

## **Province 1 Title IV training, May 3, 2025, Southborough Massachusetts**

Canons Michael Ambler and Ranjit Mathews led an in-person day of training for Province 1 participants in the Title IV process at St. Mark's Church in Southboro, Massachusetts, on May 3 2025 from 10am – 3:30pm.

The event was billed as an "introduction" to the disciplinary process, focusing on the theology and goals of Title IV, the specifics of what constitutes an "offense" under Title IV, and the process when a complaint is received. There were about 15 participants in addition to the trainers, and as it turned out, most of the participants already had some--and in a few cases quite a bit--of experience with Title IV. The group consisted largely of Intake Officers, with a smaller number of other roles such as disciplinary board presidents and members also in attendance.

Because the group was more experienced than we had expected, the trainers modified the initial plans. Rather than present the material as if it were completely unfamiliar, we chose to do a little less lecture, and good bit more conversation. So, we still reviewed all the topics we had expected to, including:

- The history, theological goals, and purposes of Title IV
- The effect of offenses on individuals and communities
- The structure of Title IV offenses--obligations and prohibitions
- Specific elements of each enumerated offense
- The complexities of "conduct unbecoming"
- The process when a complaint is received, including roles of Intake Officer, Bishop, President of the Disciplinary Board, the Reference Panel, and others
- Available sorts of referrals
- Orders and Accords

We consciously put more focus on the beginning of the process than the later stages, and avoided any attempt at a comprehensive treatment of Conference Panels and Hearing Panels, because most matters do not reach those stages, and when they do there is generally ample time to prepare.

While some of the day was a didactic presentation of materials which were also contained in a comprehensive handout, a great deal consisted of questions and answers and role plays. This was the most interesting and lively part of the day, as we expected it would be; participants asked a rich variety of questions and discussed many of them among themselves--there was a lot of wisdom in the room--as well as with the presenters. We reviewed various fact patterns to see whether they suggested possible offenses, and also role played a Title IV intake from initial report through the actions of the reference panel.

Running through the whole day was a key meta-message: the Title IV process is about justice, amendment of life, reconciliation, and other Gospel values; and we urged participants to play their parts in the process with those values in mind, and avoid

lapsing into legal-sounding, defensive, or alienating language. That was particularly well received, though it will bear repeating because most people with process responsibilities under Title IV are less than fully at home with the process and that can result in stiff communication styles. But the emphasis of the day was on remembering that we are a community of Christ even in times of trouble.

It was a pleasure to work with Canon Matthews, and I hope to be able to serve the Province in the future in this or other ways.

The Rev. Canon Michael Ambler