Mark Rivera's victims for their own political purposes**, as when former ChurchRez pastoral residents (who are now members of the ACNAtoo advocacy team) almost immediately took to Twitter to manufacture an arbitrary connection between the sexual abuse of a little girl and their frustration over the ending of their employment with the ACNA. There is no connection between the allegations that Mark abused a defenseless child and the fact that this couple were unable to plant a church in our diocese. We name this opportunistic use of the story of a child's sexual abuse to further an unrelated grievance as both **predatory** and **spiritually abusive**. This is only one example of a continuing pattern that has emerged. We are disturbed that the suffering of survivors has been used to galvanize the idea of an external "investigation into spiritual abuse" in the Diocese, which otherwise would have been handled through normal channels. It is a painful irony for us that so many who have purported to come alongside survivors in their pain have become perpetrators of a different kind of abuse. We wish for our Provincial leaders and our UMD Bishop's Council to recognize this.

It has also become increasingly clear to us that other factions within the ACNA, who are frustrated at the doctrinal stands that Bp. Stewart has taken in recent years in regard to SSA and the ordination of women, have also coalesced around the Mark Rivera scandal, and have made an arbitrary connection between their doctrinal frustrations and Mark's abuse. Even a cursory investigation of those who have publicly supported ACNAtoo's accusatory narrative against the Diocese—and have assumed the veracity of these accusations—reveals that many of those who have joined forces against Church of the Resurrection **were already at ideological odds** with our leadership. We are appalled at the spectacle of priests from within our beloved ACNA engaging in public attacks on our leaders, despite the fact that the investigation has not been completed. Witness the tweet from Rev Emily McGowin, a canon theologian, in the context of discussions about the UMD investigation:

Fret not for abuse survivors who want to burn it all down. Worry instead for callous, proud and unrepentant leaders, and their insular, unyielding institutions, so committed to their own power and survival that a consuming fire seems the only option.

We are grieved to see our leaders subjected to the grossest defamation in the public sphere. We reject the idea that it is in any way appropriate for other priests in our denomination to use our suffering to further their own grievances, and we emphatically state that the trauma of

victims should never be conscripted into cultural and theological wars. **We name this as libel of the worst kind, because it is a weaponization of empathy, an inversion of mercy, and completely antithetical to Christianity.**

To sum up, we submit to the Province and to the Archbishop that we are in need of protection from ACNAtoo's work to distort the truth and demonize our leaders, and from the opportunistic attempts of those who are not victims to use our trauma for their own benefit.

In light of this we are asking for the following:

1. For the ACNA to recognize that ACNAtoo does not speak for us, and especially **we request the ACNA to act on behalf of its members who continue to be silenced** by ACNAtoo's distorted narrative that claims to speak for survivors within the church.
2. For the ACNA to immediately withdraw from any further negotiations with Joanna Rudenbourg and to recognize that she has collaborated with Mark in his abuse.
3. For the ACNA to withdraw from widening the scope of the external investigation into spiritual abuse that was inappropriately galvanized by those who used our abuse for their own ends, and return this investigation to channels that are fitting for the charges.
4. Ultimately, we ask for justice. But justice requires two things: that full justice will come to pass for all those who have been impacted by Mark Rivera, and that those who have acted honorably and justly in this situation will receive vindication from the public vilification and false accusations that are ongoing. The silence of the ACNA is loud, and every day new insults and injustices continue to occur as a result.
5. That canon theologians, priests and other perpetrators who have engaged in libel and preyed upon our pain in the service of furthering a political and doctrinal agenda be held accountable.
6. **We ask for our bishop to be returned to us, at the very latest, before the beginning of Holy Week. We have suffered long enough without his ministry and leadership.**

We pray for those who have participated in doing harm in this situation. We believe that the Church is here to bring reconciliation even in the most difficult relationships. We do not seek to retaliate, but we do seek to contain the evil that has found a channel through their efforts.

In closing, we beg the College of Bishops and the Archbishop to consider the following: it is our clear concern that the situation surrounding Mark's abuse is a portal through which more evil

has entered our church. Much of this evil has not been recognized by those at the Provincial level. This unrecognized evil has weaponized the suffering of Mark's victims to mount an attack against our bishop, against the doctrines of orthodoxy, against the integrity of ecclesiastical authority, against our congregation, and against the ACNA as a whole. Please stand up and defend us before it is too late.

Asking for your timely consideration,

R.H.

M.S.

R.G.

K.E.

Other initials redacted

The majority of us have already engaged with the Province, but prefer not to attach our names to a public document. The Province and the College of Bishops have already received the original statement including all of the unredacted initials.