

Gay community refuses to hold burden over Anglican split

December 20, 2006

Progressive religious groups have expressed disappointment at the decisions by several Virginia parishes to split from the US Episcopal Church.

The members of the Gay and Lesbian Task Force's National Religious Leadership Roundtable spoke out against a split after churches from the Diocese of Virginia, including the Truro Church and the Falls Church, which date back to British colonial times, voted to leave the Episcopal Church on Sunday.

Reverend Jay Emerson Johnson, Acting Executive Director at the Centre for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry, said the gay community are against a church split.

He said: "Faithful lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Episcopalians are not asking anyone to leave the Episcopal Church. For many years, Anglicans have learned the fine art of agreeing to disagree with each other and still remain within the Anglican family; today should be no different. For LGBT people this commitment to our church has often come at a great price, yet we have remained even when our presence has not been welcomed. Sadly, this commitment to conversation and to mutual understanding is apparently not shared by the parishes in Virginia and elsewhere that have decided to secede from the Episcopal Church."

Reverend Susan Russell, President of Integrity USA, said the gay community shouldn't be held responsible for a split, "What it takes to create schism is for someone to leave — and I am sick to death of the unity of this church being placed on the shoulders of those of us who have committed to stay. When are we going to hold accountable those who threaten to leave? When will we name the actions of those who have conspired with factions of the larger Anglican communion to actively oppress and marginalize its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members with what it is: fomenting schism — creating conflict — sacrificing the unity of the church to their own agenda of power, control and heterosexism?"

"If schism happens — and I am not convinced it will — the blame will lie not with Claiming the Blessing, the Diocese of New Hampshire, Gene Robinson or the countless LGBT Christians living out their faith journeys in the Episcopal Church. It will lie firmly at the feet of those whose will to power is greater than their willingness to embrace the other, whose commitment to crisis is greater than their faith in the Gospel and whose singular obsession with things sexual has blinded them to the Spirit's revelation via things incarnational."

The secession occurred over what the minority of Episcopal conservatives regard as a leftward drift in the Episcopal Church and the ordination of Bishop Gene Robinson, the openly gay bishop from New Hampshire.

There are 2.3 million Episcopalians in 7,200 congregations in the United States, and the congregations attempting to "leave" the Diocese of Virginia are eight out of 195 in that diocese.