

Covenant aims to mediate disputes within Anglican Communion: A "sensible and Christian way of dealing with our conflicts"

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The final draft of a long-debated document aimed at mediating disputes between liberals and conservatives in the global Anglican Communion was sent in mid-December to the communion's 38 provinces for approval.

The Anglican Communion, which is the world's third-largest body of Christians with 77 million members, has been bitterly divided over homosexuality since the election and approval of an openly gay Episcopal bishop in 2003.

The document, called a "covenant," is "not going to be a penal code," said Archbishop Rowan Williams, the spiritual leader of Anglicanism, but rather "a practical, sensible and Christian way of dealing with our conflicts."

"We've discovered that our relations with each other as local churches have been strained," Williams said on December 18, "and we need to have a sense that we are responsible to one another."

Each Anglican province is autonomous, limiting the power of Williams and other Anglican leaders to police the communion. Earlier in December, Episcopalians in Los Angeles openly defied Williams by electing Mary Glasspool, who is openly lesbian, as an assistant bishop, subject to approval this year by other Episcopal Church bishops and dioceses.

Williams and an international panel of Anglican leaders have asked the Episcopal Church to "exercise restraint" by not confirming Glasspool's election. In addition, the Anglican Communion's Standing Committee on December 18 asked Episcopalians to exercise "gracious restraint" with respect to "actions that endanger the unity of the

Anglican Communion.”

Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, who generally supports gay rights in the church, sits on the 15-member Standing Committee. It is not known whether she supported the statement. A spokeswoman for Jefferts Schori said December 22 that “as agreed upon by the Standing Committee, the details of the conversations of the meeting are considered private.”

The nine-page covenant does not mention homosexuality, but says provinces that take “controversial” actions could face “relational consequences,” including limitations on their membership in the communion.

Williams said he hopes provinces will adopt the covenant by 2012. Episcopal leaders have said their church could not consider the proposal until 2012 at the earliest, and approval of it could take another three years. *-Religion News Service*