

## **Docket 0424-2**

### **Review of a Bishop's Ruling on a Question of Law in the North Georgia Annual Conference as to Whether the Existence of Evidence Showing that the Annual Conference Violated Disciplinary Requirements, When it Ratified the Disaffiliation of a Local Church Pursuant to ¶ 2553, Would Nullify the Annual Conference's Action.**

*Exact wording set forth herein below in compliance with the requirement added to ¶ 2608.1 by the 2012 General Conference, with the exception of the bracketed words which were added for the purpose of accuracy in this website posting.*

Matthew Daigle, lay delegate, College Park First UMC

I rise seeking a ruling of law.

Paragraph 2553 provides a limited right specifically related to reasons of conscience related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Judicial [Council] Decision 1480, issued April 25 of this year states as follows:

It will be unlawful for an annual conference to ratify a local church disaffiliation for any reason other than those specified in ¶ 2553.1 of the *Book of Discipline*.

While the decision affirms the Conference Trustee's decision not to question the reasons of conscience behind a church's decision to disaffiliate, it also holds that the validity of a church's statement is not absolute and must be weighed against other protected rights in Church law, including "the rights of Individual members of the conference to be informed on and to participate fully in all legislative decisions" as described in Judicial [Council] Decision 367.

The Conference's decision to not solicit the reasons of conscience is not the same as ignoring evidence to the contrary.

I ask the Bishop to rule definitively whether the existence of evidence showing that the conference unlawfully ratified the disaffiliation of a local church pursuant to paragraph 2553 would nullify the North Georgia [Annual] Conference's ratification.

*\*Source: Digital copy of the submitter's email setting forth his questions and speech regarding his request for an episcopal ruling.*



# THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NORTH GEORGIA EPISCOPAL AREA

ROBIN DEASE  
RESIDENT BISHOP

November 30, 2023

SUSAN GUNTER  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

VIA: CERTIFIED MAIL AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

Matthew Daigle  
Lay Member of College Park United Methodist Church  
3726 East Main Street  
College Park, GA 30337

Re: Ruling of Law In Response to Question Presented at November 18, 2023  
Special Annual Conference Meeting.

Dear Matthew:

Please find below my ruling on your question of law, which I understand to be as follows:

Would the existence of evidence showing that the conference unlawfully ratified the disaffiliation of a local church pursuant to paragraph 2553 nullify the Annual Conference's ratification of that local church's disaffiliation request?

Before engaging in a substantive analysis of your question of law, I have a fiduciary duty to confirm whether it adheres to church law as being properly before me. If your question is improper, I am strictly forbidden from ruling on its substantive merits.

For a question of law to be proper, it must be presented in writing and meet the Connection Test as set forth in Judicial Council Decision 1329 ("JCD 1329").<sup>1</sup> For a question to be proper under the Connection Test, it must: (1) have a substantive connection to the Annual Conference's business, (2) specific connection to the Annual Conference's business, and (3) be raised during the annual conference's deliberation of that business. Your question satisfies the second and third prongs of the Connection Test because it pertains to the Annual Conference's ratification of local church disaffiliation requests and it was raised during the Annual Conference's deliberations on that subject. Therefore, my analysis will focus on whether your question has the required substantive connection to the Annual Conference's special session business.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016 (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶2609.6 (Questions of law must be submitted in writing). Also, for the sake of clarity, the term Judicial Council Decision will be abbreviated as JCD when referring to specific, individual Judicial Council decisions.



If your question fails to meet the foregoing requirements for a substantive and specific connection to the business before the annual conference, then it is a hypothetical question. JCD 33 is the landmark decision on moot and hypothetical questions. That decision unequivocally states that moot and hypothetical questions are not proper and bishops are forbidden from issuing substantive rulings of law on them. This prohibition is reinforced in numerous Judicial Council decisions, including JCDs 396, 651, 746, 747, 762, and 763.

To have a substantive connection to the Annual Conference's business, your question of law "must relate to actual situations and must set forth the circumstances or acts upon which a specific ruling may be rendered."<sup>2</sup> This means that the question must be based upon some action taken or proposed to be taken by the Annual Conference, where the specific facts cast some doubt as to the legality of the action taken. The presiding Bishop has no duty or authority to rule on any hypothetical question that fails to set forth sufficiently specific facts to provide a basis upon which to issue a ruling.

Your question, does not pertain to any specific action the Annual Conference has taken or proposes to take. Instead, your question applies to an unnamed church being ratified despite the existence of unspecified evidence showing that such a ratification would be unlawful. The absence of these material details makes it impossible for me to understand exactly which church ratification you are referring to; or to issue a substantive ruling without engaging in extensive speculation regarding what evidentiary proof of specific local church misconduct you might have in mind. Therefore, your question is not a proper question of law.

As presented, your "question of law" is actually a petition for a declaratory decision. Among other things, requests for declaratory decisions are requests for a ruling on "the constitutionality, meaning, application or effect of the *Discipline* or any portion thereof."<sup>3</sup> More specifically, your question asks whether the Annual Conference's unspecified ratification of a local church's disaffiliation request **would be** unconstitutional based on your interpretation of how JCD 367 may have modified the Judicial Council's ruling in JCD 1480. Presiding Bishops do not have the authority to rule on whether speculative future Annual Conference actions would comply with the *Discipline* in light of unsettled questions of Judicial Council case law. Such authority rests exclusively with the Judicial Council.<sup>4</sup>

A petition for a declaratory decision that is presented as a question of law is improper under paragraph 2609.6 of the Book of Discipline. Therefore, your question of law is an improper petition for a declaratory decision on which I cannot substantively rule.

For all of the foregoing reasons, your question of law was not properly submitted because it fails the legal Connection Test for such questions. Furthermore, your question of law is actually an improperly submitted petition for a declaratory decision, over which I have no substantive ruling

---

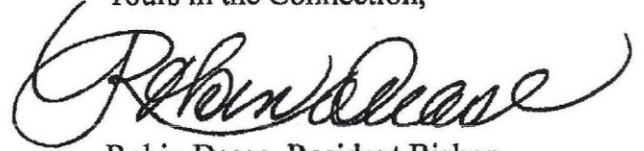
<sup>2</sup> JCD 1329 (2016).

<sup>3</sup> The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016 (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶2610.1.

<sup>4</sup> See *Id.*; see also JCD 846, 1304, 1331, and 1454.

authority. Therefore, I have determined that the proper course of action is to dismiss your question of law. I am also forbidden from including an alternative ruling that addresses the merits of your question, so I have also refrained from engaging in any such exercise here.<sup>5</sup>

Yours in the Connection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin Dease", written in a cursive style.

Robin Dease, Resident Bishop  
North Georgia Annual Conference

CC: Terry Walton, Executive Assistant to the Bishop  
Max Vincent, North Georgia Annual Conference Secretary  
Harold Buckley, North Georgia Annual Conference Chancellor

---

<sup>5</sup> JCD 1372.

**Called Annual Conference**  
**Saturday, November 18, 2023 - 10:00 a.m.**

**Pre-service music.** The worship leader, Will Buthod, led the conference in music.

**Opening of the Special Session.** Bishop Robin Dease gaveled the session to order at 10 am. She reminded the conference that we are here for the sole purpose of ratifying the churches who seek to disaffiliate according to paragraph 2553. She acknowledged that the day holds a mix of emotions. She thanked the cabinet, the conference board of trustees, and the annual conference planning committee, for preparing for the session. She welcomed the youth delegation who had a lock-in the night before at Athens First UMC. The conference cheered. She welcomed Bishop Charlene Kammerer. The conference applauded.

**Opening Prayer.** Nate Abrams, conference lay leader, opened the conference in prayer. He noted that it was appropriate to remember that we are grounded in our common call as children of God and followers of Christ.

**Opening Hymn.** Worship leader, Will Buthod, and song leader, Beth Shugart, led the conference in singing, “The Church’s One Foundation.”

**Organization of Conference.** Max Vincent, conference secretary, moved that the bar of the conference be set as all seats on the floor, stage and stadium seating in the Grand Hall, that the visitors area for the business sessions be designated as the stadium seating to the far right of the hall. There were also seats reserved for media in the guest seating areas. He reminded the conference that in order to vote during business sessions, members need to be within the designated bar of the conference. The conference voted. The motion was approved.

Vincent moved that the following persons be designated as associate secretaries: Joya Abrams, Dave Allen Grady, Kathy Brockman, Judy Bush, Lee Fullerton, Rachel Fullerton, Natalee Dukes-Hamby, Yvette Massey, Joseph McBrayer, John Pinson, Josh Roberts, Dalton Rushing, Carol Scroggs, Blair Tolbert. The conference voted. The motion was approved.

Vincent moved that Tiffany Brown and Aziza Bromfield be head Lay-Tellers and that John Mattox and Katie Mattox be head Clergy-Tellers. The conference voted. The motion was approved. Bishop Dease asked the tellers to stand. The conference applauded.

Vincent reminded the conference that according to our standing rules and conference policies, any material distributed in the Grand Hall must be distributed by the secretaries, tellers and ushers of the annual conference. Materials are not to be left on the seats between breaks and will be removed, if not authorized by the conference. Standing Rule C.5 states that no material may be placed on chairs during breaks or between sessions, at doors in or around the Grand Hall. The distribution prohibition extends to the entire Classic Center property.

Vincent noted that the agenda set by the annual conference planning committee was posted on the conference website on November 16.

**Voting Device Demonstration.** Bishop Dease invited Michael Murphy-McCarthy, conference IT director, to share about the voting devices. Murphy-McCarthy led the conference in a test vote.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The question before us is: Is cranberry sauce on your Thanksgiving menu? The conference voted. Bishop Dease read the results, 1533 voted. Bishop

Dease led the conference in a second test vote. The question is: Have you ever participated in a youth group lock-in? The conference voted. Bishop Dease read the results. She thanked Michael Murphy-McCarthy.

**Rules for the Session.** Catherine Boothe Olson, clergy, chair, standing rules committee: I'm Catherine Boothe Olson, a Deacon in Full Connection, chair of your standing rules committee. Per our standing rules, the North Georgia Conference follows Robert's Rules of Order. These rules are to be equitable and fair for all. They care for us, the community, and allow us to tend to the mission and ministry necessary today. Robert's Rules as a parliamentary process brings order to meetings and allows the group to care for business in an efficient and predictable manner. We will begin with the consent agenda. The purpose of the consent agenda is to group items at the start of the meetings to be voted on in an expedited fashion. This is a practical way to maximize time within a meeting. Items should only be removed from a consent agenda if they require further discussion and/or debate. It would be detrimental to the annual conference and our time together to remove a significant number of items from the consent agenda. The consent agenda provided by the conference board of trustees will be presented in 8 separate segments by our 8 district superintendents. These 8 segments will be presented in district alphabetical order beginning with the Central East District. A consent agenda does not need to be presented 24 hours before a meeting per Robert's Rules of Order, our standing rules, nor The Book of Discipline, thus, it is properly before you.

If a member of the annual conference desires to remove an item from the consent agenda provided by the trustees and shared by the district superintendents:

- Proceed to the closest microphone. Wait for the microphone to be called upon by number. State your name, church, and district. Then state the district number (first column from the trustee report) and church name (second column from the trustee report) you wish to remove from that district's consent agenda. This is the only information needed. District number and church name.
- A second is required for the church to be removed. A second may come from the floor. Only one second is needed.
- Once a second is received the item is removed from the consent agenda. Again, no speeches for nor against are received at the time of removal.
- A speaker may remove more than one church from the consent agenda.
- We will proceed through all 8 sections of the consent agenda led by the district superintendents in district alphabetical order.
- Remember the intent of the consent agenda is to expedite the ordering of the day. It seeks to allow for groups of churches to be approved efficiently AND then individual churches to be discussed, if desired. It is a "both and" option. It's not a strictly up and down option. Nor allowing every church to be debated. It's a means to have a middle way if you as members of the annual conference desire.

At the completion of all eight segments of the consent agenda, Bishop Dease will acknowledge the passing of the consent agenda and all churches that remain on the consent agenda will be approved for disaffiliation.

Motions: Next, we move to the churches that were removed from the consent agenda. These churches will be addressed in the order removed as individual motions.

Limiting Debate: How will these motions be handled? Each church that was removed from the consent agenda was done so because someone in our body desired discussion. In order to have time for all, we recommend in keeping with our tradition:

- Up to 3 speeches for disaffiliation,
- Up to 3 speeches against disaffiliation,
- Each speech not exceeding 1 minute (with the exception of speeches first presented in Spanish, Korean, or another first language not exceeding 1 minute and then translated into English, total time not exceeding 2 minutes)
- No person will be allowed to give more than 1 speech per church

We recognize one minute of discussion may feel too long for some and too short for others. Yet, this very prayerful consideration on time is to ensure all churches are treated with fairness, equity, and care. While at the same time allowing us to complete our important work on this day.

Lastly, a few other reminders regarding Robert's Rules of Order. If you have a question or need clarity, we want to be helpful, please go to a microphone, wait to be called on, and state that you have a

- "Point of Information" and you need clarity on a topic by asking a question or
- "Point of Parliamentary Inquiry" and ask a question related to the procedure of Robert's Rule of Order."

By asking a question using a Point of Information or a Point of Parliamentary Inquiry, we can help all people to be informed and engaged in the process. We want this to be a fair and transparent process for all. Again, we hope by using our agreed upon parliamentary process, Robert's Rule of Order, we will most faithfully and efficiently attend the work of this Annual Conference.

Olsen presented the motion for ordering the day. It requires a  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote.

- Up to 3 speeches for disaffiliation,
- Up to 3 speeches against disaffiliation,
- Each speech not exceeding 1 minute (with the exception of speeches first presented in Spanish, Korean, or another first language up to one minute and then translated into English not exceeding 2 minutes)
- No person will be allowed to give more than 1 speech per church

The conference voted. Yes 1497 No 29 Abstain 12. The motion was approved.

**Trustees Report.** Carolyn Stephens, clergy, vice chair, conference board of trustees, presented the consent agenda for churches which have voted to disaffiliate. She thanked Julie Childs, chair, who ensured that all churches met the guidelines. The district superintendents will read the names of all of the churches in their districts which have voted to disaffiliate.

Ed Tomlinson, clergy, asked to make a motion. The Bishop ruled the motion out of order.

Rodrigo Cruz, Central East district, read the list of churches for the Central East district seeking to disaffiliate. Jeff Fuller, lay leader, offered a prayer.



Michael McQueen, Central North district, read the list of churches for the Central North district seeking to disaffiliate. Dyanne Cunningham, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Will Zant, clergy, Central North, asked when the appropriate time to remove churches from the consent agenda.

Nora Colmenares, moved to remove two churches from the consent agenda: CE8 Norcross FUMC and CE16 The Fountain at Sugarloaf. The motion was seconded.

Vance Ross, clergy, Central North, moved to remove Alpharetta First, Mt. Pisgah, St. John. The motion was seconded.

Michael Stinson, clergy, East Point Mallileu, moved to remove St. James Alpharetta.

Point of Order. James Hood, clergy, First UMC Union County. These motions violate our standing rules. Standing Rule C7 states that if an item is removed from the consent agenda, it is moved to the second day of conference. They are in violation of C7. Catherine Boothe Olsen, In light of the fact that there is only one day, they would be properly before us as they come off of the consent agenda. Hood noted that a standing rule can only be overridden by a vote of the annual conference. We would have to have a vote to suspend the rules to do that. Olson, replied that this is the vote that we took to order the day.

Byron Thomas, Central South district, read the list of churches for the Central South district seeking to disaffiliate. Dianne Spencer, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Jessica Terrell, Central West district, read the list of churches for the Central West district seeking to disaffiliate. Randy Hardy, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Devon Gordon, laity, McEachern, Central West. Moved to remove McEachern Memorial from the consent agenda. It was seconded.

Doug Gilreath, North East district, read the list of churches for the Central East district seeking to disaffiliate. Kim Powell, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Beth Sanders, North West district, read the list of churches for the North West district seeking to disaffiliate. Dawn Townsend, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Hal Storey, laity, Trinity UMC, Rome, moved to remove Trinity UMC Rome, NW44, from the consent agenda.

Greg Porterfield, South East district, read the list of churches for the South East district seeking to disaffiliate. Jennifer Byrd, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Susan Landry, South West district, read the list of churches for the South West district seeking to disaffiliate. Grayland Ward, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Bob Dickson, lay, Madison First UMC, moved to remove Forsyth First from the consent agenda. The motion was seconded.

Shelly Melton, laity, moved Griffin First UMC SW12 from the consent agenda. The motion was seconded.



Barb Combs, Senoia, laity, removed Snellville CE12. The motion was seconded.

Bishop Dease called for a vote on the consent agenda. The conference voted. The motion was approved. The vote was 1222 yes, 295 no, 20 abstain.

The churches approved via consent agenda were:

Central East District:

Atlanta Bethany UMC Buford  
Bishop UMC Watkinsville  
Campton UMC Monroe  
Korean UMC of Hamilton Mill Buford  
Monroe First UMC  
New Pentecost UMC Winder  
New Prospect UMC Athens  
Pentecost UMC Winder  
Pleasant Valley UMC Monroe  
Rays UMC Bishop  
Snellville UMC  
St James UMC Athens  
Statham UMC  
Sugar Hill UMC  
Trinity UMC Duluth  
Walnut Grove UMC Loganville  
Young Harris Memorial UMC Athens

Central North District:

Antioch UMC Fairburn  
England Chapel UMC Jenkinsburg  
Mt Zion UMC Atlanta  
New Hope UMC Clayton County

Central South District:

Bethel UMC Stockbridge  
Conyers First UMC  
Harvest Point UMC Locust Grove  
Jodeco Road UMC Stockbridge  
Julia A. Porter Memorial UMC Porterdale  
Mt Carmel UMC Hampton  
Philadelphia UMC McDonough  
Red Oak UMC Newton County  
Rockland UMC Lithonia  
Shiloh UMC  
Skyland UMC Brookhaven  
Turners UMC McDonough  
Union UMC Stockbridge

Central West District:

Bethel UMC Hiram  
Bethel UMC Tallapoosa  
Bethlehem UMC Bremen  
Buchanan UMC  
Carrollton First UMC  
Center Point UMC Temple  
County Line UMC Acworth  
Covenant UMC Smyrna  
Crawford Chapel UMC Bremen  
Due West UMC Marietta  
Flint Hill UMC Hiram  
Hope UMC Dallas  
Kennesaw UMC  
Lithia Springs UMC  
Mountain View UMC Marietta  
Mt Nebo UMC Dallas  
New Beginnings UMC Kennesaw  
New Covenant UMC Douglasville  
New Hope UMC Carrollton  
Old Camp UMC Carrollton  
Pleasant Grove UMC Temple  
Pleasant Hill UMC Villa Rica  
Poseyville UMC Bremen  
Shiloh UMC Carrollton  
Shiloh UMC Kennesaw  
Smyrna UMC Dallas  
St Stephen UMC Marietta  
Tallapoosa First UMC  
Temple UMC Carroll County  
Victory UMC Carrollton  
Wesley Chapel UMC Villa Rica

North East District:

Antioch UMC Clayton  
Arbor Pointe UMC Hoschton  
Bethel UMC Dawson County  
Bethesda UMC Hartwell  
Bold Spring UMC Carnesville  
Clarkesville UMC  
Clemons Chapel UMC Gainesville  
Cleveland UMC  
Colbert UMC  
Commerce First UMC  
Confidence UMC Stephens County  
Confidence UMC Union County

Cool Springs UMC Clarkesville  
Creekside UMC Cumming  
Dahlonega UMC  
Ebenezer UMC Cumming  
Ebenezer UMC Hollywood  
Ebenezer UMC Jefferson  
Gordon's Chapel UMC Athens  
Hartwell First UMC  
Hickory Flat UMC Lula  
Holly Springs UMC Jackson County  
Homer UMC  
Jones Chapel UMC Danielsville  
Lebanon UMC Gillsville  
Liberty Hill UMC Hartwell  
Loudsville UMC Cleveland  
Lula UMC  
Macedonia UMC Cleveland  
Macedonia UMC Hart County  
McKee's Chapel UMC Dawsonville  
Midway UMC Gillsville  
Mountain City UMC  
Mt Bethel UMC Commerce  
Mt Pleasant UMC White County  
Mt Zion UMC Alto  
Nacoochee UMC  
New Hope UMC Dillard  
New Salem UMC  
Pennington Chapel UMC  
Piedmont UMC  
Providence UMC Hart County  
Providence UMC Stephens County  
Providence UMC Union County  
Redstone UMC  
Redwine UMC Hart County  
Redwine UMC Gainesville  
St James UMC Toccoa  
St Paul UMC Lumpkin County  
Sunshine UMC  
The Highlands UMC  
The Vine UMC  
Tiger UMC  
Toccoa First UMC  
Union Hill UMC Hiawasse  
Vanna UMC  
Wesley Chapel UMC Dahlonega

North West District:

Aragon UMC  
Ball Ground UMC  
Barnsley UMC Kingston  
Bethel UMC Morganton  
Bethel UMC Summerville  
Big Springs UMC Woodstock  
Blue Ridge UMC  
Canton First UMC  
Cedartown First UMC  
Center Valley UMC Chatsworth  
Chatsworth First UMC  
Elizabeth Lee UMC Chickamauga  
Eton UMC  
Fairmount UMC  
Farmville UMC Calhoun  
Five Springs UMC Dalton  
Hillside UMC Woodstock  
Jackson Chapel UMC Cave Spring  
Kingston UMC  
Kresge UMC Cedartown  
Liberty Hill UMC Morganton  
Lindale UMC  
Little River UMC Woodstock  
Lyerly UMC  
Macedonia UMC Alpharetta  
Menlo UMC  
Mineral Springs UMC Dalton  
Mizpah UMC Kingston  
Mt Gilead UMC Woodstock  
Mt Pleasant UMC Rome  
Mt Zion UMC Chatsworth  
New Echota UMC Calhoun  
New Haven UMC Dalton  
Oostanula UMC Rome  
Orange UMC Canton  
Plainville UMC  
Pleasant Grove UMC Dalton  
Rock Spring UMC  
Rockmart First UMC  
Rush Chapel UMC Rome  
Shannon UMC  
Silver Creek UMC  
Sixes UMC Canton  
Union Hill UMC Canton  
Varnell UMC Cohutta



Wesley Chapel UMC Calhoun  
West Rome UMC  
White UMC  
Williamstown UMC McCaysville  
Woodstation UMC

South East District:

Anthony Chapel UMC  
Barton Chapel UMC  
Berlin UMC  
Blythe UMC  
Burns Memorial UMC Augusta  
Central UMC Putnam County  
Cokesbury UMC Augusta  
Coldwater UMC  
Crawfordville UMC  
Dearing UMC  
Devereux UMC  
Dunn's Chapel UMC  
Eatonton First UMC  
Elberton First UMC  
Fork Chapel UMC  
Francis Asbury UMC Elberton  
Friendship UMC Hephzibah  
Gaissert UMC  
Greensboro First UMC  
Harlem UMC  
Hephzibah UMC  
Hopewell UMC Milledgeville  
Independence UMC  
Johnson UMC Warrenton  
Knowles Chapel UMC  
Liberty UMC Hephzibah  
Lincolnton UMC  
Macedonia UMC Warren County  
Martinez UMC  
Midway UMC Lincolnton  
Milledgeville First UMC  
Montpelier UMC  
Mosaic UMC  
Pennington UMC  
Philadelphia UMC Eatonton  
Philadelphia UMC Harlem  
Prospect UMC Morgan County  
Prospect UMC Norwood  
Rutledge UMC

Salem UMC Thomson  
Shiloh UMC  
Siloam UMC  
Sparta UMC (Pierce Memorial)  
St James UMC Augusta  
St Mark UMC Washington Road Augusta  
St Paul UMC Eatonton  
Swords UMC  
Thomson First UMC  
Union Point First UMC  
Washington First UMC  
Wesley Chapel UMC Eatonton  
Young Memorial UMC Thomson

South West District:

Aldora UMC Thomaston  
Bethany UMC Fayetteville  
Big Springs UMC  
Caney Head UMC Roopville  
Christ UMC Forsyth  
Concord UMC Pike County  
Culloden UMC  
Ebenezer UMC Barnesville  
Ebenezer UMC Fayetteville  
Ebenezer UMC Forsyth  
Harmony UMC LaGrange  
Highland UMC Griffin  
Hillcrest UMC LaGrange  
John Wesley UMC Grantville  
Korean UMC of LaGrange  
Korean UMC of Newnan  
Life Springs UMC Zebulon  
Mountville UMC  
Mt Zion UMC Campground  
Pomona UMC  
Prospect UMC Mansfield  
Providence UMC Fayetteville  
Stark UMC Butts County  
The Rock UMC  
Thomaston First UMC  
Trinity On The Hill UMC LaGrange  
Turin UMC  
Welcome UMC Roopville  
Williamson UMC  
Woodbury UMC  
Yatesville UMC

**Break.** Bishop Dease called for a break.

The conference sang “Marching to Zion.”

Bishop Dease called the conference back into session.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Norcross First UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification.

Bishop Dease opened the vote.

The conference voted. The motion was approved. Yes: 776 No: 698 Abstain: 61

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of The Fountain at Sugarloaf UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification. Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was not approved. The vote was Yes; 698 No: 781 Abstain: 49

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Alpharetta First UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification. Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was approved. Yes: 986 No: 495 Abstain: 52.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Mt. Pisgah UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification.

CR Hill, clergy, retired, asked a question. How often may people speak? Chancellor Buckley reminded the conference that members may speak once for each church.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The motion was approved. Yes: 919 No: 555 Abstain: 40

**Lunch.** Bishop Dease called for a lunch break. Max Vincent offered instructions.

Before reconvening, the conference sang, “Standing on the Promises.” The conference also sang, “Happy Birthday” to Bishop Dease, whose birthday is this weekend.

**Reconvening of Conference.** Bishop Dease reconvened the conference at 1:25pm.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of St. John UMC - Atlanta was before the conference.

There were speeches for and against ratification.

The bishop opened the vote. Yes: 1030 No: 365 Abstain: 39. The motion was approved.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of St. James UMC - Alpharetta was before the conference.

There were speeches for and against the disaffiliation.

**Request for Ruling of Law.** Matt Daigle, lay, Central North, requests a ruling of law. He asks:

I rise seeking a ruling of law.

Paragraph 2553 provides a limited right specifically related to reasons of conscience related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals.

Judicial Decision 1480, issued April 25 of this year states as follows:

It will be unlawful for an annual conference to ratify a local church disaffiliation for any reason other than those specified in ¶ 2553.1 of *The Book of Discipline*.

While the decision affirms the Conference Trustee's decision not to question the reasons of conscience behind a church's decision to disaffiliate, it also holds that the validity of a church's statement is not absolute and must be weighed against other protected rights in Church law, including "the rights of individual members of the conference to be informed on and to participate fully in all legislative decisions" as described in Judicial Decision 367.

The Conference's decision to not solicit the reasons of conscience is not the same as ignoring evidence to the contrary.

I ask the Bishop to rule definitively whether the existence of evidence showing that the conference unlawfully ratified the disaffiliation of a local church pursuant to paragraph 2553 would nullify the North Georgia Conference's ratification.

Bishop Dease noted that she has 30 days to respond, and because of the complexity of the question she will need that time. She will respond.

Point of information: Carter Posey, Central North, lay, point of information. What is the membership of St. James Alpharetta? The membership was 3726. The number of votes was 249.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was approved.  
Yes: 730 No: 672 Abstain: 52.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of McEachern Memorial UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification.

Point of Information: Jan Harwood, lay, Central West, point of information. Was there an issue with the membership rolls submitted by McEachern for their vote? District Superintendent, Jessica Terrell shared that McEachern reported 3603 in membership. On the roll, there were 3025 listed in membership. She said that according to some present that day, some confirmation classes were left off of the roll.



Point of Information: Jeff Jernigan, lay, Central West, point of information. We did have 50-70 who were disenfranchised. The council voted to have them reinstated. The vast majority were members of the Hispanic congregation and confirmands.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was not supported. Yes: 632 No: 778 Abstain: 54.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Trinity UMC - Rome was before the annual conference.

There were speeches for and against ratification.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. Yes: 695 No: 694 Abstain: 51. The chair determined that the motion failed, noting that the vote has to be 50% +1 to ratify.

Nanci Hicks, asked if she could pray for the annual conference. Bishop Dease invited Hicks to pray.

**Break.** Bishop Dease called for a five-minute break.

Bishop Dease called the conference back into session.

Cindy Hicks, lay, North West district, made a motion to reconsider Trinity UMC. Bishop Dease ruled the motion out of order.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Forsyth First UMC was before the annual conference.

There were speeches for and against ratification.

Point of Information. Carter Posey, lay, Central North district. What is the membership of this church according to the roster? Susan Landry shared membership statistics.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was supported. Yes: 756 No: 654 Abstain: 26

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Griffin First UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against the disaffiliation.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was not supported. Yes: 656 No: 737 Abstain: 32.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Snellville UMC was before the annual conference.

There were speeches for and against the ratification.

Point of Information. Carter Posey, Central North, lay, asked about church membership statistics. 2763 members. The number of votes cast was 299.

Bishop Dease called for the vote. The conference voted. The motion was supported.  
Yes: 696 No: 681 Abstain: 38

Point of Information. Carolyn Moore, South East, clergy, asked why Trinity UMC was not approved when a majority of the conference voted to support it. Buckley responded with a calculation, saying that one more person voted to leave rather than to stay. This is not how we calculate “50% +1.”

**Request for a Ruling of Law.** Joe Whittemore, North West, lay, requested a ruling of law on the decision of the chair regarding Trinity UMC.

“Did the Annual Conference Chair err in ruling that a vote of 695 ayes to 694 nays failed to constitute the “simple majority” threshold required to ratify Trinity United Methodist Church – Rome’s disaffiliation request?”

Bishop Dease will respond within 30 days.

Point of Information. Bill Burch, clergy, Central North, noted that the Trustees process says “simple majority.”

Point of Information. Jacob Shepherd, lay, South West, how are abstentions factored into the vote counts? Buckley, the chancellor, noted that votes to abstain are not counted as yes or no.

Point of Information. Betty Williams, lay, Snellville. Was Snellville ratified? Yes.

Moment of personal privilege. Terry Walton, asked for a moment of personal privilege. Our Bishop and district superintendents have done an amazing job in the midst of difficult situations. He asked the conference to thank them for their work. The conference applauded.

**Announcements.** Max Vincent, conference secretary, asked members of the conference to leave their voting devices behind. He thanked the conference for its work.

Jennifer Hansen, clergy, Central South, asked if we could reconsider the vote for Norcross. Bishop Dease ruled that out of order.

Sung Won Nam, clergy, South West, asked to make a motion regarding the Korean Church of Atlanta. Bishop Dease ruled the motion out of order.

Moment of personal privilege. Nate Abrams, lay, Central West, asked for a moment of personal privilege. Nate thanked the district lay leaders for their work in the disaffiliation process.

**Closing Litany.** Bishop Dease led the closing litany. She thanked the conference for its work. She acknowledged the sadness of the day.

Bishop Dease: Like Peter and Paul, Paul, and Barnabas, and the first ecumenical council of the first-century church, we have reached the point at which we feel called to continue our faith journeys separately. Though our paths diverge, we acknowledge that

All: There is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Eph. 4:4-7) As we part, we do so with mercy, recognizing the grace entrusted to each in our Lord Jesus Christ and extending to one another the right hand of fellowship.

UMC members: In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our siblings in the Holy Spirit.

Departing Members: In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our siblings in the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Dease: Let us pray. Loving Creator, through Jesus Christ you reconcile all people and raise us to new life in you. As we scatter to spread the good news, in different places, heal the scars of our division. Bind up the wounds of the brokenhearted and gather us all beneath your healing wings of compassion that we may all stand as witnesses to your great love in Jesus Christ. Hear us now as we pray for one another. (Space is given people to pray)

All: The Lord's Prayer

The conference sang the closing hymn, "Shalom to You."

Charge and Blessing

Bishop: As we depart, may we do so like the disciples released from the fear of the upper room with the words of our risen Lord ringing in our ears, "Peace be with you! As the Father sent me. I am sending you." May we go in love, may we go in faith, may we go in hope, may we go in joy and may we go in peace to love and serve the Lord. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord be kind and gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Amen. (Num. 6:24-26)

The session was adjourned at 3:19pm.

Editor's Note: Attendance was 1836.

**Docket 0424-02**  
**Interested Parties/Persons**  
**North Georgia Annual Conference**

Interested Parties and Persons to Whom Copies Should be Transmitted

Rev Max Vincent [Conf Secretary] <max.vincent@ngumc.net>,  
Matthew Daigle [Asked Q] <matthewcdaigle@gmail.com>,  
Julie Childs [Conf Trustees Chair] <juliechilds67@gmail.com>,  
Carolyn Stephens [Conf Trustees Vice-Chair] <ca.stephens1@gmail.com>,  
Catherine Boothe Olson [Rules Committee Chair] <catherine.boothe@ngumc.net>,  
Bishop Robin Dease [Presiding Bishop] <bishop@ngumc.org>,  
Terry Walton [Bishop's Exec Asst] <terry.walton@ngumc.net>,  
Harold Buckley Jr [Chancellor] <hbuckley@wbilegal.com>,  
Ellen W Jugar [Chancellor's Paralegal] <ejugar@wbilegal.com>,  
Sybil Davidson [Conf Communications] <sdavidson@ngumc.org>,