

Episcopal Church intact a year later: Trouble in Anglican Communion

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More than a year after the confirmation of an openly gay Episcopal bishop, who recently admitted he was not 100 percent sure he did the right thing, church officials say the denomination has not broken apart or fallen victim to a fatal drop in finances.

The election of Bishop V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire was approved by bishops and lay and clergy delegates in August 2003 during the church's General Convention in Minneapolis. He was formally consecrated November 2.

Robinson's election was denounced by sister churches in the Anglican Communion as an unbiblical act that threatened to tear asunder the group of 38 church provinces. Nine U.S. dioceses formed a separate network as a refuge for conservatives opposed to Robinson's election.

A memo distributed by church leaders in New York said only nine of the 38 provinces in the Anglican Communion had declared themselves in "impaired communion" with the U.S. church. The nine churches—Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Southeast Asia, Southern Cone (Latin America), Tanzania, Uganda and West Indies—represent about half of the communion's 77 million members.

Two American dioceses—Dallas and Pittsburgh—have said they will send no money to the national church, while three other conservative dioceses have not indicated what amount, if any, they will send.

Two southern California congregations in mid-August declared themselves "no longer affiliated" with the Episcopal Church, saying they voted to place themselves under the pastoral oversight of Ugandan Bishop Evans Mukasa Kisekka. However, Bishop Jon Bruno of the Los Angeles Diocese then prohibited three priests and a deacon at St. James Church in Newport Beach and All Saints in Long Beach from exercising their ministries.

Church officials were forced to make a 5 percent reduction in spending in February to make up for \$2 million in decreased contributions, but said recently that revenue was running almost \$400,000 more than expected. Officials said it would be impossible to measure where Robinson's election had affected membership figures—those figures won't be available until the fall of 2005—but they reported growth in the South, Southeast and Southwest.

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles at a national conference of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an interfaith peace group, Robinson said August 9 in a question-and-answer session that his willingness to become the denomination's first openly gay bishop "might not have been the best thing."

Talking to several thousand meeting at Occidental College, he noted, "Am I absolutely, 100 percent sure that I'm doing the right thing? No, I'm really not." In his conference speech, however, he displayed confidence in the rightness of his cause. "I believe without any shadow of a doubt that I'm going to heaven," Robinson said. "God will not have any of us on the margins." —*Religion News Service*