



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



Report by Bishop on Decision of Law

This form is to be used for (please check one):

- Reporting of decisions of law made by bishops in response to questions of law submitted to them in writing during the regular business of a conference session (§ 56.3 Const. and ¶ 2609.6 *The Book of Discipline 2016*).
- Reporting of episcopal decisions on questions of law when such decisions are appealed by one-fifth of the members of the conference (§ 56.2 Const. and ¶ 2609.7 *The Book of Discipline 2016*).

Name of Bishop: James E. Swanson, Sr.

Address: 320-E Briarwood Drive City: Jackson

State/Province: MS ZIP/Postal Code 39206 Country: USA

Phone: 601-948-4561 Fax: _____ E-mail: bishop@mississippi-umc.org

Annual Conference: Mississippi Date of session: 06/07/2019 (month/day/year)

Question(s) of Law: _____
See attached

Authorities Cited (indicate paragraph or decision number where applicable):

Constitution: Section VI. Article V Book of Discipline: Paragraph 36

Judicial Council Decision(s): _____

Signature: *James E. Swanson, Sr.*
 Bishop of The United Methodist Church

Date: 06/28/2019
 (month/day/year)

The following must be attached:

- o Decision of Law, including facts, rationale and ruling
 - o Text of the written request for decision
 - o Minutes of annual conference proceedings (relevant portions only)
 - o List of names and addresses of interested parties
 - o Other relevant materials (e.g. conference rules, resolutions, policies, reports)
- Eight (8) hard copies must be submitted via USPS or other delivery service to:
 Clerk Price of the Judicial Council, 5556 N. Sheridan Road, #610, Chicago, IL 60640, USA
- Electronic copies in both Word and PDF (with security features disabled) must be submitted to: secretary@umcjudicialcouncil.org.

Mississippi Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr.

DECISION OF LAW

On Thursday, June 6, 2019, prior to the beginning of the delegate election process, Mr. Tim Crisler did speak to his ineligibility for election as a member for the 2020 Delegation. While he did not ask for a specific ruling from the chair with regards to his eligibility; I did allow Mr. Crisler to share his frustration over not being certified by the Conference Secretary to run for election.

Mr. Crisler's understanding of the requirements for eligibility to be elected as a General and/or Jurisdictional delegate are incomplete. As you have referenced, ¶ 36 of the 2016 Book of Discipline asserts that there are three qualifications for election, and he only met two. First, one must be a professing member for "at least two year next preceding their election," which he is. Second, one must "have been active participants in The United Methodist Church for at least four years next preceding their election;" which he also meets. The final requirement is that candidates "are members thereof within the annual conference electing them at the time of holding the General and jurisdictional" conference, which he was and is not.

As you mentioned, Mr. Crisler is neither an elected member of the annual conference representing his local church nor has he been chosen as an equalizing member of the annual conference by virtue of office, service, or district appointment. He does not meet the full qualifications necessary for election.

With regards to your reference of the 2015 election of Mrs. Anne Harrington as a member of the 2016 Delegation, although she was not "in attendance" during the election; she still was, nevertheless, a duly elected member of the annual conference representing her local church. Although a medical circumstance kept her from attending to vote, she was still the elected member.

Finally, in response to your question about the validity of the 2020 Lay delegates representing the Mississippi Annual Conference, this is a hypothetical circumstance. I cannot find any allowance in the Book of Discipline to disallow those who were properly eligible and duly elected from serving, regardless of someone else's ability or inability to run. Each of those delegates were elected were in their own right.

Bishop James Swanson

Mississippi Annual Conference

June 7, 2019

Question of Law

On Thursday, June 6th, During the Plenary session of the Mississippi Annual Conference you were asked to rule whether a lay member of a conference church was eligible to be a candidate for General and Jurisdictional Conferences. This member, Timothy Christler, was not the lay Delegate to Annual Conference for his church this year. He believed that he qualified because he has been active in his church for more than four years, and has been a member for 2 years. A member of the 2016 Delegation, Mrs. Anne Harrington, was elected in absentia with her alternate delegate being the voting member of Annual conference in her place.

- 1) In light of the exclusion of a lay member of a united Methodist congregation in our conference, Timothy Christler, as a candidate, does Paragraph 36 of the Discipline require that the lay delegates to General Conference be members of the annual conference at the time of their election, regardless of whether or not they met other eligibility requirements?
- 2) If not, is an election of lay delegates invalid when any candidate(s) who meet other constitutional requirements have been excluded because they are not members of the annual conference that year?

Submitted, Respectfully, June 7th by Opal Ann LaSalle, Lay Member of Mississippi annual conference.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Opal Ann LaSalle". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name of the submitter.

MINUTES EXCERPT FROM
The 2019 Session of the MISSISSIPPI ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Thursday, June 6, 2019

MORNING SESSION

The regular annual conference of the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church was convened on Thursday, June 6, 2019, at 9:30 a.m. at the Jackson Convention Center in Jackson, Mississippi, the Bishop being in the chair.

Following a short Bible study, Rev. Trey Harper directed the voting membership to receive their electronic voting machines while non-members removed themselves from the proposed bar of the conference.

The Bishop called the conference to order, inviting Rev. Andy Stoddard to give a welcome address. He recalled his first Annual Conference twenty years prior. Acknowledging the tension, anxiety, and fear that were no doubt present, he emphasized that all present were family. He called the assembly to exercise good faith one with another.

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Rev. Harper administered a practice ballot for the conference. While waiting for the sample ballot to be prepared, the Bishop recognized that that day was the 75th anniversary of D-Day in World War II. He then asked all military veterans to stand and be recognized for their service. The Bishop asked Rev. Dr. Larry Hubbard to lead a prayer of thanksgiving for the results of D-Day and for the physical recovery of Bishop Sharma Lewis and Ms. Delphine Swanson. Rev. Harper announced that lay nominees were able to be taken from the floor, assuming they met the qualifications of *The Book of Discipline*.

Rev. Fitzgerald Lovett asked why Mr. Tim Crisler's name was missing from the list of lay delegates. Rev. Harper answered the question, saying that he had been informed that Mr. Crisler was not a lay member of the Annual Conference. Mr. Crisler rose to a point of order, saying that his disqualification was out of order. Bishop Swanson did not take the point of order, and clarified that the requirements of *The Book of Discipline* were not met. Rev. David Newton rose to clarify that Dennis Dobbs on the list should be listed as Dobbs Dennis.

Mr. Tim Crisler rose to a point of information, asking what in particular disqualified him from being on the ballot. Bishop Swanson recognized Rev. Lindsey Robinson, Superintendent of the Brookhaven District to answer the question. Rev. Robinson explained that upon investigation with the pastor and members of the local congregation, it was determined that Mr. Crisler's election at White Oak (Mr. Crisler's home church) was not valid, and there had been some conflicting communication. Tim Crisler was not the elected lay member of the Annual Conference from White Oak UMC.

Mr. Paul Razee (Grenada) rose to a request for information, asking if there were a way to learn about the additional lay candidates, as information on the earlier delegates was published. Bishop Swanson answered, saying that the Standing Rules did not allow for candidates to give candidacy speeches, which would be the only way to present that information to the body.

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Docket 0420-05

Interested Parties & Persons To Whom Notice Shall Be Given

Ann LaSalle (requested Bishop's Ruling)
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Rev. Trey Harper, Mississippi Annual Conference Secretary
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Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr. (Presiding Bishop)
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