



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
THE ARKANSAS CONFERENCE

LAURA MERRILL
RESIDENT BISHOP

August 21, 2024

Dear Friends:

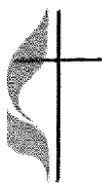
I write to submit a request for a declaratory decision from the Arkansas Annual Conference to the Judicial Council. I realize that we are sending it past the July 15 deadline. Our delay was due in part to a change in conference secretaries and jurisdictional conference hosting duties. I realize it may be too late for inclusion on the Council's fall docket, but we wanted to get it to you in any case.

Thank you for your consideration.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Laura Merrill", followed by a vertical line.

Laura Merrill
Bishop



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
 CONSEIL JUDICIAIRE DE L'EGLISE METHODISTE UNIE
 RECHTSHOF DER EVANGELISCH-METHODISTISCHEN KIRCHE
 CONSELHO JUDICIAL DA IGREJA METODISTA UNIDA
 CONSEJO DE LA JUDICATURA DE LA IGLESIA METODISTA UNIDA



Petition for Declaratory Decision

This form is to be used by the Secretary of the body authorized to petition the Judicial Council for a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision as to the constitutionality, meaning, application, or effect of (please check one):

- The Book of Discipline 2016* or any portion thereof (,r 2610.1)
- any act or legislation of a General Conference (1I 2610.1)
- any proposed legislation (,I 2609.2)

Name of body authorized to make a Petition (41T 2610.2): Arkansas Conference of the UMC

Date of session: June 21, 2024 (month/day/year) Location: Hot Springs, AR

Name of secretary: Rev. Dr. Candace Barron

Address: 800 Daisy Gatson Bates Drive City: Little Rock _____

State/Province: AR ZIP/Postal Code 72202 Country: U S A

Phone: 501-324-8000 Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

To be reviewed (indicate paragraph number, title of legislation and/or act where applicable):

Book of Discipline: Judicial Council Decision #1503 as it relates to Paragraphs 16.7, 340.2 (a)(3)(a), and 2533

Legislation: _____

Act of General Conference: _____

Signature: Candace Barron
 Secretary of the Conference/Body

Date: 08/20/2024
 (month/day/year)

The following must be attached:

- o Text of the written Petition for Declaratory Decision as originally presented
- o Minutes of proceedings
- o List of names and addresses of interested parties, including eu mail
- o Other relevant materials (e.g. conference rules, resolutions, policies, reports)

► Send electronic copy of this form and all materials in PDF and Microsoft Word format to: **secretary@umcjudicialcouncil.org**

► Mail thirteen (13) sets of hard copies to:
**UMC Judicial Council, c/o LaNella Smith, Assistant to the J.C. Secretary,
 1215 Shady Lane, Durham, NC 27712**

Rationale

This request for a declaratory decision requests that the Judicial Council clarify their Decision 1503 as it relates to paragraphs 16.7, 340.2 (a)(3)(a), and 2533 clarifying the relative authority of a local church pastor and a local church Board of Trustees in the use of church property for religious services.

Request for a Declaratory Decision:

We move that the Arkansas Annual Conference request a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church that clarifies Judicial Council Decision 1503 as it relates to the following:

Division Two, Section II, Article *N*, sub-article 6, of the Constitution (published as ¶ 16.7 in the 2016 *Discipline*), which establishes that authority for providing "the hymnal and ritual of the Church" and for "all matters relating to the form and mode of worship..." is given to the General Conference.

Paragraph 340.2(a) (3) (a) of the 2016 *Discipline*, which defines "the responsibilities and duties of a pastor" to include authority "To perform the marriage ceremony after due counsel with the parties involved and in accordance with the laws of the state and the rules of The United Methodist Church." This legislation continues, in the following sentence, to say that, "The decision to perform the ceremony shall be the right and responsibility of the pastor."

Paragraph 2533 of the 2016 *Discipline*, which defines the powers and limitations of the local church board of trustees and says, "... 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..."

Dr. Rebekah Miles

Rev. Hammet Evans

Proceedings

of the Twenty-First Session of the Arkansas Conference

June 19-21, 2024

Bishop Laura Merrill, Presiding

Reverend Candace Barron, Secretary

FRIDAY, June 21 MINUTES

The morning business session was opened with worship and a few reminders from Bishop Laura Merrill.

Ballots #5 and #6 for Jurisdictional Conference were opened with the laity vote. Lynn Baker and Harold Hughes were elected.

Rev. Jim Polk, assistant to the bishop, brought the Standing Rules to the Conference body. The Standing Rules govern the life of the Conference throughout the year. The rules begin on Page 44 of the PCJ. Changes can be found on Page 57 and 58 in the PCJ. The full report, including the changes and one amendment, were approved.

The Restart Initiative Report was given by the Rev. Dr. Michael Roberts, director of the ReStart Initiative and senior pastor at Jonesboro FUMC. Testimonies were given by pastors and representatives from Cabot, Fairview-Camden, Central-Fayetteville, Hope FUMC, Jonesboro FUMC, El Dorado FUMC, Maumelle UMC, and Searcy FUMC.

Rev. Rashim Merriwether, Special Assistant to the Bishop on Ethnic Concerns and Initiatives and senior pastor of Hunter UMC, gave the report on Dismantling the Sin of Racism.

Karon Mann, chairperson for the Committee on the Episcopacy, gave the committee report.

Rev. Bill Sardin, pastor of Morrilton UMC, gave the report for the Board of Discipleship. Dylan White, a representative of the Upper Room, presented the One Matters Discipleship Award to Fairview UMC in Camden. Rev. Sardin presented the Denman Evangelism Award to Katie McLean, laity, minister to children and families at First UMC Batesville, and to the Rev. Haley Jones, clergy, pastor of community engagement at FUMC Little Rock. The award is given for those who present exceptional ministry in evangelism.

Rev. Rebekah Miles and Rev. Hammett Evans made a motion asking the Arkansas Conference to seek a declaratory decision for Judicial Council decision 1503, which defines the relative role

of the Board of Trustees on the use of the church property. Judicial Council 1503, based on paragraph 2533 which outlines the powers of the Board of Trustees at the local level, says that nothing in Paragraph 2533 would prevent a church's Board of Trustees from adopting policies prohibiting certain worship services, including same-sex marriages. The request for a declaratory decision was approved and will be submitted to the judicial council.

Bishop Merrill updated the body on the condition of Rev. Larry Kelso and the Rev. Alicia McCastlain, both of whom have been released from the hospital.

The Annual Conference Prayer was offered by the Rev. Katie Pierce, pastor of FUMC Batesville.

The Rev. Wayne Clark, director of the Methodist Foundation of Arkansas, gave a report on the work of the foundation. The full report can be found on Page 95 of the PCJ.

Amanda Smith, executive director of the Methodist Family Health Foundation, gave a report on the work of the foundation. She also announced that the 2024 church generosity awards were given to Arkadelphia FUMC, Bella Vista UMC, Brinkley FUMC, Clarksville FUMC, Conway FUMC, Harmony UMC, Malvern UMC, Morefield UMC, St. James UMC Little Rock, and Star City UMC.

Rev. Roy Smith, senior pastor at Trinity UMC in Little Rock, gave a report on the Conference Board of Higher Education. The full report can be found on Page 76 of the PCJ. Rev. Dr. Trip Lowrey, Assistant General Secretary of Ministry and Formation for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, also gave a report to the body on the work of GBHM.

President Carla Cardoza gave a report on the work of the Lydia Patterson Institute in El Paso, Texas.

Dr. Karen Petersen, president of Hendrix College, gave a report on the work of the college. The full report can be found on Page 92 of the PCJ.

Dr. Cythia A. Bond Hopson, interim president of Philander Smith University, gave a report on the work of the university.

Rev. Dr. Rebekah Miles, Susanna Wesley Centennial Professor of Practical Theology and Ethics Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor at Southern Methodist University, gave a report on the work of Perkins School of Theology.

The Service of Remembrance was held. The Rev. U.C. Washington brought the message.

The afternoon business session was opened with the Prayer for Annual Conference brought by the Rev. Brittany Richardson Watson, pastor at Little Rock First United Methodist Church. Bishop Merrill asked for a time of prayer in response to a shooting today in Fordyce.

Rev. Dr. Candace Barron, Conference Secretary, brought forward the Consent Calendar as found on Pages 69-89 of the PCJ. The calendar was approved.

Rev. Barron also asked for approval of the covering motion, which was approved.

The Monitoring Report will be sent by email next week from Rev. Sara Bayles Charlton.

A short discussion was held concerning the Mentimeter system, with opportunities to give opinions about next steps in ministry after leaving Annual Conference.

Karon Mann, laity, General Conference delegate, reported on the Jurisdictional Conference pool to be presented as the Jurisdictional Conference in Rogers in July. The names in the pool were accepted. The list will be made public in a few days.

Totals of the collections during Conference include the sales of Arkansas United Methodist pins earned \$987 with Bishop Merrill adding to the total to make the total \$1,200. Project Transformation collected \$1,587.

The next Annual Conference will be held June 18-20, 2025, in Hot Springs.

Lay Leader Kathy Conley gave a word of thanks to Bishop Laura Merrill for her service.

Bishop Merrill brought a word of thanks to the members of the Cabinet, both those leaving and those coming on. She also gave a list of thank yous to those helping to do the work of the Annual Conference.

The setting of the appointments, a covenant renewal service and a baptism brought the Annual Conference to a close.

**Arkansas Annual Conference
Declaratory Decision Interested Parties
Submitted by Rev. LaToya Shepherd, Arkansas Conference Secretary**

Bishop Laura Merrill, Arkansas Conference Bishop

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