

Anglican breakaway church faces budget, unity tests: Anglican Church of North America

News in the [July 13, 2010](#) issue

When the Anglican Church in North America was launched last year, its founders were clear on what they didn't want to be: the Episcopal Church that they had left.

But as the ACNA marked its first anniversary in early June with a meeting in Amesbury, Massachusetts, members found that carving out a new identity requires a good dose of patience—and more money than they have on hand.

The ACNA knows what it wants to be: a church-planting, soul-saving province officially recognized by other churches and leaders in the 77-million-member Anglican Communion. Its own leaders reported some progress on those goals at the meeting, but fiscal hurdles remain.

Archbishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh, who leads the ACNA, said June 8 that membership grew from 703 congregations to 811 during the past year, a step toward fulfilling his mission to plant 1,000 new churches within the first five years. Meeting those goals, however, will mean surmounting financial challenges. The church's \$1.36 million budget, approved by the ACNA's Provincial Council, counts on a new initiative to raise half a million dollars within the next six months. If the fund-raising comes up short, projects central to establishing the young church's identity may stall.

"The vision for 'Anglican 1000' is contingent on us being able to raise \$500,000," said treasurer Bill Roemer, referring to the church-planting plans. Delegates to the ACNA meeting said these early years are critical for establishing it as a dynamic alternative to the Episcopal Church, which has been wracked by internal disputes and losing members for decades.

“The fear is that if we don’t push forward with a mission effort, we’re going to fall back to the old settled denominational pattern, which didn’t serve the Episcopal Church well and won’t serve us well either,” said Tom Finnie, rector of Christ Church in Midland, Texas.

The ACNA, composed of several distinct conservative Anglican bodies, split from the Episcopal Church in recent years after long battles over homosexuality and theological issues. Some Anglican critics are uneasy about overlapping jurisdictions and competing forms of Anglicanism within the breakaway church.

But the ACNA, which said it hasn’t yet petitioned for official standing in the Anglican Communion, enjoys significant support in Africa and other developing regions. At an April meeting in Singapore, delegates from 20 of the communion’s 38 provinces affirmed the ACNA as “a faithful expression of Anglicanism” in a region they said is in need of one.

The new church would need official approval from two-thirds of the world’s nearly 40 Anglican primates and the imprimatur of a key Anglican committee before it could be granted membership in the communion.

Even within the ACNA, there are hot-button issues that aren’t entirely resolved. Some ACNA dioceses ordain women as priests, while others regard the practice as unbiblical. A closed-door panel during the College of Bishops meeting was to have featured arguments for and against ordaining women.

Still recovering from emotionally bruising fights within the Episcopal Church, members of ACNA congregations seem to have little appetite left for pushing one another to conform. The council voted, for instance, to waive its size requirements for dioceses and accept new ones from the Great Lakes region and the South.

On highly charged issues, observers say, time will tell how much diversity the church can tolerate within its ranks.

“On matters of women, polity and the role of the bishop, they may have different views—and they’re going to have to work it out,” said David Holmes, a professor of American religious history at the College of William and Mary and author of *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church*. “I don’t see why an Anglican schismatic group would be doomed to fail, [but] I would be surprised if they didn’t encounter such problems that some groups split off.”

Delegates raised some concerns while discussing the budget. "It's said that staff expands to consume the money available, and this has been a problem in the Episcopal Church," said John Welchel, a delegate from Atlanta. -G. Jeffrey MacDonald, Religion News Service