



For Immediate Release
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Bishops respond to Judicial Council Ruling on the Special Session

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Council of Bishops expresses its deep gratitude to the Judicial Council for its careful review of the actions of the 2019 General Conference. The Judicial Council's decisions are clear and sound, and they give helpful guidance to the Church.

[In Decision 1378](#), the Judicial Council ruled that the constitutional parts of the Traditional Plan enacted by the General Conference were severable from those parts that it ruled were unconstitutional. The parts of the Traditional Plan that were declared unconstitutional during the General Conference were held again to be unconstitutional.

[In Decision 1379](#), the Judicial Council ruled that the disaffiliation petition passed by the General Conference is constitutional and clarified that the annual conference must approve a local church's decision to disaffiliate with the denomination in addition to the other requirements set forth in the new legislation.

These are some of the important rulings:

1. The question of local churches exiting from the denomination is one that is determined by votes in the local church and at the annual conference. This retains the value of our connection.
2. The practice of certifying Board of Ordained Ministry members on whether they would follow the *Book of Discipline* in its entirety, including on matters of human sexuality/LGBTQ identity, was found unconstitutional. Current language around sexuality and restrictions on same-sex weddings and ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals was not in question and is retained.
3. Accountability for bishops continues to be lodged in the jurisdictional college or central conference.
4. Exiting churches must pay their fair share of pension liability. Exiting clergy retain their pension but it is converted to limit further liability to the conference.
5. Seven petitions in the Traditional Plan were found to be unconstitutional, consistent with two previous Judicial Council decisions, and eight petitions were found to be constitutional.

Our polity disperses authority to lay and clergy delegates to General Conferences in writing legislation and to the Judicial Council in interpreting the constitutionality of that legislation. Bishops are in the role of providing spiritual and administrative leadership, which is to say, putting in practice the discernments of these two bodies. While additional questions may arise as the new church laws take effect January 1, 2020 (except in Central Conferences), today's decisions provide a path for local churches and annual conferences to move forward. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we pray that we will fulfill the law through our love for one another (Galatians 5. 14).

The peace of the Lord,

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