

Rival Anglican church body forms for North America: Unhappy with "liberal turn"

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Dissident Episcopalians in North America unhappy with what they say is the “liberal turn” of the U.S. and Canadian branches of Anglicanism have announced that they are forming an alternative denomination, or province, within the worldwide communion.

The New York-based Episcopal Church and a spokesperson for the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams dismissed the steps taken in early December at a church in Wheaton, Illinois, as irregular and premature at the least.

Though the move to form an “emerging Anglican Church in North America” was not unexpected, it did illustrate the division sharpened by disagreements over church authority and homosexuality issues—principally the Episcopal Church’s approval of a gay bishop in 2003.

“The public release of our draft constitution is an important concrete step toward the goal of a biblical, missionary and united Anglican Church in North America,” Robert Duncan, the former Episcopal bishop of Pittsburgh, said December 3. The Episcopal Church removed Duncan from his post as bishop in September for his “abandonment” of the U.S. denomination.

Supporting the new province is the Duncan-led Common Cause Partnership, which says it represents about 100,000 church members in the United States and Canada. By contrast, the Episcopal Church has 2.2 million members.

A statement from the office of Williams, the spiritual head of the 77-million-member global Anglican Communion, said specific steps must be taken to create new Anglican provinces. “Once begun, any of these processes will take years to complete,” it said. “In relation to the recent announcement from the meeting of the

Common Cause Partnership . . . the process has not yet begun.”

Episcopal church leaders note that the dissident group apparently hopes to be declared a new province on the basis of theological agreement rather than as a strictly geographical entity.

The dissident movement may be relying on the broad shift of opinion to the right among Third World Anglicans for support among Anglicans worldwide. U.S.-based conservatives cite the like-minded statements last year from the Jerusalem declaration of the Global Anglican Future Conference.

Speaking for the Episcopal Church’s presiding bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, Charles Robertson said, “There is room within the Episcopal Church for people with different views, and we regret that some have felt the need to depart from the diversity of our common life in Christ.”

In remarks on December 3, Duncan declared that “the Lord is displacing the Episcopal Church.” He also appeared to challenge the archbishop of Canterbury, noted the Episcopal News Service.

“We stand where the mainstream of Anglicanism stands,” he said. “The question will, of course, be, Will the archbishop recognize those who stand where the mainstream of Anglicans—or the mainstream of Christians—stand, or not?”