

Bishop: Heresy is preferable to split church

RELIGIONJOURNAL.COM

Heresy is better than a split in the church, an Episcopal bishop said last week.

"If you must make a choice between heresy and schism, always choose heresy," said the Rev. Peter J. Lee, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. He was quoting James I. McCord, a 20th-century Presbyterian educator and leader in the World Council of Churches.

"For as a heretic, you are only guilty of a wrong opinion. As a schismatic, you have torn and divided the body of Christ. Choose wisely," McCord had added.

Lee spoke to 550 Episcopalians at his diocese's annual convention in Reston, Va., a two-day meeting that ended Jan. 31. The Virginia Diocese is the largest in the Episcopal Church, with 89,000 members.

"I hear the pain and grief expressed by those angered by the election and consecration of Bishop Robinson of New Hampshire and by my role in that," Lee said in his address to delegates. "And I hear the pain and disappointment of gay and lesbian members of our diocese who are frustrated at the lack of availability to them of rites of blessing."

"Members of a Christian community bear one another's burdens. Listening to each other and finding those areas of mission where we can unite are important patterns of discipleship."

"I appeal also to members of our diocese who are tempted to separate from our body because of their anger at what we have done or disappointment at what we have not done to stay the course

and to learn of Christ's desire for our unity through our engagement with one another."

After delegates applauded him, Lee added, "I hope we will avoid both heresy and schism."

Lee's comments about unity were taken as a mild scolding of Episcopalians who formed the American Anglican Council in opposition to the consecration of the Rev. Gene Robinson as the denomination's first openly homosexual bishop.

The AAC has proved to be a strong force attracting

January conference in Woodbridge, Va. The convention in Reston was able to hold the diocese together — the diocese described the meeting as "a model for reconciliation" — but some delegates wondered for how long.

Delegates set up a year-long reconciliation commission charged with keeping the church's factions talking despite deep theological differences over homosexuality.

Although the establishment of the commission deferred difficult decisions on how to resolve the diocese's simmering crisis, both sides in the debate over homosexuality said the convention "only postponed an inevitable split," according to The Washington Times.

"The status quo prevailed," said the Rev. Martyn Minns, rector of Truro Episcopal Church in Fairfax, Va., and a leader of the conservative faction who has been active in forming the AAC.

While the vote "showed a general desire to move forward without dividing," resolving the crisis "may mean structural changes,"

Minns said.

Since Robinson was elected and consecrated, 24 parishes in Virginia have partially or totally cut off funding to the diocese. The diocese's 2004 budget shows a \$900,000 drop in income from 2003.

Some Virginia delegates have called the withholding blackmail, while others said the parishes' decisions were made in good conscience. The delegates set up a task force to study new rules for financial giving by churches to the diocese, and referred for further study a proposal to let parishes designate how

spent.

Lee's vote for Robinson's consecration resulted in fierce protests from several congregations in his diocese, which stretches from Northern Virginia to Richmond. He has received calls and letters from churchgoers asking him to resign, and some parishes have said Lee, who

has led the diocese for 20 years, is not welcome to visit. He has taken a conciliatory approach, allowing the two other bishops who report to him to visit congregations where he is not welcome rather than insisting that the parishes receive him.

Lee stressed that unity is paramount.

"I remind you that Christian communities often consist of solidarities not of our choosing. Our faith teaches that people with whom we differ often have important truths to teach us," he said.

At a news conference, Lee

willing to consider other possibilities," such as allowing a theologically orthodox bishop to enter his diocese to minister to several-thousand conservatives who fill his largest parishes, a key demand by the AAC.

However, he added that that could happen only with his permission.

"I would be the inviting bishop," he said. "I do not support the idea that a bishop can unilaterally come in and replace the duly consecrated bishop of Virginia."



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Obituaries

A.L. Jinwright Funeral Service
Georgia E. Hart of 628 Noles Drive, died Jan. 29 at age 65. Funeral was held Feb. 10 at Mt. Sinai Baptist church, Mount Holly, N.C.

Ethel (Chisholm) Macon, 83, of 101 N. Gregg Street, died Feb. 3. Funeral was held Feb. 6 at A.L. Jinwright Funeral Service Chapel.

Odell Mackin, 62, of 1317 Moretz Avenue, died Jan. 30. Funeral was held Feb. 6 at A.L. Jinwright Funeral Service Chapel.

"The Seventh Day is the Sabbath of the Lord" - Exodus 20:10

Northeast SDA Church
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Sabbath Service..... 11:00a.m.
Wed. Prayer Service..... 7:00p.m.

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Worship Service..... 11:00am
Wednesday Bible Study..... 7:00pm
Wednesday Prayer Service.. 8:00pm

Rev. Cuthbertson

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