

# JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## DECISION NO. 1502

IN RE: Petition for Declaratory Decision from the 2024 General Conference on the Meaning, Application, and Effect of ¶ 512 of the *2016 Book of Discipline* Concerning the Authority of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy to Recommend the Number of Bishops in the Jurisdictions.

### Digest

Under the newly amended and effective ¶ 404.2, the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy has the authority to recommend to the General Conference the number of bishops in all jurisdictions, provided it follows the process set forth in said provision.

### Statement of Facts

The General Conference during plenary session, on May 3, 2024, adopted a motion to request a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council as to the legality and effect of the Interjurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy's proposal for the number of bishops in all the jurisdictions in the U.S. being considered and applied to our budget prior to their enabling legislation coming into effect at the close of this General Conference, asking the following question: What standing does the Interjurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy have to make a recommendation to this effect given their enabling legislation — Calendar Items 546 and 473 — is not yet in effect and the authority they are given through ¶ 512 of the *2016 Book of Discipline* [hereinafter *The Discipline*] does not give an avenue for such a recommendation for all jurisdictions, only in response to single ones?

### Jurisdiction

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction pursuant to ¶ 2610 of the *2016 Book of Discipline* [hereinafter *The Discipline*].

### Analysis and Rationale

The General Conference amended ¶ 404.2 (Calendar Item 546) on April 30, 2024, which became effective immediately and is controlling in this matter. The newly amended paragraph reads:

¶ 404.2 In the jurisdictions, the number of bishops shall be determined on the basis of missional reasons, as approved by the General Conference on recommendation of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy. Before recommending the number of episcopal areas, the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy shall: a) consider these criteria in the following order of priority: 1. the number of charge conferences and the number of active clergy in episcopal areas; 2. the geographic size of episcopal areas; 3. the overall church membership in the annual conferences in the episcopal areas. b) conduct an analysis of the context and missional potential of changes in episcopal areas.

c) analyze the capacity of the episcopal fund to determine the number of bishops that can be funded. The following groups shall be consulted during this analysis of the episcopal fund: the executive committee of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy, the officers of the Council of Bishops, and the officers of the General Council on Finance and Administration. This petition is effective immediately.

The General Conference already answered the question posed in this Petition for Declaratory Decision by giving the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy the authority to recommend to the General Conference “the number of bishops [in the jurisdictions] on the basis of missional reasons.” In making its recommendations, the Committee is required to follow the process set forth in the amended ¶ 404.2.

### **Decision**

Under the newly amended and effective ¶ 404.2, the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy has the authority to recommend to the General Conference the number of bishops in all jurisdictions, provided it follows the process set forth in said provision.