

Episcopal officials hopeful despite downturn in giving: Financial fallout from Robinson's election

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The Episcopal Church is hoping the financial fallout from a gay bishop's election will level off this year after a conservative-led financial boycott helped create a 12 percent drop in giving in 2004.

Church treasurer Kurt Barnes said giving from the church's 112 dioceses fell about \$4 million in 2004 compared to 2003, but the church should be on target to meet a 2005 budget that was scaled back to adjust for the decline.

2004 was the first full year for conservatives to withhold funds in protest of the 2003 election of openly gay bishop V. Gene Robinson in New Hampshire. Three dioceses—Dallas, Pittsburgh and Quincy, Illinois—cut all donations to the national church.

Anticipating a decline, the church cut spending last year by 5 percent and lowered its expectation of \$29 million to \$27.4 million in diocesan giving. So far, Barnes said, he has collected \$22.8 million for 2004 and expects year-end contributions to plug the remaining \$4.6 million gap.

Still, that \$27.4 million is a 12 percent drop from the \$31.2 million collected in 2003. Barnes said a sputtering economy is partly to blame, but conservatives quickly dismissed that excuse as tired and worn.

"That big of a downturn, whatever the dollar amount is, hardly argues for a church where everything is fine and wonderful," David Anderson, president of the American Anglican Council, told the Associated Press.

Barnes told the church's Executive Council February 11-14 meeting in Austin, Texas, that he expects income to rise about \$1 million, or 3.7 percent, in 2005 over current levels to \$28.4 million.

Despite the modest improvements, the figures show that the protest over Robinson's election has stalled growth in the church's budget. By 2006 the church hopes to be above where it was in 2003, when Robinson was elected.

The denomination relies on contributions from local dioceses to fund 60 percent of its national operating budget—currently \$49 million in 2005. Each diocese is asked to send 21 percent of its income to church headquarters in New York. -*Religion News Service*