

COMMUNION PROCESS PRESENTS CHALLENGES FOR PROPOSED PROVINCE

Dissident Anglicans must conform to established guidelines for official recognition, Lambeth says

By Matthew Davies and Mary Frances Schjonberg December 04, 2008 [Episcopal News Service] Despite claiming to have God and history on their side, proponents of a new Anglican province in North America could face a years-long process for gaining official recognition by the rest of the Anglican Communion.

A statement from Lambeth Palace, the London office of Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, responded to the [Common Cause Partnership's](#) (CCP) December 3 proposal to form a new Anglican province in North America. The statement said that there are legislative procedures to follow in such instances.

"There are clear guidelines set out in the [Anglican Consultative Council](#) Reports, notably [ACC 10](#) in 1996 ([resolution 12](#)), detailing the steps necessary for the amendments of existing provincial constitutions and the creation of new provinces," the statement said. "Once begun, any of these processes will take years to complete. In relation to the recent announcement from the meeting of the Common Cause Partnership in Chicago, the process has not yet begun."

However, at least one leader of the movement has questioned the London-based ACC's process, asking "Why is England still considered the center of the universe?"

Members of the 11 self-identified Anglican organizations that form the Common Cause Partnership (CCP) announced December 3 the creation of what they called an Anglican "province in formation" for those who say that the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada promote erroneous biblical interpretation and theology, particularly in terms of the doctrine of salvation and acceptance of homosexuality.

Former Episcopal Church Diocese of Pittsburgh bishop and CCP moderator Robert Duncan, who will become the proposed province's first archbishop and primate, told a December 3 news briefing that the movement he leads is a descendant of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Both periods in history required Christians to reassert the power of revelation that some of their leaders had lost, he said.

"That, brothers and sisters, is what I would submit is happening right now in the 21st century across the whole Christian church, particularly in the West," he told reporters. When asked, Duncan refused to claim that the announcement amounted to a schism of the Anglican Communion. Cynthia Brust, communications director for the [Anglican Mission in the Americas](#) (a member of the partnership), told reporters that the communion "has been fractured, it has been damaged, it has been in disarray, it's been coming for a long time."

"Rather than today being about division and breaking apart in disunity, it's the day that the Anglican Communion began to be healed," she said.

The leaders of the movement released a "[provisional](#)" constitution and [canons](#) during the meeting in the suburban Chicago community of Wheaton, Illinois. The two documents are due to be ratified by participants in a planned summer 2009 "provincial assembly" at [St. Vincent's Cathedral](#) in Bedford, Texas. (St. Vincent's is in the Diocese of Fort Worth, one of four Episcopal Church dioceses in which many members have realigned with the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone.)

The leaders also signed onto the Jerusalem Declaration of the [Global Anglican Future Conference](#) (GAFCON) and affirmed GAFCON's Statement on the Global Anglican Future (both available [here](#)). The GAFCON documents said "the time is now ripe for the formation of a province in North America for the federation currently known as Common Cause Partnership to be recognized by the [GAFCON] Primates' Council."

Duncan claimed that statement and a higher authority as the authorization the group needed. "It's the Lord who's called us to do this work" after the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church in Canada caused a "crisis," he said.

"The Lord is displacing the Episcopal Church," Duncan said, adding that "it's our anticipation" that the archbishops and the provinces representing what he called the majority of the Anglican Communion "will begin to recognize this province."

Duncan appeared to lay down a challenge to the Archbishop of Canterbury. "We stand where the mainstream of Anglicanism stands," he said. "The question will of course be will the archbishop recognize those who stand where the mainstream of Anglicans -- or the mainstream of Christians -- stand, or not."

On December 3, prior to the release of details of the proposed province, the Rev. Charles Robertson, canon to Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, noted in a statement that "the Episcopal Church, along with the [Anglican Church of Canada](#) and [La Iglesia Anglicana de Mexico](#), comprise the official, recognized presence of the Anglican Communion in North America."

"And we reiterate what has been true of Anglicanism for centuries: that there is room within The Episcopal Church for people with different views, and we regret that some have felt the need to depart from the diversity of our common life in Christ," he added.

Recognition of any new province by the official structures of the Anglican Communion is complicated. The ACC, the communion's main policy-making body, meets every three to four years and has the authority "to advise on inter-Anglican, provincial, and diocesan relationships, including the division of provinces, the formation of new provinces and of regional councils," according to its constitution.

The ACC legislation about new provinces cited by Williams' spokesperson refers to provinces being created on a geographical basis as opposed to on theological grounds such as the Common Cause Partnership's proposed province.

"Once initial consultation had taken place, and it was agreed in principle that it would be expedient to form a new province in the region, the promoters would appoint a drafting committee, to consider the outline draft constitution set out by the ACC," the resolution says, noting that "the drafting process in itself is likely to take some considerable time."

ACC resolutions have repeatedly stated that before the creation of a new province there should be consultation "from the earliest stages in their discussions" with the secretary general of the Anglican Communion or the Anglican Consultative Council "for guidance and advice, especially in regard to the form of constitution most appropriate."

Asked whether the secretary general had been consulted by any member of the Common Cause Partnership, a spokesman for the Anglican Communion Office said December 4 that there has been no approach.

Martyn Minns, a former Episcopal priest and a bishop of the breakaway [Convocation of Anglicans in North America](#), [told](#) the New York Times December 3: "One of the questions a number of the primates are asking

is why do we still need to be operating under the rules of an English charity, which is what the Anglican Consultative Council does. Why is England still considered the center of the universe?"

If the Common Cause Partnership were to abide by the ACC's procedures, the process could take several years, according to the schedule outlined in the resolution. "Having agreed on the form of the new constitution, the proposers are asked to submit their application ... to the ACC not less than 15 months ahead of the next meeting of the full council," the resolution says. The ACC's next meeting will be held May 1-12, 2009 in Jamaica. According to the resolution's schedule, any formal attempt by the Common Cause Partnership to have the ACC accept its proposed constitution would need to wait until the following meeting, presumably in 2012.

Two-thirds of the primates would also have to approve such a constitution before it is presented to the ACC for consideration.

ACC resolutions on the creation and division of provinces date back to its first meeting in 1971 and have been reaffirmed by subsequent meetings of the council. At the first meeting, the ACC resolved ([resolution 21](#)) that when creating and dividing provinces "there must be the good will of the existing province in order not to create difficulties of disunity after division." (A first set of guidelines for drafting and revising provincial constitutions was developed at the fourth meeting of the ACC in 1979).

While the new province would be based on theological commonality rather than the geographical proximity that generally shapes the rest of the provinces in the Anglican Communion, the members are not united in all of their theological positions. This is especially true on the issue of women's ordination.

"Scripture is unclear" on the subject, Duncan said in response to a reporter's question. He noted that both the Old and New Testaments give women leadership roles and that "clearly it is the case that women had an apostolic function in the New Testament" even though all the apostles were male and the church has "traditionally" defined the priesthood as all male.

"Whereas some issues are quite clear in Scripture, others have a complexity," Duncan said.

Noting that some members ordain women only to the diaconate and not the priesthood, Duncan said they agreed that women could not become bishops in the province. To allow female bishops "wouldn't bring unity and it wouldn't be universally accepted," said Duncan, who has ordained women as priests. "We've submitted to one another on matters that make for unity."

Questions about that issue evolved into a larger discussion about the authority of Scripture. Duncan accused the Episcopal Church of being unwilling to adhere to what he called the clear biblical "standard" that defines marriage and the family as a lifelong union that mirrors Christians' relationship with God.

"Scripture makes it plain that homosexual relations are not in God's will," Duncan told reporters. "Jesus' love is for absolutely everybody. Jesus meets people where they are and then he says 'go and sin no more.' What the Episcopal Church has done -- and the Anglican Church in Canada -- has been to leave the whole scriptural notion of transformation in the power of the Holy Spirit out of the equation. The gospels being preached particularly in the West -- and it's not only in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church in Canada -- [are] a gospel of acceptance, a gospel of affirmation. The classic gospel is a gospel of transformation where people are delivered out of their own desires into God's desires for how we live our lives."

The group's provisional constitution and canons have several differences from those of the [Episcopal Church](#), including:

- ♦ an archbishop elected to up to two consecutive five-year terms only by his fellow bishops (Episcopal Church bishops elects not an archbishop but a presiding bishop for one nine-year term and the General Convention's House of Deputies ratifies that election);
- ♦ all congregational property is owned by the congregation and not subject to "any trust interest or any other claim of ownership arising out of the canon law of the province" (the Episcopal Church asserts such trust interests);
- ♦ member groups (known as diocese, clusters or networks) can leave the province at any time (the Episcopal Church maintains that while people may leave dioceses and parishes, those entities remain a part of the church unless they are dissolved or otherwise reconfigured by their governing bodies); and
- ♦ "an ecclesiastical court of final decision," to be known as the provincial tribunal, to settle all disputes arising from the constitution and canons (the Episcopal Church has no such court).

The actions in Wheaton are the latest in a more than two-year-old effort to create an alternative province in North America for those Anglicans who disagree with the theological and biblical interpretation stances of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada. The outlines of that effort are available at the end of [this story](#).

The Common Cause Partnership's members include the [American Anglican Council](#), the [Anglican Coalition in Canada](#), the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes (also known as the [Anglican Communion Network](#)), the [Anglican Mission in the Americas](#), the [Anglican Network in Canada](#), the [Convocation of Anglicans in North America](#), [Forward in Faith North America](#), the [Reformed Episcopal Church](#), and bishops and congregations linked with Kenya, Uganda, and South America's Southern Cone.

Common Cause says that together the groups represent 700 congregations and more than 100,000 Anglicans. The Episcopal Church includes some 7,600 congregations and 2.4 million Episcopalians. There are an estimated 77 million Anglicans in 164 countries worldwide.