



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
 CONSEIL JUDICIAIRE DE L'ÉGLISE METHODISTE UNIE
 RECHTSHOF DER EVANGELISCH-METHODISTISCHEN KIRCHE
 CONSELHO JUDICIAL DA IGREJA METODISTA UNIDA
 CONSEJO DE LA JUDICATURA DE LA IGLESIA METODISTA UNIDA



Report by Bishop on Decision of Law

This form is to be used for (please check one):

Reporting of decisions of law made by bishops in response to questions of law submitted to them in writing during the regular business of a conference session (§ 56.3 Const. and ¶ 2609.6 *The Book of Discipline 2016*).

Reporting of episcopal decisions on questions of law when such decisions are appealed by one-fifth of the members of the conference (§ 56.2 Const. and ¶ 2609.7 *The Book of Discipline 2016*).

Name of Bishop: Leonard E. Fairley

Address: 700 Waterfield Ridge Place City: Garner

State/Province: NC ZIP/Postal Code 27529 Country: USA

Phone: 919-779-9435 Fax: 919-882-8460 E-mail: Bishop@nccumc.org

Annual Conference: North Carolina Date of session: November 19, 2022 (month/day/year)

Question(s) of Law: Is it lawful for an annual conference to approve a local church for disaffiliation under paragraph 2553 of the Discipline for any reason other than the removal of conscience names? →

Authorities Cited (indicate paragraph or decision number where applicable):

Constitution: _____ Book of Discipline: ~~2529.1 B(3)~~; 2553.4

Judicial Council Decision(s): 1371, 1379, 1421, 1424, 1425

Signature: Leonard E. Fairley
 Bishop of The United Methodist Church

Date: December/12/2022
 (month/day/year)

The following must be attached:

- o Decision of Law, including facts, rationale and ruling
- o Text of the written request for decision
- o Minutes of annual conference proceedings
- o List of names and addresses of interested parties
- o Other relevant materials (e.g. conference rules, resolutions, policies, reports)

➤ Thirteen (13) hard copies must be submitted via USPS or other delivery service to:
UMC Judicial Council, c/o LaNella Smith, Assistant to the J.C. Secretary,
1215 Shady Lane, Durham, NC 27712

➤ Electronic copies in both Word and PDF (with security features disabled) must be submitted to: secretary@umcjudicialcouncil.org.

2. Do the annual conference members have the right to receive in writing all the available information pertinent to the disaffiliation.

The Question of Law

Charles Michael Smith, a clergy member of The NC Conference, made the following request for a decision of law at the start of the called session.

I write to submit a question in the form of a request for you to make a decision of law. I do so out of respect for, and in accordance with, the established Division Three, Article VII, of the Constitution of The United Methodist Church (published as paragraph 51 in the 2016 DISCIPLINE) and paragraph 2609.6 in our church law.

The request that I submit is for you to make a ruling of law concerning the following, which is a question with two parts:

1. First, is it lawful for an annual conference to approved a local church for disaffiliation under paragraph 2553 of The DISCIPLINE for any reasons other than the "reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues..."?
2. Second, does the annual conference, all lay and clergy members present and voting in this Special Session for this sole purpose, have the right to receive in writing all the available information on the reasons of conscience each church seeking to disaffiliate has given to the district superintendent conducting their Church Conference, as their reasons for doing this?

This two-part question of law arises in the context of procedures that have been used to implement paragraph 2553. In the North Carolina Annual Conference, we have only been given the name of the church and its district whereas our sister conferences adjoining us in Virginia and Western North Carolina have each been given voluminous information on each local church requesting disaffiliation. Given that the Annual Conference is the body that has final authority for making this decision as paragraphs 2529.1B(3) and 2553.4 make clear and as multiple Judicial Council decisions affirm (for example, 1371, 1379, 1421, 1424, 1425), it seems reasonable that those voting at the annual conference special session should have before them all pertinent information.

In the case of the North Carolina Annual Conference, that has not been provided.

Further, at least one church has proclaimed widely that its decision to disaffiliate is not for "reasons of conscience" pertaining to policies on homosexuality but other issues. Exactly two months ago in an interview published on the front page of a local

newspaper, one of our pastors said of his church's vote to disaffiliate: "Trinity's vote was not about homosexuality; however, it was about maintaining a belief that the Bible should be read literally as the inerrant and infallible word of God." He further stated that "Methodists with similar views as him and his church have been 'accused of being anti-homosexual and that's the furthest thing from the truth.'"

The Minutes of The Special Session of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church Meeting in Annual Conference

November 19, 2022 at Methodist University, Fayetteville, NC

Plenary Session, November 19, 2022

Bishop Leonard Fairley welcomed everyone at 10:18 a.m. The congregation sang, "My Hope Is Built." Bishop Fairley prayed and preached a sermon referencing Micah 6:8 and reminding us of life, death, and the promise of resurrection. The congregation sang, "It Is Well with My Soul."

Bishop Leonard Fairley called the special session to order at 10:48 a.m. Rev. Gray Southern, Conference Secretary, thanked those who helped make this session possible. Rev. Southern reviewed the standing rules of this called session, which are the same as those adopted by the Annual Conference at our regularly scheduled session in June of 2022.

The North Carolina Conference Trustees Report was presented by David Peele, President and Chair of the Board of Trustees¹. Those present were reminded, "As a matter of procedure, it is important to note that this report is part of step 6 as outlined in the church disaffiliation procedures on the Conference website and all churches intending to disaffiliate must meet all terms and conditions of the agreement on or before the effective date of the agreement in order for the agreement to be valid. The agreements of any churches that do not meet the requirements as defined in the disaffiliation agreement by the effective date of December 31 will be considered null and void."

The Board of Trustees motion: Therefore, in accordance with paragraphs 33 and 2529.1(b)(3) of The Book of Discipline and Judicial Council Decision #1379 which requires that 'the disaffiliation agreement be ratified by a simple majority of the members of the annual conference present and voting,' the Board of Trustees move the ratification of the Disaffiliation Agreements of the churches named in the Addendum to this report distributed as members registered. No second was required.

Rev. Charles Smith (Retired Clergy, Beacon) called for a division of the assembly². The request was received by Bishop Fairley and a secret ballot will be taken.

Ken Ripley (Laity, Gibson Memorial, Heritage) made a motion that was ruled out of order³. Mr. Ripley spoke against the Trustees' motion. Rev. Reggie Ponder (Retired Clergy, Capital) spoke against the motion.

Rev. Bryan Lassiter (Clergy, Core Creek, Sound) called the question and by a show of hands was approved.

The written ballot was taken.

Rev. Charles Smith (Retired Clergy, Beacon) presented a request for a ruling of law⁴.

The ballot results were shared with the conference. The motion passed with 957 for and 165 against.

Christine Dodson, Conference Treasurer and Chair of the Committee of the Episcopacy, recognized the work of Bishop Leonard Fairley and thanked him for his service as our bishop. Bishop Connie Shelton will be joining our conference on January 1, 2023.

Worship was concluded with the singing of "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

The session was adjourned at 11:55 a.m. by Bishop Fairley.

NOTES

1. BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT

The Board of Trustees of the Annual Conference works to fulfill responsibilities outlined in paragraphs 2512-2516 of the 2016 Book of Discipline, as well as paragraph 2553 approved at the Special Session of General Conference 2019. As the November 2022 Special Session of Annual Conference is called for the stated purpose of voting on disaffiliation matters, the following report provides details of the responsibilities of the Conference Board of Trustees related to paragraph 2553 since the last meeting of the Annual Conference in June 2022.

As required by the legislation approved by the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the Board of Trustees developed a process of disaffiliation for any churches in the NC Conference that express an interest in doing so under the provisions of the Book of Discipline paragraph 2553. As reported to the June 2022 Annual Conference, a final Disaffiliation Agreement was published by the Board of Trustees in May 2022. Since that time, the Board of Trustees has been engaged with the Bishop, Cabinet, and other leaders to process churches as requested through the disaffiliation process. Following the published disaffiliation agreement and process, the Board of Trustees has included a listing of local churches whose church conference has approved the disaffiliation agreement and process as an addendum to this report. Upon ratification of the Annual Conference and fulfillment of all provisions of the disaffiliation agreement prior to the effective date of December 31, 2022, the churches listed in the addendum will disaffiliate and no longer be a local church of The United Methodist Church.

While the Board of Trustees regrets the state of disunity and separation in The United Methodist Church, the Board has worked to fulfill the responsibilities entrusted to its care in The Book of Discipline. Therefore, in accordance with paragraphs 33 and 2529.1(b)(3) of The Book of Discipline and Judicial Council Decision 1379 which requires that 'the disaffiliation agreement be ratified by a simple majority of the members of the annual conference present and voting,' the Board of Trustees moves the ratification of the Disaffiliation Agreement of the churches named in the Addendum to this report.

The Board of Trustees will continue to work in the best interest of The North Carolina Annual Conference and The United Methodist Church to the best of our ability, with thanksgiving and praise to God, and in compliance with The Book of Discipline.

Respectfully submitted,
David Peele, President

District	Church Name	City	District	Church Name	City
Beacon	Asbury	Washington	Capital	Daniels Memorial	Goldsboro
Beacon	Bethany	Wanchese	Capital	Elevation	Benson
Beacon	Camden	Camden	Capital	Elm City	Elm City
Beacon	Clarks Bethel	Salvo	Capital	Eureka	Eureka
Beacon	Duck	Duck	Capital	Falling Creek	Goldsboro
Beacon	Epworth	Scranton	Capital	Garris Chapel	LaGrange
Beacon	Fairfield	Swan Quarter	Capital	Goshen	Newton Grove
Beacon	First	Washington	Capital	Keener	Clinton
Beacon	Harrellsville	Harrellsville	Capital	Holland's	Raleigh
Beacon	Powellsville	Powellsville	Capital	Kenly	Kenly
Beacon	Jamesville	Jamesville	Capital	Layden Memorial	Raleigh
Beacon	Siloam	Jamesville	Capital	Yelverton	Fremont
Beacon	Mt. Carmel	Manns Harbor	Capital	Lucama	Lucama
Beacon	McBride	South Mills	Capital	Fellowship	Kenly
Beacon	Mt. Hermon	Creswell	Capital	Mt. Carmel	Pikeville
Beacon	New Hope	Hertford	Capital	Mt. Pleasant	Bailey
Beacon	Soule	Swan Quarter	Capital	Mt. Zion	Garner
Beacon	Sharon	South Mills	Capital	New Hope	Goldsboro
Beacon	Trinity	South Mills	Capital	Newton Grove	Newton Grove
Beacon	Trinity	Belhaven	Capital	Maple Grove	Dunn
Beacon	Vernon	Williamston	Capital	Providence	Goldsboro
Beacon	Watson's Chapel	Engelhard	Capital	Saulston	Goldsboro
Beacon	Wesley	Shiloh	Capital	Sims	Sims
Beacon	Windsor	Windsor	Capital	St. Joseph	Pikeville
Beacon	Woodland	Hertford	Capital	St. Paul	Goldsboro
Capital	Asbury	Raleigh	Capital	Wesley Chapel	Godwin
Capital	Bailey	Bailey	Corridor	Center	Snow Camp
Capital	Pleasant Grove	Bailey	Corridor	Camp Springs	Reidsville
Capital	Benson	Benson	Corridor	Carr	Burlington
Capital	Beston	LaGrange	Corridor	Concord	Roxboro
Capital	Bethel	LaGrange	Corridor	Friendship	Burlington
Capital	Brogden	Dudley	Corridor	Hebron	Mebane
Capital	Buckhorn	Kenly	Corridor	Mt. Zion	Hurdle Mills
Capital	Coats	Coats	Corridor	Oak Grove	Roxboro
Capital	Corinth	Four Oaks	Corridor	Orange Chapel	Chapel Hill

District	Church Name	City	District	Church Name	City
Corridor	Phillips Chapel	Haw River	Gateway	Parkton	Parkton
Corridor	Salem	Haw River	Gateway	Roberdell	Rockingham
Corridor	St. Luke's	Burlington	Gateway	Salem	Eastover
Corridor	St. Paul's	Burlington	Gateway	Sandy Plains	Pembroke
Corridor	Warren's Grove	Roxboro	Gateway	St. Paul	Rockingham
Fairway	Page Memorial	Biscoe	Gateway	Tabor	Fayetteville
Fairway	Bascom Chapel	Robbins	Gateway	Trinity	Fairmont
Fairway	Meroney	Bear Creek	Gateway	West Rockingham	Rockingham
Fairway	West End	Siler City	Harbor	Andrews Chapel	Calabash
Fairway	Cool Springs	Broadway	Harbor	Bethabara	Autryville
Fairway	Cumnock Union	Sanford	Harbor	Bethany	Stedman
Fairway	Mt. Pleasant	Ellerbe	Harbor	Bethel	Mt. Olive
Fairway	First	Troy	Harbor	Bethel	Clarendon
Fairway	Goldston	Goldston	Harbor	Lebanon	Clarendon
Fairway	Hickory Mountain	Pittsboro	Harbor	Beulah	Roseboro
Fairway	Love Joy	Troy	Harbor	Windsor	Elizabethtown
Fairway	Macedonia	Troy	Harbor	Shiloh	Bolton
Fairway	Ophir	Troy	Harbor	Brownings	Mt. Olive
Fairway	Mt. Carmel	Carthage	Harbor	Cokesbury	Stedman
Fairway	Uwharrie	Troy	Harbor	Epworth	Clinton
Fairway	Parsons Grove	Candor	Harbor	Evergreen	Evergreen
Fairway	Piney Grove	Siler City	Harbor	Fair Bluff	Fair Bluff
Fairway	Mt. Vernon	Siler City	Harbor	Cerro Gordo	Cerro Gordo
Fairway	Sapling Ridge	Pittsboro	Harbor	Faison	Faison
Fairway	Smyrna	Robbins	Harbor	First	Clinton
Gateway	Beauty Spot	Rowland	Harbor	Centenary	Harrells
Gateway	Beaver Dam	Laurel Hill	Harbor	Halls	Autryville
Gateway	Black's Chapel	Dunn	Harbor	Herring's Chapel	Burgaw
Gateway	Central	Laurinburg	Harbor	Kenansville	Kenansville
Gateway	Chestnut Street	Lumberton	Harbor	Lake Waccamaw	Lake Waccamaw
Gateway	Coharie	Clinton	Harbor	Magnolia	Magnolia
Gateway	Collins Chapel	Lumberton	Harbor	Mishop Springs	Whiteville
Gateway	Cumberland	Fayetteville	Harbor	Bethesda	Nakina
Gateway	Roseboro	Roseboro	Harbor	Old Dock	Boiling Springs Lakes
Gateway	First	Rockingham	Harbor	Peace	Whiteville
Gateway	Gardners	Fayetteville	Harbor	Pine Valley	Wilmington
Gateway	Leslie	Dunn	Harbor	Purdie	Elizabethtown

Gateway	New Philadelphus	Red Springs	Harbor	Rocky Point	Rocky Point
District	Church Name	City	District	Church Name	City
Harbor	Rones Chapel	Mt. Olive	Heritage	Hermon	Henderson
Harbor	Sarecta	Pink Hill	Heritage	Bethany	Conway
Harbor	Seven Springs	Seven Springs	Heritage	Severn	Severn
Harbor	Sharon	Supply	Heritage	Woodland	Woodland
Harbor	Singletary	Dublin	Heritage	Zion	Conway
Harbor	Smith Chapel	Mt. Olive	Heritage	Nashville	Nashville
Harbor	Trinity	Elizabethtown	Heritage	Rehoboth	Jackson
Harbor	Trinity	Kelly	Heritage	Shiloh	Louisburg
Harbor	Trinity	Magnolia	Heritage	Smith	Roanoke Rapids
Harbor	Unity	Warsaw	Heritage	Speight's Chapel	Whitaker
Harbor	Watha	Watha	Heritage	White Oak	Nashville
Harbor	Wesley	Riegelwood	Heritage	Tabernacle	Townsville
Harbor	Westview	Burgaw	Heritage	Providence	Warrenton
Harbor	Woodland	Albertson	Heritage	Shocco	Henderson
Harbor	Zion	Mt. Olive	Heritage	Warren Plains	Warrenton
Heritage	Banks	Wilton	Heritage	Zion	Norlina
Heritage	Shady Grove	Inez	Sound	Arapahoe	Arapahoe
Heritage	Calvary	Littleton	Sound	Beech Grove	New Bern
Heritage	Cokesbury	Henderson	Sound	Rhems	New Bern
Heritage	Community	Butner	Sound	Belgrade	Belgrade
Heritage	Stem	Stem	Sound	Tabernacle	Maysville
Heritage	Concord	Pleasant Hill	Sound	Bethlehem	Bogue
Heritage	Sharon	Margarettsville	Sound	Broad Creek	Morehead City
Heritage	Conetoe	Conetoe	Sound	Campbell's Creek	Aurora
Heritage	Hobgood	Hobgood	Sound	Cedar Island	Cedar Island
Heritage	Conway	Conway	Sound	Sea Level	Cedar Island
Heritage	Pleasant Grove	Seaboard	Sound	Core Creek	Newport
Heritage	Hawkins Chapel	Roanoke Rapids	Sound	Covenant	Winterville
Heritage	Tabor	Littleton	Sound	Cypress Creek	Trenton
Heritage	Hornes	Wilson	Sound	Epworth	Vanceboro
Heritage	Jackson	Jackson	Sound	Faith	New Bern
Heritage	Seaboard	Seaboard	Sound	Farmville	Farmville
Heritage	Jerusalem	Warrenton	Sound	First	Havelock
Heritage	Corinth	Littleton	Sound	First	Morehead City
Heritage	Weaver's Chapel	Littleton	Sound	Franklin Memorial	Morehead City
Heritage	Macon	Macon	Sound	Garber	New Bern
Heritage	Marrow's Chapel	Henderson	Sound	Harkers Island	Harkers Island

Heritage	Middleburg	Middleburg	Sound	Haw Branch	Richlands
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District	Church Name	City			
Sound	Hookerton	Hookerton			
Sound	Jerusalem	Snow Hill			
Sound	Lane's Chapel	Dover			
Sound	Lee's Chapel	Pollockville			
Sound	Brooks Frizzelle Memorial	Maury			
Sound	Mt. Herman	Lizzie			
Sound	Maysville	Maysville			
Sound	Merrimon	Merrimon			
Sound	Midway	Stella			
Sound	Pamlico	Oriental			
Sound	Reelsboro	New Bern			
Sound	Richlands	Richlands			
Sound	Salter Path	Salter Path			
Sound	Shady Grove	Kinston			
Sound	Stonewall	Stonewall			
Sound	Straits	Beaufort			
Sound	North River	Beaufort			
Sound	Tabernacle	Walstonburg			
Sound	Trenton	Trenton			
Sound	Trinity	Jacksonville			
Sound	Tuttle's Grove	Beaufort			
Sound	Vanceboro	Vanceboro			
Sound	Verona	Jacksonville			
Sound	Warren Chapel	Blounts Creek			
Sound	Williston	Williston			
Sound	Stacy	Stacy			
Sound	Woodington	Kinston			

11/19/2022-10:56a.m.-**PASSED** 957-for; 165-against

2. Smith Parliamentary Procedure

I call for a division of the assembly.

11/19/2022-11:05 a.m.-**PASSED** by show of hands, though a vote was not necessary.

3. Ripley Motion

I move that the Annual Conference requests our Conference trustees require each church requesting disaffiliation to document its compliance with 2553 by submitting a written statement as an addendum to the Disaffiliation Agreement which includes the specific change by the 2019 General Conference in the Book of Discipline related to homosexuality to which the local church as well as specifies the “reason of conscience” for the objection.

11/19/2022-11:08 a.m.-Board of Trustees Report: Local Church Disaffiliation Motion-**Ruled out of order per Judicial Council ruling #1420.**

4. Smith Ruling of Law Request

I write to submit a question in the form of a request for you to make a decision of law. I do so out of respect for, and in accordance with, the established Division Three, Article VII, of the Constitution of The United Methodist Church (published as paragraph 51 in the 2016 DISCIPLINE) and paragraph 2609.6 in our church law.

The request that I submit is for you to make a ruling of law concerning the following, which is a question with two parts:

1. First, is it lawful for an annual conference to approved a local church for disaffiliation under paragraph 2553 of The DISCIPLINE for any reasons other than the "reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues..."?

2. Second, does the annual conference, all lay and clergy members present and voting in this Special Session for this sole purpose, have the right to receive in writing all the available information on the reasons of conscience each church seeking to disaffiliate has given to the district superintendent conducting their Church Conference, as their reasons for doing this?

This two-part question of law arises in the context of procedures that have been used to implement paragraph 2553. In the North Carolina Annual Conference, we have only been given the name of the church and its district whereas our sister conferences adjoining us in Virginia and Western North Carolina have each been given voluminous information on each local church requesting disaffiliation. Given that the Annual Conference is the body that has final authority for making its decision as paragraphs

2529.1B(3) and 2553.4 make clear and as multiple Judicial Council decisions affirm (for example, 1371, 1379, 1421, 1424, 1425), it seems reasonable that those voting at the annual conference special session should have before them all pertinent information.

In the case of the North Carolina Annual Conference, that has not been provided.

Further, at least one church has proclaimed widely that its decision to disaffiliate is not for "reasons of conscience" pertaining to policies on homosexuality but other issues. Exactly two months ago in an interview published on the front page of a local newspaper, one of our pastors said of his church's vote to disaffiliate: "Trinity's vote was not about homosexuality; however, it was about maintaining a belief that the Bible should be read literally as the inerrant and infallible word of God." He further stated that "Methodists with similar views as him and his church have been 'accused of being anti-homosexual and that's the furthest thing from the truth.'"

11/19/2022-11:25 a.m. **Received for ruling**

THE NORTH CAROLINA ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

DECISION OF LAW OF BISHOP LEONARD E. FAIRLEY

THE MATTER IN QUESTION

On June 16, 2022 at the Session of the NC Annual Conference, Bishop Fairley announced a called Special Session of The NC Annual Conference to be held on Saturday, November 19, 2022. The purpose of the Special Session was announced to be the question of whether or not the NC Conference would ratify the disaffiliation of those churches who had completed the process to disaffiliate as determined by The NCC Board of Trustees in conformity with *The Book of Discipline*, Paragraph 2553.

The Special Session was held at Methodist University on November 19, 2022 in conformity with Bishop Fairley's call. All those local churches who had previously complied with The NCC Board of Trustees procedure (complying with Paragraph 2553) were submitted for ratification.

The Question of Law

Charles Michael Smith, a clergy member of The NC Conference, made the following request for a decision of law at the start of the called session.

I write to submit a question in the form of a request for you to make a decision of law. I do so out of respect for, and in accordance with, the established Division Three, Article VII, of the Constitution of The United Methodist Church (published as paragraph 51 in the 2016 DISCIPLINE) and paragraph 2609.6 in our church law.

The request that I submit is for you to make a ruling of law concerning the following, which is a question with two parts:

1. First, is it lawful for an annual conference to approved a local church for disaffiliation under paragraph 2553 of The DISCIPLINE for any reasons other than the "reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues...?"

2. Second, does the annual conference, all lay and clergy members present and voting in this Special Session for this sole purpose, have the right to receive in writing all the available information on the reasons of conscience each church seeking to disaffiliate has given to the district superintendent conducting their Church Conference, as their reasons for doing this?

This two-part question of law arises in the context of procedures that have been used to implement paragraph 2553. In the North Carolina Annual Conference, we have only been given the name of the church and its district whereas our sister conferences adjoining us in Virginia and Western North Carolina have each been given voluminous information on each local church requesting disaffiliation. Given that the Annual Conference is the body that has final authority for making this decision as paragraphs 2529.1B(3) and 2553.4 make clear and as multiple Judicial Council decisions affirm (for example, 1371, 1379, 1421, 1424, 1425), it seems reasonable that those voting at the annual conference special session should have before them all pertinent information.

In the case of the North Carolina Annual Conference, that has not been provided.

Further, at least one church has proclaimed widely that its decision to disaffiliate is not for "reasons of conscience" pertaining to policies on homosexuality but other issues. Exactly two months ago in an interview published on the front page of a local newspaper, one of our pastors said of his church's vote to disaffiliate: "Trinity's vote was not about homosexuality; however, it was about maintaining a belief that the Bible should be read literally as the inerrant and infallible word of God." He further stated that "Methodists with similar views as him and his church have been 'accused of being anti-homosexual and that's the furthest thing from the truth.'"

Decision of Law

I am issuing this decision of law pursuant to the authority given to me as a presiding officer on Paragraph 51 of *The Book of Discipline 2016*. The decision is made within the time prescribed by Paragraph 2609.6 of *The Discipline*.

The question of law complies with the requirements of Decisions 799, 1103 and 1279. Therefore, it is properly before me and I have jurisdiction to issue a decision of law.

Ruling

In response to your first question, "is it lawful for an annual conference to approve a local church for disaffiliation under paragraph 2553 of *The Discipline* for any reason other than 'the reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of *The Book of Discipline* related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as

resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues” – No it would not be lawful for the NC Conference to act to ratify a local church’s disaffiliation for any reasons other than those specified in Paragraph 2553. All of the churches whose requests for disaffiliation were before the NCC Special Called Session had approved requests to disaffiliate for the very reasons stated in Paragraph 2553 in their various church conferences which were properly and fairly conducted so those actions were properly before us. Regardless of what other actions or statements members and/or clergy of those local churches may have made, the motion approved at their church conference was based on stating their reasons for requesting disaffiliation were the exact same requirements stipulated in Paragraph 2553. Reference Judicial Council Decision 1422.

Second: “does the annual conference, all lay and clergy members present and voting in this Special Session for this sole purpose, have the right to receive in writing all the available information on the reasons of conscience each church seeking to disaffiliate has given to the district superintendent conducting their Church Conference, as their reasons for doing this?” Paragraph 2553 of The Book of Discipline and Paragraph 2529.1(b) (3) do not state what, if any, information must be supplied to an annual conference considering the disaffiliation of a local church. The list of those churches requesting disaffiliation was made known well in advance of the meeting as was the statement that the churches whose requests for disaffiliation were to be submitted for ratification had all satisfied The NC Conference Board of Trustees’ requirements of churches seeking such action. Foundational to those requirements was that each local church seeking disaffiliation must approve a motion asking for disaffiliation by a two-thirds vote of those professing members present and voting that disaffiliation was sought on the grounds specified in Paragraph 2553, “reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of The Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the action or inactions of its annual conference related to these matters.” Each local church seeking to disaffiliate from the NCC had satisfied that requirement. Other details about those churches seeking disaffiliation are available in the NC Journal and available to anyone seeking that data. Various annual conferences will present such information in different ways.

Therefore, in regards to both your questions:

It is lawful that the NC Annual Conference proceeded to consider whether or not to ratify the disaffiliation of each local church as it did in the Special Session on November 19, 2022.

Bishop Leonard E. Fairley

Presiding Bishop, The NC Annual Conference

Date: December 6, 2022

Interested Parties 0423-10

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