

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

DECISION NO. 1503

IN RE: Petition for Declaratory Decision from the 2024 General Conference on the Meaning, Application, and Effect of ¶ 2533 of the *2016 Book of Discipline* Concerning the Right of the Board of Trustees of a Local Church to Adopt Policies Prohibiting the Conduct of Same-Sex Marriage Ceremonies.

Digest

Nothing in ¶ 2533 of the *2016 Book of Discipline* prevents the Board of Trustees of a local church from adopting policies prohibiting the conduct of worship services that include same-sex marriage ceremonies.

Statement of Facts

The General Conference during plenary session, on May 3, 2024, adopted a motion to request a declaratory decision on the following question:

With the provisions passed by this General Conference, does the language of Paragraph 2533, “the board of Trustees shall not interfere with the pastor in the use of any said property for religious services or other proper meetings or purposes recognized by the law, usages and customs of the UMC...” prevent local churches from creating policies that would prohibit pastors from conducting worship services that include the marriage of same-sex couples in a local church.

Jurisdiction

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

Analysis and Rationale

The pertinent paragraph in *The Discipline* states:

¶ 2533. *Board of Trustees’ Powers and Limitations*—1. Subject to the direction of the charge conference, the board of trustees shall have the supervision, oversight, and care of all real property owned by the local church and of all property and equipment acquired directly by the local church or by any society, board, class, commission, or similar organization connected therewith, provided that the board of trustees shall not violate the rights of any local church organization elsewhere granted in the Discipline; provided further, that the board of trustees shall not prevent or interfere with the pastor in the use of any of the said property for religious services or other proper meetings or purposes recognized by the law, usages, and customs of The United Methodist Church, or permit the use of said property for religious or other meetings without the consent of the pastor or, in the pastor’s absence, the consent of the district superintendent; and provided

further, that pews in The United Methodist Church shall always be free; and provided further, that the church local conference may assign certain of these duties to a building committee as set forth in ¶ 2544 or the chairperson of the parsonage committee, if one exists. [emphasis added]

Nothing in ¶ 2533 prevents the Board of Trustees of a local church from adopting policies prohibiting the conduct of worship services that include same-sex marriage ceremonies. The answer to the question posed in this Petition for Declaratory Decision: **NO**.

Decision

Nothing in ¶ 2533 of the *2016 Book of Discipline* prevents the Board of Trustees of a local church from adopting policies prohibiting the conduct of worship services that include same-sex marriage ceremonies.