

S.C. Episcopal diocese claims a victory in secession struggle

by [Lauren Markoe](#)

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The breakaway Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina has won the latest round in its fight to secede from the national church.

A South Carolina judge on Wednesday (Jan. 23) issued a temporary restraining order that prevents the national church from using the name or seal of the diocese, which espouses a more traditional theology and disapproves of the national church's acceptance of same-sex marriage and gay bishops.

The order, as diocesan officials understand it, essentially tells the national church that it may not preside over the existing diocese.

"We believe what the judge has said is what we have been saying for quite some time," said Jim Lewis, a top aide to Bishop Mark Lawrence.

"The Episcopal Church is more than free to establish a new diocese in South Carolina," Lewis said. "What the ruling says, though, is that they can't do that and claim to be us."

Though 44 of the 71 parishes in the diocese support secession, according to the diocese, Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori has said that differences of opinion within the church should be tolerated but unilateral secession is not permitted.

Secession must be approved by the church's General Convention, she said, which next meets in 2015.

South Carolina Circuit Court Judge Diane S. Goodstein issued the restraining order three days before Schori is scheduled to preach in Charleston, the seat of the diocese, which covers the eastern half of South Carolina.

On that same day, Jan. 26, Jefferts Schori will lead a meeting to elect a new provisional bishop and other clergy and lay leaders for the diocese.

The restraining order will stand for only 10 days, but other judicial action on the standoff could be taken at a Feb. 1 circuit court hearing and when lawsuits over the secession are heard.

Neva Rae Fox, national spokeswoman for the Episcopal Church, said she had no comment on the injunction.

In recent years, four other conservative Episcopal dioceses – in California, Texas, Illinois and Pennsylvania – have left the national church without seeking approval from the General Convention. —*RNS*