

Docket 1023-5

IN RE: Review of a Bishop's Ruling in the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference on Questions Seeking Information, Procedural Answers, and Substantive Answers Concerning Matters Related to Changes in a Colleague's Conference Relationship and Clergy Status.

The Written Questions:

There is a preamble to the questions which sets forth in substance and pertinent part:

The clergy session of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference met on June 3, 2023, to vote on all matters related to the character and conference relations of its clergy members in accordance with ¶ 33.

On page 11 (42) [the clergy person] is given the status of "Withdrawn."

Therefore, the presiding Bishop is asked to rule on the following questions of law, in accordance with ¶ 51, as they pertain to the work and business of the clergy session held on June 3, 2023.

1. Has [the clergy person] submitted a letter of withdrawal in accordance with ¶360?
2. Is the Global Methodist Church, which [the clergy person] is purported to have joined and therefore purported to have voluntarily withdrawn in accordance with JCD 696, another Christian, Wesleyan Denomination in accordance with JCD 696 and ¶360, ¶433.3, and ¶2553.4.g?
3. To whom and when did [the clergy person] make a declaration of intent containing personal objective elements about provisionally accepting an appointment in the Global Methodist Church effective on July 1, 2023 in accordance with JCD 696?
4. Was [the clergy person]'s declaration, containing personal and objective elements about provisionally accepting an appointment in the Global Methodist Church on July 1, 2023, sufficient to surrender his ministerial office and membership in the annual conference on June 1, 2023, and deny him a ministerial review under ¶20 and ¶362?
5. What was the date that [the clergy person] participated in the ritual that joined him full communion in the Global Methodist Church in accordance with JCD 696?
6. Is [the clergy person] entitled to remuneration for the period of time that no appointment was made after June 1, 2023, in accordance with JCD 492?

1023-5 Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference Bishop's Ruling

Ruling: The “questions of law” are improper questions. Therefore, they are out of order.

Statement of Facts:

At the June 3, 2023 Clergy Session of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, Nathanael Fugate asked the following “questions of law”:

1. Has [the clergy person] submitted a letter of withdrawal in accordance with ¶360?
2. Is the Global Methodist Church, which [the clergy person] is purported to have joined and therefore purported to have voluntarily withdrawn in accordance with JCD 696, another Christian, Wesleyan Denomination in accordance with JCD 696 and ¶360, ¶433.3, and ¶2553.4.g?
3. To whom and when did [the clergy person] make a declaration of intent containing personal objective elements about provisionally accepting an appointment in the Global Methodist Church effective on July 1, 2023 in accordance with JCD 696?
4. Was [the clergy person]’s declaration, containing personal and objective elements about provisionally accepting an appointment in the Global Methodist Church on July 1, 2023 sufficient to surrender his ministerial office and membership in the annual conference on June 1, 2023, and deny him a ministerial review under ¶20 and ¶362?
5. What was the date that [the clergy person] participated in the ritual that joined him full communion in the Global Methodist Church in accordance with JCD 696?
6. Is [the clergy person] entitled to remuneration for the period of time that no appointment was made after June 1, 2023 in accordance with JCD 492?

Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi ruled that the “questions of law” were actually matters of information, not “questions of law”, and therefore, out of order. Bishop Moore-Koikoi encouraged Nathanael Fugate to meet with [the clergy person]’s previous District Superintendent in order to obtain the information Nathanael Fugate requested.

It should also be noted that Nathanael Fugate has withdrawn membership from the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 2023.

Rationale:

Questions 1, 3, and 5 are matters of information, not questions of law. In addition to being matters of information questions 2, 4, and 6 contain factual errors.

Question 2 assumes facts that are incorrect. [The clergy person]'s withdrawal was not in accordance with JCD 696. Rather, [the clergy person] communicated with his District Superintendent stating his intension to withdraw from The United Methodist Church and his acceptance into the Global Methodist Church. (See Questions 4 and 6 below for details).

Question 4 assumes facts that are incorrect. [The clergy person]'s withdrawal was, for all intents and purposes, at his request. (See Questions 4 and 6 below).

Questions 4 and 6 assumes facts that are incorrect. On April 4, 2023 [the clergy person] contacted his District Superintendent via a telephone call to inform her that he had accepted an appointment in the Global Methodist Church. Subsequent to that conversation, but before April 19, 2023, [the clergy person] announced via Facebook and during a worship service in his then current appointment that he was leaving the UMC and had accepted an appointment in the Global Methodist Church. On April 19, 2023 two District Superintendents met with [the clergy person] and confirmed that he had accepted membership in the Global Methodist Church and an appointment in the Global Methodist Church. During the April 19, 2023 conversation, the District Superintendents shared with [the clergy person] that he would be given his current compensation - cash, pension, and health benefits through June 30, 2023. They also clarified with [the clergy person] that he could not hold membership in the Global Methodist Church and the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Although [the clergy person], in spite of repeated requests from his District Superintendent, did not put his withdrawal in writing, he was made aware of the fact that his application for membership, acceptance of membership, and appointments in the Global Methodist Church constituted his withdrawal of membership in the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

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Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference

Interested Parties & Persons Available for Courtesy Copy

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Asked Question During Clergy Session

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