

Nigerian archbishop defies Episcopal Church, Canterbury: Akinola installs bishop on U.S. soil

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Nigerian Archbishop Peter Akinola, who defied the top bishops of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion by installing his own bishop on U.S. soil this month, declared that “insulting and condescending” American bishops are to blame for the controversy.

“We have developed numerous proposals, established various task forces and yet the division has only deepened,” Akinola said in an open letter to the head of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. “The decisions, actions, defiance and continuing intransigence of the Episcopal Church are at the heart of our crisis.”

Akinola heads the 17-million-member Anglican Church of Nigeria, reportedly the Anglican Communion’s second-largest church—after the Church of England—and has been an outspoken leader among conservatives.

In Woodbridge, Virginia, on May 5 he installed Martyn Minns as missionary bishop of the Convocation of Anglicans in North America. CANA has about 30 congregations of Nigerian immigrants and American conservatives who have left the Episcopal Church. In public letters, Williams and Episcopal presiding bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori had urged Akinola not to install Minns.

Jefferts Schori said the installation would hamper reconciliation efforts between liberals and conservatives in the Anglican Communion and urged Akinola to respect the tradition of not interfering in another bishop’s geographical territory. If the service went ahead, the presiding bishop told Akinola in a May 2 letter, it “would display to the world division and disunity that are not part of the mind of Christ.”

The Nigerian answered his critics May 6 in his letter to Williams. "If we fail to act, many will be lost to the church and thousands of souls will be imperiled," he said.

Akinola has been a persistent critic of the American church in part because in 2003 it ordained V. Gene Robinson, an openly gay man in a same-sex relationship, as the Episcopal bishop of the state of New Hampshire. *-Religion News Service*