

Fort Worth diocese leaves Episcopal Church: Affiliates with Anglican Province of the Southern Cone

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The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth became the fourth to secede from the denomination as delegates voted last month to align with a more conservative branch of the Anglican Communion.

Nearly 80 percent of clergy and lay delegates from the North Texas diocese voted to join the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone, based in Argentina. Since last December, the dioceses of San Joaquin, California; Pittsburgh; and Quincy, Illinois, have also left the Episcopal Church to join the Southern Cone.

"This diocese stands for orthodox Christianity," said Fort Worth bishop Jack Iker on November 15, "and we are increasingly at odds with the revisionist practices and teachings of the official leadership of the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church we once knew no longer exists."

Fort Worth and Quincy are the only two of the Episcopal Church's 110 dioceses that do not allow women to be ordained. Fort Worth also disagreed with the national church on the blessing of same-sex unions and the 2003 consecration of an openly gay man as bishop of New Hampshire.

Episcopal presiding bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said that her church "grieves the departure of a number of persons from the Diocese of Fort Worth" and that the "door is open" should they want to return. She said that the national church will work with local loyalists to rebuild the diocese.

"The gospel work to which Jesus calls us demands the best efforts of faithful people from many theological and social perspectives," Jefferts Schori said, "and the Episcopal Church will continue to welcome that diversity."

Five of the Fort Worth diocese's 56 congregations and an estimated 4,000 of its 19,000 members will remain with the Episcopal Church, according to Iker and other officials. -*Religion News Service*