

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

DECISION 1498

[Docket 0524-4]

IN RE: Petition for Declaratory Decision from the General Conference 2024 Regarding the Meaning, Application, and Effect of ¶¶ 408.1b and 357.1 of *The 2016 Book of Discipline* Concerning Mandatory Retirement of Bishops.

DIGEST

Paragraph 357.1 applies to ordained elders, not bishops. If a Central Conference Bishop fits the requirements for retirement under ¶ 408.1b of the 2012 Discipline, the bishop must retire no later than one year from the end of the General Conference session. There will be no need for episcopal oversight in as much as a new bishop will be elected at the central conference.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

On May 1, 2024 during the morning plenary session, a delegate from the Liberia Annual Conference rose and made the following motion:

I move that, in accordance with Par. 2601.1, the General Conference requests a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council on the meaning, application, and effect of Paragraph 408.1b and 357.1 with regard to the following questions:.

1. Does the provision for mandatory retirement for ordained elders in Par. 357.1 apply to bishops?
2. If so, should bishops who have currently passed the mandatory retirement age be immediately placed in the retired relation, with the Council of Bishops providing alternative episcopal oversight for the affected annual Conference
3. If a central conference bishop fits the requirements of Par. 408.1 for retirement, must they be placed in the retired relation as of August 4, 2024, even if their central conference is being held after that date?
4. If so, must the Council of Bishops provide alternative episcopal oversight for the affected annual conference until a new bishop is elected and consecrated?
5. If one or more bishops in a central conference are retiring under Par. 408.1b, must the central conference be held in enough time to allow the newly elected bishop(s) to take office by September 1, 2024?

Jurisdiction

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction pursuant to ¶ 2610 of *The 2016 Book of Discipline* [hereinafter the *Discipline*].

Analysis And Rationale

The Judicial Council responds as follows to the questions put to it by the delegate from the Liberia Annual Conference as follows:

No.1: No. ¶ 357.1 applies to ordained elders but not bishops.

No. 2: Question 2 presupposes that the answer to question 1 is Yes (“If so,” i.e. “If yes”), and is therefore moot.

No. 3: No. The 2016 version of 408.1b did not make it into the Book of Discipline. See JCD 1370.¹ The 2012 language is still valid and applicable.

b) A bishop in a central conference shall be retired at a date no later than **one year** following the adjournment of General Conference, if the bishop’s sixty-eighth birthday is reached on or before the opening day of his or her scheduled conference effective on January 1, 2016.

Therefore, the term of a bishop who has reached the age of sixty-eight before the beginning of the central conference, must retire no later than one year following the adjournment of General Conference.

No. 4: No. There will be no need for episcopal oversight in as much as a new bishop will be elected at the central conference.

No. 5: No. See question and answer No. 4.

Decision

Paragraph 357.1 applies to ordained elders, not bishops. If a Central Conference Bishop fits the requirements for retirement under ¶ 408.1b of the 2012 Discipline, the bishop must retire no later than one year from the end of the General Conference session. There will be no need for episcopal oversight in as much as a new bishop will be elected at the central conference.

May 2, 2024

¹“General Conference could not enact 408.1(b) without violating its own policy in ¶ 2201.2. The adoption of Calendar Item 218 was null and void. ¶ 408.1(b) of The Discipline, 2012 is revived.”
JCD 1370