

SUBJECT TO FINAL EDITING

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

MEMORANDUM NO. 1373

IN RE: Administrative Appeal of Rev. Eric Seise from the Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals.

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 Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals [hereinafter SEJCOA] affirmed on August 8, 2018. Within thirty days, the Appellant filed Notice of Appeal with the Judicial Council.

JURISDICTION

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

DIGEST

The administrative fair process requires that “the respondent (the person against whom involuntary action...is directed) shall have a right to be heard before any final action is taken.” *The Discipline*, ¶ 361.2(a). The right to be heard also means that the clergyperson is entitled to an administrative appellate decision expounding the facts and grounds relied upon that allows him to prepare and bring his case before the Judicial Council. None of that is provided in the 2-page decision of the SEJCOA. The first page serves as cover page; the second page contains the findings of the appellate body in three short paragraphs and the officers’ signatures, but no statement of facts, procedural history, or rationale. From the strikingly brief opinion it was impossible to comprehend how the SEJCOA reached its decision.

With respect to a bishop’s decision of law, the Judicial Council said in Memorandum 1338 that the “Constitution sets a high bar for episcopal rulings both in terms of form and substance.” A decision of law, the Council ruled, must have at least three distinguishable parts: statement of facts, analysis, and disposition. “Bishops are expected to exercise due diligence in fulfilling their constitutional responsibility. Interested parties and others affected by decisions of law deserve nothing less.” *Id.*

What is required of bishops is also expected of administrative appellate bodies such as the SEJCOA. Without a well-reasoned appellate opinion that includes the facts, procedural history, legal authorities, and analysis of the case, the Appellant cannot understand the ruling's rationale and adequately prepare his appeal, nor can the Judicial Council properly review and rule on the merits of his case. At a minimum, the SEJCOA must separately address each of the five grounds alleged by Appellant to have violated fair process.¹

The case is remanded to the SEJCOA for a new ruling within thirty (30) days from the date of this Memorandum.

February 21, 2019

Beth Capen participated in discussion.

Kent Fulton, second lay alternate, was seated and voting when the decision was adopted.

Ruben Reyes was absent.

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

¹ An excellent example is the SEJCOA Opinion rendered in *In the Matter of the Rev. Errol Leslie (2016)*.