

Conservative Anglicans talk up realignment: Episcopal Church in the USA versus Anglican Communion Network

by [Ann Rodgers](#) in the [December 13, 2005](#) issue

Following a meeting of 2,400 conservatives unified in their belief that the Episcopal Church no longer upholds biblical tradition, tension remains between those eager to leave the church and others who counsel patience.

The predominant word at the November 10-12 conference in Pittsburgh was not *split* but *realignment*. The tension surfaced between the slow-moving, theologically conservative minority within the 2.3-million-member Episcopal Church in the USA (ECUSA) and the often less patient leaders of the conservative majority in the 77-million-member worldwide Anglican Communion.

Eight conservative primates—high-ranking bishops who represent some 30 million Anglicans outside the U.S.—attended the meeting called by the Anglican Communion Network, formed last year.

When one primate was asked what he and his colleagues would like the network's Episcopal bishops to do that they have not yet done, Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria began his reply by saying that the American bishops now stand with one leg in ECUSA and one in the Anglican Communion Network.

“If you really want the global South to partner with you, you must let us know exactly where you stand. Are you ECUSA or are you Network? Which one?” Akinola asked. He received a standing ovation from most of those in the convention center.

But Assistant Bishop Henry Scriven of Pittsburgh, the right-hand man to Pittsburgh bishop Robert Duncan, moderator of the network, remained seated.

“The problem with this is that it encourages breakaway. We need to be patient enough to see the Episcopal Church break itself away from the Anglican Communion. There is a difference between them breaking away and us breaking away,” Scriven said.

Indeed, network leaders have counseled remaining, at least for now. Just before the primates’ panel appearance, David C. Anderson, president of the American Anglican Council and secretary of the network, urged disgruntled Episcopalians to “stay [in ECUSA] as long as you can and work with us.”

Yet the conference probably heightened conflict in ECUSA by ordaining a priest and three deacons who will serve under South American bishops at newly formed congregations in the U.S. Less controversial sessions were aimed at getting affluent Episcopalians engaged in fighting the dire poverty, disease and corruption that their Third World counterparts contend with daily.

There was broad criticism of ECUSA, which several speakers claimed teaches a “counterfeit” theology that stresses God’s love but not the call to repentance and transformation. Underlying much of the criticism was the 2003 consecration of an openly gay bishop, V. Gene Robinson, in New Hampshire.

Duncan and the primates predicted that the 2006 General Convention of the Episcopal Church will refuse the request of the Anglican Communion’s Windsor Report to refrain from liturgically affirming same-sex relationships through ordination, consecration or blessing. If ECUSA denies or deflects that request, network leaders believe it will be clear to the world that ECUSA has broken ranks with worldwide Anglicanism.

But the Windsor Report also asks overseas Anglican bishops to stop intervening in U.S. dioceses. At the closing Eucharist, Bishop Frank Lyons of Bolivia ordained three deacons and a priest to serve newly formed groups started by former Episcopalians in the U.S. “These men have been ordained to minister to those folks who cannot remain in communion with the Episcopal Church,” Lyons said. He ordained the deacons for his own diocese, and the priest on behalf of Bishop Tito Zavala of the Diocese of Chile.

The priest, Eliot Winks, will serve the Church of the Resurrection in Baltimore. Of the deacons, William Haley will have a ministry among the poor in Washington, D.C.; Ian Crom will serve a congregation in Greenwich, Connecticut; and David Drake will

serve Holy Trinity, a congregation in Raleigh, North Carolina.

The ordinations were termed “appalling” by Bishop Robert Ilhoff of Baltimore. “This is in violation of the Windsor Report, which called on bishops in various other parts of the Anglican Communion not to interfere with local matters,” he said.

Duncan said that several primates contend that since the Episcopal Church has not abided by the request to stop ordaining gay priests and blessing gay relationships, foreign bishops are not obligated to stop outreach in Episcopal Church territory.

“If the Episcopal Church turned back, I’m sure they’d be delighted to turn these churches over to the Episcopal Church. They are doing their own missionary work, and of course we are supportive of them,” Duncan said.