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Abp. Williams laments 'chaos' over women, gays

by Al Webb by Religion News Service

LONDON -- Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams warned Anglican clergy Tuesday (Feb. 9) that their debate about female and gay bishops is causing "chaos" that must be resolved if the Church of England is to be unified.

In a key address in London, Williams pleaded with the General Synod -- the church's parliament -- to start listening to each other and stop pursuing a "zero-sum, self-congratulating" course.

Otherwise, he said, "the present effect is chaos."

The archbishop added, in an apparent reference to the Episcopal Church, that "certain decisions made by some provinces impact so heavily on the conscience and mission of others that fellowship is strained or shattered and trust destroyed."

In December, the Episcopal Church, which is the U.S. branch of the Anglican Communion, elected an open lesbian as an assistant bishop in Los Angeles. The 2004 consecration of an openly gay priest as bishop of New Hampshire has caused deep dissent within the Anglican Communion.

As head of the worldwide communion, Williams is fighting to keep it from flying apart amid disagreements and feuds over gay bishops in the United States and female bishops in Britain.

What's needed, the archbishop said, is a new set of guidelines for the communion. "We need to look for a resolution that allows some measure of continuing dignity and indeed liberty to all."

In an appeal for unity, the archbishop said, "The challenges of our local and global Anglican crises have to do with how this shapes our councils and decision-making. It is not a simple plea for the sacrifice of the minority to the majority."

He called for a 'major change of heart all round' among Anglicans and urged them to 'discover an ecclesiastical fellowship in which we trust each other to act for our good.'

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