

Dissident bishop is removed from Episcopal ministry: Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh

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Episcopal bishops have removed Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh from the denomination's ministry, saying the leading conservative in a church split has renounced and abandoned the Episcopal Church.

The action began on September 18— with 88 bishops in favor of removing Duncan, 35 against and four abstaining—during a special session of the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops in Salt Lake City, Utah. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori signed the formal sentence deposing Duncan the next day, declaring that his authority as an Episcopal bishop had ended.

The effect of removing Duncan may be limited, however, because the Diocese of Pittsburgh was poised to leave the Episcopal Church October 4 to join the more conservative Anglican Province of the Southern Cone, based in Argentina. It would be the second diocese to do so, after the Fresno, California-based Diocese of San Joaquin.

Duncan has already been accepted as a bishop in the Southern Cone, and the Pittsburgh diocese was expected to reelect him, the diocese said in a statement.

"This is of course a very painful moment for Pittsburgh Episcopalians," said David Wilson, president of the diocese's standing committee. "While we await the decision of the diocesan convention on realignment to a different province of the Anglican Communion, we will stand firm against further attempts . . . to intimidate us."

The charges against Duncan were initiated by Pittsburgh Episcopalians who feared he would lead the diocese into secession and take church property with him.

Duncan "has rejected numerous opportunities and warnings to reconsider and change course," said the Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh in a statement.

“Instead, he has continued to resolutely pursue a course of action designed to remove this diocese and many unwilling Episcopalians from the Episcopal Church.”

Elected bishop of the 20,000-member diocese 11 years ago, Duncan has been a prominent voice for conservative Episcopalians distraught over the liberal drift of the church on biblical interpretation and sexual ethics. He leads the Anglican Communion Network, a conservative network that claims some ten dioceses and 900 congregations in North America.

Duncan is the second Episcopal bishop removed from active ministry this year. In January, Fresno bishop John-David Schofield was deposed for leading the San Joaquin diocese to secede.

Jefferts Schori, at a September 19 news conference, said the Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh “will not go away” even if diocesan leaders vote to realign with the Southern Cone. She singled out a group called Across the Aisle that is working to maintain ties to the Episcopal Church, calling it “a remarkable example of cooperation across a variety of differences of opinion.”

According to a September 22 statement on the diocese’s Web site, an attorney for Duncan said that he “was denied his fundamental right—the right to a church trial—because the presiding bishop believes that his ‘deposition’ will assist her in her desire to seize the property of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.” *-Religion News Service*