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N.M. diocese votes to stay Episcopal

by Kevin Eckstrom by Religion News Service

Episcopalians in New Mexico have voted to leave a conservative umbrella group and "reaffirm" their commitment to the Episcopal Church rather than join a new rival Anglican province on U.S. soil.

The Albuquerque-based Diocese of the Rio Grande on Thursday (Dec. 11) said it could not support plans to launch a new Anglican Church in North America and voted to end its four-year membership in the Pittsburgh-based Anglican Communion Network.

The Anglican Communion Network is one of 11 conservative groups that joined together to launch the new province on Dec. 3. Four Episcopal dioceses that belonged to the Pittsburgh group and have already left the national church plan to join the new province.

But other Episcopal dioceses that supported the Pittsburgh group, like Rio Grande, do not plan to join the new province and are likely to remain in the Episcopal Church, officials said.

"The Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande disaffiliates from the Anglican Communion Network and rescinds its motion of support ? and reaffirms the Diocese of the Rio Grande?s commitment to the Episcopal Church," the diocese?s elected leadership said in a unanimous resolution.

The Very Rev. Mark Goodman, the dean of Albuquerque?s Cathedral of St. John, told Episcopal News Service that the diocese wants to find a way to remain a part of the national church.

"I think the picture people have in their mind about the Diocese of Rio Grande being a very conservative and evangelical diocese is, in many ways, not an accurate picture of where we are today,?? he said.

The Rev. Peter Frank, a spokesman for the Pittsburgh group, downplayed the vote in Rio Grande, saying officials knew that not all dioceses would join the new province.

Frank's group is scheduled to fold its operations into the new province over the next few months. About half of the Pittsburgh group's 100,000 members are expected to join the new province, Frank said.

"We're an organization of free association; we could never force anyone in and we would never force anyone out," Frank said. "The main thing we need to do, as people make different choices about whether to stay in the Episcopal Church or join with us in creating a new province, is make sure that we don't demonize each other or stand in judgment of each other."

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