



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
 CONSEIL JUDICIAIRE DE L'EGLISE 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: LaTrelle Miller Easterling  
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 State/Province: MD ZIP/Postal Code 20759 Country: USA  
 Phone: (410)290-7300 Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: bishopeasterling@pdcbwc.org  
 Conference: Northeastern Jurisdictional Date of session: 07/10/2024 (month/day/year)  
 Question(s) of Law: Appended as Exhibit A

Authorities Cited (indicate paragraph or decision number where applicable):  
 Constitution: 16, 27, 49 Book of Discipline: 404, 406, 512, 524  
 Judicial Council Decision(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: LaTrelle Miller Easterling Date: 07/11/2024  
 Bishop of The United Methodist Church (month/day/year)

**The following must be attached:**

- Decision of Law, including facts, rationale and ruling
  - Text of the written request for decision
  - Minutes of annual conference proceedings
  - List of names and addresses of interested parties
  - 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](mailto:secretary@umcjudicialcouncil.org).

## Request for a Question of Law

WHEREAS the Interjurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy approved the following:

*“Recognizing that we are in a time of significant time of transition in the United Methodist Church and that our current scenario has never existed previously, the ICOE has done their best work to follow the mandate of the General Conference regarding distribution of bishops in the United States, and also, to abide by ¶49 and ¶512.2 of The 2016 Book of Discipline: “No bishop shall be transferred unless that bishop shall have specifically consented.”*

*This report and recommendation addresses the needs of the annual conferences, episcopal leaders, and the mission of the United Methodist Church. The highest priority has been to offer a plan of supervision for 32 bishops with all conferences having episcopal coverage. This recommendation is for the next four years, recognizing the work required as 2028 will bring further reductions.*

*The ICOE executive team has met 5 times since General Conference with each meeting lasting 90-120 minutes. They have spent a significant amount of time in prayerful discernment. Each jurisdictional team had at least one individual consultation with each non-retiring, active bishop as directed in ¶512.*

*The chairpersons of the jurisdictional COEs have further consulted with their COE members, the colleges, and had more conversations with individual bishops. There has been unprecedented collaboration across jurisdictions. No bishop is willing to transfer jurisdictions. While the recommendation at General Conference indicated there would be no elections, circumstances have changed since then resulting in two vacancies. One bishop is retiring and one bishop is going on long-term disability leave. There is one bishop willing to serve across jurisdiction lines and be appointed in two jurisdictions for this season, clearly keeping with the spirit of the distribution and the budget approved by General Conference.*

*The ICOE executive team continues to consider the good of the whole United Methodist Church in the United States now and into the future. Each jurisdiction is giving to the whole in specific and sacrificial ways. There are fewer bishops than annual conferences in each jurisdiction. Each jurisdiction will have bishops who will serve one annual conference and bishops who will serve multiple annual conferences.*

*The following recommendation indicates the distribution of bishops to each jurisdiction and gives the context of each jurisdiction. The ICOE executive team strongly recommends agreement to this plan.*

- 1. South Central Jurisdiction*

- a. The SCJ will have 2 non-mandatory retirements this summer which will leave 6 active bishops serving 10 annual conferences.*

- b. *The reduction of bishops will require the SCJ to significantly adjust their episcopal areas.*
  - c. *The SCJ supports the good of the whole, giving more than they receive to the Episcopal Fund. Apportionments are based on current and previous membership numbers which continue to decline in all conferences, significantly in some.*
2. *Southeastern Jurisdiction*
- a. *The SEJ will have one retirement this summer, requiring further adjustments of episcopal areas.*
  - b. *Bishop Wallace-Padgett has agreed to serve an annual conference in the SEJ and the NEJ. These conferences will include West Virginia in the NEJ and Holston in the SEJ. This will leave 10 bishops serving 14 annual conferences. In conversation with the Holston Conference, the SEJ COE will request funding from the SEJ to pay for the office and housing expense for Holston as needed. The Episcopal Fund allotment for office and housing will go to the West Virginia Conference. Bishop Wallace-Padgett will be a member of both colleges and fully participate in their meetings and evaluation process. Matters related to retirement, status changes, or complaint processing, will be retained in her home jurisdiction, the SEJ.*
  - c. *The SEJ supports the good of the whole, giving more than they receive to the Episcopal Fund. Apportionments are based on current and previous membership numbers which continue to decline in all conferences, significantly in some.*
3. *Northeastern Jurisdiction*
- a. *The NEJ will have 1 bishop retiring and 1 bishop concluding serving in retirement this year, leaving 5 active bishops.*
  - b. *With Bishop Wallace-Padgett serving West Virginia in the NEJ (see SEJ 2b above), that will provide the NEJ 6 bishops to serve 10 annual conferences. The NEJ is embracing the good of the whole through this distribution. The NEJ supports our connectional commitments, giving more than they receive to the Episcopal Fund. Apportionments are based on current and previous membership numbers which continue to decline across the Jurisdiction.*
4. *North Central Jurisdiction*
- a. *The NCJ will have 2 bishops retire this summer. Bishop Beard will go on long-term disability August 1. This will leave 6 bishops to serve 10 annual conferences.*
  - b. *The NCJ COE, following ¶524d has “determine(d) the number of effective (meaning available for service) bishops eligible for assignment.” According to ¶818.11, Bishop Beard would not be counted in the 32 active bishops to be assigned. “Should any effective bishop in the interim of the quadrennial sessions of the jurisdictional conference be relieved by the College of Bishops of the jurisdiction from the performance of regular episcopal duties on account of ill health or for any other reason... (after 60 days which Bishop Beard has already*

*served) ...shall be interpreted as a release of the said bishop from the performance of regular episcopal duties.*

- c. Bishop Beard has served admirably and with his health concerns, has no intent to return to active service. The ICOE believes that if some circumstance would require Bishop Beard to return to active service, the Council of Bishops could locate an opportunity for service. This would fulfill the employment law mandate that someone has a job waiting for them upon return from long-term disability, if needed.*

#### *5. Western Jurisdiction*

- a. The WJ will have 2 bishops retire this year, leaving 3 active bishops. The WJ has 7 annual conferences encompassing a geographic span from Canada to Mexico.*
- b. The WJ will hold two elections in July so that they have the minimum number of 5 bishops.*

#### *Summary*

- *General Conference agreed to the assignment of 32 bishops. This aligns with the budget.*
- *The Western Jurisdiction will elect 2 bishops, thus meeting the minimum number of 5, approved at General Conference.*
- *One bishop will serve in the SEJ and the NEJ.*

*The ICOE appreciates the significant work of the Executive Team, the support of the officers of the Council of the Bishops, and helpful conversations with each of the colleges. We offer this report and recommendation for the ICOE's consideration. Following approval by the ICOE, each jurisdiction COE will take subsequent steps as outlined and present final assignment recommendations to the jurisdiction for approval."*

Therefore Be It Resolved, that the following questions of law be submitted under the provisions of ¶51 of the Book of Discipline.

1. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference violate the provisions of ¶¶27.2, 27.5 and 525, in that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church voted at its meeting in May of 2024 that the Southeastern Jurisdiction be eligible to have 9 effective bishops available for assignment and this "sharing" of a bishop with the Northeastern Jurisdiction provides for the Southeastern Jurisdiction to be eligible to have 10 effective bishops available for assignment?
2. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy violate the provisions of ¶524.3(d) in that the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee may

determine the number of effective bishops to be 10 serving 14 annual conferences and Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy to report the number of 6 effective bishops serving 10 annual conferences, as contrary to the vote of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in May of 2024?

3. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy violate the provisions of ¶406 as the Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy recommends to the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference the assignment of a bishop to an episcopal area in the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference?
4. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy violate the provisions of ¶406 as the Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy recommends to the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference the assignment of a bishop whose membership is held in the Southeastern Jurisdictional College of Bishops?
5. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference violate the provisions of ¶49 in providing a bishop residential and presidential supervision in a jurisdiction in which they are neither elected or to which they have transferred?
6. Does the action of the 2024 General Conference under the provision of ¶16.10 mean that the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference must have elected or transferred the exact number passed by the General Conference under ¶49 at the conclusion of their regular meeting and did the actions of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference at this meeting meet that standard?
7. Does the action of the 2024 General Conference under the provision of ¶16.10 mean that the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference is only entitled to 6 bishops that it has elected or transferred to be assigned residential and presidential supervision in its jurisdictional area and is Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference is only entitled to only 9 bishops that it has elected or transferred to be assigned residential and presidential supervision in its jurisdictional and do the actions of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy, the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference meet that standard?
8. Under the provision of ¶16.10 and the action of the 2024 General Conference number of bishops in each jurisdiction: Northeastern Jurisdiction 6, North Central Jurisdiction 6, South Central Jurisdiction 6, Southeastern Jurisdiction 9, Western Jurisdiction 5; does the Interjurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy Committee alter those number in light of Judicial Council Decision 1445, “The formula and the number of bishops for each jurisdiction recommended by the Committee and approved by the 2016 General Conference remain legally binding and effective until replaced by a new formula.”?
9. Did the actions of the Interjurisdictional Episcopacy Committee, the Northeastern Committee on Episcopacy, the Southeastern Committee on Episcopacy, the Northeastern

Jurisdictional Conference and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference violate the Discipline in wielding its authority given to it by the General Church particularly in exercising a power that is reserved to the Council of Bishops the authority to make cross-jurisdictional assignments and then only in a temporary or emergency situation and not at a jurisdictional conference (§49)?

Judi M. Keanston, Chair

Rev. Robert F. Zilhaver, Secretary

Bethany Amey, Fred Brewington, Noel Chin, Drew Dyson, Judy Ehninger, Vicki Gordy-Stith, Bonnie Marden, Christina McDermott, Ianther Mills, Colleen Moskov, William Mudge, Tom Salsgiver, Amy Shanholtzer, Vicki Stahlman, Cynthia Taylor, Dawn Taylor-Storm, Carmen Vianese, Jay Williams, Members

Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – July 3, 2024**  
**FROM THE INTERJURISDICTIONAL COMMITTEE ON EPISCOPACY**  
**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

During General Conference 2024, the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy recommended 32 total bishops in the jurisdictions and the allocations of bishops of 6 in the NCJ, 6 in the NEJ, 6 in the SCJ, 9 in the SEJ, and 5 in the WJ. This recommendation was approved by General Conference and would have required three bishops to transfer.

Since General Conference, the Executive Committee of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy has met five times and consulted with each bishop regarding transfer. The ICOE has discovered either an unwillingness or inability to transfer any bishops through the process outlined in the *Discipline*. The *Discipline* clearly states, “No bishop shall be transferred unless the bishop shall have specifically consented.” (Par. 49)

Two new developments have occurred that impact the number of bishops in the jurisdictions. Bishop Frank Beard, from the NCJ, has requested long term disability effective August 1. Bishop Robert Schnase, from the SCJ, announced his retirement effective September 1. This has created two unexpected vacancies in the number of bishops eligible for assignment.

Based on these developments, the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy met on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and overwhelmingly approved the following:

- The NCJ will assign the six remaining bishops in their jurisdiction.
- The SCJ will assign the six remaining bishops in their jurisdiction.
- The NEJ and SEJ will share a bishop who will serve in both jurisdictions and be a member of both colleges of bishops.
- The NEJ will assign six bishops to serve in their jurisdiction.
- The SEJ will assign nine bishops to serve in their jurisdiction with one additional bishop being shared with the NEJ and assigned to both jurisdictions.
- The WJ will elect two bishops and assign five bishops to serve in their jurisdiction.

There has been unprecedented collaboration across jurisdictions to get to this point. This plan gives each jurisdiction the minimum of five bishops as required by our *Discipline* and maintains the number of 32 total bishops in the jurisdictions to be funded by the episcopal fund. The vast majority of the expenses related to Bishop Beard’s long-term disability are funded outside of the episcopal fund.

This report addresses the needs of the annual conferences, episcopal leaders, and the mission of The United Methodist Church. It is a report that focuses on the next four years, recognizing more work will be required in 2028 when there will be further reduction of bishops.

The ICOE continues to consider the good of the whole United Methodist Church in the United States now and into the future. Each jurisdiction is giving to the whole in specific and sacrificial ways. There are fewer bishops than annual conferences in each jurisdiction. Each jurisdiction will have bishops who will serve multiple annual conferences.

The work of the jurisdictional conferences next week will be to receive from their respective committees on episcopacy a recommendation regarding the episcopal areas and the assignment of bishops within their jurisdictions.

The ICOE recognizes that we are in significant time of transition and invites The United Methodist Church to be in prayer for the election of two bishops in the West, the assignment of each bishop, and the work of the whole church that is now before us.



**MINUTES**  
**JURISDICTIONAL CONFERENCE**  
**PLENARY 1**  
**JULY 10, 2024**

Call to Order

Bishop LaTrelle M. Easterling called the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Jurisdictional Conference to order by welcoming delegates, reserves, and guests. Bishop Easterling, NEJ College President, acknowledged bishops who will assist her: Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, WV and Bishop Peter Weaver, retired. She thanked Tom Salsgiver, NEJ Secretary and Darlynn McCrae, NEJ Assistant Secretary.

Episcopacy Committee Report

Judi Kenaston explained the work of the NEJ Committee on Episcopacy and explained how they have worked and labored. The committee has been divided in some issues but remain united to listen to each other.

Judi also expressed thanks to the College of Bishops for their collaboration with the NEJ COE.

She continued to remind the delegates of the history regarding the General Conference budget allocated funding in the Episcopal Fund for 32 Bishops in the United States. The Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy (IJCOE) recommended and was approved by the General Conference with a margin of over 90% that there would be six Bishops in the Northeastern Jurisdiction, the North Central Jurisdiction and the South Central Jurisdiction, while the Southeastern Jurisdiction would have nine Bishops and the Western Jurisdiction would have five. This meant that some jurisdictions would have more than were allotted, and some would have less.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction had less than the allotted six. The intention of the committee when we left General Conference would be that the difference would be made by transferring Bishops from those jurisdictions that had more to those who had less.

However, Judi explained that they were caught up in a constitutional issue because transfers require the approval of the Bishop as well as the approval from both Jurisdictions involved. During General Conference, the Judicial Council ruled that only Bishops elected prior 2022 could be considered for transfer.

The primary priority of the IJCOE was to do no harm in keeping with our General Rules. One suggested solution was that the Southeastern and Northeastern Jurisdictions would share a bishop.

The NEJ COE voted to support this recommendation of sharing a bishop. We look at this as assignment and not coverage which is something our committee has tried to avoid.

The recommendation that was agreed on was incorporated into the plan that was presented by the IJCOE. This plan was approved by the IJCOE by a vote of 91-11. Judi indicated that the committee is proceeding with their work with the assumption that the authority that was granted to the IJCOE includes the authority to institute this plan across the jurisdictions.

At the end of this report, Judi indicated that the NEJ COE will offer to the body a proposal for a request for a declaratory decision and a question of law so that this can be definitively decided by the Juridical Council.

Judi explained that the COE is also responsible to recommend Bishops for retirement. On behalf of the COE, she announced the mandatory retirement of Bishop John Schol. Therefore, on behalf of the COE, she moved the retirement of Bishop John Schol.

It was a unanimous vote for his retirement with gratitude for his service.

¶1524.3 d) requires that the COE determines the number of effective bishops eligible for assignment within the jurisdiction. The Episcopacy Committee has determined that there are six effective Bishops for assignment. They include Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, Bishop Thomas Bickerton,

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, Bishop Hector Burgos Nunez, and Bishop Deborah Wallace-Padgett.

This provides the full number of Bishops allowed by the General Conference for the 2025-2028 quadrennium. Because we have Bishop the full number of Bishops the NEJ will not be electing any new Bishops at this Jurisdictional Conference.

Judi expressed gratitude for this committee, which has acted with passion and shared consideration for the good of the whole. She also thanked the body for the opportunity for our Holy Conferencing yesterday. It was helpful for the body to understand the complexity and the challenges that we experienced as we continued to do our work as we thought through assignments and areas for the next quadrennium.

Judi indicated that this is an ongoing project as we seek to make a jurisdiction that is flexible, creative and fruitful in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Judi Kenaston invited Robert Zilhaver, secretary of the COE to speak. There are two actions to come before the body. One is a motion for a Question of Law. It comes from the COE to the Jurisdictional Conference. After distribution and printing, it will need to be acted on by the Jurisdictional Conference.

The second is a Declaratory Decision brought by the individual members of the NEJ Committee on Episcopacy. The question of law is printed in the DCA. This is not voted on by the Jurisdictional Conference, but the Bishop will have 30 days to answer.

**PLENARY 9**  
**NORTHEASTERN JURISDICITON**  
**MINUTES**  
**JULY 12, 2024**

Call to Order

Bishop John Schol called the session to order. He was assisted by Bishop Burgos-Nunez and Bishop Jane Middleton. Bishop Schol explained the work that is before the body and the short timeframe we have to complete it.

Bishop Schol gave two announcements. The College of Bishops met and elected a new president of the College of Bishops. Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi is the new president of the College. The College also announced the election of a secretary of the College of Bishops. Bishop Hector Burgos-Nunez is the new secretary.

Bishop Schol also introduced and welcomed Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett as we look forward to serving with you.

Bishop also thanked the persons who have been providing child care.

Bishop Schol invites the three committees to give their reports:

Credentials: The Credentials Committee reports that we have 151 delegates today.

Journal: The Journal Committee has reviewed the minutes and have found them in order.

Courtesies: The Courtesies Committee has nothing to report.

Bishop calls on Judi Kenaston, Chair of NEJ Committee on Episcopacy. The COE is charged with recommending the Episcopal areas names and assignments.

The committee affirms the discussion yesterday and will work with CONAM in naming Episcopal areas. We offer these interim names as placeholders as this important work continues.

The Committee on Episcopacy moves the recommendation of the following missional assignments and placeholder names for the Northeastern Jurisdiction

- Baltimore Washington & Peninsula Delaware area: Bishop LaTrelle Easterling
- Eastern Pennsylvania & Greater New Jersey area: Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi
- New England & New York area: Bishop Thomas Bickerton
- Susquehanna & Upper New York area: Bishop Hector Burgos Nunez
- West Virginia area: Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett
- Western PA area: Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

There was a question regarding the names chosen with regards to the concern for Native lands Included in the names. It was explained that the current names are “placeholders” to give the areas a chance to confer with CONAM.

Vote was taken to approve the names of the Conference Areas and Episcopal Assignments:

YES – 127; NO – 9.

After the vote, Judi Kenaston wanted to acknowledge and thank the ongoing work of the Southeastern Jurisdiction and the Northeastern Jurisdiction. Wanted the body to know that the Southeastern Jurisdiction that they have approached this in a very gracious way.

One of the things the SEJ has adopted at their Jurisdictional Conference is that they will assume the cost of the office expenses for the Holston Conference. The entire GCFA funding for the Episcopal office will come to the NEJ.

We have two requests for Declaratory Decisions.

Bishop Schol reminds the people that the Declaratory Decision by Rev. Robert Zilhaver can be found on page 17 of Volume 22 of the DCA. Rev. Zilhaver is recognized by Bishop Schol and  
“Moves on behalf the Committee on Episcopacy, to submit this Declaratory Decision found on page 17 of Volume 22 of the DCA.”

Bishop indicated that this is non-debatable.

Vote: YES – 127; No – 19. It passes and will be sent to the Judicial Council.

Bishop Schol recognized Becca Girrell, Clergy delegate from New England Annual Conference moved to request a Declaratory Decision. The wording for the Declaratory Decision can be found on page 14 of the July 12, 2024 DCA. The Declaratory Decision says:

“Under the provisions of ¶2610, the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference requests a Declaratory Decision on the constitutionality, meaning, application, and effect of ¶48 or any other constitutional or disciplinary paragraph on the decision of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference to assign an individual Bishop to two annual conferences across two Jurisdictions. Specifically, is it permissible for a Bishop to be assigned to two annual conferences across two Jurisdictions and hold membership in two Colleges simultaneously? Is it permissible for a Bishop to be assigned to two annual conferences across two jurisdictions and hold membership in only one College?”

Bishop Schol reminded the body that this is nondebatable. There was a second and Bishop Schol called for the vote.

YES – 100; NO – 39.

The motion passes and it will be sent to the Judicial Council

Bishop Schol gave further insight as to the difference between a Question of Law and Declaratory Decision. There are only certain bodies that can ask for a Declaratory Decision. The Jurisdictional Conference has standing to ask for a Declaratory Decision.

Bishop turned to the Secretary for announcements and two motions.

The Secretary moved:

“The Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference receives all reports printed in the DCA and said reports to be included in the journal”.

It was properly seconded.

Motion overwhelming passed with the raising of hands.

The Secretary moved:

“The 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference be adjourned at the conclusion of the Service of Celebration, Anointing and Sending Forth.”

It was properly seconded.

Motion overwhelming passed with the raising of hands.

Bishop Jane Middleton closed the session with prayer.

## **IV Daily Proceedings**

### **IV. Daily Proceedings “Dressed for the Harvest” Bayfront Convention Center, Erie, Pennsylvania**

#### **CLERGY SESSION Thursday, June 6, 2024**

**GREETING** – At 8:00 AM, Bishop Moore-Koikoi welcomed the members to this year’s clergy session. Pam Gardner, co-chair of the Board of Ministry, welcomed Dan Beschelman, pianist, to the clergy session.

**CALL TO WORSHIP** – Pam Gardner, co-chair of the Board of Ministry, led the Call to Worship and the body joined in song with “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing.”

**PRAYER** – Kelley Schanely, co-chair of the Board of Ministry, led the body in prayer for the day’s business and worship.

**PROCEDURES & CORRECTIONS** – Kelley Schanely explained the procedure for progressing through the business of the clergy session today, following the prepared report from the Board. Following the presentations of items today, there will be a comprehensive omnibus motion for approval of all matters contained in the report that have not been specifically voted upon. She also drew attention to the ERRATA sheet attached to the back of the report for any misspellings or corrections.

**(13) CHARACTER OF THE CLERGY** – Bishop Moore-Koikoi asked (13) “Are all the clergy members of the conference blameless in their life and administration?” (§§604.4; 605.7) On behalf of all the District Superintendents, Sung Chung, Dean of the Cabinet, responded that most of the clergy members of the annual conference have been faithful.

**2023 HYBRID LICENSING SCHOOL GRADUATES** – Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, identified those who had completed the residential Local Pastor Licensing School during 2023 and recognized any who were present. Graduates were: Kelly A. Black, Adam M. Goswick, Patricia A. Miller, Benjamin L. Sorrow, David A. Wilson.

**2023-2024 COURSE OF STUDY GRADUATES** – Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, identified those local pastors who had completed Course of Study and recognized any who were present. Graduates were: Melissa D. Kraus, Harry S. Zurasky, Jr.

**(16) APPROVAL OF THOSE WHO HAVE COMPLETED THE STUDIES FOR THE LICENSE AS A LOCAL PASTOR BUT ARE NOT UNDER APPOINTMENT** – Upon motion by Kelly Schanely, co-chair of the Board of Ministry, according to §315. APPROVED.

## 2024 Western Pennsylvania Conference

**(17a) FULL-TIME LOCAL PASTORS** – Upon motion by Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, according to ¶318.1. APPROVED.

**(17b) PART-TIME LOCAL PASTORS** – Upon motion by Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, according to ¶318.2. APPROVED.

**(18) EXITING OR DISCONTINUED LOCAL PASTORS** – Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, reported the names of local pastors who have exited or been discontinued, according to ¶320.1: For a complete listing of 2023 discontinuances, refer to pages 143-144 of the *2023 Conference Journal*. The following names will appear in the *2024 Conference Journal*: Andrew M. Flower (1/31/24), Thomas A. Harrison (6/30/24), Denton R. Lester (12/26/23), Samuel R. McClintock (8/9/2023), Scott A.F. Miller (6/3/2024), Stephen C. Moore (7/1/2024), William H. Weppleman (2/5/24)

**(20a) CLERGY FROM OTHER CONFERENCES SERVING IN WPA** – Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, reported the names of clergy from other Annual Conferences serving in Western Pennsylvania (¶¶331.8, 346.1): David S. Dempsey (RE) Upper New York, Arnold G. Husk (RE) West Virginia, Carole J. Bergman (RE) California-Nevada, Barbara J. Bailey (RE) West Virginia, Lawrence A. Peters (FE) West Virginia, Wellington Chiomadzi (FE) Zimbabwe West, Raphael K. Koikoi (PE) Baltimore-Washington, Chenda Innis Lee (FE) Virginia, James Y. Dolo (FE) Liberia, Dora J. Odarenko (RA) New York, Sang Hak Lee (FE) Great Plains, and Al Hammer (FD) Baltimore-Washington.

**(20b) CLERGY FROM OTHER METHODIST DENOMINATIONS SERVING IN WPA** – Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, reported the names of clergy from other Methodist denominations serving in Western Pennsylvania (¶¶331.8, 346.1): Bethany C. Rosler (FE) Free Methodist.

**(21) CLERGY FROM OTHER DENOMINATIONS SERVING IN WPA** – Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, reported the names of clergy from other Methodist denominations serving in Western Pennsylvania (¶¶331.8, 346.2): Peg Bowman (FE) Anglican Church

**(23) ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP (¶322))**: Received on motion of Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, a) Associate Members (v) Sara J. Wrona APPROVED

**(24a) PROVISIONAL MEMBERSHIP & COMMISSIONING: DEACON** – Received on motion of Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, in the deacon track, according to ¶¶324.4.a,c; 324.5: Todd M. Clarimboli, Karen S. Slusser. APPROVED.

#### **IV Daily Proceedings**

**(24b) PROVISIONAL MEMBERSHIP & COMMISSIONING: ELDER** – Received on motion of Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, in the elder track, according to ¶¶324.4.a,c; 324.6: Edmund L. Bach, Amanda D. Mitchell. APPROVED.

**(25) PROVISIONAL MEMBERS CONTINUED** – Erk Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, called the body’s attention to those provisional members who are continuing to pursue ordination as a deacon or an elder according to ¶326: Jillian E. Jones (Elder 2019) (PTS); Matthew C. Scott (Deacon 2020) (United); (Debra Lynn Mason (Elder 2021) (PTS); Diane Curry Randolph (Elder 2021) (PTS); John F. Balliet, Jr. (Elder 2022) (PTS); Jacob Penvose(Deacon 2023); Sarah E. Bell, (MTSO) (Elder 2023) Oscar L. Chambers Jr.(Duke) (Elder 2023); Ronald E. Cox,(PTS) (Elder 2023); Rebecca Konegen (PTS) (Elder 2023); Heather J. Wakefield (Harvard) (Elder 2023) APPROVED.

**(28a) FULL MEMBERSHIP: DEACONS** – Received on motion of Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, according to ¶335: Megan R. Miles APPROVED.

**(28b) FULL MEMBERSHIP: ELDERS** – Received on motion of Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, according to ¶335: Sarah E. Adkins, Kimberly L. Foos. APPROVED.

**(29) DEACON’S ORDERS** – Received on motion of Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, according to ¶335: Megan R. Miles (Pittsburgh). APPROVED for ordination as a deacon.

**(30a) ELDER’S ORDERS** – Received on motion of Erik Hoeke, residency director of the Board of Ministry, according to ¶335: Sarah E. Adkins (United), Kimberly L. Foos (Pittsburgh). APPROVED for ordination as elders.

**HYMN** – The body joined together in singing the first verse of “Here I Am, Lord”.

**(34) RECEIVED BY TRANSFER FROM OTHER ANNUAL CONFERENCES**  
Jeffrey T. St. Clair (FE) from: Florida (07/11/2024) APPROVED

**(37) TRANSFERRED OUT TO OTHER ANNUAL CONFERENCES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH** (¶416.5) Natalie Marionneaux FD Mountain Sky 07/01/2024 APPROVED

**(38b) DISCONTINUED AS PROVISIONAL MEMBERS** -- Upon motion by Tom Strandburg, co-chair of the Board of Ministry, a) by expiration of 8-year limit (¶327) (v) Melody L. Kimmel b) by voluntary discontinuance (¶327.6) (v) Samantha S. Corbin, Jessica K. Gray, Shawn T. Lehman APPROVED.



## 2024 Western Pennsylvania Conference

**(41) HONORABLY LOCATED AND ORDERS THEIR ORDERS TERMINATED** (§358.2)? (v) (Give date when this action became effective and prior clergy status.) Gary C. Bailey (12/26/23)

**(42b) CONFERENCE MEMBERSHIP TERMINATED** -- Upon motion by Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, by withdrawal from the ordained ministerial office, according to ¶360.2, .4 (with effective date); b) By withdrawal from the ordained ministerial office (¶360.2, .4) (v) For a complete listing of 2023 withdrawals, refer to pages 149 and following of the *2023 Conference Journal*. The following names will appear in the *2024 Conference Journal*: **Kenneth S. Custer** (5/3/2024), Thomas R. Scott (3/25/2024), David R. Stains (5/3/2024), Thomas R. Verner 12/18/2023), Barry L. Weyant (3/1/2024) APPROVED.

**(44) THE HONORED DEAD** -- Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, read the names of those clergy who have died since Annual Conference 2023: *(44A)(ASSOCIATE MEMBERS): 44C)(ELDERS):* David Alleman; Emory Billingsley; Donald Bloomster; Leo Cramer; Keith Dovenspike; Rodney Doughty; Jean Fletcher; Robert George; William Heaton; Clyde W. Henry; Terry L. Hurlbutt; Reed Hurst; Leroy W. Jones; William Kinsey; James Morris; Arnold Rhodes; James Salmon; Paul E. Schradling; Robert Siple, Jr.; Dale R. Smith; Francis Storer; Paul Toothman; Robert C. Wilson.  
*(44D)(DEACONS): (44E)(LOCAL PASTORS):* Robert R. Shettler

**PRAYER** -- Bishop Moore-Koikoi led the body in a prayer of gratitude for the lives and ministries of these faithful colleagues who have gone on to their eternal reward.

**HYMN** – The group sang verse four of “For All the Saints.”

**(45) APPOINTED TO SERVE IN OTHER ANNUAL CONFERENCES** -- Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, reported, according to ¶331.8, 346, the names of deacons and elders who have received appointments in other United Methodist Annual Conferences, while retaining their membership in Western Pennsylvania: Name Status Conference Appointment Tracey L. Henderson, FD, West Ohio, Portsmouth; Rebekah R. Clapp, FD, West Ohio, United Theological Seminary; Leah R. Bergstrom, RE, Desert Southwest, North Scottsdale; Kevin J. Rea, FE, Great Plains, Grace/Crestview, Topeka; Nicole M. Crouch, FD, Virginia Family Law & Domestic Violence Paralegal/Ayuda; John R. Virgin, FE, South Carolina, St. Paul’s Waccamaw UMC; Matthew C. Scott, PD, South Carolina, Latta-Mount Andrew; Eric S. Park, FE, New York, NYC: Christ Church. APPROVED

**(46A) LEAVE OF ABSENCE, VOLUNTARY** -- Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, read the names of those who have requested voluntary leave of absence according to ¶353: Anthony R.C. Hita (5<sup>th</sup> year). *(Approved in omnibus motion).*

**(46A-1) LEAVE OF ABSENCE, PERSONAL** -- Thomas Q. Strandburg, secretary of the Board of Ministry, read the names of those who have requested personal leave of absence

#### **IV Daily Proceedings**

according to ¶353.2a 3: Austin P. Hornyak (8/14/2020) (4<sup>th</sup> year), William M. Pieringer (07/01/2021) (3<sup>rd</sup> year), Darryl S. Lockie (July 1, 2024) (1<sup>st</sup> year). (*Approved in omnibus motion*).

**(46A-2) LEAVE OF ABSENCE, PERSONAL (AFTER 5 YEARS)** – Granted on motion by Thomas Q. Strandburg, according to ¶353.2a 3: David R. Lewis (22<sup>nd</sup> year), Stephen A. Tiffany (12<sup>th</sup> year), Chul Park (13<sup>th</sup> year). APPROVED.

**(46A-4) FAMILY LEAVE (AFTER 5 YEARS)** – Granted on motion by Thomas Q. Strandburg, according to ¶353.2b 3): Beth A. Cooper (6<sup>th</sup> year). APPROVED.

**(46A-5) TRANSITIONAL** – Transitional (¶353.2c) Matthew F. Howe (1 year). APPROVED.

**(48) MEDICAL LEAVE** – Continued medical leave granted on motion by Thomas Q. Strandburg, according to ¶356.1: Debra Anne Groeger (FE) 02/01/1997, Pamela S. Armstrong (FE) 07/01/2017, David D. Ealy (FE) 05/01/2019, Jillian E. Jones (without benefits) (PE) 03/01/2020, Lance S. Tucker (AM) 07/01/2022 Oscar L. Chambers (PE) 03/01/2024. APPROVED.

**(49) RETIREMENTS: FULL MEMBERS** – Granted on motion by Thomas Q. Strandburg: *ELDERS*: Kathleen J. Barnhart [¶357.2] 30 years of service, January 1, 2024; Arthur L. Black [¶357.2] 33 years of service, July 1, 2024; Jeffrey C. Bobin [¶357.2c] 21 years of service, July 1, 2024; Thomas D. Carr [¶357.2d] 41 years of service, January 1, 2024; Angel De La Cruz [¶357.2d] 5.5 years of service, October 1, 2024; Donald R. Henderson [¶357.2d] 34.5 years of service, November 1, 2023; Thomas E. Hoeke [¶357.2c] 21 years of service, July 1, 2024; Bruce R. Judy [¶357.2c] 31 years of service, July 1, 2024; Glenn C. McQuown, Jr. [¶357.1] 38.5 years of service, July 1, 2024; William B. Meekins, Jr. [¶357.2d] 40 years of service, August 1, 2024; Ricky D. Nelson [¶357.2b] 38 years of service, July 1, 2024; Susan E. Sphar [¶357.2c] 29 years of service, July 1, 2023; Randy D. Sweet [¶357.2c] 35 years of service, July 1, 2024, Dennis W. Swineford [¶357.2c] 43 years of service, July 1, 2024; R. Duane Thompson [¶357.2c] 28 years of service; July 1, 2024; Robert F. Zilhaver, Sr. [¶357.2b] 31 years of service (July 1, 2024). APPROVED.

**(50) RETIREMENTS: ASSOCIATE MEMBERS – NONE**

**(51) RETIREMENTS: LOCAL PASTORS** – Thomas Q. Strandburg read the names of Local Pastors who have been recognized as retired (¶320.5): Beth A. Meier, [¶357.2b] 9 years of service, July 1, 2024; Randall J. Hall [¶357.2c] 12 years of service, July 1, 2023; Randall Ord [¶357.1] 3 years of service, July 1, 2024; Robert E. Kifer [¶357.2c] 16 years of service, July 1, 2024; Gene A. Lenk, II [¶357.1] 9 years of service, July 1, 2024; Karen J. Martin [¶357.1] 4 years of service, July 1, 2024; Pamela C. Ramsey [¶357.1] 7 years of service, July 1, 2024. APPROVED

## 2024 Western Pennsylvania Conference

**PRAYER** -- Bishop Moore-Koikoi led in prayer that God would bless the retirees as they begin new seasons of life and ministry.

**HYMN** – The body joined together in singing the second verse of “Here I Am, Lord.”

**(54) CERTIFIED IN SPECIALIZED MINISTRY** – Thomas Q. Strandburg read the names of those in our Annual Conference who are certified in specialized ministry: Patricia M. Nelson (Older Adult Ministries), Jaime Willey (Youth Ministry). These certifications are effective for a two-year period, with a required affirmation in even years.

**(67a) PASTORS SERVING LESS THAN FULL-TIME SERVICE** – Approved on motion of Thomas Q. Strandburg, according to ¶¶338.2, 342.2, 1506, the following associate members and elders are approved for appointment to less than full time service: Willard C. Adkins, (AM), ¼ time, year 22 ¾; Tina M. Keller, (FE), ¾ time, year 16 ¾; John R. Wilson, (FE), ¾ time, year 31 ¾; Carol H. Hickman, (AM), ¾ time, Year 7; Jason E. Schweinberg, (FE), ¾ time, Year 4; Brenda K. Walker, (FE), ½ time, Year 4; Jack L. Tickle III, (FE), ¾ time, Year 2; Joshua Demi, (FE), ¾ time, Year 2.

**(67b) DEACON SERVING LESS THAN FULL-TIME SERVICE** – Approved on motion of Thomas Q. Strandburg, according to ¶331.7, the following deacon is approved for appointment to less than full time service: Nicole M. Crouch, (FD), ½ time, Year 4. APPROVED.

**HYMN** – The body joined together in singing the third verse of “Here I Am, Lord.”

**COMPREHENSIVE MOTION** – Approved on motion of Pam Gardner, co-chair of the Board of Ministry, members of the Clergy Session approved a comprehensive motion to receive and approve the report of the Board of Ministry, including approval of all matters contained in the report that had not already been specifically voted upon.

**COMMENTS BY THE BISHOP** -- Bishop Moore-Koikoi shared her appreciation for the work of the Clergy Session in what can sometimes seem like what she recognizes as work that enables ministry.

**CLOSING & RECESS** – Kelley Schanely led the clergy in prayer for the Bishop and in the Covenant Prayer, followed by the singing of “Go Forth For God.” Bishop Moore-Koikoi closed the Clergy Session with a final blessing from Ephesians 3:20 at 9:42 AM.

**DECISION OF LAW**

***In Response to a Request for Rulings of Law Presented by the Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy During the 2024 Session of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church***

**I. BACKGROUND**

The request for rulings of law addressed in this decision ultimately flows from the Postponed Session of the 2020 General Conference’s own decision, in May 2024, to adopt the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy (“ICOE”) that the number of bishops assigned to annual conferences in the United States be reduced from 39 to 32. That reduction was prompted by concerns about funding levels of the Episcopal Fund (the fund that supports episcopal salaries), which were magnified by the unprecedented loss of a significant number of local churches that opted to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church pursuant to the time-limited provisions of *Discipline* ¶ 2553.

In keeping with ICOE’s primary function under *Discipline* ¶¶ 404.2 and 512.1, it further fell to the ICOE to recommend to the General Conference the specific number of bishops to which each jurisdiction should be entitled during the ensuing quadrennium. Here, too, the General Conference adopted the ICOE’s recommendation, thereby mandating that the 32 effective and available bishops be allocated across the jurisdictions as follows:

<b><u>Jurisdiction</u></b>	<b>Number of Bishops</b>
Southeastern	9
Northeastern	6
North Central	6
South Central	6
Western	<u>5</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>32</b>

Not long after the General Conference adjourned, however, the ICOE was confronted with an unprecedented dilemma. Whereas there were 32 active U.S.-based bishops that were eligible for assignment in the upcoming quadrennium at the time the General Conference adjourned, two unexpected vacancies arose shortly thereafter, when Bishop Beard of the North Central Jurisdiction announced that he had been approved for long-term disability leave effective August 1, 2024, and Bishop Schnase of the South Central Jurisdiction announced that he would be retiring effective September 1, 2024. Those two unexpected episcopal vacancies meant that the number of non-retired, active U.S. bishops fell two short of the 32 bishops the General Conference had authorized and allocated across the jurisdictions.

In truth, even before the two-bishop deficit came to light, it was well understood that the assigning of even a “full” complement of 32 U.S. bishops in compliance with the geographic allocations approved by General Conference presented a monumentally complex task. The chief reason for that complexity was that the previously anticipated mandatory retirements of various bishops meant that (a) the Northeastern Jurisdiction would be in particular left with only five active (non-retired) bishops, one less than the six it had been allocated by the General Conference, and (2) the Western Jurisdiction would be left with just three active bishops, two less than that jurisdiction had been allocated.

In the usual case, the *Discipline* contemplates that the ICOE should seek to address such dilemma by exploring “the possibility of transfers of bishops across jurisdictional lines at the forthcoming jurisdictional conferences for residential and presidential responsibilities in the ensuing quadrennium.” *Discipline* ¶ 512.1. The availability of that solution, however, is limited by the corresponding constitutional command that “[n]o bishop shall be transferred unless that bishop shall have specifically consented.” *Discipline* ¶ 49 (Constitution, Div. Three, Art. I)

(emphasis added). *See also id.* ¶ 512.2 (“A bishop may be transferred across jurisdictional lines only when that bishop has consented to such transfer . . .”). As it turned out, notwithstanding the ICOE’s diligent efforts, that very limitation blocked the option of solving the shortage of bishops in the Northeastern and Western jurisdictions by transferring bishops across jurisdictional lines. As ICOE reported, each of its “jurisdictional team[s] had at least one individual consultation with each non-retiring, active bishop as directed in ¶ 512,”<sup>1</sup> but at the end of the day ICOE was unable to effect any transfers of bishops to address those shortfalls.<sup>2</sup>

Under the circumstances described above, the ICOE, working with its corresponding Jurisdictional COE’s, was obliged to identify a solution that would simultaneously (1) heed the General Conference’s mandate that no more than 32 bishops be assigned to oversee U.S. based annual conferences during the upcoming quadrennium; (2) follow the General Conference’s concomitant mandate that the assignment of those 32 bishops be distributed across the jurisdictions in accordance with the allocations approved in Charlotte; and (3) accomplish both things without curing any shortfall of bishops in any given jurisdiction by transferring any bishop without their consent in violation of Discipline ¶¶ 49 and 512.2.

By all accounts, the ICOE worked diligently—and with “unprecedented collaboration across jurisdictions”<sup>3</sup>—to craft a solution to this unique dilemma, making it their “highest priority . . . to offer a plan of supervision for 32 bishops with all conferences having episcopal coverage.”<sup>4</sup> Before arriving at its recommended resolution of the difficulty presented, the ICOE reports that its

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<sup>1</sup> The ICOE quotations referenced here are drawn principally from a preamble that the Northeastern Jurisdiction’s COE added for context to the written iteration of questions of law that are being addressed here. That document is attached hereto as Exhibit A. The ICOE quotes included in Exhibit A are substantially similar to the statements ICOE made in a press release it issued on July 3, 2024, a copy of which is attached hereto as Exhibit B.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibit B.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

“executive team . . . met 5 times” between the adjournment of General Conference and the convening of all jurisdictional conferences barely two months later, “with each meeting lasting 90-120 minutes”; and each “jurisdictional team had at least one individual consultation with each non-retiring, active bishop” contemplated by ¶ 512, albeit in a more compressed timeframe under the unique circumstances presented.<sup>5</sup> The record further discloses that, in addition to the “significant amount of time” the ICOE itself directly invested “in prayerful discernment,”<sup>6</sup> the “chairpersons of the jurisdictional COEs . . . further consulted with their COE members, the colleges [of bishops], and had more conversations with individual bishops.”<sup>7</sup>

In the end, the ICOE presented a recommendation that it judged to be the best means of “address[ing] the needs of the annual conferences, episcopal leaders, and the mission of The United Methodist Church,” while at the same time taking all reasonably available steps to harmonize, and thereby to honor to the greatest extent possible, the mandates of the General Conference, the limitations imposed by the *Discipline*, and the economic realities that demand fiscal stewardship of the highest order in this signal time of transition in The United Methodist Church.

The ICOE’s ultimate recommendations are outlined in detail in a press release issued on Wednesday, July 3, 2024, and they are similarly outlined in a preamble to the written questions of law that the NEJ’s COE presented for rulings of law during were the NEJ’s jurisdictional conference. To read the ICOE’s detailed episcopal assignment recommendations in full is to appreciate the complexity of the multi-faceted problem the ICOE and jurisdictional COE’s were obliged to address. For purposes of the questions of law addressed in the following rulings of law, however, the most salient aspects of the ICOE’s recommendations are follows:

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<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

- Notwithstanding that the two unexpected episcopal vacancies arose in the North Central and South Central jurisdictions, those vacancies were counterbalanced—bringing the total number of active bishops back to 32—by electing two new bishops in the *Western* Jurisdiction, filling voids left by the mandatory retirements of Bishops Oliveto and Carcaño. Without those elections, and with ICOE being unable to effect any transfers to fill the void, the Western jurisdiction would have been left with just three active bishops, rather than the five they had been allocated by the General Conference.

- Meanwhile, the mandatory retirement of Bishop John Schol, combined with Bishop Peggy Johnson’s return to her fully retired status (following an interim assignment as Bishop of the New England Conference), stood to leave the Northeastern Jurisdiction with only five active bishops, one less than the number the General Conference had allocated to the Northeastern Jurisdiction. Here, too, no transfer to the Northeastern Jurisdiction could be effected to fill that shortfall. That said, during the course of its extended consultations with individual bishops, colleges of bishops, and jurisdictional COE’s, the ICOE learned that Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett of the Southeastern Jurisdiction was amenable to being assigned to serve as bishop of both the SEJ’s Holston Conference and the NEJ’s adjacent West Virginia Conference, with unanimous consent of the College of Bishops of both jurisdictions.

During a meeting held on July 3, 2024, the NEJ’s COE met and voted to affirm the ICOE’s recommendation in its entirety. Thereafter, during a plenary session held on July 10, 2024, the Chair of the NEJ COE, Judi Kenaston, reported to the jurisdictional conference delegates that the NEJ COE had voted to affirm the ICOE’s recommendations, including the sharing of Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett with the Southeastern Jurisdiction.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, with Bishop Wallace-Padgett

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<sup>8</sup> See Exhibit C (Minutes of Plenary Session, July 10, 2024) at 1.



available for assignment to an Episcopal area in the NEJ—along with Bishops Sandra Steiner Ball, Thomas Bickerton, Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, Hector Burgos Nunez, and myself—Ms. Kenaston reported that the NEJ COE, in performing its assigned duty under *Discipline* ¶ 524.3(d), had made the determination that there were six “effective bishops eligible for assignment” within the NEJ.<sup>9</sup>

Thereafter, during the jurisdictional conference’s final plenary session, NEJ COE Chair Kenaston was again recognized, and at that point she announced, and moved that the delegates approve, the NEJ COE’s recommendation, made pursuant to *Discipline* ¶ 406.1, that the following episcopal assignments be made to the episcopal areas indicated:<sup>10</sup>

- Baltimore Washington & Peninsula Delaware Area: Bishop LaTrelle Easterling
- Eastern Pennsylvania & Greater New Jersey Area: Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi
- New England & New York Area: Bishop Thomas Bickerton
- Susquehanna & Upper New York Area: Bishop Hector Burgos Nunez
- West Virginia Area: Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett
- Western Pennsylvania Area: Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

Exercising the authority bestowed in *Discipline* ¶ 406.1, the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference delegates overwhelmingly approved the above-referenced episcopal assignments by a vote of 127 to 9.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> See Exhibit D (Minutes of Plenary Session, July 10, 2024).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

## II. QUESTIONS PRESENTED

Prior to the body’s approval of the NEJ COE’s recommended episcopal assignments, the then Secretary of the NEJ COE, the Rev. Rogert Zilhaver,<sup>12</sup> presented on the committee’s behalf a written request for rulings of law on the following questions:<sup>13</sup>

1. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference violate the provisions of ¶¶27.2, 27.5 and 525, in that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church voted at its meeting in May of 2024 that the Southeastern Jurisdiction be eligible to have 9 effective bishops available for assignment and this “sharing” of a bishop with the Northeastern Jurisdiction provides for the Southeastern Jurisdiction to be eligible to have 10 effective bishops available for assignment?
2. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy violate the provisions of ¶524.3(d) in that the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee may determine the number of effective bishops to be 10 serving 14 annual conferences and Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy to report the number of 6 effective bishops serving 10 annual conferences, as contrary to the vote of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in May of 2024?
3. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy violate the provisions of ¶406 as the Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy recommends to the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference the assignment of a bishop to an episcopal area in the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference?
4. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy and the

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<sup>12</sup> At the time he rose to present these questions, Rev. Zilhaver had only recently retired as a clergy member of the Western Pennsylvania Conference (“WPC”), effective July 1, 2024, having been approved for that status during by the WPC’ clergy session on June 6, 2024. *See* Exhibit E (Daily Proceedings of the WPC Clergy Session (June 6, 2024) at 5. Since then—in fact, in what seems to have been only a matter of *days* following the adjournment of the jurisdictional conference in which he presented these questions—Rev. Zilhaver has apparently *withdrawn* from The United Methodist Church entirely and has aligned instead with the Global Methodist Church (“GMC”). Indeed, as of August 1, 2024, Rev. Zilhaver (with a co-author) commenced publication of a series of articles commenting on a proposed *constitution* that the GMC will consider adopting when it convenes for its first general conference in September to “serve as the governing document and [to] outline the core beliefs, governance structures, and operational procedures of the GMC.” R. Zilhaver & N. Fugate, “Introduction on GMC Constitutional Purpose” (Aug. 1, 2024) (accessible at <https://revnathanaelfugate.substack.com/p/introduction-on-gmc-constitutional>).

<sup>13</sup> The final written form in which these questions were presented, preceded by the previously mentioned preamble of statements by the ICOE, is attached hereto as Exhibit A.

Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Committee on Episcopacy violate the provisions of ¶406 as the Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy recommends to the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference the assignment of a bishop whose membership is held in the Southeastern Jurisdictional College of Bishops?

5. Does the recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and the actions of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference violate the provisions of ¶49 in providing a bishop residential and presidential supervision in a jurisdiction in which they are neither elected or to which they have transferred?
6. Does the action of the 2024 General Conference under the provision of ¶16.10 mean that the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference must have elected or transferred the exact number passed by the General Conference under ¶49 at the conclusion of their regular meeting and did the actions of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference at this meeting meet that standard?
7. Does the action of the 2024 General Conference under the provision of ¶16.10 mean that the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference is only entitled to 6 bishops that it has elected or transferred to be assigned residential and presidential supervision in its jurisdictional area and is Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference is only entitled to only 9 bishops that it has elected or transferred to be assigned residential and presidential supervision in its jurisdictional and do the actions of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy, the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference meet that standard?
8. Under the provision of ¶16.10 and the action of the 2024 General Conference number of bishops in each jurisdiction: Northeastern Jurisdiction 6, North Central Jurisdiction 6, South Central Jurisdiction 6, Southeastern Jurisdiction 9, Western Jurisdiction 5; does the Interjurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy Committee alter those number in light of Judicial Council Decision 1445, “The formula and the number of bishops for each jurisdiction recommended by the Committee and approved by the 2016 General Conference remain legally binding and effective until replaced by a new formula.”?
9. Did the actions of the Interjurisdictional Episcopacy Committee, the Northeastern Committee on Episcopacy, the Southeastern Committee on Episcopacy, the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference violate the Discipline in wielding its authority given to it by the General Church particularly in exercising a power that is reserved to the Council of Bishops the authority to make cross-jurisdictional assignments and then only in a temporary or emergency situation and not at a jurisdictional conference (¶49)?

### III. ANALYSIS

The lengthy framing of the above-referenced questions should not ~~be obscure~~obscure the overarching issue that deserves a response and on which this decision will focus. Simply put, that issue is whether the law of The United Methodist Church was violated when the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference voted to approve an assignment of six bishops to oversee the jurisdiction's six Episcopal areas, on the grounds that one of those bishops was not elected to the Episcopacy by the Northeastern Jurisdiction. Framed somewhat differently, but still focusing on the core issue, the central issue is whether the Constitution or any of the *Discipline's* legislative provisions must be read to bar a bishop elected in one jurisdiction from being assigned to oversee an Episcopal area in any other jurisdiction, other than in two limited circumstances: (1) when the bishop in question has agreed to a wholesale "transfer" from one jurisdiction to the other pursuant to *Discipline* (Constitution) ¶ 49 and *Discipline* ¶ 512; or (2) when the Council of Bishops assigns a bishop to service in "another jurisdiction than that which elected the bishop" on a temporary basis, or in the case of an "emergency . . . through the death or disability of a bishop or other cause," in either case acting at the request or with the consent of the majority of the bishops in the jurisdiction in which the bishop will be serving.

For the reasons explained below, I have concluded that the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference's decision to assign Bishop Debra-Wallace Padgett to the West Virginia Episcopal Area neither violated United Methodist law, nor contravened any directive or mandate received from the General Conference. On the contrary, and particularly when viewed in light of the unique, multi-faceted, and challenging circumstances presented, the episcopal assignment approved overwhelmingly by the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference—based on the recommendations made by the ICOE and its own COE, and with the consent of the Colleges of Bishops of both the Northeastern and Southeastern Jurisdiction—constituted the best available means of heeding the

General Conference’s mandates regarding both the maximum number of bishops (32) that could be assigned to Episcopal areas in the United States, and the minimum number of those bishops that must be eligible for assignment in each jurisdiction, while at the same time achieving maximal fidelity with relevant provisions of the Constitution and the *Discipline*.

**A. Neither the Constitution, nor the Discipline, Bar Jurisdictional Conferences from Approving the Assignment of Bishops Elected by Another Jurisdiction**

Upon scrutiny, any suggestion that the NEJ’s assignment of Bishop Wallace-Padgett to oversee the West Virginia Episcopal Area violates the Constitution or the *Discipline* rests largely on failing to appreciate the distinction the Constitution makes between (1) the *election* of a bishop and (2) the *assignment* of a bishop to a particular Episcopal area. There is no question that, since 1939 at least, the Constitution has reserved to the “jurisdictional conferences” the power to “*elect* bishops.” *Discipline* ¶ 27.2. The Constitution reiterates the same point in ¶ 46, providing there as well that “bishops shall be elected by the respective jurisdictional and central conferences . . . .” Meanwhile, the jurisdictional conference’s power to *assign* bishops to particular Episcopal areas is *not* a power bestowed in the Constitution, but rather derives from the legislative provisions codified in *Discipline* ¶¶ 406 and 524.

A careful review of these provisions reveals, firstly, that none of the provisions that empower jurisdictional conferences to “*elect* bishops” preclude bishop elected in one jurisdiction from accepting assignments to two episcopal areas, including one that lies within the jurisdiction of the bishop’s election and another that lies in a neighboring jurisdiction. It is true, of course, that the Constitution requires that “bishops shall have residential and presidential supervision in the jurisdictional or central conferences in which they are elected,” but that provision is fully satisfied in the instant case. Bishop Wallace-Padgett will in fact have “residential and presidential

supervision in the Southeastern Jurisdiction’s Holston Conference, even as she is simultaneously assigned to the contiguous West Virginia Conference in the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

In the same vein, moreover, none of the provisions that empower jurisdictional conferences to determine the assignment of bishops preclude jurisdictional conferences from deciding for themselves, using the process spelled out in the *Discipline*, to assign a bishop who was elected to the episcopacy in the first instance by another jurisdiction. In plain terms, the *Discipline* requires the following steps be taken when making episcopal assignments, all of which were taken in the present case:

1. **Pursuant to ¶ 524.3(d), the Jurisdictional COE shall “[d]etermine the number of effective bishops eligible for assignment.”** *Here, the record establishes that the NEJ’s COE made this determination and further that the number of effective bishops the committee determined to be eligible for assignment included Bishop Wallace-Padgett. The minutes of the first plenary session held on July 10, 2024, confirm that Jurisdictional COE Chair Judi Kenaston announced to the body that “¶ 524.3(d) requires that the COE determines the number of effective bishops eligible for assignment within the jurisdiction,” that the “Episcopacy Committee has determined that there are six effective Bishops for assignment,” and that those bishops included not only Bishops Steiner Ball, Bickerton, Moore-Koikoi, Burgos Nunez, and myself, but also Bishop Wallace-Padgett. See Exhibit C at 1-2.*

2. **Once the determination required by ¶ 524.3(d) is made, Jurisdictional COE’s are next required, after consulting with the College of Bishops, to make a recommendation to the jurisdictional conference concerning to which Episcopal areas the eligible bishops should in fact be assigned.** *Discipline ¶ 406.1.* Here, too, the record establishes that the NEJ’s COE satisfied this requirement. As previously indicated, the minutes of the ninth plenary session

held on July 12, 2024, confirm that *Jurisdictional COE Chair Judi Kenaston* reported to the body that the NEJ COE was now recommending, and moved the conference delegates to approve, the episcopal assignments to all six of the NEJ’s Episcopal Areas, including the assignment of Bishop Wallace-Padgett to the West Virginia Episcopal Area.<sup>14</sup>

3. ***Discipline ¶ 406.1 gives the Jurisdictional Conference delegates the right to take “final action” on the assignment of bishops, by accepting or rejecting the assignments made by the Jurisdictional COE.*** *Again, the record establishes that this step was taken. The minutes of the final plenary session held on July 12, 2024, demonstrate that the delegates approved the NEJ COE’s recommended episcopal assignments, including the assignment of Bishop Wallace-Padgett to the West Virginia Episcopal Area, by an overwhelming margin, with of 127 voting to approve those assignments and only 9 voting against them.*<sup>15</sup>

To reiterate, none of the constitutional or legislative provisions outlined above constrained (1) the NEJ COE’s ability to determine pursuant to *Discipline ¶ 524.3(d)*, in accordance with ICOE’s recommendation, that there were in fact six effective bishops eligible for assignment in the NEJ; (2) the same body’s ability to recommend—after duly consulting with and confirming the consent of both Colleges of Bishops—that Bishop Wallace-Padgett be assigned to the West Virginia Episcopal Area; or (3) the NEJ’s conference delegates from approving all of their COE’s recommended episcopal assignments, including the assignment of Bishop Wallace-Padgett.

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<sup>14</sup> See Exhibit D at 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

**B. The Fact that Bishops May “Transfer” Jurisdictions if Certain Conditions are Satisfied, or that the Council of Bishops may Make a Cross-Jurisdictional Episcopal Assignment on an *Ad Interim* Basis in Certain Circumstances, Does not Preclude Jurisdictional Conferences from Approving Episcopal Assignments of Bishops Elected in Other Jurisdictional Conference in the Circumstances Presented Here**

In reaching the conclusions stated above, I am mindful that the Constitution provides that bishops “may be *transferred* from one jurisdiction to another jurisdiction for presidential and residential supervision” provided certain conditions are satisfied, *Discipline* ¶49 (emphasis added), including that the bishop being transferred “shall have specifically consented” to the transfer, and that the transfer is approved by “a majority vote of the members present and voting of the jurisdictional committees on episcopacy of the jurisdictions that are involved.” The scenario contemplated by that provision of the Constitution, however, is the *wholesale* transfer of a bishop’s membership in one jurisdiction’s College of Bishops to another jurisdiction’s College of Bishops. It makes sense that the Constitution speaks to that particular scenario, with the aim of establishing (a) that certain conditions must be satisfied before that can happen, including primarily obtaining the consent of the bishop and the approval of jurisdictional conferences involved, and (b) that once that happens, the bishop will henceforth be treated as a member of the transferee jurisdiction’s college of bishops and subject to assignment by that jurisdictional conference.

Nothing in that Constitutional provision precludes, either affirmatively or by necessary implication, the entirely sensible decision that was made in this instance—and to which all impacted parties consented—to assign a bishop elected in one jurisdiction to serve the missional needs of another, particularly in the unique circumstances the denomination currently faces, without insisting that the bishop willing to make that sacrifice first separate entirely from the jurisdiction in which she was elected.



Similarly, the distinct provisions in the second and third paragraph of ¶ 49, which allow the *Council of Bishops* to make cross-jurisdictional episcopal assignment in limited circumstances, are obviously designed to give the Council itself leeway, without having to call a special session of the jurisdictional conference, to provide episcopal coverage on a temporary basis, or in an emergency context arising from “the death or disability of a bishop or other cause.” *Discipline* ¶ 49. Such a provision says nothing about the scope of *jurisdictional conference’s* authority to approve episcopal assignments.

**C. Foundational and Constitutionally Rooted Principles of United Methodist Polity Support the Episcopal Assignments Recommended by the ICOE and the NEJ’s COE, and Ultimately Approved by the Overwhelming Vote of the NEJ Delegates**

The legal principles addressed in the foregoing sections focus on provisions in the *Discipline* that deal specifically and directly with the election and assignment of bishops. A thorough and responsible construction and application of those principles, however, demands that they be construed in light of certain bedrock principles of United Methodist polity, including especially those that have been embedded in the Constitution from the outset. As explained below, the Episcopal assignments recommended to and approved by the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference are well-aligned with several such foundational principles of United Methodist law and polity:

- The ICOE’s paramount focus on heeding the General Conference’s mandates on the number of bishops and the allocation of the bishop across all jurisdictions aligns with the Constitution’s clear command that the “General Conference shall have full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional,” *Discipline* ¶ 16, which matters surely include determining the number and allocation of bishops needed to adequately serve the missional needs of all jurisdictions and to do so on a fiscally responsible basis.

- In turn, the NEJ COE’s decision to affirm the ICOE’s recommendations not only heeded the General Conference’s mandates concerning the number and allocation of bishops; the decision to evaluate and ultimately accept ICOE’s recommendations displays respect for the General Conference’s *prior* decision to establish the ICOE to serve as the agency charged with coordinating and guiding all jurisdictional conferences and their associated colleges of bishops in determining the number and allocation of bishops best suited to supporting the each jurisdiction’s missional needs and objectives.

- The episcopal assignments recommended and approved here, including the cross-jurisdictional assignment of Bishop Wallace-Padgett, are in full accord with the foundational principle, as enshrined in the denomination’s very first *Discipline*, that the duties of all bishops include the duty “to travel through the connection at large.”<sup>16</sup> Further, that duty is not vestige of the past. It did not expire in 1939, when the power of electing bishops was transferred from the General Conference to the newly established Jurisdictional Conferences. On the contrary, the same understanding remains even in the *Discipline* of today, which continues to insist that the “role of bishop is to lead the whole Church in claiming its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,”<sup>17</sup> and which still retains the Third Restrictive Rule to ensure that the Church’s general superintendency shall forever remain an “itinerant general superintendency.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it has always been understood that a United Methodist bishop is obliged to serve the entire Connection, and for that reason every bishop holds their defining membership in the Council of Bishops, which is “composed of all the bishops of The United

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<sup>16</sup> *The Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Episcopal Church in America, with Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (10th ed.) (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), § IV (“Of the Election and Consecration of Bishops, and of their Duty”), 38.

<sup>17</sup> *Discipline* ¶ 403.1(c).

<sup>18</sup> *Discipline* ¶ 19.

Methodist Church,” the result that all bishops are charged to serve “the temporal and spiritual interests of the entire Church.”

#### IV. CONCLUSION

None of this is to say or suggest that the power of jurisdictional conferences to elect and assign bishops is inconsequential, or that the Northeastern Jurisdiction was duty bound to yield to the ICOE’s recommendations in this instance. On the contrary, I conclude simply (a) that the NEJ COE violated no law of The United Methodist Church and no mandate of the General Conference when it determined, in exercising its authority under *Discipline* ¶ 524.3(d); (b) that the NEJ COE likewise violated no law of The United Methodist Church and no mandate of the General Conference when, in exercising its authority under *Discipline* ¶ 406.1, it recommended that the NEJ approve the assignment of those same six bishops to the Episcopal areas in the NEJ; and (c) that the NEJ itself violated no law of The United Methodist Church and no mandate of the General Conference when, in exercising its own authority under *Discipline* ¶ 406.1, voted overwhelmingly to approve those same Episcopal assignments, including the assignment of Bishop Wallace-Padgett to the West Virginia Episcopal Area.

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respond in the negative to ~~Questions 1~~all of the questions presented. The recommendations made by the ICOE and the NEJ COE regarding Episcopal assignments, and the Episcopal assignments approved by the NEJ, are all in accordance with, and do not violate, the law of The United Methodist Church.

Dated: August 11, 2024

/s/ Bishop LaTrelle Easterling  
Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

## INTERESTED PARTIES

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