

Episcopal pastor, accused of theft, joins dissidents: Continues to occupy church property

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Declared by a church court to be guilty of \$400,000 in thefts and other financial misdeeds at a Colorado Springs church, pastor Donald Armstrong was defrocked November 1 by Bishop Robert O'Neill of the Colorado Episcopal Diocese.

However, Armstrong and the vestry of Grace Church and St. Stephen's continue to occupy the church's property, saying they aligned the congregation with the Nigerian-connected Convocation of Anglicans in North America last spring. "It's sort of like being fired after you've already quit," said Armstrong to the *Rocky Mountain News*.

The church, which once had a membership over 2,000, now has about 500 worshipers weekly, parish spokesperson Alan Crippen said.

Another 400 to 500 members loyal to the diocese are meeting at nearby First Christian Church until a civil lawsuit filed in El Paso County District Court is decided.

The diocese's ecclesiastical court has turned over its findings to Colorado Springs police, who agreed to conduct a criminal investigation.

The court found Armstrong guilty not only of theft but also of causing the church to issue false W-2 forms and underreport Armstrong's income and benefits by nearly \$550,000, receiving loans of \$122,000 in violation of church laws, and encumbering the church with \$2.5 million in trust deeds without diocesan approval, according to Episcopal News Service.