

Rowan Williams: Anglicans Must Not Drift Apart

The outgoing leader of the world's 80 million Anglicans has said their national churches must live with some **religious diversity** but not become like "distant relatives who sometimes send Christmas cards to each other".

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams told the primates of the worldwide Anglican Communion that their loose association of 38 member churches "has endured much suffering and confusion and still lives with this in many ways."

But he added in his farewell letter to them: "Our Communion has never been the sort of Church that looks for one central authority... We have to have several points of reference for the organizing of our common life."

Williams spent most of his decade as Anglican **spiritual leader** struggling to keep bitter disputes between liberals in western countries and traditionalists, mostly from African and other developing countries, from tearing the Communion apart.

Faced with strong traditionalist opposition to gay clergy, women priests and liberal interpretations of the Bible, he tried to balance both sides and to strengthen central authority in Anglicanism so member churches did not diverge too much.

But his Anglican Covenant project failed when even his Church of England rejected the idea of a stronger center. Unlike the powerful Roman Catholic pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury is only the spiritual leader of Anglicans and has no direct authority over the Communion's member churches.

"As I leave office at the end of the year, there will of course be some self-questioning for me at the thought of much

left undone and unresolved,” he said.

“Halfway Formal Model”

The Church of England, mother church for the Communion, last month chose Bishop Justin Welby, a former oilman with long experience as a conflict negotiator in Africa, as the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

While he comes from the Church’s evangelical wing, which should please traditionalists, he also backed the failed bid to allow women bishops in England and has said he might reconsider his opposition to same-sex marriage.

The traditionalist campaign against western liberals went into high gear in the past decade after the Episcopal Church—the U.S. branch of the Anglican Communion—ordained its first **openly gay bishop** in 2003.

The Communion’s so-called “Global South”—where the majority of Anglicans now live—created a parallel group and supported conservatives in North America who opposed **gay bishops** and growing approval there for same-sex marriage.

Leaders of this traditionalist movement said last July that the next Archbishop of Canterbury “must be committed to uphold the orthodoxy of the Christian ‘faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints’.”

Early last month, Kenyan and Nigerian bishops attending a Communion leadership meeting protested against the presence of U.S. and Canadian bishops whose churches “continue to produce revisionist forms of the Christian faith that are unrecognizable to the majority of Anglicans worldwide.”

In his letter, Williams described the Communion as a “halfway formal model of a global community of prayer” that linked Anglicans around the globe through common work on projects such as spreading the faith, promoting healthcare and

defending rights of women and children.

“What we aspire to as Anglicans,” he wrote, “is not to be a federation of loosely connected and rather distant relatives who sometimes send Christmas cards to each other, but a true family and fellowship.”

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