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## Plan to Supplant Episcopal Church USA Is Revealed

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Wednesday, January 14, 2004; Page A04

Episcopalians who oppose the consecration of a gay bishop are preparing to engage in widespread disobedience to church law in 2004, according to a confidential document outlining their strategy.

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The document makes clear that despite their public denials of any plan to break away from the 2.3 million-member Episcopal Church USA, leaders of the traditionalist camp intend to severely challenge the authority of Episcopal bishops, and expect that both civil lawsuits and ecclesiastical charges against dissenting priests will result.

The six-page strategy paper, obtained by The Washington Post, was confirmed as authentic yesterday by its principal author, the Rev. Geoff Chapman, pastor of St. Stephen's Church in Sewickley, Pa.

After reviewing the document, James Solheim, a spokesman for the national church, called it "very provocative." The strategy it outlines, he said, "is going to plunge us into litigation for decades."

The document, dated Dec. 28, is addressed from Chapman to Episcopalians who have contacted the American Anglican Council, a Washington-based group marshaling opposition to the Nov. 2 consecration of New Hampshire Bishop V. Gene Robinson.

Robinson, who has lived with a male partner for 14 years, is the first openly gay prelate in the 75 million-member Anglican Communion, a worldwide family of churches descended from the Church of England. His election has sparked international protests from Anglicans who view it

**Document**

- [Full Text:](#) Letter From | Chapman (PDF)

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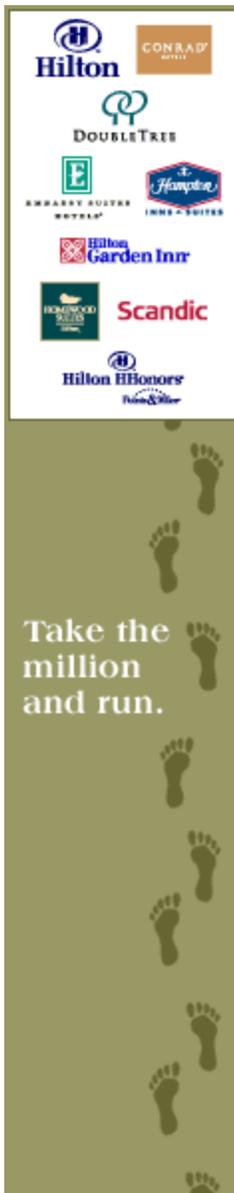
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as a unilateral American rejection of biblical injunctions against homosexuality.

The document says the American Anglican Council's Strategy Committee has worked for months to win permission for traditionalist bishops to oversee congregations that are unhappy under their current, more liberal bishops. But, it says, this "adequate episcopal oversight" is just an intermediate step.

"Our ultimate goal," it says, is a "replacement jurisdiction . . . closely aligned with the majority of world Anglicanism." Chapman, in a phone interview, said that means traditionalists hope their network of parishes will supplant the Episcopal Church USA as the recognized Anglican offshoot in the United States.

The document outlines a two-stage process. Initially, conservative parishes would announce that their relationship with their diocesan bishop is "severely damaged." They would seek the care of a more orthodox U.S. or foreign bishop but not engage in legal confrontations over church property.

In the second stage, "probably in 2004," traditionalists would seek "negotiated settlements" over property and the right to have like-minded priests and bishops. If settlements cannot be reached, the document says, "faithful disobedience of canon law on a widespread basis may be necessary."

Chapman maintained that liberal bishops who have long preached tolerance are now crushing dissent by threatening parishes and priests who oppose their "revisionist" position

on homosexuality.

In such circumstances, he said, disobedience would be "faithful" because the purpose of church laws is to uphold the gospel. "When they are distorted . . . and used to restrict or oppose the gospel, then canon law itself has to be challenged," he said.

The document notes that sitting bishops "hold almost all the cards in property disputes and clergy placement if they want to play 'hardball.' " But, it adds, "we think that the political realities are such that American revisionist bishops will be reticent to play 'hardball' for a while. They have just handed the gay lobby a stunning victory, but are being forced to pay a fearsome price for it."

*The full text of the document is available at [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com).*

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