

Members of the Safe and Sacred Space Task Force urge a NO vote on Proposed Amendment 18-B.1 because it increases the risk of abuse within the church.

Shall G-2.0509 be amended by striking the fourth paragraph and adding two new paragraphs to read as follows:

~~“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.”

The last paragraph raises concern that the amendment increases the risk of sexual misconduct and abuse.

The new language eliminates any requirement for membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) prior to applying. “Application” is not defined, nor is there guidance or a detailed process for a presbytery’s response. Although the amendment declares that “provisions of D-10.0401d and D-12.0200 shall apply”, the current language in the chapter 10 citation is **not** mandated (“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...”). “May” designates that an action is permissible but not required; “shall” designates action that is mandated. A 1989 General Assembly authoritative interpretation clarified that when a minister of Word and Sacrament renounced jurisdiction, the individual may rejoin the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) but must do so as a member of a congregation. If the individual discerns a renewed call to ordained ministry and the congregational community is supportive, the individual must go through the process for Preparation for Ministry in G-2.06. This process is based upon relationships in a congregation and in a presbytery and includes accountability.

The current *Book of Order* preserves the right of the individual who had renounced jurisdiction during a disciplinary process to rejoin the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

through membership in a congregation by reaffirmation of faith, giving the new session of membership the jurisdiction and responsibility to discipline the individual based upon the original allegation of offense. Once the disciplinary process is completed, the session could discern if the individual has the gifts for ordained ministry and could endorse the individual as an inquirer for ordination as minister of Word and Sacrament. The presbytery could then become part of the discernment to determine the inquirer's suitability for ordered ministry and readiness to begin that ministry.

Renunciation of jurisdiction is the voluntary action of an individual to abandon their affiliation and allegiance to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). When this occurs during a disciplinary proceeding in which a minister of Word and Sacrament is the accused, that process ends without resolution, not because of presbytery action, but because the former minister of Word and Sacrament is no longer subject to the church's discipline and is removed from the presbytery's membership as a consequence of the renunciation.

Proposed Amendment 18-B.1 allows the former presbytery of membership to first admit as a member the former minister of Word and Sacrament and then submit the minister member to the judicial process. The individual who renounced membership and ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) now has the possibility of being restored to ordained ministry without the accountability and relationships in the process of endorsement, inquiry and candidacy, and evaluation of call **prior to discipline and, potentially, without discipline if the subsequent investigating/prosecuting committee is unable to prove at a later date the alleged offense beyond a reasonable doubt.**

This amendment would, in effect, allow former ministers of Word and Sacrament – those who renounced the jurisdiction and membership of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) while in the midst of judicial disciplinary process as an accused, and who wanted to return to ministry in this denomination – to skip multiple layers of accountability, giving them access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults, thus increasing the risk of potential abuse in the church. Achieving justice and compassion for all participants in any dispute is a principle of church discipline. An easy path of restoration to membership would not accomplish that goal for those who had come forward with allegations of abuse without resolution.

The Task Force urges commissioners in presbyteries to vote NO on Proposed Amendment 18-B.1.

Safe and Sacred Space Task Force

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