

Conservative Anglicans Launch 'Reformation'

The Common Cause Partnership, led by Bishop Robert Duncan, unveiled a provisional constitution on Wednesday to form a conservative branch of the Anglican Church in North America.



[] Conservative Anglicans living in North America took a first step on Wednesday toward forming a denomination separate from the Episcopal Church, the U.S. branch of Anglicanism that has been teetering on the verge of a split since it ordained an openly gay bishop in 2003.

During a news conference in Wheaton, Ill., leaders of the Common Cause Partnership (CCP), a conservative group comprised of Anglican associations worldwide, unveiled a provisional constitution and the first set of canons for the new Anglican Church in North America (ACNA).

Leaders said the rival denomination represents 700 congregations, or roughly 100,000 people, in the U.S. and Canada.

"The purpose of the province is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and His transforming love in the United States, Canada and beyond," said Bishop Robert Duncan, moderator of the CCP.

Duncan, whom Episcopal Church leaders deposed from his position as bishop of the diocese of Pittsburgh in September, will serve as the interim leader of the ACNA. His diocese defected from the Episcopal Church in October to align with Latin America's Southern Cone based in Argentina.

The ACNA's formation poses the biggest threat yet to the unity of the England-based Anglican Communion, which boasts roughly 77-million members worldwide. Dozens of conservative congregations have defected from the Episcopal Church to align with bishops in Latin America and Africa amid concerns that

the American branch of Anglicanism was breaking with orthodox Christianity by embracing gay bishops and blessing same-sex unions.

If the global Anglican Communion were to approve the formation of a new American branch, it could lead to further defections.

The new ACNA denomination already includes the breakaway dioceses of Pittsburgh, Fort Worth, Texas; Quincy, Ill.; and San Joaquin, Calif.—which each represent dozens of churches. Conservative Anglicans who left the Episcopal Church in the 1970s following changes to the Book of Common Prayer and the ordination of women are also among the new denomination's supporters.

The Rev. Charles Robertson, canon for the Episcopal Church's presiding bishop, Katherine Jefferts Schiori, told the *New York Times* on Wednesday that there is room for diverse perspectives within the church. "We regret that some have felt the need to depart from the diversity of our common life in Christ," he said.

Robertson added that the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church of Canada and La Iglesia Anglicana de Mexico are "the official, recognized presence of the Anglican Communion in North America."

But Duncan said Anglicanism is experiencing a sort of revolution. "We're going through Reformation times, and in Reformation times things aren't neat and clean," he told the *Times*. "In Reformation times, new structures are emerging."

CCP leaders expect seven Anglican primates to approve the new denomination. Many of those leaders, including the archbishops of Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda and the Southern Cone, participated in a first-ever Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in Jerusalem in July, where the primates signed a declaration proclaiming a new era for global Anglicanism.

On Friday, several of the GAFCON leaders are scheduled to present the provision constitution of the North American

branch to the Rev. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury. A spokesperson for Williams said on Thursday that the conservative American leaders had not begun to create a new church, Agence France-Presse reported.

"There are clear guidelines set out in the Anglican Consultative Council Reports ... detailing the steps necessary for the amendments of existing provincial constitutions and the creation of new provinces," the spokesperson said.

"Once begun, any of these processes will take years to complete. In relation to the recent announcement from the meeting of the Common Cause Partnership in Chicago, the process has not yet begun."

Duncan spokesman Rev. Peter Frank said the new denomination would proceed with or without the approval of the archbishop or the Anglican Consultative Council. Duncan spokesman Rev. Peter Frank said the new denomination would proceed with or without the approval of the archbishop or the Anglican Consultative Council, the group responsible for sanctioning new jurisdictions.

"Certainly the leaders of the largest Anglican provinces are a great place to start, and they're on board with this," Frank told *Charisma*. "We also know that we're past the point where some committee in England is going to be able to unilaterally decide who's Anglican and who's not. So that's where we're starting, with the support and the encouragement given to us by Anglican leaders around the world."

Michael W. Howell, executive director of CCP-affiliated Forward in Faith North America, said many conservative Anglicans had been praying for the formation of a new church for decades. "Instead of focusing on things that divide us, we as orthodox Anglicans are focusing on the things that unite us," he said.

Cynthia Brust, communications director for the Anglican Mission in the Americas, which is also part of the CCP, said

that Wednesday marked “the beginning of the healing of the Anglican Communion.”

“The main component to me is the mission focus,” Brust said. “We will be driven by mission, not structure.”

The CCP links eight conservative Anglican organizations across the globe, including the American Anglican Council, the Anglican Coalition in Canada, the Anglican Communion Network, the Anglican Mission in the Americas, the Anglican Network in Canada, the Convocation of Anglicans in North America, Forward in Faith North America and the Reformed Episcopal Church, as well as the bishops and congregations linked with dioceses in Kenya, Uganda and the Southern Cone.

Despite their shared theological conservatism, the groups hold divergent views on significant issues such as liturgical practices and the ordination of women. Frank said the new denomination will encourage mutual submission while “doing all we can to give each other freedom to follow our convictions.”

The ACNA plans to hold an assembly next summer in Texas, where congregations that choose to align with the denomination will ratify the provisional constitution. **-Adrienne S. Gaines**