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“The Gap Has Only Widened” — The Anglican Separation Begins

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For the first time since 1860 a diocese of the Episcopal Church has seceded from the national body. The vote came Saturday as delegates to the annual convention of the Diocese of San Joaquin in central California voted 173 to 22 to remove all mention of the Episcopal Church USA from its ruling documents.

“We are now clearly outside the jurisdiction of the Episcopal Church,” declared Bishop John-David Schofield.

Press reports underlined the importance of the move. *The Los Angeles Times* explained that the California diocese “became the first in the nation to secede from the Episcopal Church, taking the historic, risky step as part of a years-long struggle within the U.S. church and global Anglican Communion over homosexuality and biblical authority.” *The Fresno Bee* reported: “Saturday’s unprecedented votes set the stage for possible further disintegration of the U.S. church, which is now left with 109 dioceses. The dioceses in Pittsburgh and Fort Worth, Texas, are scheduled to vote next year on whether they also will leave.”

For years now, Episcopalians opposed to the increasingly liberal trajectory of the national body have warned that a separation would come. The 2003 election and consecration of an openly homosexual bishop set the stage for the final conflict that would, over just four years, produce the separation.

Conservatives, determined to remain within the Anglican Communion, have pressed for corrective action from the Episcopal Church USA. Instead, the church has refused to repent of its actions contrary to Scripture. Soon after the election of V. Gene Robinson, the national church elected a liberal woman, the Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts-Schori, as its Presiding Bishop. As Bishop of Nevada, Bishop Jefferts-Schori had supported the election of Gene Robinson and was considered in favor of normalizing homosexuality within the church.

Meanwhile, the larger Anglican Communion expressed its grave concern through a document known as the Windsor Report and through repeated efforts to call the American church to correct its actions that violated the tradition and consensus of the global communion.

Meanwhile, conservative Episcopalians grew increasingly frustrated at the refusal of their church to accept correction. Indeed, it became clear that no correction would come. Conservative organizations and networks sought to find a way for orthodox believers to remain within the church with integrity, but to no avail. As Bishop Schofield told his convention, “the gap has only widened.”

The gap is fully evident now as more evangelical and conservative Anglicans have begun to affiliate with provinces of the so-called “Global South.” Even as churches in North America and Britain have moved leftward, bishops in Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, Uganda, and Kenya have accepted churches formerly identified as Episcopal within their jurisdiction. Bishop Schofield told his diocese that more than 360 congregations have already come under the protection of these bishops.

The Diocese of San Joaquin voted to align with the Province of the Southern Cone (in South America) under the protection of Archbishop Gregory Venables. In response to the diocese’s action, Archbishop Venables offered this

greeting to his new churches in San Joaquin: “Welcome Home. And welcome back into full communion with the Anglican Communion.”

Bishop Schofield told reporters that the alignment with the South American province was a temporary and emergency measure. It seems likely that the eventual future alignment of the Diocese of San Joaquin and other churches and dioceses likely to secede will have to await the determination of legal issues and other matters. The Episcopal Church USA has indicated that it intends to claim ownership of church properties held by the departing churches and dioceses.

In his [address to the annual convention](#), Bishop Schofield offered this powerful reflection, citing Anglican theologian J. I. Packer:

For twenty years and more we have watched The Episcopal Church lose its way: straying, at first, from Scripture... to the point of dismissing the Word of God, in some instances, as mere historical documents – of value, perhaps in bygone eras – but no longer applicable to us, to appropriating powers to itself through the General Convention it had never had and, finally, on to unilateral decisions about theology, sexuality, and ordination potentially cutting itself off from the Anglican Communion. J. I. Packer, the eminent British Theologian now living in Canada, puts this in clear perspective when he says: “Liberal theology as such knows nothing about a God who uses written language to tell us things, or about the reality of sin in the human system, which makes redemption necessary and new birth urgent. Liberal theology posits, rather, a natural religiosity in man (reverence, that is, for a higher power) and a natural capacity for goodwill towards others, and sees Christianity as a force for cherishing and developing these qualities. They are fanned into flame and kept burning in the church, which in each generation must articulate itself by concessive dialogue with the culture pressures, processes and prejudices that surround it. In other words, the church must ever play catch-up to the culture, taking on board whatever is the “in thing” at the moment; otherwise, so it is thought, Christianity will lose all relevance to life. The church will inevitably leave the Bible behind at point after point, but since on this view the Bible is the word of fallible men rather than of the infallible God, leaving it behind is no great loss.”

At this crucial time in the history of this church, we must pray for those offering brave leadership and biblical witness. The separation has begun.

From other voices

David Virtue of [VirtueOnline](#):

The Episcopal Church’s rejection of 2,000 years of church history and biblical exegesis on human sexuality is the final straw for orthodox Episcopalians. (The Anglican Church of Canada is also breaking up for the same reasons.)

We will now see a huge exodus from The Episcopal Church exposing what will become an enormous public relations nightmare, a disaster that it cannot possibly reverse, despite the fiction put out by homosexual leaders like Louie Crew and Bishop Robinson that an inclusive church would see an enormous influx of Roman Catholic homosexuals and other closeted homosexuals who want a place to worship. That hasn’t happened. Robinson’s consecration four years ago has only emptied churches.

An ecclesiastical blood-bath is clearly in the making. Mrs. Katharine Jefferts Schori, the Presiding Bishop of [The Episcopal Church], has made it abundantly clear, in less than reconciling language, that there will be “potential consequences”, code for lawsuits, now that Bishop John-David Schofield and the majority of his diocese have voted to leave the national church.

A massive [thread of media reports](#) is available from [TitusOneNine](#), the weblog of The Rev. Canon Kendall Harmon.

From [EpiscopalLifeOnline](#) [official ECUSA publication]:

Nancy Key, a co-founder of ‘Remain Episcopal,’ said those who wished to remain in the Episcopal Church have felt marginalized and maligned.

“It feels like spiritual violence,” said Key, a parishioner at Holy Family Church in Fresno, which has chosen to remain within the Episcopal Church. “All we want to do is be in the Episcopal Church that actively ordains women and is inclusive,” she said. San Joaquin is among three dioceses that refuse to ordain or deploy women priests. The others are Fort Worth and the Peoria, Illinois-based Diocese of Quincy.

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