

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
MEMORANDUM 1485

IN RE: Clarification and Modification of Judicial Council Decisions 1451 and 1472

For the purpose of clarification and constitutional consistency, the Judicial Council, on its own motion, hereby modifies its ruling in Decisions 1451 and 1472 regarding the quadrennial scheduling of the regular sessions of General Conference as well as General Conference Delegation vacancies.

Paragraph 14 of the Constitution establishes the frequency at which the General Conference must convene, not the actual year when this occurs. “The General Conference shall meet once in four years at such time and in such place as shall be determined by the General Conference or by its duly authorized committees.” *2016 Book of Discipline*. Pursuant to the travel bans and travel restrictions imposed by various governments in early 2020, as a result of a global pandemic, which restrictions and emergency measures were not completely lifted internationally until 2023, General Conference was not held in 2020 nor in 2021, 2022 or 2023. General Conference is currently scheduled to convene in 2024. As such, pursuant to ¶ 14, the *regular session* of General Conference that is to be convened following the upcoming **2024 regular session**, would be held **four years thereafter, in 2028**. The Judicial Council hereby modifies its holding and related commentary in Decision 1472 on the topic of the scheduling of the regular session of the General Conference that will follow the adjournment of the 2024 regular session of General Conference.

Those persons that were duly elected to serve as delegates to the regular session of General Conference that had been scheduled to convene in 2020, shall so serve as delegates to the regular session of General Conference that is now expected to convene in 2024 (four years later than anticipated). The reason for this determination, which is limited and applicable to the upcoming regular session of General Conference only, is that the names of all those persons who were elected to serve as General Conference delegates in 2020 were duly submitted in a certified report, by their Annual Conference Secretary, to the General Conference Secretary who was then prepared to issue the credentials for said persons. At the time that the travel bans and international restrictions went into effect, the names of all of the duly elected delegates had been **certified and submitted to the General Conference Secretary** and preparations were underway for the convening of the regular session of General Conference which was less than three months away from the point in time when the global pandemic triggered travel bans and international restrictions and thereby necessitated the cancellation of the regular session of General Conference that was scheduled to convene in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2020.

To reiterate our earlier ruling, there are to be no new elections for General Conference delegates with one minor exception: if the laity who were elected, or if the clergy who were elected, as General Conference delegates or reserve delegates (in this instance reserve delegates includes all persons elected to serve as a delegate or reserve delegate to Jurisdictional or Central Conference), have become so depleted, pursuant to death/change of status, that there are not enough laity to fill the Annual Conference’s lay delegate seats at General Conference or enough clergy to fill the Annual Conference’s clergy delegate seats at General Conference.

In that extremely rare and improbable instance, the Annual Conference may hold elections for the purpose of electing new delegates to fill those vacant General Conference delegate seats and the General Conference alternates and reserves. However, no elections shall occur except and unless that circumstance exists. As to outstanding concerns regarding annual conferences who have lost some of their Jurisdictional and Central Conference delegates and reserve delegates, then that issue can be determined at the next regular session of General Conference which will convene prior to any future sessions of Jurisdictional and Central Conferences.

This ruling and our other Decisions related to these issues arising from the cancellation of the regular session of General Conference that had been scheduled to convene in 2020, are limited and applicable only to the cancellation/rescheduling of this particular regular session of General Conference. We have issued these decisions only because these circumstances — triggered by the global pandemic — were not envisioned by General Conference and provided for in the *Discipline*. We emphasize that this decision, and the other decisions issued on related matters since 2021, should not be deemed as precedent for any other General Conferences. It is within the sole discretion and authority of the General Conference to amend the *Discipline* and add provisions regarding contingencies and protocols upon which the denomination can rely in circumstances such as those that were caused or triggered by the global pandemic of 2020. It is only General Conference, not the Judicial Council nor the Council of Bishops, which is authorized to do so.

Digest

Pursuant to ¶ 14 of the *Discipline*, the Commission on the General Conference is neither required nor permitted to make arrangements for a Regular Session of General Conference to be held less than, nor more than, four years following the adjournment of the 2024 regular session of General Conference [*i.e.*, neither prior to nor later than 2028].

Those persons that were duly elected to serve as delegates to the regular session of General Conference that was scheduled to convene in 2020, shall so serve as delegates to the regular session of General Conference that is now expected to be convened in 2024 (four years later than anticipated). There shall be **no elections to replace the delegates** elected to serve at the regular session of General Conference initially scheduled for 2020. Furthermore, there shall be **no elections to fill vacancies** except in the very limited circumstance referenced herein.

October 30, 2023