

Breakaway Anglicans tap Atlanta bishop as new leader

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(RNS) The Anglican Church in North America, which broke away from the Episcopal Church in 2009 because of sharp differences over human sexuality and the authority of the Bible, has elected a bishop from Atlanta to become the church's next leader.

The Rt. Rev. Foley Beach, who currently oversees ACNA's Diocese of the South, was elected Saturday (June 21) to succeed Archbishop Robert Duncan, the former Episcopal bishop of Pittsburgh who has served as ACNA's founding archbishop.

Beach was elected archbishop after a three-day conclave at St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, east of Pittsburgh. He will serve a five-year term. He was first elected a bishop in 2010, overseeing more than 50 parishes from Florida to West Virginia.

Duncan, who will remain as bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh, called Beach's election "a happy day for the Anglican Church in North America, a happy day for the Anglican Communion, and a happy day for the Christian Church."

Archbishop Eliud Wabukala of Kenya, chairman of the primates' council of GAFCON, the Global Anglican Future Conference of conservative archbishops from the Global South, called Beach a "man of courage, compassion for the lost and biblical conviction, and I am greatly encouraged for the continuing witness of this new Province he has been called to lead."

ACNA now counts 112,000 members in 983 churches across the U.S., Canada and Mexico. While it has never been formally recognized as a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion—the Episcopal Church remains the official U.S. branch of Anglicanism—it has the support of GAFCON and other patrons from Africa and Asia who have broken ties with the Episcopal Church.

ACNA started as a refuge for conservative and evangelical Episcopalians upset by their church's liberal drift. "Many of us had been exiled from—or were walking away from—the church that had shaped and formed us," Duncan said Tuesday.

Duncan set a goal of starting 1,000 churches in the first five years, but growth has been hindered by finances and geographical turf battles among various Anglican groups. Duncan reported that 488 new churches had been started. "Well, 488 is not 1,000, but it sure is an awesome harvest," he said.