

Bishops make moves on Episcopal chessboard: San Joaquin out, Pittsburgh still in

by [John Dart](#) in the [February 12, 2008](#) issue

In a scenario that may be performed repeatedly in months ahead, the Episcopal Church has declared that two bishops have “abandoned the communion of the church”—John-David Schofield, whose diocese in California has completed its voting to leave the denomination, and Robert Duncan of the Pittsburgh diocese, who has been the leader among dissident bishops aiming to form a competing, traditionalist church body.

But by mid-January, it became clear that Schofield had his right to conduct Episcopal ecclesial functions revoked, or “inhibited,” whereas that prohibition was not applied to Duncan, leader of the conservative Common Cause Partnership, whose status will not be decided until September.

Duncan and his allies, who contend that Episcopal Church leadership has unacceptably installed a gay, partnered bishop and allowed same-sex union blessings, welcomed the news, saying that the move by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori to depose Duncan had failed.

Three senior bishops did not give Jefferts Schori permission January 11 to inhibit Duncan, and because of procedural restraints Duncan’s case will not be heard until the September meeting of the Episcopal House of Bishops, noted the Episcopal News Service.

That means that Duncan will still be in office for the July 16–August 3 Lambeth Conference of the worldwide Anglican Communion. That will “likely serve as a rallying point for conservatives against the Episcopal Church” and may encourage some bishops in Africa and Latin America to attend a once-a-decade meeting some of them had threatened to boycott over the homosexuality and biblical interpretation issues, according to the conservative American Anglican Council Web

site.

Traditionalist partisans in the Episcopal Church contend that liberal trends have shifted the denomination away from orthodoxy in beliefs and practices—and that thus they have not abandoned the New York-based church.

“Few bishops have been more loyal to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church,” Duncan said in a January 15 statement about himself. “I will continue to serve and minister” as the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, added Duncan.

The Fresno-based diocese of San Joaquin decided in its second and final vote in December to secede from the Episcopal Church—unlike the Pittsburgh diocese, which to date has taken only the first step. Schofield has the right to recant at the March meeting of the Episcopal House of Bishops, but that is considered unlikely.

Another conservative bishop, Jack Iker of the Fort Worth diocese, declared in a statement that it was “tragic and deeply disturbing” that Jefferts Schori would move against Duncan before Pittsburgh made a final decision on pulling out of the denomination. Iker accused the Episcopal leaders of giving lip service to efforts to heal divisions.

A majority of San Joaquin’s 50 churches and some 9,000 members joined, as long planned, the Anglican province of the Southern Cone of South America. The San Joaquin diocese and its bishops also have opposed the denomination’s ordination of women to the priesthood.

Archbishop Gregory Venables of Argentina, who heads the Southern Cone province, said Schofield “is not under the authority or jurisdiction of the Episcopal Church or the presiding bishop.” Venables continued: “He is, therefore, not answerable to their national canon law but is a member of the House of Bishops of the Southern Cone and under our authority.”

Episcopal leaders, who maintain that individuals can leave the church but dioceses and congregations cannot, are expected to contest San Joaquin’s claim of ownership over diocesan assets and property.

Bonnie Anderson, president of the Episcopal Church’s House of Deputies, said that “clarification of [Schofield’s] status will be a relief to many Episcopalians in the diocese. That clarity will help them in their ministry to each other and beyond in the

continuing Diocese of San Joaquin.” Episcopal leaders will call a new convention after March and appoint a temporary bishop to head the diocese while searching for a new prelate.