

# Why Southern Episcopalians Are in an All Out War

A dispute between the U.S. Episcopal Church and a breakaway diocese angered over its acceptance of gay rights wound up in court on Tuesday as a trial got under way to decide the fate of \$500 million in historic real estate.

The fight pits the Diocese of South Carolina, consisting of some 50 parishes, against a national church it left in 2012 after the larger organization moved to ordain gay clergy and bless same-sex marriages.

"We don't just want to get the buildings back and keep the roof on a colonial structure," said Holly Behre, spokeswoman for The Episcopal Church in South Carolina, which is affiliated with the national church. "We're more concerned about the people and wanting them to come back to the church," she said. The breakaway diocese sued in January 2013 to protect it from property seizure by the U.S. Episcopal Church and 27 affiliated local parishes.

The breakaway group has kept the name of the Diocese of South Carolina and has remained in historic buildings including St. Philip's Church, originally built in 1681, and St. Michael's Church, erected the following century, both in Charleston.

In addition to the disputed properties, at issue in the trial being held in rural St. George is the name of the diocese, Behre said.

The breakaway Diocese of South Carolina predates the national Episcopal Church by four years, said diocese spokeswoman Joy Hunter, who said it formed in 1785 and incorporated as an independent nonprofit in 1973.

"Our position is that marriage is between a man and a woman,"

Hunter said.

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*Reporting by Harriet McLeod; Editing by Jonathan Kaminsky and Eric Walsh*

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