

African churches refuse funding over gay clergy issue

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NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) -- Africa's Anglican archbishops decided Thursday to reject donations from any diocese that recognizes gay clergy and refuse cooperation with any missionary that supports the idea.

Their decision at a meeting with their counterparts from Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America was the latest attack by church conservatives against the consecration of an openly gay bishop in the United States.

The African archbishops also recommended that the Episcopal Church USA, the American branch of the Anglican church, be disciplined and be given three months "to repent" for the consecration in August of Bishop V. Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, in New Hampshire.

If the Episcopal church is not disciplined, African Anglicans will be free to take whatever action they see fit, but breaking away from the worldwide Anglican Communion "is not an option", Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria told journalists.

The election of an openly gay bishop has created deep divisions within the worldwide Anglican Communion, a confederation of national Anglican churches. The communion established a commission to look into the issue and its report is due in October.

The archbishops from Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean at Thursday's meeting were to issue a statement Friday, but Akinola said that "by and large we are together on most issues."

Akinola acknowledged that rejecting funds raised in wealthy nations, particularly the United States, will hurt the African churches in the short term.

"If we suffer for a while to gain our independence and our freedom and to build ourselves up, I think it will be a good thing for the church in Africa," said Akinola, who also is chairman of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa, which represents 12 national and regional churches plus the diocese of Egypt.

"We will not, on the altar of money, mortgage our conscience, mortgage our faith, mortgage our salvation," he said.

Akinola urged African dioceses to become more self-reliant, giving the example of the Anglican Church of Kenya, which uses rent from buildings it owns in the capital Nairobi and elsewhere in the country to pay for some of its work.

After the New Hampshire diocese consecrated Robinson, several African Anglican churches severed ties with it. All African churches -- except those in South Africa -- have opposed the ordination of homosexuals.

Akinola said the South African leader, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of

Cape Town, told him in a telephone conversation Thursday that he supported the stand taken by the other African archbishops.

He added that Archbishop Drexel Gomez of the Bahamas, who listened in on the conversation, "is firmly in support of the views which we are espousing. He made that quite clear."

The worldwide Anglican Communion, a group of 37 independent national churches that trace their roots to the Church of England, has 76.5 million members, of whom 36.8 million are African. The African churches are the fastest growing in the world.

"We are not against every church in the America. We are not against every in the West," Akinola said, explaining that in the American Anglican church there were individual churches which did not support what happened in U.S. Diocese of New Hampshire.

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