

18-B. Renunciation of Jurisdiction

Background

These two proposed amendments, 18-B.1 and 18-B.2, (Item 06-09, Recommendations 1. and 2.) come out of the intent to clarify congregational prohibition and individual jurisdiction when a PC(USA) minister of Word and Sacrament renounces jurisdiction while in the midst of disciplinary proceedings and then wants to rejoin the PC(USA). [Editor's Note: The General Assembly approved the combination of two proposed amendments in one item. The advice on each of these proposed amendments come from the separate items, (Items 06-09 and 06-07) not on the combined items. In addition, the General Assembly asked that a third item similar be referred to the Rules of Discipline Task Force (Item 06-09, Recommendation 3.).]

18-B.1.

On Amending G-2.0509 (Item 06-09)

The 223rd General Assembly (2018) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-2.0509 be amended by striking the fourth paragraph and adding two new paragraphs to read as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added is shown as italic.]

"Whenever a former minister of the Word and Sacrament has renounced jurisdiction in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding as the accused, that former minister of the Word and Sacrament shall not be permitted to perform any work, paid or volunteer, in any congregation or entity under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) unless and until the person rejoins the church, comes forward and resubmits to the disciplinary process.

"No congregation or entity under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be permitted to employ, for pay or as a volunteer, a former minister of the Word and Sacrament (teaching elder) who has renounced jurisdiction in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding as the accused.

"Any former minister of the Word and Sacrament (teaching elder) who has renounced jurisdiction and later wants to be restored to office can be restored only through application to the presbytery in which he or she renounced jurisdiction for restoration to office, in which case the provisions of D-10.0401d and D-12.0200 shall apply."

Rationale

The proposed amendment 18-B.1 originated from the Presbytery of Central Florida as Item 06-09 and proposed amendment 18-B.2 originated from the Presbytery of The Twin Cities Area as Item 06-07 Recommendation 2 and added to Item 06-09 by the General Assembly. The Presbyteries of Albany, Grand Canyon, Muskingum Valley, Newton, North Alabama, Tropical Florida, Wabash Valley and de Cristo concurred with Item 06-09 and the Presbyteries of Albany, Denver, Grand Canyon, Missouri River Valley, Wabash Valley and de Cristo concurred with former Item 06-07 including Item 06-07 recommendation 2. The Presbytery of Central Florida provided the following rationale for Item 06-09 [edited].

The [former] amendments to G-2.0509, while intended to protect the church and its entities from ministers who have left the church without submitting to the constitutional process for establishing guilt or innocence and providing for repentance when repentance is needed, have instead created a situation in which the administration of justice, as defined

4

by the amendment, is impossible to carry out. By definition of the section itself, a person who has renounced jurisdiction no longer holds membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The preamble to the Rules of Discipline defines the limits of church discipline as follows:

... The purpose of discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ; to preserve the purity of the church by nourishing the *individual within the life of the believing community*; to achieve justice and compassion for all participants involved; to correct or restrain wrongdoing in order to bring *members* to repentance and restoration; to uphold the dignity of those who have been harmed by disciplinary offenses; to restore the unity of the church by removing the causes of discord and division; and to secure the just, speedy, and economical determination of proceedings. ... (D-1.0101, emphasis added)

Since church discipline exists for the welfare of the believing community and applies to members of that community, a former minister of the Word and Sacrament (teaching elder) who has renounced jurisdiction is no longer a member by action of the presbytery that removes his or her name from its rolls. In any complaint, the Rules of Discipline would apply to the congregation or other entity which employed that former minister. Should a former minister of the Word and Sacrament who has renounced jurisdiction wish to be restored to the ordered ministry of minister of the Word and Sacrament (teaching elder), the process for restoration is spelled out in the Rules of Discipline, D-12.0200.

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 223rd General Assembly (2018) to answer Item 06-09 with action on Item 06-07 providing the following advice [edited]. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 223rd General Assembly (2018) to answer Item 06-07 recommendation #1 with disapproval and refer recommendation #2 to the Rules of Discipline Task Force. They provided the following advice [edited].

Both Items 06-07 and 06-09 would amend G-2.0509 on renunciation of jurisdiction. Each proposes correcting a perceived flaw in the language of the last paragraph of G-2.0509. The approaches are different and do not achieve the same end. There is a comprehensive description of the issues related to renunciation of jurisdiction in the advice on Item 06-07 that will provide helpful background for consideration of this overture as well.

There are particular issues inherent in Item 06-09 [18-B.1]. The first sentence of Item 06-09 addresses the actions of a congregation. The second sentence of Item 06-09 [18-B.1], addresses actions of a former minister. Each part is discussed separately below.

... The Advisory Committee on the Constitution finds that the first paragraph would place requirements on the congregation or entity under the jurisdiction of the PC(USA), rather than on a former minister who has renounced the jurisdiction of this church and, therefore, is no longer subject to its jurisdiction

and discipline. Section G-2.0509 is about ministers of the Word and Sacrament and their actions in renouncing jurisdiction. Insertion of requirements for a congregation or entity under the jurisdiction of the PC(USA) interrupts the flow and sense of this section.

... The Advisory Committee on the Constitution finds that the second paragraph presents some matters of concern.

- Having struck the requirement for rejoining the church in the existing text of G-2.0509, if approved, the new language would eliminate any requirement for membership before “application” for restoration.
- It would require “application” to the presbytery. “Application” is not defined, nor are there any criteria for considering such an “application.”
- Most significantly, it assumes that renunciation of jurisdiction is equivalent to removal from ordered ministry in judicial process. A person who seeks to be restored after the censure of removal (D-12.0201) has subjected him or herself to the discipline of the church and satisfied the requirements for restoration. A person who has renounced jurisdiction of this church in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding has avoided the discipline of this church. A 1989 authoritative interpretation specifies that one who renounces jurisdiction and seeks to return to ministry of the Word and Sacrament “should first come again under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a member of a particular church and then initiate the process and procedures found in G-2.06, Preparation for Ministry (formerly G-14.0300, Preparation for the Office of Minister of the Word and Sacrament).” The proposed language of Item 06-09 conflicts with this and would not require membership in the church.

5

[Editor’s note: As noted in their advice above, the ACC provided advice on Item 06-07, which also applies to Item 6-09 since they recommended answering Item 06-09 with Item 06-07. The applicable advice is as follows.]

Return to Ordered Ministry

When a former minister renounced jurisdiction while a disciplinary case against him or her was pending, and now desires to return to ordered ministry in the PC(USA), additional process is required. Renunciation is not the removal of a person’s status in ordered ministry, but a voluntary abandonment of it. A minister of the Word and Sacrament who renounced jurisdiction may not be *restored* to ordered ministry and the office of minister of Word and Sacrament because the person voluntarily acted in a manner to negate that status. This is particularly true where the minister renounced while a disciplinary case was pending against him or her and thus refused to be subject to church discipline.

1. A person who has renounced jurisdiction while subject to a disciplinary process and who is a minister in good standing of another denomination may seek to have those credentials recognized under G-2.0505.
2. A person who has renounced jurisdiction while subject to a disciplinary process and who is not a minister in good standing in another denomination or whose credentials are not recognized by the PC(USA), must do so as a member of a congregation through the process of G-2.06, Preparation for Ministry.

18-B.2.

On Amending D-10.0401d (Item 06-09)

Shall D-10.0401d be amended to read as follows? [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

“For instances where a former minister of the Word and Sacrament comes forward in self-accusation to undergo a disciplinary process to regain permission to perform work under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (G-2.0509) *who renounced jurisdiction while being accused in a disciplinary case rejoins the church*, no time limit from the time of the commission of the alleged offense to the filing of charges shall apply. Charges based on all accusations that had been made by the time that the former minister of the Word and Sacrament had renounced jurisdiction may be brought regardless of the date on which any such offense is alleged to have occurred.”

Rationale

The proposed amendment 18-B.1 originates from the Presbytery of Central Florida as Item 06-09 and proposed amendment 18-B.2 from the Presbytery of The Twin Cities Area as Item 06-07

Recommendation 2. The Presbyteries of Albany, Grand Canyon, Muskingum Valley, Newton, North Alabama, Tropical Florida, Wabash Valley, and de Cristo concurred with Item 06-09 and the Presbyteries of Albany, Denver, Grand Canyon, Missouri River Valley, Wabash Valley and de Cristo concurred with former Item 06-07 including Item 06-07 Recommendation 2. The Presbytery of Central Florida provided the following rationale for Item 06-09 [edited].

How the Book of Order’s Currently Mandated Disciplinary Process in G-2.0509 and D-10.0401d Is Inconsistent with the Preamble of the Rules of Discipline

Recently adopted language in the *Book of Order* may seem to be merely a compassionate response to former ministers of the Word and Sacrament who renounced jurisdiction while being accused in a disciplinary case, who may have done so because of pressing family or medical reasons, for example. The current process allows former teaching elders to rejoin the church, but does not require them to face accusations until sometime in the future when they themselves choose to come forward, in self-accusation, to resume the disciplinary process. However, requiring the disciplinary process to resume only when the accused chooses to come forward in self-accusation is inconsistent with

6

five out of seven of the purposes of discipline stated in the Preamble of the Rules of Discipline (D-1.0101), because such a process (1) tramples on victim’s rights, (2) is not likely to remove causes of suspicion, and (3) is not likely to bring perpetrators of offenses to repentance, especially if many years pass between when the accused renounces jurisdiction and when the accused chooses to resume the disciplinary process.

The Preamble of the Rules of Discipline state that three of the purposes of discipline are:

- “to achieve justice and compassion for all participants involved;”
- “to uphold the dignity of those who have been harmed by disciplinary offenses;”

- “to secure the just, speedy, and economical determination of proceedings.” (D-1.0101)

When an accusation is made, victims have a right to see a fair and impartial investigation go forward with all deliberate speed (up to and including a trial, if necessary), so that, whatever the outcome of the disciplinary process², victims feel free to put memories of painful events in the past, and move on with their lives. However, under the current process in the *Book of Order*, victims (and perhaps their families or friends) may feel compelled to have to constantly prepare to testify about abusive events, just in case they ever receive notice from a new investigating committee that the accused wants to resume the disciplinary process, which could be at any time in the future of the accused’s choosing. It is cruel, inhumane, and anything but “speedy,” to expect victims to keep hanging on to evidence of abuse and to relive painful memories for months, years, or even decades in the future, on the perhaps slim chance that the accused might rejoin the church and choose to resubmit to the disciplinary process. In the words of a theological seminary advisory delegate to the 2016 General Assembly (2016), the process in G-2.0509 and D-10.0401d as now written “punishes victims.”

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 223rd General Assembly (2018) to answer Item 06-09 with action on Item 06-07 providing the following advice [edited]. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 223rd General Assembly (2018) to answer Item 06-07 recommendation #1 with disapproval and refer recommendation #2 to the Rules of Discipline Task Force. They provided the following advice [edited].

Part 2

Recommendation 2 of Item 06-07 would amend D-10.0401d to add words to make clear the section applies only to a former minister of the Word and Sacrament who renounced jurisdiction of the PC(US.) while a disciplinary proceeding was proceeding against him or her as the accused. There is a task force working on a revision to the Rules of Discipline. The amendment to D-10.0401d (Recommendation 2 of Item 06-7) should be referred to it.

Advice from the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns

The Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns advised the 223rd General Assembly (2018) to approve Item 06-09 for its greater clarity of language in amending the *Book of Order*, G-2.0509 and approve Item 06-07 Recommendation 2.

While ACWC supports the above changes, they are inadequate. Unless victims have the right to a fair and impartial investigation with all deliberate speed, they will never feel free to put memories of painful events in the past and move on with their lives. Under the current ruling, however, former teaching elders are allowed to rejoin the church but are not required to face accusations and resume the disciplinary process until a time in the future of their own choosing. Thus, a predator can deliberately wait until after key witnesses have moved on with their lives, perhaps even died, or *the original* evidence is no longer available.

Advice from the Office of the General Assembly

The Office of the General Assembly advised the 223rd General Assembly (2018) advises that all items, including Items 06-09 and 06-07, amending the Rules of Discipline, be referred to the Rules of Discipline Task Force, which is

7

currently revising the Rules of Discipline as a whole and will report with suggested changes to the 224th General Assembly (2020).

The Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry (06) voted to approve the proposed amendment as amended 54/3. The 223rd General Assembly (2018) approved the committee's recommendation with amendment 466/7. (See *Minutes*, 2018, Part I, pp. 71–72, 588.)

For the full report of Item 06-09, go to <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/committee/3000008/business>