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## ACNA to Try Bishop on Mishandling Abuse Charges

By [Arlie Coles](#) | July 12, 2025



*Stewart Ruch III presides at a baptism in Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. / Church of the Resurrection/Instagram*

The ecclesiastical trial of the Rt. Rev. Stewart Ruch III, bishop of the Anglican Church in North America's [Diocese of the Upper Midwest](#), is slated to begin July 14. The second bishop to be tried in the ACNA's Court for the Trial of a Bishop since the denomination's founding in 2009, Bishop Ruch will face charges involving alleged mishandling of sexual abuse disclosures, and alleged habitual promotion of abusive ministers in his diocese and at his cathedral, [Church of the Resurrection](#) in Wheaton, Illinois.

The trial comes two years after Mark Rivera, a lay catechist in a Diocese of the Upper Midwest church, was [sentenced](#) to 15 years in prison for felony child sexual abuse and assault against a 9-year-old congregant, and six years since her abuse was disclosed to Bishop Ruch in 2019. Rivera was also [sentenced](#) to an additional six years in prison for felony criminal sexual assault of a woman, and has been accused of grooming young women and children by inebriating them, using [alcohol](#) in his home and [consecrated sacramental wine](#) at church, during his time as a lay minister.

According to the three bishops who brought charges against Ruch in a 2022 presentment, the bishop did not initiate an investigation into the allegations against Rivera for nearly two years after being informed of the 9-year-old's abuse.

“habitually neglect[ing] to properly vet, train, and/or discipline” his ministers, citing 11 other diocesan leaders accused of misconduct.

The bishops were joined by a group of laity and clergy who issued another presentment in 2023, exercising the ACNA’s other canonical method of charging a bishop. They separately [charged](#) that Ruch “knowingly elevat[ed] numerous former criminal offenders or those credibly accused of serious wrongdoing to positions of ecclesial authority in churches in the [diocese]” and “grant[ed] these former offenders unsupervised access to uninformed congregants.”

The laity and clergy named six persons allegedly raised to various levels of integration and leadership by the bishop despite known past behaviors, including solicitation of a prostitute and domestic violence rising to charges of second-degree attempted murder, and accused the bishop of a “misguided penchant for harboring and attempting to rehabilitate sexual predators.”

The case will be heard by ACNA’s Court for the Trial of a Bishop, composed of three bishops, two priests, and two confirmed adults in good standing. The court could take five to 10 days to hear the trial, but is likely to take the maximum of 60 days after that to render its verdict, “given the complexity of the case,” an ACNA spokesperson told [THE LIVING CHURCH](#).

Unlike hearing panels in the Episcopal Church, whose proceedings are public, Ruch’s trial will take place virtually and is closed to the public and to the media. ([THE LIVING CHURCH](#) was denied access.) The court [claimed](#) that the privacy will “preserve the integrity of the process, protect the dignity of those involved, and prevent undue influence or public pressure,” while presentment authors [claimed](#) that the non-transparency erodes the confidence of abuse victims in the trial.

Ruch [stated](#) that he is “grateful for a canonical process that allows for all sides to be heard,” and has distanced himself from the actions of his ministers. In November 2022, after returning from a 16-month leave of absence, he allegedly [claimed](#) that he played no role in choosing Rivera for leadership of the church where he was lay catechist, the now-closed Christ Our Light Anglican Church in Big Rock, Illinois.

Christ our Light was planted by a separate organization, the Greenhouse Movement, and not the cathedral, he reportedly said. At that time, Greenhouse churches constituted a deanery of the Diocese of the Upper Midwest, according to diocesan canons, with their ministry overseen by the bishop.

“Once you get a lay catechist, your lay catechist is working for the bishop, because the whole region is one church of which the bishop is the chief pastor,” [said](#) the Rev. Canon William Beasley, who founded Greenhouse in 2001, in a presentation on its polity in 2012. “It’s very clear who reports to whom.” In 2023, a diocesan canonical revision [dissolved](#) the Greenhouse deanery.

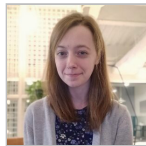
Bishop Ruch was consecrated for the nascent Diocese of the Upper Midwest by Archbishop Robert Duncan (Pittsburgh) in 2013, making a cathedral of his Church of the Resurrection, or “Rez,” which Ruch had attended since 1989. He succeeded Beasley as its rector in 1999, but his priestly and diaconal ordinations are less clear: Rez left the Episcopal Church in 1993, and was without a bishop until 2000. Ruch does not appear in the *Episcopal Clerical Directory* from 1989 to 1993.

Before leaving the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, Rez was widely known in charismatic circles for its ministry of healing homosexuals, which put Rez in conflict with Bishop Frank Griswold, and which Canon Beasley [called](#) “part of the fabric of the church” in 1993.

After Rez became independent, that ministry continued to grow under charismatic figures like Leanne Payne and Mario Bergner, expanding to healing conditions other than homosexuality. Former

Rez became attached to the early Anglican realignment movement when Beasley and John Rodgers Jr. formed the American Anglican Congregations on Mission network in 1997. In 2000, the network [merged](#) with Chuck Murphy's similar organization, First Promise, as Rodgers and Murphy were consecrated bishops for the Anglican Mission in America by Archbishops Emmanuel Kolini (Rwanda) and Moses Tay (South East Asia).

Bishop Ruch's long-awaited trial signals the coming end of a difficult chapter for ACNA members, having sparked a [grassroots anti-abuse organization](#), two third-party investigations [costing](#) at least \$350,000, a [constitutional crisis](#) that pit Archbishop Foley Beach against the denomination's highest court, two open-letter campaigns (by [clergy](#) and [laity](#)), a [documentary podcast](#), and [multiple rounds](#) of from-scratch revisions of the denomination's disciplinary canons. The Diocese of the Upper Midwest [reported](#) 18 congregations and 2,601 members in 2024, a 22 percent and 8 percent year-over-year decrease respectively.



### Arlie Coles

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