



# CNI

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## PRESS WATCH -

### Why now? The deeply strange timing of the renegade conservative Anglicans

The leader of my Church is **distinguishing himself in the Middle East**. Compassionate, astute and politically savvy, he's meeting with spiritual and secular leaders in an attempt to draw attention to important causes, Andy Walton writes on Christian Today

Meanwhile, my Church is in the vanguard of a **monumental programme of prayer** which will take place in the 10 days between Pentecost and the Ascension. Crossing ecumenical boundaries and taking in congregations small and large, Thy Kingdom Come is a hugely exciting project.

There's much quiet work going on. Clothing and feeding destitute people, helping couples

prepare for marriage, providing youth services, night shelters, credit union access points, post offices and a whole lot more.

In other words, reports of the death of the Church of England have been greatly exaggerated. Yes, we're struggling for numbers in places and yes, there are difficult decisions ahead, but we have wise leadership, active local congregations, and great relationships with other churches.

Why renegade Anglicans would choose such a time to throw a spanner in the works is beyond me.

But that's what has happened. A curate in Newcastle has been ordained as a 'bishop in the Church of God' by a South African splinter group. It isn't clear what is happening here given that other conservative bodies both within and without the Church of England seem to have been caught on the hop. Then, my colleague Harry Farley **exclusively revealed** a bigger plan to set up a rival Anglican church in England for disaffected Anglicans unhappy with the alleged 'liberal' drift of the denomination.

The only conclusion we can come to is that those involved are not especially concerned

about the impact they have on all of the great work mentioned above. A charitable reading says they decided they could wait no longer and needed to take decisive action to shore up their conservative base.

A less charitable reading says that they don't particularly care what the rest of the Church is up to – they are going to follow their consciences and, to coin a phrase, to hell with the consequences.

I want to think well of these, my brothers in Christ (and you can be sure, those involved *are* all brothers). I want to think that they have been deep in prayer and considered the consequences of their actions carefully. I want to believe they are concerned only about the good news, and deplore political game playing.

And yet...

Their actions came to light when the Archbishop of Canterbury was out of the country. This is either a case of very bad timing or a deeply cynical ploy to 'play while the cat was away'.

The shortsightedness of the move is obvious to many of us who are looking on with a mix of horror and fascination.

Firstly, the two archbishops (arguably the five most senior bishops for that matter) are orthodox and evangelical. This is unprecedented. In fact, conservative evangelicals have their own bishop for the first time in a long while, the Bishop of Maidstone offering oversight for those from a Reformed tradition.

There are deep problems, yes, but under Justin Welby there is a sense of tremendous excitement. Churches are being planted, lives are being changed and the gospel is being preached.

Just this week I was at a meeting which brought a great amount of joy and excitement to all of those present. Discussing a new church plant which will take place within the Church of England, there was a sense of vitality and energy that would match any worship service from across the world, the vision was cast.

It was a vision for the growth of the Church and the transformation of society through Jesus. But this seems not to have made an impact on those determined to upset the applecart.

Let's be clear, there are big problems with the Church of England – no one with eyes and ears

is denying that. But in parishes, chaplaincies, church plants and cathedrals across the country there is much good work being done. There is a choice before all of us who call this Church ours. We can take our own route and seek a purity of doctrine and practice. Or we can roll up our sleeves, get our hands dirty and join in with the rest of the institution which has been doing Church imperfectly in England since the 6th century.

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