

S.C. diocese eases away from Episcopal church

Daniel Burke Religion News Service | Oct. 27, 2009

The Diocese of South Carolina voted on Saturday, Oct. 24, to begin withdrawing from some governing bodies in the Episcopal Church in protest over the denomination's approval of same-sex blessings and gay bishops.

While the diocese did not secede from the Episcopal Church, as four other dioceses have done in recent years, it did take similar steps, including declaring certain churchwide policies "null and void" and reducing participation in church governance.

Bishop Mark Lawrence, whose diocese includes an estimated 30,000 Episcopalians in the southeastern part of South Carolina, said the moves were necessary to fight the "false gospel of indiscriminate inclusivity."

"It is about what the church has the authority to recognize as authentically Christian, and what is appropriate for ordained leadership," Lawrence said in an address to the special convention on Saturday.

At a churchwide convention last summer, the Episcopal Church voted to lift a de facto ban on gay and lesbian bishops and approved a broad local option for same-sex blessings.

The Diocese of Minnesota will consider electing a lesbian as bishop this weekend (Oct. 31).

The election of an openly gay man as bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 has led four dioceses and dozens of parishes to leave the 2.1 million-member Episcopal Church and caused widespread dissent in the Anglican Communion.

Bonnie Anderson, president of the Episcopal Church's House of Deputies, told the South Carolina delegates in a letter that their resolutions "contain misleading statements" and "are similar to" actions taken by dioceses that have seceded.

"I fervently pray that is not what is intended," Anderson said.

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