

1024- 5 Use of ¶ 2549 Related to Petitions to Annual Conference Requesting Church Closure
The Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference requests a Declaratory Decision from the
Judicial Council Pursuant to ¶ 2549.2b of the *Discipline*, as amended by Petition 20159 at the
postponed 2020 General Conference, is it proper or permissible for a local church's Church
Council to form a petition asking for the Annual Conference to close that church or is it in
conflict with the church law around the role of the Charge Conference of that local church
especially Section XI of the Constitution and ¶¶ 244.1, 246.1, and 252?



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



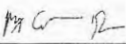
Petition for Declaratory Decision

This form is to be used by the Secretary of the body authorized to petition the Judicial Council for a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision as to the constitutionality, meaning, application, or effect of (please check one):

- The Book of Discipline 2016* or any portion thereof (§ 2610.1)
- any act or legislation of a General Conference (§ 2610.1)
- any proposed legislation (§ 2609.2)

Name of body authorized to make a Petition (§ 2610.2): Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference
 Date of session: June 17, 2024 (month/day/year) Location: FUMC Montgomery, AL
 Name of Secretary: Mary Catherine Phillips
 Address: 4719 Woodmere Blvd City: Montgomery
 State/Province: Alabama ZIP/Postal Code 36106 Country: USA
 Phone: 334-590-5641 Fax: _____ E-mail: marycatherine@awfumc.org

To be reviewed (indicate paragraph number, title of legislation and/or act where applicable):
 Book of Discipline: Use of Paragraph 2549 related to petitions to annual conference requesting church closure
 Legislation: _____
 Act of General Conference: _____

Signature:  Digitally signed by Mary Catherine Phillips
 Date: June 18, 2024
Date: 2024.06.20 11:09:15 -05'00'
 Secretary of the Conference/Body (month/day/year)

The following must be attached:

- o Text of the written Petition for Declaratory Decision as originally presented
- o Minutes of proceedings
- o List of names and addresses of interested parties, including eu mail
- o Other relevant materials (e.g. conference rules, resolutions, policies, reports)
- Send electronic copy of this form and all materials in PDF and Microsoft Word format to: **secretary@umcjudicialcouncil.org**
- Mail thirteen (13) sets of hard copies to:
**UMC Judicial Council, c/o LaNella Smith, Assistant to the J.C. Secretary,
 1215 Shady Lane, Durham, NC 27712**

REQUEST FOR A DECLARATORY DECISION OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Bishop, I move the Annual Conference request a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council on the following:

Pursuant to Paragraph 2549.2b of the Discipline, as amended by Petition 21058 and pursuant to new Paragraph 2549.3 of the Discipline, as amended by Petition 20159 at the postponed 2020 General Conference, is it proper or permissible for a local church's Church Council to form a petition asking for the Annual Conference to close that church or is it in conflict with the church law around the role of the Charge Conference of that local church especially Section XI of the Constitution and ¶244.1, ¶246.1, and ¶252?

Submitted by Dr. Geoffrey Lentz
Pastor, First United Methodist Church Pensacola

BACKGROUND

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church approved Consent Calendar A04 on April 30, 2024, which contained two petitions, numbers 21058 and 21059. Both of these petitions allow for a local church's Church Council to directly petition the Annual Conference for its Church to be closed. While the intention of these petitions is not known, some local churches view this new addition as an alternative means to disaffiliation and a way for the local church to have the Annual Conference release its trust of the property to the local church and/or its members can take control of the property.

However, giving the Church Council this authority is in conflict with our United Methodist polity. The Church Council is not a "conference" and is not part of the connectional web that holds our church together. The Constitution of the Church in section XI shows that the local church is connected to the "conferences" through its Charge Conference not through its Church Council. ¶246.1 states, "Within the pastoral charge the basic unit in the connectional system of The United Methodist Church is the charge Conference." Furthermore, ¶244.1 states, "The church council and all other administrative and programmatic structures of the local church shall be amenable to the charge conference(see ¶246)." It does not seem proper for the local church's Church Council to usurp the authority of the Charge Conference while its purpose is to "provide for planning and implementing a program of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church" and is "amenable to and functions as the administrative agency of the charge conference(¶252). Annual Conferences need clarity on whether how and if these new provisions can be used due to perceived conflict with our polity.

We, therefore, request a declaratory decision of the Judicial Council to advise the Annual Conference how it should proceed when requests to close as local churches come from the Church Council of the local church as means to disaffiliate. If these two provisions are found to not be proper, in relation to the Church Council and its role, it is recommended that the entirety of the two new provisions be struck down so that the General Conference may re-address its concerns in a more consistent way.

Written by Dr. Geoffrey Lentz
Pastor, First United Methodist Church, Pensacola

**Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference
Declaratory Decision Interested Parties, submitted by Geoffrey Lentz**

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2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE MINUTES
First United Methodist Church Montgomery
Montgomery, Alabama
June 16-18, 2024

Theme: Revive Us Again, *Isaiah 43: 18-19*

MORNING SESSION
Tuesday, June 18, 2024
Theme: Revive Us Again, *Isaiah 43: 18-19*

CONFERENCE BUSINESS SESSION

Dr. Paul Seay led in the opening song, "Go Make of All Disciples."

Bishop Graves called the business session to order at 8:30 am. Rachel Harris, St. Paul UMC, gave the opening prayer.

Conference Secretary made the following announcements:

All Huntingdon Alumni and faculty are meeting after this session for a picture.

A nail file has been found – please come claim it.

Rev. Danny Gilroy's health is rapidly declining. Bishop Graves offered a prayer for him.

REPORT OF THE JOURNAL COMMITTEE

Having reviewed minutes from Sunday and Monday, June 16 and 17, 2024, Rev. Gillian Walters, Chair of the Journal Committee, found the minutes from Sunday and Monday to be in order and moved to accept the minutes. The motion was approved. Rev. Walters also moved that the minutes from today's session be accepted, after review and corrections by the Journal Committee. The motion was approved.

FIXING OF THE 2024-2025 APPOINTMENTS

Bishop Graves invited the District Superintendents to report new appointments for the coming year. He also recognized Rev. Jenni Hendrix, Director of Ministerial Services, as she is returning to ministry in the local church. Bishop Graves offered a prayer.

Bishop Graves recognized Rev. Jeff Wilson who served for 8 years as a District Superintendent and will move this year into a new position with the Conference office as the Director of Ministerial Services and Assistant to the Bishop.

ACTION ON STANDING RULES

Sarah McWilliams brought the proposed changes to Standing Rule 5b, 14, 18 to be considered all together since they are all connected with changes to district structure.

The Committee recommends the approval of these proposed changes.

Bishop Graves noted that this simply cleans up our language.
Motion passes.

Standing Rule 37 – the motion is to delete this Standing Rule because the Episcopal Residence has been sold.

Bishop Graves noted that this simply cleans up our language.
Motion passes.

POI – Rev. Geoffrey Lentz made a motion to request a declaratory decision and submitted the following:

Pursuant to Paragraph 2549.2b of the Discipline, as amended by Petition 21058 and pursuant to new Paragraph 2549.3 of the Discipline, as amended by Petition 20159 at the postponed 2020 General Conference, is it proper or permissible for a local church's Church Council to form a petition asking for the Annual Conference to close that church or is it in conflict with the church law around the role of the Charge Conference of that local church especially Section XI of the Constitution and ¶244.1, ¶246.1, and ¶252.

Seconded.

Bishop Graves offered some clarity on the request.

The vote on this declaratory decision was taken by ballot.

Rev. Deborah Bishop corrected her report to note that Rev. John Kelsoe is receiving an appointment to Marlow UMC – she asked for forgiveness for the oversight.

ACTION ON RESOLUTIONS AND PETITIONS

Rev. Christina Shaver, St. Paul UMC, reminded the body that 4 new resolutions were passed out yesterday. The committee suggests bundling these new resolutions and voting on them all at the same time since they are all connected with disaffiliation.

The Committee recommends nonconcurrency because they believe the resolutions are out of order.

Bishop Graves confirmed that he too believes they are out of order.

He reminded the body that there has been a request on clarification of Paragraph 2549 of the Book of Discipline, and this will largely determine next steps.

Bishop Graves also offered words of appreciation to the General Conference delegation for removing their

Bishop ruled the resolutions out of order.

POI – ?? Ferguson, Trinity Prattville UMC
Asking about clarity between policies in South Georgia and AWF

POI – Andy Wendland, Church Street UMC

Asking if the resolution submitted is now dead. Effectively yes. Until we get more information on next steps.

POI - Bill Ferguson, Echo UMC

No way for a church to leave until the declaratory statement from the Judicial Council?

Correct

Kenny Purdue, Highland Park UMC – Requested RULE OF LAW (was then withdrawn)

Bishop Graves shared the results of the Declaratory Decision from Rev. Lentz

342 voted

299 yes

43 no

87.4%

POI – Phill Craddock, Asbury UMC

Why was a the Asbury UMC Resolution ruled out of order since it was based on the spirit of

2553