

Openly gay bishop Robinson sets retirement date

by [Kevin Eckstrom](#) in the [November 30, 2010](#) issue

Most Episcopal bishops retire around age 65, and Bishop V. Gene Robinson made his retirement date official by asking the Diocese of New Hampshire to elect a successor so that he can retire in early 2013.

Addressing

delegates November 6 at the diocesan convention in Concord, New Hampshire, Robinson, 63, said the furor following his groundbreaking election as the first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church has taken a "toll on me, my family and you."

Robinson said he would

continue after retirement to be a roving ambassador for gay rights in the church and beyond, particularly as a bridge between unaffiliated or former Christians and a denomination that ordains women and gay bishops.

"I

have had the privilege of bringing many people into the church for the first time, or convincing them that the church is becoming a safe place to which they can return with a reasonable expectation of welcome," he told his convention. "This is evangelism for me, pure and simple."

But

Robinson, who wore a bullet-proof vest during his installation as bishop, said the diocese should elect a successor to take over when he retires officially on January 5, 2013.

"Death threats, and the now

worldwide controversy surrounding your election of me as bishop, have been a constant strain, not just on me, but on my beloved husband, Mark . . . and in some ways, you."

Starting with his election in 2003, Robinson's tenure shaped life within the 2.1-million-member Episcopal Church and strained relationships with its sister Anglican churches overseas.

Conservative Anglicans, especially in Africa and Asia, cut ties with the Episcopal Church after Robinson's election; one prominent African archbishop called it a "Satanic attack upon God's church."

His election also deeply strained the ties between the Episcopal Church and the spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. Last May, the U.S. church consecrated its first openly lesbian bishop, Mary Glasspool, in Los Angeles.

Even though Robinson's election caused the secession of four U.S. dioceses and the birth of a rival Anglican Church of North America for disgruntled conservatives, he remained unapologetic and said there was no going back.

"I believe that you elected me because you believed me to be the right person to lead you at this time," Robinson told delegates. "The world has sometimes questioned that, but I hope you never did."

His election touched off a dramatic realignment of the 77-million-member Anglican Communion. Saying the U.S. church is "out of step" with other Anglican churches, Williams has sidelined Episcopalians in Anglican decision-making bodies and proposed pushing the U.S. church into second-tier membership.

Episcopalians, meanwhile, have largely rejected external pressure and plotted their own course by electing Glasspool and taking steps to approve rites to bless same-sex unions and marriages.

Robinson said he is in good health and remains sober five years after seeking treatment for alcohol dependency, and has lost the "25 pounds put on over the last seven years

in part by eating all your good food." —RNS