

United Methodist Church Judicial Council

Decision 1521

MEMORANDUM

IN RE: Request for Declaratory Decision by The Uganda – Sudan – South Sudan Annual Conference Concerning the Authority of The General Council on Finance and Administration to Withhold Reduce or Condition Episcopal Office, Housing, Travel, And Operational Support for The Bishop of The East Africa Episcopal Area 2011 – 2024.

DIGEST

The Judicial Council declines jurisdiction. The legal issues raised have already been determined in Decision 1298, and therefore, the matter is moot.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

For decades, there have been issues of fiscal management involving the Uganda – Sudan – South Sudan Annual Conference (East Africa Episcopal area) presided over by Bishop Wandabula. The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) first raised the issue and then asked the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) to monitor the financial appropriations to that Conference. This led to a restriction in the non-salary budgeted funds allocated to Bishop Wandabula, the Uganda – Sudan – South Sudan Annual Conference (East Africa Episcopal area), and the Church entities under his episcopal supervision.

Previous Judicial Council Decisions have addressed this situation. (See Decisions 1353 and 1298.)

Now, Uganda – Sudan – South Sudan Annual Conference (East Africa Episcopal area) again questions whether GCFA properly complied with Paragraphs 543.4 and 819.3-819.5 of the *Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2020/2024*.

At the Session of the Uganda-Sudan-South Sudan Annual Conference August 21-25, 2025, the Annual Conference by a two-thirds (2/3) majority adopted the Resolution Calling for a Petition to the Judicial Council for a Declaratory Decision. The Conference asks whether GCFA has authority to withhold, reduce, delay or condition episcopal support. The Conference affirms that such actions have materially affected the work, mission, finances, and governance of the Annual Conference and affirms the leadership and integrity of Bishop Daniel Wandabula. The questions presented for a declaratory decision include:

1. Authority Over Episcopal Support – Does GCFA possess authority under Paragraph 543.4 and Paragraph 818 to reduce, suspend, or withhold episcopal support?

2. Conditioning Support – May GCFA condition episcopal support on documentation or audit requirements not authorized by the *Book of Discipline*?
3. Consultation – Must GCFA consult the Council of Bishops before altering episcopal support?
4. De Facto Discipline – Does withholding constitute unlawful discipline absent due process under Paragraph 2701-2712?
5. Restrictive Rule Paragraph 20 – Did GCFA’S actions violate Article III by impairing itinerant superintendency?
6. Standing – Is the Annual Conference a proper petitioner under Paragraph 2609.5 and Paragraph 2610.2(j)?
7. Restoration – Must GCFA restore withheld allowances for 2011-2024, with interest?
8. Prospective Compliance – May the Judicial Council require GCFA to remit future support fully and on time?

JURISDICTION

The Judicial Council declines to take jurisdiction. The Judicial Council has in the following pertinent cases declined jurisdiction on mootness. See Decisions 33, 463, and 1393.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE

Upon considering the factual background of this case, the declaratory relief sought, the applicable paragraphs in the discipline and the balance of the convenience, the following observations are worth mentioning. The parties’ long-standing conflict and dispute has since been addressed such that there is no reason to revisit the legal issues. There is no dispute or discord as regards the role of GCFA in the exercise of its fiscal responsibilities. Decision 1298 begs of no ambiguity warranting re-visit.

The Council decided that GCFA could not reduce the salary of a Bishop but that it had authority to set, administer, and require accountability in the form of accounting audits as to those non-salary expenses. The question was deliberated and decided on, such that there is no live dispute to relate to in the present petition. The GCFA duties are enumerated in ¶818. ¶2610.2 by no means seeks to undermine the fiscal responsibility of GCFA. Checks and balances remain intact with each party playing its complementary role. These issues were resolved in Decision 1298 such that taking jurisdiction in this matter would amount to re-ploughing a trodden area. There is no live dispute and as such the matter is moot. Fact-finding is not a role of the Judicial Council;

as such, the issues raised by the Uganda – Sudan – South Sudan Annual Conference cannot be engaged (Decision 820).

We acknowledge that the current petition presents factual issues that are the subject of a longstanding dispute. While there is no indication that those issues cannot be resolved, it appears that no resolution is in the offing. To prevent this from becoming a stalemate, we note that GCFA has the discretion to report unresolved issues like the current dispute to the General Conference together with a recommendation as to how it might be resolved by the General Conference. ¶ 806.13(c)(3).

DECISION

The Judicial Council declines jurisdiction. The legal issues raised have already been determined in Decision 1298, and therefore, the matter is moot.

April 24, 2026