

Church of England gives OK to Anglican covenant

by [Al Webb](#) in the [December 28, 2010](#) issue

The Church of England, defying opposition from its traditionalist wing, has given its support to a global covenant aimed at keeping the Anglican Communion intact in the face of disputes over homosexuality and female bishops.

The Church's General Synod has voted its preliminary approval of draft legislation that could be put to a final ballot within two years. The draft now goes to dioceses for their consideration.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who heads the 77-million-strong worldwide Anglican Communion, has tossed his full support to the proposed covenant, but conservative Anglicans have already stepped in to try to scuttle the project.

The proposal has received a cool reception in Anglicanism's American branch, the Episcopal Church, which sparked a global furor with its decisions to consecrate openly gay bishops in 2003 and 2010.

A statement by leaders of the British-based Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans said the covenant, while "well-intentioned," is nevertheless "fatally flawed," and therefore "support for this initiative is no longer appropriate." That statement has been endorsed by archbishops from West Africa, Rwanda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and Australia, as well as the Anglican Church in North America, a splinter group formed from the Episcopal Church.

Backers of the proposed covenant, which was passed by the General Synod on November 24, said the document offers a road map to the resolution of various disputes. The draft covenant does not adopt a position on gay clergy or other divisive issues but is intended to provide communal standards that would bind the Anglican Communion's 38 provinces.

But even some who voted for the legislation appear uneasy about it. Bishop of Gloucester Michael Perham said he voted in favor with "some reluctance." Still, the bishop told the French news agency Agence France-Presse that "not to vote for it is to make more difficult the task of the archbishop of Canterbury in his ministry to the Communion. I want to strengthen, not weaken, his hand," Perham said. —RNS