

Breakaway Anglicans told to return property

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [April 4, 2012](#) issue

A Virginia judge has ordered seven congregations that broke from the Episcopal Church to return all property to the local diocese—from valuable land to sacred chalices—by April 30. The Diocese of Virginia had wanted the properties returned by March 30, a week before Easter. But Fairfax County Circuit Court Judge Randy Bellows agreed to give the breakaway congregations more time. In a closely watched case that reached the Virginia Supreme Court, Bellows ruled in January that congregations have the right to leave the Diocese of Virginia, but not to take church property with them.

The conservative congregations must return an estimated \$40 million worth of property, including several large, historic churches, according to the *Washington Post*. They must also return chalices, prayer books, crosses and some of the money they had on hand before they left the Episcopal Church.

"We hope that this will mark the end of this lengthy litigation," said Virginia Bishop Shannon Johnston.

Frustrated with the Episcopal Church's liberal theology, which includes consecrating gay and lesbian priests as bishops, the congregations voted to leave the denomination in 2006 and 2007. They are now part of the rival Anglican Church in North America.

Jim Oakes, a spokesman for the breakaway congregations, said they are "prayerfully considering their legal options." Oakes said they are particularly upset at Bellows's order to turn over donations given to the congregations before they left the Episcopal Church. —RNS