

Episcopal bishops remain defiant on gay bishop's election: Apologize for "pain" caused but not for action

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The bishops of the Episcopal Church have formally apologized for the “pain, hurt and damage” caused by the consecration of an openly gay bishop but stopped short of saying the action was wrong.

The bishops’ collective response was the first to a high-level report released in October by the Anglican Communion that called on the U.S. church to apologize. “Knowing that our actions have contributed to the current strains in our Communion, we express this regret as a sign of our deep desire for and commitment to continuation of our partnership in the Anglican Communion,” said the bishops at the close of their January 12-13 meeting in Salt Lake City.

But the statement signals that the U.S. church remains defiant in its support for the 2003 election of openly gay Bishop V. Gene Robinson in New Hampshire, and is still cool to the idea of a moratorium on other gay bishops or an outright ban on the blessing of same-sex unions.

The church’s top officer, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, declined to offer a stronger apology or answer his critics’ call to “repent” of his support of Robinson. “It’s very difficult to apologize for an action when those who took part in it believe it was under the leading of the Holy Spirit,” he said in a phone interview.

The Episcopal Church, as the U.S. branch of the 77-million-member Anglican Communion, has been harshly criticized by other Anglican churches and American traditionalists for its support of Robinson.

At the same time, a group of 21 conservative bishops issued a dissent, urging the church toward a more sincere apology and a promise not to make any more decisions that aren’t “fully compatible with the interests, standards, unity and good

order” of the global church.

Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh, leader of the church’s conservative wing, said liberals would eventually isolate themselves from the broader Anglican Communion unless they temper their support of gay issues. “The majority has the power to coerce the minority and even put us out,” Duncan said, “but in so doing, they ensure their destruction.”

The so-called Windsor Report issued in October by the Anglican Archbishop in Ireland Robin Eames chastised the U.S. church for breaching “the proper constraints of the bonds of affection” in the communion. It called for a moratorium on gay bishops and same-sex blessings but declined to recommend strong sanctions against the Americans.

The Eames report will be considered by the primates, or chief bishops, of the communion’s 38 provinces in a meeting this month in Northern Ireland. The U.S. bishops will reconvene in March.

In their statement, the bishops noted that the U.S. church is more democratic than other Anglican churches and said they could not “preempt” the will of lay members and clergy, who supported Robinson by wide margins.

As a signal of his support for gay clergy, Griswold has convened a committee to answer the Eames report’s request for a rationale for gay bishops. Griswold has named Mark McIntosh, a professor at Loyola University in Chicago, to lead the group, which will include at least two bishops. *-Religion News Service*