

IN FACE OF CHANGE, ANGLICANS UPHOLD TRADITION

While other denominations struggle over homosexuality and the ordination of women, a conservative church stands firm.

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As the conservative and liberal factions of Episcopal Church U.S.A. struggle over homosexuality, more traditional branches of the denomination are benefiting from the fallout.

The Anglican Church in America, once viewed as a tiny sect of the Episcopal Church USA, is growing as Episcopalians and Roman Catholics join its ranks seeking a more orthodox worship experience. And one of its Iowa leaders is gaining international prominence.

Anglican Archbishop Louis Falk of Clive, leader of the Diocese of the Missouri Valley, hosted an annual diocesan meeting in Des Moines last June and ordained two priests and a deacon into the church in July.

In February, he will consecrate the Rev. David Moyer of Philadelphia, a controversial orthodox Episcopal pastor who has been defrocked by his bishop in an ideological battle over homosexuality. Falk will consecrate Moyer, who has gained international attention for his campaign against liberal trends, as a bishop in the Anglican Church.



GARY FANDEL/THE REGISTER

Keeping up traditions: Archbishop Louis Falk, left, and the Rev. Nicholas Taylor of St. Aidan's Anglican Church in Des Moines emphasize tradition.

Threat of Fracture

Recent decisions by U.S. Episcopal leadership—including the ordination of a gay bishop—threaten to fracture the denomination today. It is just part of a liberal trend that began three decades ago, Falk said.

“We parted company with the Episcopal Church institutionally in the 1970s over the ordination of women,” Falk said. “The Des Moines parish met for a while at a funeral home on Merle Hay, and St. Aidan’s Anglican Church was formed in 1978. We claim orthodox and traditional theology, the same ministry that dates all the way back to the Apostles.”

The term “Anglican” simply means English, but the term is also used to indicate any national church that derives from the Church of England.

The Anglican Church in America formed in 1977 by Episcopal bishops, clergy and faithful. They sought to preserve traditional doctrine and forms of worship in the face of what they saw as drastic changes in liturgy, morality and order by liberals in the church.

As the U.S. Episcopal church further embraced an “open and affirming” position regarding the ordination of homosexuals and blessing of gay marriages, the small denomination, which has about 8,000 members, has welcomed others who seek a more traditional form of worship.

Welcomes Roman Catholics

“Our ministry is closer to Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox than the Episcopal Church USA,” Falk said. “People coming to our church from the Episcopal Church say that their church leaders don’t seem to understand the Bible like we do.”

Falk’s sect also welcomes Roman Catholics who long for pre-Vatican II ceremony and tradition in their religion.

“And Catholics coming to us say that they are seeking worship like they once had in their churches,” Falk said. “Vatican II and the extreme interpretations that followed were devastating to many older people. All of a sudden, all the things they had cherished in their church were thrown out the window. A lot changed in a hurry—the candlesticks and tabernacle were gone, the altar was pulled forward.”

Perhaps the only thing different from pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic services is that Mass at St. Aidan’s is performed in Elizabethan English, instead of Latin.

“There’s a certain majesty to it,” said the Rev. Nicholas Taylor, St. Aidan’s pastor, one of the two men ordained by Falk in July.

The Anglican Church in America is affiliated with the Traditional Anglican Communion, which has about 500,000 members in 18 countries.

The church has been in conversation with Vatican officials about possibly becoming a semi-autonomous Anglican rite of the Roman Catholic church, similar to the Ukrainian Catholic and Greek Catholic rites. Falk declined to comment on the status of those talks.

“If you’re looking for contemporary services and music, St. Aidan’s or other traditional Anglican churches aren’t the place to find it,” Taylor said.

“Some things can’t be changed,” Taylor said.

“We realize that tradition isn’t a trendy thing, but we will still be here when people come back to it.”

Falk believes conservative denominations are growing because this brand of religion tends to make absolute claims on believers.

“With us, religion is central,” Falk said. “We believe our religion is the most important thing in our lives because this life isn’t all there is.”

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