

Anglican Alliance Gains Steam In North Florida Ten churches have now left Episcopal Diocese, with more to follow

From the Anglican Alliance of North Florida
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The number of Anglican congregations which have separated from the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Florida has now risen to ten. All of these churches are part of the Anglican Alliance of North Florida, and remain a part of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The churches include the six congregations which had previously appealed for alternative oversight, sometimes referred to as the "Florida Six." Five of these—Grace Church, in Orange Park; All Souls and Church of the Redeemer, in Jacksonville; St. Michael's in Gainesville; and St Luke's Community of Life, in Tallahassee—announced that they were no longer under the Episcopal Church as of January 1 (the sixth, Calvary, in Jacksonville, had already pulled out in November).

For several of these churches the move was precipitated by a continued threat by the Bishop of Florida, the Rt. Rev. John Howard, to reduce them from parish to mission status in January on account of their refusal to give direct support to the diocese financially—an action not mandated by church law (each of the congregations had continued to support diocesan ministries).

One of the churches, St. Michael's in Gainesville, also adopted a new name and moved to a new location. The new Servants of Christ, under the leadership of the Rev. Alex Farmer, had its first service in a shared space with the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Gainesville on Sunday, January 8th, with 242 worshippers in attendance.

These six congregations join St Peter's Anglican Church in Tallahassee, which was formed with the clergy and most of the congregation of St John's Episcopal Church in October, as well as the Anglican Fellowship of High Springs, whose rector and congregation left the diocese in October of 2004. In addition, two other churches have announced they have taken the same step, also as of January 1: St James, in MacClenny (now St. Peter's Anglican Fellowship), and Church of the Nativity, in Jacksonville.

Four other churches have announced that they are also making preparations to leave the Episcopal Church. In a letter sent to Florida Bishop John Howard and released to his congregation on January 8th, the Rev. Bob Coon, rector at Church of the Advent in Tallahassee, wrote that "it is time for Advent to begin the process of disassociation with the Episcopal Church." The three others churches—Church of the Epiphany, in Jacksonville, Good Samaritan, in Orange Park, and St. Teresa in Wakulla County—are planning to break with the Episcopal Church if it does not reverse course at its next General Convention in June. The Rev. Mark Eldridge, Rector at Epiphany, said "we have no expectation of repentance." Several other churches are making similar plans, but have not yet made formal announcements.

While four of the congregations which have left so far have already vacated their property and buildings, five others are staying and laying claim to them (St Luke's will continue to occupy rented space). The latter are Grace, All Souls, Church of the Redeemer, Church of the Nativity, and St James. In a letter to Bishop Howard dated Dec. 31st, the Mission Board of St. James indicated that their church had been "self-supporting since its inception" and that "we have no intention of leaving our beloved and historical building."

All ten of the congregations either already have or will be receiving alternative oversight from another bishop in the Anglican Communion. So far churches in the Anglican Alliance have come under the Provinces of Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, and the Southern Cone (in South America). On Friday January 6th, on the Feast of the Epiphany, Grace Church in Orange Park held a special service to mark its transference to the Church of Rwanda, and a Bishop of Rwanda, the Rt. Rev. Thomas Johnston, participated in Grace's services the following Sunday.

Last week Bishop Howard inhibited several of the priests of these congregations from performing priestly duties in the Diocese of Florida. The Anglican Alliance does not consider the inhibitions to be relevant, since the priests in question are no longer pastoring congregations which are part of the Diocese of Florida (please see 1/12/06 AANF press release for a fuller response).

The members of the Anglican Alliance look forward with eager and prayerful anticipation to developments in the coming months, as a new, Biblically-centered Anglican movement takes shape in North Florida. In addition to churches with Episcopal roots, which are members of the Anglican Communion Network nationally, the Anglican Alliance also includes several congregations which are part of the Anglican Mission in America, and is working toward joining with other Anglican churches which are represented by the "Common Cause" movement. Planning for an Anglican version of the "Cursillo" weekend is already underway, along with several youth events. The steering committee of the Anglican Alliance will be meeting on January 29-31 to make plans for the rapidly expanding role of the Alliance.

The Anglican Alliance of North Florida was formed in the fall of 2005 as a way to begin gathering together Biblically faithful congregations in the Anglican tradition. It includes sixteen member congregations and thirty-five clergy in the North Florida area.