

SUBJECT TO FINAL EDITING

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

DECISION NO. 1384

IN RE: Review of an Administrative Appeal by Erik Seise.

DIGEST OF CASE

The decision of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals is affirmed.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

This matter arose from the decisions of the Board of Ordained Ministry, Conference Relations Committee, Administrative Review Committee, and clergy session of the Florida Annual Conference to place on involuntary leave of absence and discontinue the provisional membership of Rev. Eric Seise [hereinafter the Appellant] in 2018. The Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals [hereinafter SEJCOA] affirmed on August 8, 2018. Within thirty days, the Appellant filed a Notice of Appeal with the Judicial Council. In Memorandum 1373 issued on February 21, 2019, the Judicial Council remanded the case to the SEJCOA for a new ruling within thirty days from the date of the Council's decision. The memorandum decision required the SEJCOA to provide "a well-reasoned appellate opinion that includes the facts, procedural history, legal authorities, and analysis of the case...". In addition, the SEJCOA was instructed to "separately address each of the five grounds alleged by Appellant to have violated fair process." The SEJCOA issued its opinion on remand on March 20, 2019, in compliance with the deadline established by the Judicial Council in its Memorandum Opinion.

JURISDICTION

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction pursuant to *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016* ¶¶ 2718.3 and 2718.4.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE

As we instructed in JCD 1373, the right to be heard means that the clergyperson (against whom involuntary action...is directed) is entitled to an administrative appellate decision expounding the facts and grounds relied upon that allows him or her to prepare and bring the case before the Judicial Council. On remand the SEJCOA filed an opinion containing a full statement of facts and procedural history and addressing Appellant's Grounds for Appeal with sufficient particularity with respect to the alleged violations of fair process in the proceedings related to Appellant's involuntary leave of absence and discontinuation from Probationary membership. The SEJCOA concedes that "the Administrative Review Committee's omission of the grounds for its findings could have made it difficult for the Appellant to formulate his response." Opinion at 10. The SEJCOA finds, however, that the Appellant overcame that impediment and diligently argued his appeal to the Florida Conference clergy session and to the SEJCOA. The SEJCOA

found no errors of church law which would vitiate the actions of any of the appellees.

We find that the SEJCOA has complied fully with our instructions on remand. Under ¶ 2715.7, the Judicial Council “shall determine two questions only: (a) Does the weight of the evidence sustain the charge or charges? (b) Were there such errors of Church law as to vitiate the verdict and/or the penalty?” Appellant reiterates on this appeal many of the arguments that were made to appellees and to the SEJCOA. None of the grounds alleged by Appellant rises to the level of “egregious errors of Church law” sufficient to require additional review or reversal. Appellant urges us to explicate further the requirements of fair process. We decline to do so in the absence of egregious errors of Church law.

RULING

The decision of the SEJCOA is affirmed.

Lidia Romao Gulele was absent.

Warren Plowden, first lay alternate, participated in this decision.

Øyvind Helliesen was absent and did not participate in this decision.

Angela Brown, second clergy alternate, participated in this decision.

November 1, 2019