

**TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**IN RE: APPEAL FROM THE ACTION OF THE  
BULGARIA-ROMANIA PROVISIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**NOTICE OF APPEAL BY THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF CENTRAL AND  
SOUTHERN EUROPE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**PURSUANT TO ¶2609.4**

Bishop Patrick Streiff, being the only resident bishop in the College of Bishops of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe of The United Methodist Church (“CC-CSE College”), acting on behalf of the CC-CSE College, hereby serves notice of the CC-CSE’s appeal of the action of the Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Annual Conference to separate from The United Methodist Church and to take related actions associated with the decision to separate, and for these reasons, states:

**Jurisdiction**

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction to hear this appeal pursuant to ¶ 2609.4 of the 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. *See also* Memorandum 1448. Bishop Patrick Streiff is the only active bishop in the CC-CSE College. He and Bishop Heinrich Bolleter, retired, met as the only members of the CC-CSE College on August 30, 2022, and determined to perfect this appeal to the Judicial Council on behalf of the CC-CSE College and as its authorized representatives. Minutes of the August 30, 2022, meeting are attached hereto as Exhibit 1. BOD ¶ 2609.4 has no time limit in which to submit an appeal, and therefore, this appeal is timely.

**Factual Summary**

As indicated by the record attached hereto collectively as Exhibit 2, certain delegates of

NOTICE OF APPEAL OF THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE  
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the Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Annual Conference submitted a resolution calling for the annual conference to withdraw and sever all ties with The United Methodist Church and to become an annual conference of the Global Methodist Church, effective on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2022. The resolution provided that it was “not made based on Article 572 of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church.” No other authority for the separation of the annual conference from the UMC was set forth in the resolution. The minutes of the annual conference session on April 1, 2022, reflect that Bishop Streiff asked the maker of the motion about the legal basis of the motion whereupon Superintendent Daniel Topalski made reference to Judicial Council Decision 1366.

Bishop Streiff then explained to the delegates that there is no legal basis in the Discipline for separation of an annual conference in a central conference except ¶ 572. He further explained that Judicial Council Decision 1366 does not provide a right to an annual conference to separate from the UMC. He also informed the conference that the Council of Bishops has submitted a request for a declaratory decision on Judicial Council Decision 1366. Seeking to avoid a ruling of law that would be authoritative and end any further consideration of the resolution until the ruling was reviewed by the Judicial Council pursuant to ¶ 51, the delegates leading the discussion of the resolution attempted to preclude any decision on a question of law, including stating their position that the bishop’s ruling was out of order as a parliamentary ruling that the delegates could overturn. The delegates appealed the bishop’s ruling to the body, which overturned it. Bishop Streiff informed the body that he would report his ruling to the Judicial Council as required and that no further consideration of the resolution in question should proceed. He then left the chair but not the meeting, and the delegates illegally elected Superintendent Daniel Topalski as chair of the session and the delegates voted to pass the

resolution and separate from the UMC.

Bishop Streiff submitted a timely report of his decision of law to the Judicial Council. On August 23, 2022, the Judicial Council ruled in Memorandum 1448 that it has no jurisdiction because a question of law was not presented. However, in a concurrence, members of the Judicial Council indicated that an appeal could be lodged pursuant to ¶ 2609.4. Therefore, Bishop Streiff, on behalf of the CC-CSE College submits this appeal and requests that the Judicial Council reverse the decision of the Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Annual Conference to separate from The United Methodist Church, ruling that the decision and all related decisions are not authorized and are null and void.

#### **Grounds for Appeal**

The decision of the Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Annual Conference to separate from The United Methodist Church was not authorized, *ultra vires*, and therefore null and void as Bishop Streiff ruled during the annual conference session. In Decision 1444, the Judicial Council ruled that an annual conference has no right to vote to separate or take any action regarding possible separation from the UMC pursuant to ¶ 33 or the interpretation of that paragraph in Decision 1366. Therefore, the decision to separate and all related decisions should be reversed and ruled to be null and void.



BISHOP PATRICK STREIFF

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I certify that this Notice of Appeals has been served upon the following persons by electronic mail (as pdf) on this 31<sup>st</sup> day of August, 2022:

Daniel G. Topalski  
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BISHOP PATRICK STREIFF

Note:

The ordained elders Daniel G. Topalski, Krasimir Madzharov and Tsvetan Ilief, each one individually, sent in to me as bishop that they surrender their credentials as an elder in The United Methodist Church effective May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 and ask to be received as an elder from the Global Methodist Church.

## **Interested Parties**

### **Docket 0423-01 [0522-01 Bulgaria-Romania]**

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College of Bishops of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

## **Minutes of the phone conference of August 30, 2022**

Attendees: Bishop Patrick Streiff, resident bishop  
Bishop Heinrich Bolleter, retired

### **1. Judicial Council Memorandum 1448 and follow up**

Bishops Streiff and Bolleter have taken note of and discussed the Memorandum 1448 related to the session of the Provisional Annual Conference Bulgaria – Romania. They both agreed that it would be important for the Judicial Council to decide on the legality of the decisions taken at said conference on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2022.

**Moved and agreed that Bishop Streiff submits an appeal, based on BOD ¶ 2609.4.**

Zurich, August 30, 2022

  
Bishop Patrick Streiff



[Note from Bishop Streiff:

This is a translation done by DeepL-program; I only revised where needed official terms (e.g. 'Judicial Council') and sent a note to the secretary of conference, for two corrections:

- I promised to call a special session of the annual conference within 10-40 days (not 10-14 days) after a ruling of the Judicial Council that would allow the annual conference to vote on the motion.
- in the speech of Rares Calugar, it should read 'General Conference' not 'annual conference']

1 April 2022 - start of the working session

Patrick Streiff: On the agenda, part of the order for today is a vote on the decision to leave the United Methodist Church in Bulgaria and Romania. First, I would ask the superintendent to read the full text of the motion.

Daniel Topalski read the full text of the proposal (it will be attached)

Patrick Streiff: What we're voting on here, we're doing it as the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. At this point, the Discipline of The United Methodist Church still applies to us. In discussions prior to this session and receiving this decision, I shared with the superintendents of the cabinet that I see no legal basis in the Discipline for such a decision. I shared that the only legal basis I see in the Discipline for an Annual Conference to leave The United Methodist Church is Article 572. In my opinion, that is the only legal option to leave The United Methodist Church. And because it is the only option, I have to determine this decision to be a violation of order. When the bishop determines that something is a violation of order because it is a violation of the Discipline, it cannot be part of the Annual Conference. Then those making the motion have the right and opportunity to state the basis of their motion. Then it becomes a question of law. I have to determine this motion for a ruling that it is a breach of order because it violates the Discipline. You are free to challenge it and say on what grounds you object.

Daniel Topalski: I challenge the bishop's determination that it is a violation of order, arguing that any such decision by him is a parliamentary decision. Even when he considers that the motion has no basis in the Discipline. We are under no obligation to seek a ruling on a point of law, and I exercise my right to challenge his ruling and appeal to Annual Conference to rule on the matter. It is the consistent practice of the Judicial Council that Episcopal determinations of violation of order are appealed to the Annual Conference and the Judicial Council does not rule on these matters. We simply challenge the ruling and appeal to the Annual Conference for a decision as to whether or not it supports the Bishop's ruling, and that is consistent with the Discipline.

Patrick Streiff: I want the legal basis of your proposal.

Daniel Topalski: As we said in the motion, we don't think that Article 572 applies to us. It talks about autonomous, affiliated and post-affiliated churches. It specifies that churches retain some kind of relationship with the United Methodist Church. We do not intend that. It is clear from our decision that we do not want to become a church within the meaning of Article 572, the preceding article sheds light on this. We wish to join the Global Methodist Church on May 1, 2022, not to maintain our relationship with the United Methodist Church. Essentially, according to Decision 1366, rendered on another occasion, the constitutional plans before the 2019 General Conference, the Judicial Council determined that the Annual Conference has a basic and fundamental right to its decision to leave. It is not settled by the Discipline and must still be settled at some time. But the General Conference is inactive and cannot make such a decision; it may as well remain silent on the matter. That does not mean that we are not allowed to act. The fundamental rights of the basic units of The United Methodist Church cannot be dependent upon the inaction of the General Conference. If there are no other rules, according to the general ones, we can ask for and vote on one. With that, I state the legal grounds and repeat that we can vote on whether or not the Presiding Bishop's decision to declare the motion out of order is correct. I appeal to the Annual Conference to vote on whether or not this should be part of the agenda. Acts are important, not intentions - a basic legal position. The Annual Conference can and should rule. If the Bishop is unwilling to put this matter to a vote, I will ask for the suspension of the rules and the removal of the current Presiding Bishop and the appointment of a new Presiding Bishop.

Patrick Streiff: Are you referring to legal counsel?

Daniel Topalski: No, I don't.

Patrick Streiff: The legal basis for you is Judicial Council decision 1366. For information to the Annual Conference - I want to share that the Council of Bishops asked for an interpretive ruling on this Decision 1366. Whether the Annual Conference in the United States can leave The United Methodist Church, or whether there are other elements in the Discipline that limit a vote on such a decision. This question is before the Judicial Council. It is hoped that by April the Judicial Council will rule and clarify the issue. When we vote on what Daniel Topalski has suggested, that he is challenging my decision, it is related to a legal issue. You may have a different opinion on that, but it will be a legal question that I will refer to the Judicial Council. That is my obligation. Legal matters before the Judicial Council can become effective when it has ruled. I understand the urgency that you see for the motion that has been made. I promise you that if and when the Judicial Council rules that it is legal, then I will call a special session of the Annual Conference within 10-14 [note: 10-40] days of such a ruling. Then you can vote on that decision. I have no intention of preventing the separation if it has a legal basis.

Daniel Topalski: What about my proposal?

Tsvetan Iliev: It is not a legal question, but a procedural one. We have before us Daniel Topalski's proposal to judge whether we accept the bishop's decision or not.



I call on the Annual Conference to vote.

Jessica Morris-Ivanova: According to Robert's Rules of Order, we can make a decision about that. I support the view that section 572 does not apply to us. We don't want to become autonomous, we want to leave the United Methodist Church. With all due respect, this article says that the Annual Conference has the right to decide. It is our right, and it may be part of the order, to make a voting decision.

Krasimir Madjarov: I reject the proposal made by the bishop. You heard, the Annual Conference has the right to decide for itself. You heard, Article 572 is not for us, we do not want to be an autonomous church. Now is the time for the Annual Conference to vote on the decision to leave the United Methodist Church.

Mariela Mihailova: I support the vote on such a decision. It is democratic to be able to do it. Otherwise we would be lost. I have witnessed that the procedures are slow and cumbersome and there is a danger that the voice of a church community will not be heard. To me, it is a waste of time to continue to comment on the issue of inclusivity. We have more important work to do.

Patrick Streiff: Let me read a short paragraph from Decision 1366 (English original): "An annual conference has the right to vote to withdraw from The United Methodist Church. This reserved right, however, is not absolute but must be counterbalanced by the General Conference's power to "define and fix the powers and duties of annual conferences" in par. 16.3. The last sentence in par. 33 reaffirms this authority by stating that the annual conference "shall discharge such duties and exercise such powers as the General Conference under the Constitution may determine."

This means that the Annual Conference has rights and authority, but they are not absolute and are related to what the General Conference determines. This is the reason we have a legal issue. You can vote that my decision is incorrect and that you see a basis for your motion based on Article 33, but that is a legal question.

Daniel Topalski: It says in the rules, whoever makes the motion - insist. There is a motion before the Annual Conference to rule on the Bishop's determination that our motion is out of order. This has been debated in the Judicial Council. I don't accept being pushed into a point of law and missing our opportunity to vote. I challenge the Bishop's determination that it is a violation of order, and move that Annual Conference reject it. If the bishop does not want this vote to happen, I make a motion to suspend the presiding bishop and elect another to allow us to vote. No one can take that right away from us.

Tsvetan Iliev: I also want to call on the Annual Conference to vote on the rightness of the bishop's decision.

Krasimir Madjarov: I support.

Patrick Streiff: Then let's vote - I've determined it's a violation of the order because there's no legal basis in the Discipline. Those who disagree with my decision may raise their hand.

Vote against Bishop's ruling that this was a violation of order: ayes - 35, nays - 0, abstentions - 0. I will report this to the Judicial Council because it is a legal matter in my opinion.

If the answer of the Judicial Council is that there is a legal basis, I will call a special session of the Annual Conference within 10-14 [note: 10-40] days. So that the decision be before the Annual Conference for a vote.

Daniel Topalski: I have a different understanding of the situation. The bishop ruled by ruling that our proposal was in violation of the order. We voted and ruled that the motion was not out of order. That is what I see as the immediate and self-evident consequence. If he wants to, to then refer our decision to legal counsel if we vote on a decision. We are not bound by any forthcoming decisions of the Judicial Council as to whether we can exercise our rights or whether we accept the Bishop's opinion. The logic is infinitely simple, let's not reverse the rules.

Patrick Streiff: At this point, I'm going to close the debate, as bishop of the United Methodist Church. If you want to continue this, you can do it with another chair. But not as part of the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. [The bishop steps down from the chair]

Daniel Topalski: If any bishop could obstruct the work of the Annual Conference, we would not be a Methodist church. I move that we remove the bishop from the presidency and proceed with the election of an interim president. Those in favor to signify by a show of hands - 35 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions.

Tsvetan Iliev: I accept the nominations for Chair.

Vladimir Zhelezov: I nominate former superintendent Daniel Topalski.

Tsvetan Iliev: Are there any other nominations?

35 in favour, none against and none abstentions.

Daniel Topalski: I am serving in this capacity on an interim basis. You have the offer. It has come a long way. Discussion and debate have established the continuation towards our future. We have reason to make this decision. I have been told that Decision 1366 is balanced by the rights of the General Conference. It has not exercised them because it has not found it necessary. The right to life, personal dignity and conscience are fundamental rights. Voids in law, including ecclesiastical law, should do no harm. You have the proposal. You have an opportunity to comment before we vote.

Bedros Altounian: I didn't think I was going to speak. Like almost the few attendees at the founding, after 47 years of not having a bishop, when we got one, it was a celebration. We welcomed our bishop with great love. Our bishops were well respected, and we had that same respect for Bishop John. Patrick Streiff. He has supported the Annual Conference in Bulgaria ever since. Today we are compelled to be part of such an Annual Conference. The

young people have a new vision and this crisis situation has united them all. Never has the pastoral college been so united and strong as today. Fire purifies always. We are experiencing such a moment. If there is a value to be proud of, it is tolerance. We, the older generation of pastors, see that everything is done with love and understanding. For two years and more this has been going on. And to comment on whether or not we are going to separate already sounds absurd. Whatever happens, we must do it with love. We are grateful that the Central Conference has helped rebuild the church. In my opinion, nothing should change in our attitude toward the Central Conference. There is a different culture here. What is normal for America is not normal here. The church has a right to conform to its view on theological issues. I believe that we must come to a decision about the future with peace. I don't want to take the bishop's place, but he has a responsibility to both the Central Conference and the Council of Bishops. The decision to divide the church required a clear statement. I think we need to calm down and think about the future. I believe that the new generation will do more than us.

Daniel Topalski: Other statements? None? Okay? You have seen that along with the decision there is a proposal to amend the statutes. We are not making any substantive amendments. What we are proposing is the change in the preamble. All the other decisions have to do with whether in the new church we will have an appointed bishop, or an interim president to provide for the situation somewhat. The Annual Conference with the consent of the Bishop or the Interim President and so on... We are not dissolving the EMEC in Bulgaria legal entity. There are requirements of the law. This constitution does not comply with it. In any legal problem, there will be adequate regulation and then the Bulgarian law will apply, not the Discipline. This is something our American friends cannot understand. We live in countries with their own legislation. This is a sign of sovereignty. Methodists may think it does not apply to us, but it does not.

Margarita Todorova: No matter how painful the issue is, I think that everyone has gone through their own struggle. We have considered. With a sense of responsibility. I don't like conflict and I grew up in this church. It's painful for me. I recently came across a story very relevant to our situation: they put some frogs in a pot of cold water and it heated up. The frogs don't jump out. Their bodies adjust to the temperature. However, the temperature continues to rise and the frog compensates to adapt. There comes a point where it can no longer adapt, it wants to jump out but it doesn't have the strength. We set a quick deadline because how much strength do we have to adapt? In the end we will not have the strength. By continuing to compromise, we will not have the strength. As much as it pains me and I don't want to split the church, we have come to a decision point. I don't want to be like those frogs.

Jessica Morris-Ivanova: I support this decision and I am aware that we are the church in Bulgaria and Romania. I also want to hear the voice of Romania, we were very noisy, the Bulgarians. Could you share?

Raresh Kalugar: I had raised my hand but nobody noticed me. We have been faithful to the process so far and have been patient. Even after the Annual Conference [note: General Conference] was postponed, we hoped that it would be held in 2022, the Protocol would be voted and then there would be a peaceful outcome. We want it to be a peaceful outcome. I also want to see the difference between the man Patrick and Bishop Streiff. He is trying to do his duty but since we are in a democratic church - we can vote. Maybe someone else will decide rightly or wrongly this is done today. But I told my colleagues and the bishop yesterday that it is immoral for me to go to the Central Conference Special Session and vote for a bishop who will not be our bishop. So why the rush? Because I don't want us to be part of a superintendent's meeting and talk about a future that we won't be part of. I feel like I'm being held hostage in a place and by people who are talking about a common future but without us. Not because the reason is that they don't want us to not be a part of that future, but for the reason that we want to continue in another denomination. To be part of a church where the people are our brothers and sisters from all over the world, working together, with the same heart, led by the same Spirit. We are not against the United Methodist Church and by leaving we are not saying that they are not the church of Jesus Christ. But we want to continue our journey with people who understand the mission as we do and have the same understanding on an issue that is fundamentally fundamental. So that we can build together on a foundation on which we agree. This year, if there was a General Conference, we would have waited and not made such a proposal. The other thing that motivates us to do it now is because the new church is starting soon and we don't want someone else deciding for us. We want to be partners with them, to be involved in the decisions about the building of the new church and have our brothers take us into consideration. We don't want to be pushed into a place where we will be dependent on Central Conference and unable to take care of our future. Why shouldn't we care about our future? It makes sense to me that it should happen now. Because we want to make our own decisions. Because others are making plans for the future of The United Methodist Church, why not us? I want to be part of the decisions about the future of my church in Romania. I am in favor of this decision and have nothing personal against Patrick Streiff. There are people in Romania who will regret it if the relationship with Patrick Streiff does not continue.

Daniel Topalski: If there are no speeches, I will make a personal note. I found myself as the protagonist and I don't want you to think that this is my personal battle with the bishop. You have witnessed for yourselves that we did not oppose the bishop - the decision for the superintendent was accepted. I am not pursuing my own career. I would have done it outside the church, but everyone makes their own choices. I have no personal controversy with the bishop. I have acted guided by my own convictions. Do NOT think my behavior is waging a personal war. I am motivated by my convictions.

CW [?]: All of us in the regular pastoral fellowship that we have have expressed our position of support for leaving the United Methodist Church. I personally have not felt influenced to do so - I have acted out of my own conviction. I believe that to be part of a church that ordains and wreaths [?] the entire spectrum of LGBTQIA+ would not only send us to the margins of

evangelical life in this country, it would mean our complete erasure from it. No mission we could accomplish. It would look like a ritual suicide of our inner cities, after which there would not even be anyone to weep for us. I don't see any other option but to vote on the decision to leave the United Methodist Church and proselytize to the Global Methodist Church.

Krassimir Madjarov: With this discussion and with the decision we are going to take, we are clearly expressing our internal convictions. This is a clear and precise statement of our faith. This is our choice. Conscience, the voice of God, speaks in us and it is good to listen to that voice every time. I affirm the words of Raresh Kalugar that as a superintendent I see no point in attending Central Conference sessions. I have nothing against the Bishop personally, but I do not wish to participate in discussions that make no sense.

Daniel Topalski: The voice of human conscience can be the voice of God only through God's grace.

Nerses Ketikian: And for me, as a pastor of a small church, it's important that this decision be voted on. You don't know Mr. Topalski if you think he is out to influence. He is a man of truth and puts everything on the table, letting everyone decide for themselves. Back when the discussions started, we were used to living in a western dictatorship for years, where some people in some offices decide for other people and call it a democracy. We should decide, not people in cubicles. I join, as part of the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church and the Armenian community in the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church, in this decision. Today we are making a new beginning. Bulgaria will not be the last wagon, but the locomotive. And we will show that in a true democracy, the community decides, not people in cubicles. My call is to accept this decision and work for God. When we do our part, God will do his.

Christian Istrate: It's hard to talk about, but I understand that everything we do is out of love, and I know - it doesn't force anyone. I am tired from the depths of my heart and soul of making excuses for the United Methodist Church. I've been doing it for 11 years now. I've done it to other evangelical organizations. I've apologized to historic churches like the Unitarians and the Orthodox Church when it came to different ways of viewing sexuality in our church. I want to be a part of a church where I won't apologize anymore. To keep saying that they think this way, but we don't. I want to be in a place where people think alike, have one purpose and one mission. I want to be happy in such a place, with everyone to share that this is who we are. Faithful Wesleyans - loving God and neighbor. But without this ongoing war. This is a long term war and I know countries like ours feel held hostage, captive for many years. There have been occasions and places where I have not felt significant. In the presence of Methodist theologians looking at us as second hand intellectuals just because we think differently than they do. I believe the Church needs to hold fast to truth and recontextualize the Gospel. The cross of Christ is still the cross of Christ. It has not become something else and it is still bloody. Christ is still just as beaten. On the cross He has not

become something else. He rose again that we might be witnesses of His resurrection. I only believe in the progress of going back to the cross.

DT: If there are no other speakers, I will move the vote to leave. We will vote on the resolution and the statute separately.

**I put to the vote the decision to leave before you, which you know well enough. 35 in favour, none against and no abstentions. The decision was adopted by all members present at the conference.**

The proposal to change the statutes is also before you. It reflects the proposed deletion and insertion. We do not have a translation of this text. If the bishop wants, we will translate it.

Nerses Ketikian: Let's vote on all the motions en bloc.

Daniel Topalski: It's a technical job. The document will be translated for the bishop. The vote is only for the Bulgarian part of the conference.

**Voting on the amendments to the Statutes of EMEC in Bulgaria - FOR - 32, AGAINST - 0, ABSTAIN - 0**

The amendments will be submitted to the Sofia City Court. The minutes must be signed by all. If anyone cares about the right to collect personal data - we are the controller and we are very responsible to them. We are the controller with regard to the persons who are in service with EMEC in Bulgaria. Only when they are requested by the court, then they are provided.

I declare this matter exhausted and recess for 30 minutes.

Margarita Todorova: Message. At the women's annual conferences we collect the membership fee. The last two years we have not held. We used to have an ANNUAL CONFERENCE for this. Mariana Genova is the treasurer, but she is not here. I will collect the membership dues.

**Annual Conference for Bulgaria and Romania**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**01 April 2022**

**I. Our Way Forward – discussion and voting on the *Resolution of the Annual Conference for Bulgaria and Romania for Withdrawal from the United Methodist Church***

**Bishop Patrick Streiff** called the meeting to order opening with the following statement:

According to the agenda, the first item for consideration today is to vote on a resolution for Bulgaria and Romania to leave the United Methodist Church. First, I would like to ask the Superintendent to read the full text of the resolution.

**Daniel Topalski** read the full text of the resolution:

**RESOLUTION OF THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE FOR BULGARIA AND ROMANIA FOR  
WITHDRAWAL  
FROM THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

In light of the current crisis in The United Methodist Church, the Annual Conference for Bulgaria and Romania enacts the following resolution:

1. The Annual Conference for Bulgaria and Romania (registered as the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church in Bulgaria and the various legal entities in Romania) withdraws from and severs all ties, legal or otherwise, with The United Methodist Church as of 01 May 2022 and immediately becomes an annual conference of the Global Methodist Church, a Wesleyan Christian church that upholds the authority of Scripture and seeks to live in obedience to the Lord's commands, as we understand them. From henceforth, this annual conference commits itself to live under the doctrinal standards and polity of the Global Methodist Church, as stipulated in its *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline* and the *Book of Doctrines and Discipline* as hereafter adopted by its General Conference. This resolution is not made on the basis of Article 572 of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church.
2. The Annual Conference for Bulgaria and Romania (registered as the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church in Bulgaria and the various legal entities in Romania) shall operate under the bishop or president pro tempore assigned by the Transitional Leadership Council of The Global Methodist Church, on the date at which this resolution becomes effective. The annual conference will assume responsibility for all salary, social and health benefits and operating expenses of such office. The Annual Conference for Bulgaria and Romania releases any claim on the Episcopal Fund of The United Methodist Church effective upon the date of its withdrawal from The United Methodist Church.
3. The national leadership cabinet of the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church in Bulgaria and the superintendent of the Romanian part of the Annual Conference are directed and

empowered to take all actions necessary to effectuate this resolution for withdrawal from The United Methodist Church and joining with the Global Methodist Church. The first step in relation to this will be for the Annual Conference to amend the Articles of Incorporation of the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church in Bulgaria according to the Laws for Religious Institutions and the present resolution.

4. The Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church in Bulgaria and the various legal entities in Romania retain the entirety of their tangible and intangible property.

5. Immediately after the adoption of this resolution, the clergy of this Annual Conference shall meet in an executive session, with each clergy member having the opportunity to sign a declaration of intent to surrender their credentials in The United Methodist Church, affirming their commitment to the *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline* of the Global Methodist Church, and requesting issuance of credentials from the Global Methodist Church. Clergy members of the Annual Conference who have signed such a declaration shall thereafter be entitled to a vote as clergy in the Annual Conference. Upon receiving the declaration, the Board of Ministry of the Annual Conference shall issue ordination credentials to persons signing the declaration recognizing their status in the Global Methodist Church. Persons who do not sign the declaration shall have no vote in the Annual Conference and their failure to sign the declaration shall constitute a resignation from any board, agency, or leadership position in the Annual Conference. The same rule applies to all local pastors who sign the declaration continue their ministry in the Global Methodist church.

6. Any clergy member of the Annual Conference who desires to remain part of The United Methodist Church shall apply for transfer to an annual conference of The United Methodist Church in accordance with its *Book of Discipline*.

7. Any lay members of the Annual Conference who intend to remain members of The United Methodist Church after the adoption of this resolution shall recuse themselves from any Annual Conference boards, agencies, and leadership positions and shall abstain from all votes on business of the Annual Conference after the adoption of this resolution.

8. Any congregation of the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church in Bulgaria and in the Romanian part of the Annual Conference that desires to remain part of The United Methodist Church may do so by a simple majority vote of all professing members present and voting at a regular or called church conference. Such action must occur within one calendar year of this resolution becoming effective.

9. The Annual Conference for Romania and Bulgaria commits itself to allow the free flow of information to clergy and congregations, so that they may make an informed decision for their future without intimidation or the withholding of information.

**Bishop Streiff:** The resolution that is under consideration has been brought before the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. As such, we are under the jurisdiction of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. In the discussions that were had prior to this session after I received this resolution, I shared with your



superintendents that I do not see a legal basis in the Discipline for the acceptance of such a resolution. I shared with them that the only legal grounds that I see for an Annual Conference to leave the United Methodist Church are found in Article 572 of the Discipline. This is the only legal possibility for leaving the United Methodist Church. And because this is the only option, I have to rule that this decision is out of order.

When a bishop determines that something is out of order because it is a violation of the Discipline, it cannot be considered by the Annual Conference. Then those who have submitted such a resolution have the right and opportunity to declare on what grounds they have brought their resolution. Then it becomes a question of law. I declare this resolution to be out of order because it violates the Discipline. You are free to challenge it and say on what grounds you oppose it.

**Daniel Topalski:** I appeal the decision of the bishop that this resolution is out of order, on the basis that this is a question not of law but of parliamentary procedure. Despite the bishop's admonition that the resolution has no legal grounds in the Discipline and that is a question of law, we are not asking for a ruling on a question of law. I exercise my right to appeal the "out of order" ruling and call upon the Annual Conference to move forward and vote on this matter.

**Tsvetan Iliev:** I second the motion.

**Daniel Topalski:** The procedure states, as upheld by the Judicial Council, that when the bishop declares an item as "out of order", the appeal can be made by the Annual Conference and still be voted upon. The Judicial Council does not rule on these issues and this is not a question of law. We are simply challenging the "out of order" ruling and I call upon the Annual Conference to decide whether or not they will uphold the bishop's ruling. This is in accordance with the Discipline.

**Patrick Streiff:** I would like to hear the legal basis for your resolution.

**Daniel Topalski:** As we have stated in the resolution, we do not believe that Article 572 applies to us. That article speaks only about autonomous, affiliated and semi-affiliated churches that maintain some kind of relationship with the United Methodist Church. This is not our aim. The resolution clearly states that we do not want to become a church as is delineated in Article 572. We want to join the Global Methodist Church effective 01 May 2022 and not to remain an affiliated church with the United Methodist Church.

The legal grounds on which we propose this resolution are in accordance with Decision #1366 of the Judicial Council, a ruling that was made in preparation for the Special General Conference held in 2019. In that ruling the Judicial Council was considering the different constitutional plans being proposed to the Special GC and the Judicial Council determined that an Annual Conference has a fundamental and basic right to choose to withdraw from the UMC as a body. This is not explicitly found in the Discipline and it should be. But the General Conference has been inactive on this issue and has remained silent on it.

This does not mean, however, that we have no right to act. The fundamental rights of the acting bodies of the United Methodist Church cannot depend on the inaction of the General Conference. If there are no other rulings that specifically relate to our resolution, we can act in accordance with the general procedures and therefore, we can call for a vote on this resolution.

With this clarification of our legal grounds, I reiterate that we have the right to vote on whether or not to accept the decision of the presiding bishop who has ruled the resolution to be “out of order”. I urge the Annual Conference to vote on whether or not this item will be a part of our agenda. What matters are actions, not intentions - a basic legal position. The annual conference can and should vote. If the bishop does not wish to put the matter to a vote, I will move to suspend the rules and remove the presiding bishop so that a new chair be appointed during the consideration of this matter.

**Patrick Streiff:** Do you refer to the Judicial council?

**Daniel Topalski:** No, I don't.

**Patrick Streiff:** The legal basis you mention is Decision 1366 of the Judicial Council. For your information as regards the Annual Conference, I would like to share that the Council of Bishops have asked for an interpretative decision on this Decision 1366 as to whether an Annual Conference in the United States can leave the United Methodist Church or if there are other elements in the Discipline that restrict voting on such a matter. This question is being considered by the Judicial Council. We hope that by April the Judicial Council will issue a ruling and clarify the issue. When we vote on what Daniel Topalski has proposed in appealing my decision, this is a question of law. You may have a different opinion about this, but it will be a question of law that I will refer to the Judicial Council. This is my duty.

Questions of law can become effective once the Judicial Council has ruled on them. I understand the urgency you see for the resolution that has been presented. I promise you that if and when the Judicial Council decides that this is a legal course of action, I will immediately call for a special session of the Annual Conference within 10-14 days of such a decision. You can then vote on this resolution. I do not intend to prevent your departure from the UMC if it has a legal basis.

**Daniel Topalski:** And what about my motion?

**Tsvetan Iliev:** The issue at hand is not legal but procedural. Before us is the proposal of Daniel Topalski to decide whether or not we will accept the decision of the bishop that this agenda item is out of order. I call on the Annual Conference to vote.

**Jessica Morris-Ivanova:** According to *Robert's Rules of Order – 11<sup>th</sup> Edition*, p. 255-260, when something is determined to be out of order and then appealed, we, as an Annual Conference, can vote as to whether or not we want to proceed and consider

the matter. It is our right to vote on this resolution. I support the opinion that Article 572 does not apply to us. We do not want to become an affiliated church, but to leave the United Methodist Church. With all due respect to the bishop, this Article says that the Annual Conference has the right to express its desire to leave. It is our right to express this desire by voting on the resolution.

**Krasimir Madjarov:** I reject the resolution made by the bishop. You have heard that the Annual Conference has the right to decide for itself. You have heard also that Article 572 is not for us. We do not want to be an affiliated church. Now is the time for the Annual Conference to vote on the resolution to leave the United Methodist Church.

**Mariela Mihailova:** I support the vote on the resolution. It is democratic to be able to do so. Otherwise, we would be lost. I have witnessed how slow and cumbersome church procedures can be and there is a danger that the voice of a church community will not be heard. I consider it to be a waste of time for us to continue to debate the issue of inclusiveness. We have more important work to do – namely, the mission of God and the church.

**Patrick Streiff:** Let me read a short paragraph from Decision 1366. “An annual conference has the right to vote to withdraw from The United Methodist Church. This reserved right, however, is not absolute but must be counterbalanced by the General Conference’s power to “define and fix the powers and duties of annual conferences” in par. 16.3. The last sentence in par. 33 reaffirms this authority by stating that the annual conference “shall discharge such duties and exercise such powers as the General Conference under the Constitution may determine.”

This means that the Annual Conference has rights and powers, but not absolute ones, and they are granted by what the General Conference has determined. This is the reason that the issue before us is a question of law. You can vote that my ruling is incorrect and that you see grounds for your resolution, based on the constitutional Article 33, but this is a question of law.

**Daniel Topalski:** The procedures state that whoever makes a motion should insist upon its action. There is a motion before the Annual Conference to rule on the bishop's ruling that our resolution is out of order. This regards an issue that has already been debated in the Judicial Council. I do not agree that this resolution be considered a question of law and in such a way we could lose our opportunity to vote. I challenge the bishop's ruling that it is out of order, and I propose that the Annual Conference reject this. If the bishop does not want this vote to take place, I propose that the chair of this meeting be suspended and another be elected to allow us to vote. No one can take away our right to vote.

**Tsvetan Iliev:** I second this and call on the Annual Conference to vote on the bishop's declaring this “out of order”.

**Krasimir Madjarov:** I second it as well.

**Patrick Streiff:** Then let's vote - I have determined this to be out of order, because there is no legal basis in the Discipline for this resolution. Those who disagree with my decision can raise their hand.

**Vote to refute the "out of order" ruling of the bishop and to proceed with consideration of the resolution for withdrawal.**

**For - 35, against - 0, abstained - 0.**

**Patrick Streiff:** I will report this to the Judicial Council, because it is a question of law in my opinion. If the answer of the Judicial Council is that there is a legal basis, I will convene an extraordinary session of the Annual Conference within 10-14 days. This would allow the resolution to be voted on by the Annual Conference.

**Daniel Topalski:** I have a different understanding of the situation. The bishop ruled that our resolution was out of order. We voted and decided that the resolution was not out of order. The following step is therefore obvious and should be immediate. If the bishop wants to, he can refer our decision to the Judicial Council if we adopt the resolution. We are not bound by the awaiting decisions of the Judicial Council as to whether or not we can exercise our rights and instead just accept the opinion of the bishop. The logic is infinitely simple. Let's not overturn the rules.

**Patrick Streiff:** At this point, as bishop of the United Methodist Church I will close the debate. If you want to continue this, you will be able to do so with another chair. But it will not be as a part of the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

*(At this point Bishop Streiff stood from his place at the table as chair and went and sat in the congregation.)*

**Daniel Topalski:** If every bishop could hinder the work of the Annual Conference, we would not be a Methodist church. I propose that we remove the bishop as chair and proceed to elect an interim president.

**Vote of confirmation for the election of an interim president.**

**For – 35, against – 0, abstained - 0**

**Daniel Topalski:** I recommend that the secretary of the Annual Conference lead the proceedings for the election of a presiding chair for dealing with this agenda item.

**Tsvetan Iliev:** I will accept nominations for the chair.

**Vladimir Zhelezov:** I propose the outgoing superintendent, Daniel Topalski.

**Tsvetan Iliev:** Are there any other nominations?

*(There were none.)* Then I call for us to elect the temporary chair.

**Vote to appoint Daniel Topalski as temporary chair for the consideration of the matter of the resolution.**

**For - 35, against - 0 and abstained - 0.**

**Daniel Topalski:** I hold this position temporarily and prefer to stand instead of sitting in the place of the bishop. You have the resolution before you. It has come a long way. Discussions and debates were a part of its creation as we considered what our future would be. We have a basis on which to make such a decision. I was told that Decision 1366 is balanced by the rights of the General Conference. The General Conference has not exercised them because it did not find it to be necessary. The right to life, personal dignity and conscience are fundamental rights. • void in the law even in the church should not be a hinderance. You have the resolution before you. I open the floor for comments and discussion before voting.

**Bedros Altunian:** I didn't think that I would speak. There are only a few of us here today who were present at the founding Annual Conference after the 47 year absence of a bishop. It was like a holiday for us. We received the bishop with great love. Our bishops were respected. We have always had the same attitude towards Bishop Patrick Streiff. He has supported the Annual Conference in Bulgaria so far. Today we are forced to be part of such an Annual Conference. The young people have a new vision and this crisis situation has united them all. Never has the pastoral college been so united and strong as it is today. Fire always purifies. We are experiencing such a moment. If there is a value to be proud of, it is tolerance. We, the older generation of pastors, see that everything is done with love and understanding. This has been going on for two years or more. And to comment on whether we will separate or not already sounds absurd. Whatever happens, we must do it with love. We are grateful that the Central Conference helped restore the church. In my opinion, nothing should change in our attitude towards the Central Conference. We are talking about a difference in culture here. What is normal in America is not normal here. The church has the right to not compromise its views on theological issues. I believe that we must reach a solution for the future in peace. I would not to be in the bishop's position, but he is accountable to both the Central Conference and the Council of Bishops. The decision to separate as a church requires a very clear position. I think we need to calm down and think about the future. I believe that the new generation will do more than we were able to.

**Daniel Topalski:** Are there other statements? There are none? Okay? You have seen that along with the resolution there is a motion to amend the Bulgarian church constitution. We are not making significant changes. What we are proposing is a change in the preamble. All other changes deal with whether or not we will have an appointed bishop or interim president in the new church and are an attempt to anticipate the situation to some extent. It states "the annual conference with the consent of the bishop or the interim president, etc ..." We will not change the title of the church as a legal entity as it is registered now as "EMETS in Bulgaria". There are some new requirements that the laws for religious institutions mandate. The current constitution does not comply with those new laws. In case of any legal problems in Bulgaria it is the Bulgarian law that is the deciding factor and not the Book of Discipline. This is something our American friends cannot understand. We live in sovereign countries with their own legislation. Methodists may think that this does not apply to us, but this is not the case.

**Margarita Todorova:** As painful as the issue is, I think everyone has gone through their own struggle to get to this moment. We have considered the options with a sense of responsibility. I don't like conflicts and I grew up in this church. It hurts me. I recently came across a story that is very appropriate for our situation. They put a few frogs in a pot of cold water and began to heat the water. The frogs didn't jump out. Their bodies began to adjust to the temperature. However, the temperature continued to rise and the frog began to adapt to compensate for the change. However, when the time came that it could no longer adapt and it wanted to jump out, the frog has no strength with which to do that. All of this has happened rapidly here at the end and the question that I ask is whether or not we have the strength to adapt? If we wait too long, we will not have the strength. If we continue to compromise, we will have no strength. As much as it hurts me and I don't want the church to split, we've reached a moment of decision. I don't want to be like those frogs.

**Jessica Morris-Ivanova:** I support this resolution. I also acknowledge that we are the church serving in Bulgaria and Romania. I would like to hear the voice of the Romanians. We, Bulgarians, are in the majority and are very noisy. Romanians, would you like to share?

**Rares Calugar:** I had raised my hand, but no one noticed me. We have been faithful to the process so far and we have been patient. Even after the General Conference was postponed twice, we hoped that it would take place in 2022, that the Protocol would be accepted and that there would be a peaceful way to exit. We want a peaceful outcome. I also want to see the difference between the man who is Patrick Streiff and the bishop who has that same name. He is trying to fulfill his duty, but since we are in a democratic church, we can vote. It might be that others will later on decide that what we decided today was done correctly or even incorrectly. But I told my colleagues and the bishop yesterday that it was immoral for me to go to the Special Session of the Central Conference and vote for a bishop who will not be our bishop. So, why are we in such a hurry? Because I do not want to be part of the meetings with the other Central Conference superintendents and talk about a future of which we will not be part. I feel like a hostage in a place with people who talk about a common future, but without us. It's not because they don't want us to be part of this future but because we want to continue in another denomination. We want to be part of a church in which people are our brothers and sisters from all over the world, with whom we work together, with the same heart, led by the same Spirit. We are not against the United Methodist Church, and by leaving we do not want to say that they are not the Church of Jesus Christ. But we want to continue our journey with people who understand the mission as we do and have the same understanding of an issue that is foundational for us. We need to be with those with whom we are in agreement about our commonly shared foundation and with whom we can build on the same. This year, if there had been a General Conference, we would have waited and we would not have made such a resolution. The other thing that motivates us to do it now is because the new church is about to launch and we don't want anyone else to decide for us. We want to be partners with them, to participate in the decisions, to build the new church and for our brothers to take us

into account. We do not want to be pressed into a place where we will be dependent on the Central Conference and unable to take care of our future. Why should we not be interested in our future? It makes sense to me for us to do that now. Because we want to make our own decisions. Because others are making plans for the future of the United Methodist Church and why should we not do the same? I want to be part of the decision making for the future of my church in Romania. I am in favor of this resolution and I have nothing personal against Patrick Streiff. There are people in Romania who will regret deeply if our relationship with Patrick Streiff is severed over this.

**Daniel Topalski:** If there are no other statements, I would like to insert a personal note. In this I turned out to be the main protagonist, and I don't want you to think that this is my personal battle with the bishop. You, yourself, have witnessed that we did not oppose the bishop - the decision for superintendent was made. I have not pursued my own career. I could have done so outside the church, but everyone makes their own choices. I have no personal disagreements with the bishop. I have acted on my own convictions. Do not think that my behavior is a personal war. I am motivated by my convictions.

**Tsvetan Iliev:** Each of the pastors in the pastoral college has expressed their position in support of leaving the United Methodist Church. Personally, I did not feel influenced by this. I acted out of my own conviction. I believe that if we are part of a church that ordains and marries people from the entire spectrum of LGBTQIA +, this would not only send us to the periphery of evangelical life in Bulgaria, it would mean complete annihilation. We could not accomplish any mission. It would look like a ritual suicide in the center of our cities, after which there will be no one to cry for us. I see no other option than to vote on the decision to leave the United Methodist Church and join the Global Methodist Church.

**Krasimir Madjarov:** With this discussion and the decision we will make, we clearly express our inner convictions. This is a clear and precise statement of our faith. This is our choice. Conscience, the voice of God, speaks within us, and it is good to hear that voice every time. I confirm the words of Rares Calugar that, as superintendent, I see no point in participating in the sessions of the Central Conference. I personally have nothing against the bishop, but I do not want to participate in discussions that do not make sense.

**Daniel Topalski:** The voice of human conscience can be the voice of God only through God's grace.

**Nerses Ketikian:** And for me as a pastor of a small church, it is important that this decision is voted on. You do not know Rev. Topalski if you think he aims to influence. He is a man of truth and puts everything on the table, letting everyone decide for themselves. Long ago these discussions began. For years we have been accustomed to living under a Western dictatorship, where some people sitting in an office somewhere decided for others and called it democracy. We have to decide - not some people sitting in an office far away. I affirm this resolution, as a part of the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church and the Armenian community in the

Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church. Today we are creating a new beginning. Bulgaria will not be the caboose on the train but the locomotive. And we will show that in a true democracy, the community decides, not the people in the offices. My encouragement to all of you is to vote for the acceptance of this resolution and work for God. When we do our part, God will do His part.

**Cristian Istrate:** It's hard to speak, but I understand that everything we do is out of love, and love doesn't force anyone. I am tired from the depths of my soul and heart of apologizing for the United Methodist Church. I've been doing it for 11 years. I have done it in front of other evangelical organizations. I have apologized to historical churches such as the Byzantine Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church when it came to different ways of perceiving sexuality in our church. I want to be part of a church where I will not apologize anymore. I keep saying they think so, but we don't. I want to be in a place where people think alike, have one goal and one mission. I want to be happy in such a place, to share with everyone that this is us. Faithful Wesleyans - loving God and neighbor. But without this ongoing war. This is a long-term war, and I know that countries like ours have been held hostage for many years. There have been cases and places where I have not felt significant – like in the presence of Methodist theologians, who see us as second-hand intellectuals just because we think differently from them. I believe that the Church must hold fast to the truth and recontextualize the Gospel. The cross of Christ is still the cross of Christ. He has not become anything else and he is still bloody. Christ was still beaten. On the cross He has not become anything else. He rose to be a witness to His resurrection. I believe in progress only as a return to the cross.

**Daniel Topalski:** If there are no other statements, I call for us to vote on the resolution for withdrawal. We will vote on the resolution and the church constitution update separately.

**Vote for acceptance or refusal of the resolution for withdrawal from the UMC**  
**For - 35, against - 0, abstentions - 0**

## **II. Actualization of the Bulgarian church constitution**

**Daniel Topalski:** Before you is the proposal for the changes to the Bulgarian church constitution. You can see additions in bold and the texts for deletion are marked through. We have no translation of this text. If the bishop wants, we will translate it.

**Nerses Ketikian:** Let us vote on all the changes in one block.

**Daniel Topalski:** This is a technical job. The document will be translated for the bishop. Voting is only for the Bulgarian part of the conference.

**Voting on the amendments to the Statute of EMEC in Bulgaria**  
**For - 32, against - 0, abstentions - 0**



**Daniel Topalski:** The changes will be submitted to the Sofia City Court. The protocol must be signed by everyone. If anyone is interested in knowing about our policies for the handling of personal data - we are very responsible in the way that we handle personal information. We follow the laws with respect to persons who are in an official legal relationship with EMETS in Bulgaria. Only when required by the court are they provided.

*(After these two items were discussed and voted on, Daniel Topalski resigned as temporary chair and Bishop Streiff returned to his place at the table as chair continuing on with the work of the Annual Conference.)*