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COMMON CAUSE IN THE U.S.

By David Phillips

When the Anglican Primates met in Tanzania in February they set an ultimatum to the United States Episcopal Church (ECUSA - now officially TEC) with a deadline of 30th September. Writing just before the deadline all the indications are that the conditions will not be met. However, the Archbishop of Canterbury is due to meet with the US Bishops in the interim and it is still possible that they will issue a statement fudging the matter and he will try to read it as compliance. The Primates required them to covenant together not to permit same-sex blessings or to permit those in same-sex relationships to become Bishops. Statements from some in the US indicate that they are so convinced that they are right that they will not back down and are willing to continue tearing apart the body of Christ.

The response within the US to all this seems to get more confusing by the day. Over the summer three new Bishops were consecrated by African provinces and three more announced. In 2004 an umbrella was created called Common Cause Partners which covers ten organisations in both the US and Canada with varying relationships to ECUSA.

The Anglican Communion Network (ACN) was also established in 2004, it consists mainly of those still within the formal structures of ECUSA. It includes 10 ECUSA Dioceses, 900 congregations and around 200,000 laity. The convenor is Bob Duncan, Bishop of Pittsburgh. ACN has an 'International Conference' (Icon) made up of around 100 congregations which are no longer part of ECUSA structurally. Over the summer Bill Atwood and Bill Murdoch were made Bishops of the Province of Kenya and John Guernsey a Bishop of the Province of Uganda to serve these congregations. Two retired ECUSA Bishops are also part of the Icon; Bill Cox, now under the Province of the Southern Cone, and Andy Fairfield under Uganda.

Two other partners, Forward in Faith North America and the American Anglican Council are also predominantly made up of those still within ECUSA.

The Anglican Mission in the Americas (formerly 'in America') is a missionary movement sponsored by the Province of Rwanda and begun in 2000. There are about 125 affiliated congregations in the US and Canada. There are four existing Bishops (Chuck Murphy, Thad Barnum, Sandy Greene and TJ Johnson) and one retired (John Rodgers). Rwanda has announced three new consecrations for January (Terrell Glenn, Philip Jones and John Miller).

The Convocation of Anglicans in North America (CANA) is linked with Nigeria and is reckoned to have a membership of around 60,000 including three of the largest ECUSA parishes who have now joined CANA. Martyn Minns was consecrated in Nigeria as a missionary Bishop and another retired ECUSA Bishop (David Bena) is now also part of CANA. CANA has a larger membership than the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The three Canadian groups in Common Cause are Anglican Coalition in Canada, Anglican Essentials Canada and Anglican Network in Canada.

The remaining two bodies have a longer history. The Anglican Province of America (APA) was formed by a merger in 1991 though its roots go back to the late 1960s. It is a traditionalist body but since the merger has been more Anglo-Catholic in outlook and now distinctly pro-Roman. The Reformed Episcopal Church dates from the mid 19th Century but like its sister church, the Free

Church of England, has ceased to be Reformed and has become uncomfortable for those who are. APA and REC have discussed formal merger.

The Common Cause Partners are thus a very mixed bunch and few within them are clearly protestant and reformed. Some are ritualistic, some favour women's ordination whilst others reject it, and medieval vestments which are associated with erroneous views of episcopal power (cope and mitre) or the sacraments (stole and chasuble) are common. Some groups, such as AMiA are largely charismatic, some use watered down modern liturgy whilst others insist on traditional language. Contrary to what is sometimes alleged it is not opposition to homosexual practice that unites them, but to the whole revisionist agenda. But some of these groups have already accepted that it is possible to re-interpret Scripture and twist the plain meaning of the Articles, therefore they have within them the seeds of what they are seeking to unite against.

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