

Charismatics Form New Network for Conservative Episcopalians

The Network of Anglican Dioceses and Parishes was formed in response to the denomination's election of V. Gene Robinson

Angered by the U.S. Episcopal Church's recent election of an openly gay man as bishop of New Hampshire, a group of conservative Episcopalians, headed by a charismatic bishop, have formed a new network that leaders say will function as a part of the broader Anglican Communion.

Chartered Jan. 20 in Plano, Texas, the Network of Anglican Dioceses and Parishes (NADP) was organized by the bishops of 12 dioceses, which represent at least 10 percent of the 2.3 million Anglicans in the United States. So far, four diocese have ratified the charter.

The Episcopal Church in the United States (ECUSA) is part of the Anglican Communion, a global association of denominations that trace their lineage to the Church of England.

The new group's charter said the network constitutes "a true and legitimate expression of the worldwide Anglican Communion," Reuters reported. Its leader, Robert Duncan, a charismatic Episcopal bishop from Pittsburgh, said ECUSA strayed from the denomination's constitution when it blessed homosexual unions and elected V. Gene Robinson, who is openly gay, as a bishop.

The new network, which was formed after consultation with

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, would “operate in good faith within the constitution of the Episcopal Church,” Duncan said. “We are not splitting off from the Episcopal Church.”

Formed during the annual meeting of the American Anglican Council (AAC), a conservative group of Episcopal churches, the network is led largely by people influenced by the charismatic renewal that swept through ECUSA 40 years ago.

“The majority of the bishops and priests who are leaders of the orthodox movement leading the charge today against ECUSA have charismatic renewal backgrounds,” said AAC board member Roger Ames, rector of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Akron, Ohio.

“They are the fruits of the charismatic renewal of the ’60s to the ’80s,” said Ames, who is charismatic. “The days of working ... to bring charismatic renewal have now come of age. The majority of the leaders who are resisting [ECUSA’s] culture moves have been prepared like Esther for a time like this.”

Before his death in 1991, ECUSA renewal leader Dennis Bennett said that if his denomination ever declared that homosexuality was the norm, he would have to leave, his widow, Rita Bennett, told Charisma. Though she has chosen to remain in her Episcopal congregation, Rita Bennett said: “I believe the Episcopal Church has stopped teaching and taking the book of Moses and the Torah seriously. All the laws on sexuality are given there. ... It’s dangerous to throw out the law and be left with grace only.”

Alan Hansen, president and CEO of Acts 29 Ministries in

Atlanta, which is designed to help strengthen leaders, believes ECUSA is going through a “mini-reformation.” Churches that choose to withdraw from the Anglican Communion entirely stand to lose their facilities, and ministers would forfeit their parishes and possibly their retirement benefits. Duncan claims his network—a “realignment” that remains connected to the broader Anglican Communion—would circumvent that kind of sacrifice.

Still, Hansen, who is charismatic, said the mini-reformation will not come without a price. He believes orthodox clergy will be persecuted as they work to restore fellowship with the rest of the Anglican Communion and the ecumenical family.

Since Robinson’s election, Anglicans worldwide have expressed their disapproval of ECUSA’s actions. In December, the archbishop of the Anglican Church in Uganda sent a letter to ECUSA’s presiding bishop saying the Uganda church “has recognized your departure from the faith” and “cuts her relationship and Communion.” The letter also rescinded an invitation to participate in a January ceremony to consecrate a new archbishop.

Letters of condemnation also have been circulating from Anglican leaders in Guatemala and Papua New Guinea. In October the top primates, or spiritual leaders, of the Anglican Communion condemned ECUSA’s moves during a conference at Lambeth Palace in London. In February, ECUSA reported a \$3 million drop in donations, due in large part to churches withholding financial support in protest of Robinson’s election.

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