

Antiochian Orthodox Christians leave NCC: Gay rights at issue

by [Chris Herlinger](#) in the [August 23, 2005](#) issue

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America plans to leave the National Council of Churches, saying it is unhappy with policies and statements some member denominations have made supporting gay and lesbian church members.

Metropolitan Philip Saliba, the denomination's top bishop, was reportedly outspoken during the archdiocesan convention in Dearborn, Michigan, in urging the church to withdraw from the NCC. According to the online *Orthodox News*, published by Orthodox Christian Laity, both clergy and lay delegates approved the step unanimously July 28.

"It got to be too much," said Antiochian spokesman Thomas Zain. "There was no more reason to be part of it." The New York-based NCC has "lost its goal of Christian unity on a doctrinal basis. The goal seems to be including everybody and [promoting] niceties."

Most recently, denominational officials were unhappy with an NCC fundraising letter in which, according to Zain, the NCC asked churches for support to fight "right-wing attacks" against the ecumenical agency.

The more pressing issue for the Orthodox church body, however, was the support of the United Church of Christ for the right of gays and lesbians to marry, and the lingering dispute in the Episcopal Church over the consecration of V. Gene Robinson as its first openly gay bishop.

"We just feel we don't have much in common with the [other NCC] churches," Zain said. While the denomination considered taking up the matter with a larger body of U.S. Orthodox denominations, officials decided to act alone.

Several Orthodox churches have signed on to a new ecumenical body, Christian Churches Together, formed to complement but not replace the NCC. The Antiochian

archdiocese has yet to join that body, though Zain said it “seems interesting.”

The archdiocese, headquartered in Englewood, New Jersey, has about 390,000 members and 240 parishes, according to the *2005 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*. The church traces its roots to Arabic-speaking immigrants to North America.

Wesley “Pat” Pattillo, the NCC’s associate general secretary for communications, said in early August that the 36-member council had not yet received any communication from the denomination about its plans, but he called the move “unfortunate.”