

Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori's letter to the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops concerning Diocese of Fort Worth Bishop Jack Iker

From the Presiding Bishop:

On November 20, 2008, the Title IV Review Committee certified to me pursuant to the canons that the Rt. Rev. Jack Leo Iker, Bishop of Fort Worth, had abandoned the Communion of the Episcopal Church, having purported to separate his Diocese from the Church. With the consent of the three senior bishops, I then inhibited Bishop Iker from exercising his pastoral ministry. In response to this action, on November 24, 2008, Bishop Iker issued a public statement (a copy of which is attached) in which he made clear that he had chosen to leave the Episcopal Church and that he no longer wished to carry out the responsibilities of ordained ministry in the Church. Accordingly, I have, with the consent of my Council of Advice, chosen this day to accept Bishop Iker's voluntary renunciation of his Orders in the Episcopal Church and have removed and released him from our ordained ministry.

I have chosen to follow this course rather than seeking consent of the House of Bishops to Bishop Iker's deposition for abandonment of the Communion of this Church because I believe it to be a more pastoral response to Bishop Iker's clear expression of his desire not to be a part of the Episcopal Church at this time. I believe this course best expresses my hope and prayer that reconciliation in the future can be achieved by God's love and grace.

My decision to accept Bishop Iker's voluntary renunciation fits squarely within the canons. Bishop Iker's November 24 statement clearly constitutes "a renunciation of the ordained ministry of this Church, and a desire to be removed therefrom" as contemplated by Canon III.12.7(a). Other, similar letters -- most recently from Bishops Bena and Fairfield -- have also been treated as voluntary renunciations and with the consent of my Council of Advice I have accepted them and removed and released those bishops from our ordained ministry, as well.

The fact that Bishops Schofield and Duncan were deposed under the abandonment canon rather than having their voluntary renunciations accepted by me is not dispositive of my decision here. As to Bishop Duncan, at no time before his deposition did he make a statement that satisfied the clear renunciation of the ministry of this Church that is required by Canon III.12.7(a). Bishop Schofield, on the other hand, issued a letter containing statements indicating his departure from the Episcopal Church that were arguably as clear as Bishop Iker's recent statements. (A copy of Bishop Schofield's letter is attached.) The circumstances that surrounded Bishop Schofield's letter, however, differed from those surrounding Bishop Iker's recent public statement in two important respects. First, I received Bishop Schofield's letter in early March 2008, only days before the meeting of the House when the vote on the consent to his deposition was already scheduled. The matter had already been placed on the agenda, and materials regarding Bishop Schofield's abandonment had already been shared with the House; arguably, the matter had already been "presented" to the House by me. By contrast, Bishop Iker's

statement has arrived far in advance of the next meeting of the House. Second, Bishop Schofield was the first to present to the House the question of whether a bishop who purports to take his Diocese out of the Episcopal Church has by those actions abandoned the Communion of this Church. The landscape is different now: The House has now affirmed on two separate occasions -- involving Bishops Schofield and Duncan -- that such actions do in fact constitute abandonment. Accordingly, there can be no doubt in anyone's mind that the House would consent to Bishop Iker's deposition, as well.

In this light, two important pastoral concerns, in my view, weigh in favor of employing the voluntary renunciation canon rather than pursuing deposition for abandonment.

Accepting Bishop Iker's voluntary renunciation now rather than waiting for the March meeting of the House will do much to alleviate the difficult circumstances facing the Episcopalians in Fort Worth, who are functioning in a Diocese devoid of any formal leadership. Second, renunciation is a more hospitable avenue of departure from the Church, and therefore increases the hope for reconciliation with Bishop Iker and his followers at some point.

*Editor's note: Documents referred to as being attached to the Presiding Bishop's letter were not provided to Episcopal Life Online.*