

Canadian court rules dissident churches must abandon property

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November 19, 2010

TORONTO (RNS/ENInews) An Canadian appeals court has ruled in favor of an Anglican diocese in a property dispute with congregations opposed to same-gender blessings.

In a unanimous decision released on Monday (Nov. 15), British Columbia Court of Appeal Justice Mary Newbury, writing for a three-judge panel, dismissed an appeal by four breakaway parishes against a 2009 lower court ruling.

Newbury said that the dissident clergy of the four parishes in the Vancouver-based diocese of New Westminster cannot remove themselves from their bishop's oversight and the diocesan structure and retain the right to use properties that are held for purposes of Anglican ministry in Canada.

The diocese has begun to replace the clergy of the four Vancouver-area churches, whose properties are worth an estimated \$20 million. One of the churches, St John's Shaughnessy, is widely considered one of Canada's wealthiest parishes.

Clergy and trustees of the four churches, which split from the Anglican Church of Canada in 2002 when the diocese authorized a liturgy for blessing same-sex couples, had asked the court to give them control over the properties.

Those who left joined a breakaway group called the Anglican Network in Canada (ANiC), which they say is the true, orthodox Anglican church.

Monday's decision could set a precedent for similar cases across Canada, where gay marriage is legal. Six out of 30 Anglican dioceses in Canada make some provisions for same-gender unions.

"Obviously, we are deeply disappointed by this decision, which is currently being reviewed by our legal counsel," said ANiC legal advisor Cheryl Chang in a statement on the network's website. The congregations may appeal, she said.