

Episcopal bishop cleared of 'abandonment' charge

by [Daniel Burke](#)

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(RNS) The Episcopal bishop of South Carolina, who has distanced his diocese from the national denomination since its sanction of openly gay bishops, has not "abandoned" the Episcopal Church, a church committee announced Monday (Nov. 28).

Bishop Mark Lawrence, an outspoken conservative, has said that he wants to remain part of the Episcopal Church, even as he decries its "false gospel of indiscriminate inclusivity."

The Episcopal Church consecrated an openly gay priest as bishop of New Hampshire in 2004, and a lesbian priest as an assistant bishop in Los Angeles last year.

In protest, the South Carolina diocese, which covers the eastern portion of the state, has declared itself "sovereign" within the national denomination, rejected the leadership of Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and withdrawn from some governing committees.

However, the church's Disciplinary Board for Bishops "was unable to make the conclusions essential to a certification that Bishop Lawrence had abandoned the communion of the church," said Bishop Dorsey Henderson, the panel's chairman.

Under church law, bishops who reject the doctrine, worship or discipline of the national denomination are deemed to have abandoned the church.

Henderson, the former bishop of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina, said that it is "significant that Bishop Lawrence has repeatedly stated that he does not intend to lead the diocese out of the Episcopal Church -- that he only seeks a safe place within the church to live the Christian faith as that diocese perceives it."