

Docket 0424-03

Review of a Bishop's Ruling on a Question Raised During the North Georgia Annual Conference Regarding the Presiding Bishop's Parliamentary Ruling Concerning the Outcome of a Vote by the Annual Conference.

Pursuant to ¶ 2608.1 of the *Discipline* [requiring that “[t]he complete wording in the document requesting an appeal, declaratory decision, or ruling on a question of law shall be posted on the Judicial Council website....”] the complete wording of the oral and handwritten requests for an episcopal ruling are set forth below.

Oral Request as contained in the Conference Journal

“Did the Annual Conference Chair err in ruling that a vote of 695 ayes to 694 nays failed to constitute the ‘simple majority’ threshold required to ratify Trinity United Methodist Church – Rome's disaffiliation request?”

Written Request as Submitted

I request a ruling of law on the ruling of the chair that 695 to 694 vote on Trinity [Rome] did not qualify as ratification of Trinity for disaffiliation. A 694 to 694 vote is a 50% vote. 695 to 694 is exactly 50% + 1.

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Joe Whittemore
North East District
Lay Member
from Hartwell First

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NE District
Lay Member
from Hartwell
First



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
NORTH GEORGIA EPISCOPAL AREA

ROBIN DEASE
RESIDENT BISHOP

November 30, 2023

SUSAN GUNTER
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

VIA: CERTIFIED MAIL AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

Joe Whittemore
Lay Member of Hartwell First United Methodist Church
PO Box 770
Hartwell, GA 30643

Re: Ruling of Law In Response to Question Presented at November 18, 2023
Special Annual Conference Meeting.

Dear Joe:

Please find below my ruling on your question of law, which I understand to be as follows:

Did the Annual Conference Chair err in ruling that a vote of 695 ayes to 694 nays failed to constitute the “simple majority” threshold required to ratify Trinity United Methodist Church – Rome’s disaffiliation request?

The operation of Annual Conference meetings is governed by the Book of Discipline, our Standing Rules of Procedure, and applicable Judicial Council rulings.¹ However, because I have not identified any Judicial Council rulings or provisions in the Discipline that would be on-point for this issue, my analysis is limited to our standing rules.

The Annual Conference’s substantive standing rules do not specify what constitutes a ruling majority when the body takes a vote. However, standing rule A.1 adopts Robert’s Rules of Order by reference to govern how the Annual Conference conducts its business. Therefore, given the lack of explicit guidance in any applicable church law, any provisions in Robert’s Rules that are on-point will govern the outcome of my analysis.

Robert’s Rule 44.1 directly addresses the question of what constitutes a majority vote as follows:

“As stated in 11:6, the basic requirement for approval of an action...by a deliberative assembly, except where a rule provides otherwise, is a *majority vote*. The word *majority* means “more than half”; and when the term *majority vote* is used without qualification-as is the case of the basic requirement-means more than half of the votes cast by persons entitled to vote, excluding blanks or abstentions, at a regular or properly called meeting. **For example...[if] 19 votes are cast, a majority (more than 9 ½) is 10.**” (Emphasis added.)

¹ I have attached a copy of the Annual Conference’s standing rules for your ease of reference.

The meaning of this rule is explained on the Robert's Rules of Order Association's ("RRA's") website, which features a 'frequently asked questions' page that you can review here: <https://robertsrules.com/frequently-asked-questions/>. RRA is a partnership of direct descendants of General Henry Martyn Robert that was formalized in 1960 to manage and advance the Robert's Rules of Order books and legacy. On its FAQ page, the RRA addresses our question in frequently asked question #4m which asks "In determining the result of a vote, what constitutes a majority?" The answer to that question, as presented on the website, is:

"The word "majority"... means, simply, *more than half*. The use of any other definition, such as 50 percent plus one, is apt to cause problems. Suppose in voting on a motion 17 votes are cast, 9 in favor and 8 opposed. Fifty percent of the votes cast is 8 ½ so that 50 percent plus one would be 9 ½. **Under such an erroneous definition of a majority**, one might say that the motion was not adopted because it did not receive 50 percent plus one of the votes cast, although it was, quite clearly, passed by a majority vote. [RONR (12th ed.) 44:1; see also p. 66 of RONR In Brief.]" (Emphasis added.)

The RRA's website also clarifies various Robert's rules to make it clear that abstentions are not votes, so they have no bearing on the outcome of a formal vote beyond the establishment of a quorum. Therefore, any abstentions from the Trinity UMC – Rome ratification vote have no bearing on the outcome of the present question of law.

Based on the foregoing provisions from Robert's Rules, Trinity UMC – Rome's disaffiliation request should have been ratified because the 695 affirmative votes that were cast exceed the threshold of what constitutes a ruling majority for that Annual Conference vote, which in this case was 694.5 affirmative votes.

Yours in the Connection,



Robin Dease, Resident Bishop
North Georgia Annual Conference

Attachment

Cc: Terry Walton, Executive Assistant to the Bishop
Max Vincent, North Georgia Annual Conference Secretary
Harold Buckley, North Georgia Annual Conference Chancellor

Called Annual Conference
Saturday, November 18, 2023 - 10:00 a.m.

Pre-service music. The worship leader, Will Buthod, led the conference in music.

Opening of the Special Session. Bishop Robin Dease gavelled the session to order at 10 am. She reminded the conference that we are here for the sole purpose of ratifying the churches who seek to disaffiliate according to paragraph 2553. She acknowledged that the day holds a mix of emotions. She thanked the cabinet, the conference board of trustees, and the annual conference planning committee, for preparing for the session. She welcomed the youth delegation who had a lock-in the night before at Athens First UMC. The conference cheered. She welcomed Bishop Charlene Kammerer. The conference applauded.

Opening Prayer. Nate Abrams, conference lay leader, opened the conference in prayer. He noted that it was appropriate to remember that we are grounded in our common call as children of God and followers of Christ.

Opening Hymn. Worship leader, Will Buthod, and song leader, Beth Shugart, led the conference in singing, “The Church’s One Foundation.”

Organization of Conference. Max Vincent, conference secretary, moved that the bar of the conference be set as all seats on the floor, stage and stadium seating in the Grand Hall, that the visitors area for the business sessions be designated as the stadium seating to the far right of the hall. There were also seats reserved for media in the guest seating areas. He reminded the conference that in order to vote during business sessions, members need to be within the designated bar of the conference. The conference voted. The motion was approved.

Vincent moved that the following persons be designated as associate secretaries: Joya Abrams, Dave Allen Grady, Kathy Brockman, Judy Bush, Lee Fullerton, Rachel Fullerton, Natalee Dukes-Hamby, Yvette Massey, Joseph McBrayer, John Pinson, Josh Roberts, Dalton Rushing, Carol Scroggs, Blair Tolbert. The conference voted. The motion was approved.

Vincent moved that Tiffany Brown and Aziza Bromfield be head Lay-Tellers and that John Mattox and Katie Mattox be head Clergy-Tellers. The conference voted. The motion was approved. Bishop Dease asked the tellers to stand. The conference applauded.

Vincent reminded the conference that according to our standing rules and conference policies, any material distributed in the Grand Hall must be distributed by the secretaries, tellers and ushers of the annual conference. Materials are not to be left on the seats between breaks and will be removed, if not authorized by the conference. Standing Rule C.5 states that no material may be placed on chairs during breaks or between sessions, at doors in or around the Grand Hall. The distribution prohibition extends to the entire Classic Center property.

Vincent noted that the agenda set by the annual conference planning committee was posted on the conference website on November 16.

Voting Device Demonstration. Bishop Dease invited Michael Murphy-McCarthy, conference IT director, to share about the voting devices. Murphy-McCarthy led the conference in a test vote.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The question before us is: Is cranberry sauce on your Thanksgiving menu? The conference voted. Bishop Dease read the results, 1533 voted. Bishop Dease led the conference in a second test vote. The question is: Have you ever participated in a youth group lock-in? The conference voted. Bishop Dease read the results. She thanked Michael Murphy-McCarthy.

Rules for the Session. Catherine Boothe Olson, clergy, chair, standing rules committee: I'm Catherine Boothe Olson, a Deacon in Full Connection, chair of your standing rules committee. Per our standing rules, the North Georgia Conference follows Robert's Rules of Order. These rules are to be equitable and fair for all. They care for us, the community, and allow us to tend to the mission and ministry necessary today. Robert's Rules as a parliamentary process brings order to meetings and allows the group to care for business in an efficient and predictable manner. We will begin with the consent agenda. The purpose of the consent agenda is to group items at the start of the meetings to be voted on in an expedited fashion. This is a practical way to maximize time within a meeting. Items should only be removed from a consent agenda if they require further discussion and/or debate. It would be detrimental to the annual conference and our time together to remove a significant number of items from the consent agenda. The consent agenda provided by the conference board of trustees will be presented in 8 separate segments by our 8 district superintendents. These 8 segments will be presented in district alphabetical order beginning with the Central East District. A consent agenda does not need to be presented 24 hours before a meeting per Robert's Rules of Order, our standing rules, nor The Book of Discipline, thus, it is properly before you.

If a member of the annual conference desires to remove an item from the consent agenda provided by the trustees and shared by the district superintendents:

1. Proceed to the closest microphone. Wait for the microphone to be called upon by number. State your name, church, and district. Then state the district number (first column from the trustee report) and church name (second column from the trustee report) you wish to remove from that district's consent agenda. This is the only information needed. District number and church name.
2. A second is required for the church to be removed. A second may come from the floor. Only one second is needed.
3. Once a second is received the item is removed from the consent agenda. Again, no speeches for nor against are received at the time of removal.
4. A speaker may remove more than one church from the consent agenda.
5. We will proceed through all 8 sections of the consent agenda led by the district superintendents in district alphabetical order.
6. Remember the intent of the consent agenda is to expedite the ordering of the day. It seeks to allow for groups of churches to be approved efficiently AND then individual churches to be discussed, if desired. It is a "both and" option. It's not a strictly up and down option. Nor allowing every church to be debated. It's a means to have a middle way if you as members of the annual conference desire.

At the completion of all eight segments of the consent agenda, Bishop Dease will acknowledge the passing of the consent agenda and all churches that remain on the consent agenda will be approved for disaffiliation.

Motions: Next, we move to the churches that were removed from the consent agenda. These churches will be addressed in the order removed as individual motions.

Limiting Debate: How will these motions be handled? Each church that was removed from the consent agenda was done so because someone in our body desired discussion. In order to have time for all, we recommend in keeping with our tradition:

- Up to 3 speeches for disaffiliation,
- Up to 3 speeches against disaffiliation,
- Each speech not exceeding 1 minute (with the exception of speeches first presented in Spanish, Korean, or another first language not exceeding 1 minute and then translated into English, total time not exceeding 2 minutes)
- No person will be allowed to give more than 1 speech per church

We recognize one minute of discussion may feel too long for some and too short for others. Yet, this very prayerful consideration on time is to ensure all churches are treated with fairness, equity, and care. While at the same time allowing us to complete our important work on this day.

Lastly, a few other reminders regarding Robert's Rules of Order. If you have a question or need clarity, we want to be helpful, please go to a microphone, wait to be called on, and state that you have a

1. "Point of Information" and you need clarity on a topic by asking a question or
2. "Point of Parliamentary Inquiry" and ask a question related to the procedure of Robert's Rule of Order."

By asking a question using a Point of Information or a Point of Parliamentary Inquiry, we can help all people to be informed and engaged in the process. We want this to be a fair and transparent process for all. Again, we hope by using our agreed upon parliamentary process, Robert's Rule of Order, we will most faithfully and efficiently attend the work of this Annual Conference.

Olsen presented the motion for ordering the day. It requires a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote.

- Up to 3 speeches for disaffiliation,
- Up to 3 speeches against disaffiliation,
- Each speech not exceeding 1 minute (with the exception of speeches first presented in Spanish, Korean, or another first language up to one minute and then translated into English not exceeding 2 minutes)
- No person will be allowed to give more than 1 speech per church

The conference voted. Yes 1497 No 29 Abstain 12. The motion was approved.

Trustees Report. Carolyn Stephens, clergy, vice chair, conference board of trustees, presented the consent agenda for churches which have voted to disaffiliate. She thanked Julie Childs, chair, who ensured that all churches met the guidelines. The district superintendents will read the names of all of the churches in their districts which have voted to disaffiliate.

Ed Tomlinson, clergy, asked to make a motion. The Bishop ruled the motion out of order.

Rodrigo Cruz, Central East district, read the list of churches for the Central East district seeking to disaffiliate. Jeff Fuller, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Michael McQueen, Central North district, read the list of churches for the Central North district seeking to disaffiliate. Dyanne Cunningham, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Will Zant, clergy, Central North, asked when the appropriate time to remove churches from the consent agenda.

Nora Colmenares, moved to remove two churches from the consent agenda: CE8 Norcross FUMC and CE16 The Fountain at Sugarloaf. The motion was seconded.

Vance Ross, clergy, Central North, moved to remove Alpharetta First, Mt. Pisgah, St. John. The motion was seconded.

Michael Stinson, clergy, East Point Mallileu, moved to remove St. James Alpharetta.

Point of Order. James Hood, clergy, First UMC Union County. These motions violate our standing rules. Standing Rule C7 states that if an item is removed from the consent agenda, it is moved to the second day of conference. They are in violation of C7. Catherine Boothe Olsen, In light of the fact that there is only one day, they would be properly before us as they come off of the consent agenda. Hood noted that a standing rule can only be overridden by a vote of the annual conference. We would have to have a vote to suspend the rules to do that. Olson, replied that this is the vote that we took to order the day.

Byron Thomas, Central South district, read the list of churches for the Central South district seeking to disaffiliate. Dianne Spencer, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Jessica Terrell, Central West district, read the list of churches for the Central West district seeking to disaffiliate. Randy Hardy, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Devon Gordon, laity, McEachern, Central West. Moved to remove McEachern Memorial from the consent agenda. It was seconded.

Doug Gilreath, North East district, read the list of churches for the Central East district seeking to disaffiliate. Kim Powell, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Beth Sanders, North West district, read the list of churches for the North West district seeking to disaffiliate. Dawn Townsend, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Hal Storey, laity, Trinity UMC, Rome, moved to remove Trinity UMC Rome, NW44, from the consent agenda.

Greg Porterfield, South East district, read the list of churches for the South East district seeking to disaffiliate. Jennifer Byrd, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Susan Landry, South West district, read the list of churches for the South West district seeking to disaffiliate. Grayland Ward, lay leader, offered a prayer.

Bob Dickson, lay, Madison First UMC, moved to remove Forsyth First from the consent agenda. The motion was seconded.

Shelly Melton, laity, moved Griffin First UMC SW12 from the consent agenda. The motion was seconded.

Barb Combs, Senoia, laity, removed Snellville CE12. The motion was seconded.

Bishop Dease called for a vote on the consent agenda. The conference voted. The motion was approved. The vote was 1222 yes, 295 no, 20 abstain.

The churches approved via consent agenda were:

Central East District:

Atlanta Bethany UMC Buford
Bishop UMC Watkinsville
Campton UMC Monroe
Korean UMC of Hamilton Mill Buford
Monroe First UMC
New Pentecost UMC Winder
New Prospect UMC Athens
Pentecost UMC Winder
Pleasant Valley UMC Monroe
Rays UMC Bishop
Snellville UMC
St James UMC Athens
Statham UMC
Sugar Hill UMC
Trinity UMC Duluth
Walnut Grove UMC Loganville
Young Harris Memorial UMC Athens

Central North District:

Antioch UMC Fairburn
England Chapel UMC Jenkinsburg
Mt Zion UMC Atlanta
New Hope UMC Clayton County

Central South District:

Bethel UMC Stockbridge
Conyers First UMC
Harvest Point UMC Locust Grove
Jodeco Road UMC Stockbridge
Julia A. Porter Memorial UMC Porterdale
Mt Carmel UMC Hampton
Philadelphia UMC McDonough
Red Oak UMC Newton County
Rockland UMC Lithonia
Shiloh UMC
Skyland UMC Brookhaven
Turners UMC McDonough
Union UMC Stockbridge

Central West District:

Bethel UMC Hiram
Bethel UMC Tallapoosa
Bethlehem UMC Bremen
Buchanan UMC
Carrollton First UMC
Center Point UMC Temple
County Line UMC Acworth
Covenant UMC Smyrna
Crawford Chapel UMC Bremen
Due West UMC Marietta
Flint Hill UMC Hiram
Hope UMC Dallas
Kennesaw UMC
Lithia Springs UMC
Mountain View UMC Marietta
Mt Nebo UMC Dallas
New Beginnings UMC Kennesaw
New Covenant UMC Douglasville
New Hope UMC Carrollton
Old Camp UMC Carrollton
Pleasant Grove UMC Temple
Pleasant Hill UMC Villa Rica
Poseyville UMC Bremen
Shiloh UMC Carrollton
Shiloh UMC Kennesaw
Smyrna UMC Dallas
St Stephen UMC Marietta
Tallapoosa First UMC
Temple UMC Carroll County
Victory UMC Carrollton
Wesley Chapel UMC Villa Rica

North East District:

Antioch UMC Clayton
Arbor Pointe UMC Hoschton
Bethel UMC Dawson County
Bethesda UMC Hartwell
Bold Spring UMC Carnesville
Clarkesville UMC
Clemons Chapel UMC Gainesville
Cleveland UMC
Colbert UMC
Commerce First UMC
Confidence UMC Stephens County
Confidence UMC Union County

Cool Springs UMC Clarkesville
Creekside UMC Cumming
Dahlonega UMC
Ebenezer UMC Cumming
Ebenezer UMC Hollywood
Ebenezer UMC Jefferson
Gordon's Chapel UMC Athens
Hartwell First UMC
Hickory Flat UMC Lula
Holly Springs UMC Jackson County
Homer UMC
Jones Chapel UMC Danielsville
Lebanon UMC Gillsville
Liberty Hill UMC Hartwell
Loudsville UMC Cleveland
Lula UMC
Macedonia UMC Cleveland
Macedonia UMC Hart County
McKee's Chapel UMC Dawsonville
Midway UMC Gillsville
Mountain City UMC
Mt Bethel UMC Commerce
Mt Pleasant UMC White County
Mt Zion UMC Alto
Nacoochee UMC
New Hope UMC Dillard
New Salem UMC
Pennington Chapel UMC
Piedmont UMC
Providence UMC Hart County
Providence UMC Stephens County
Providence UMC Union County
Redstone UMC
Redwine UMC Hart County
Redwine UMC Gainesville
St James UMC Toccoa
St Paul UMC Lumpkin County
Sunshine UMC
The Highlands UMC
The Vine UMC
Tiger UMC
Toccoa First UMC
Union Hill UMC Hiawassee
Vanna UMC
Wesley Chapel UMC Dahlonega

North West District:

Aragon UMC
Ball Ground UMC
Barnsley UMC Kingston
Bethel UMC Morganton
Bethel UMC Summerville
Big Springs UMC Woodstock
Blue Ridge UMC
Canton First UMC
Cedartown First UMC
Center Valley UMC Chatsworth
Chatsworth First UMC
Elizabeth Lee UMC Chickamauga
Eton UMC
Fairmount UMC
Farmville UMC Calhoun
Five Springs UMC Dalton
Hillside UMC Woodstock
Jackson Chapel UMC Cave Spring
Kingston UMC
Kresge UMC Cedartown
Liberty Hill UMC Morganton
Lindale UMC
Little River UMC Woodstock
Lyerly UMC
Macedonia UMC Alpharetta
Menlo UMC
Mineral Springs UMC Dalton
Mizpah UMC Kingston
Mt Gilead UMC Woodstock
Mt Pleasant UMC Rome
Mt Zion UMC Chatsworth
New Echota UMC Calhoun
New Haven UMC Dalton
Oostanula UMC Rome
Orange UMC Canton
Plainville UMC
Pleasant Grove UMC Dalton
Rock Spring UMC
Rockmart First UMC
Rush Chapel UMC Rome
Shannon UMC
Silver Creek UMC
Sixes UMC Canton
Union Hill UMC Canton
Varnell UMC Cohutta

Wesley Chapel UMC Calhoun
West Rome UMC
White UMC
Williamstown UMC McCaysville
Woodstation UMC

South East District:

Anthony Chapel UMC
Barton Chapel UMC
Berlin UMC
Blythe UMC
Burns Memorial UMC Augusta
Central UMC Putnam County
Cokesbury UMC Augusta
Coldwater UMC
Crawfordville UMC
Dearing UMC
Devereux UMC
Dunn's Chapel UMC
Eatonton First UMC
Elberton First UMC
Fork Chapel UMC
Francis Asbury UMC Elberton
Friendship UMC Hephzibah
Gaissert UMC
Greensboro First UMC
Harlem UMC
Hephzibah UMC
Hopewell UMC Milledgeville
Independence UMC
Johnson UMC Warrenton
Knowles Chapel UMC
Liberty UMC Hephzibah
Lincolnton UMC
Macedonia UMC Warren County
Martinez UMC
Midway UMC Lincolnton
Milledgeville First UMC
Montpelier UMC
Mosaic UMC
Pennington UMC
Philadelphia UMC Eatonton
Philadelphia UMC Harlem
Prospect UMC Morgan County
Prospect UMC Norwood
Rutledge UMC

Salem UMC Thomson
Shiloh UMC
Siloam UMC
Sparta UMC (Pierce Memorial)
St James UMC Augusta
St Mark UMC Washington Road Augusta
St Paul UMC Eatonton
Swords UMC
Thomson First UMC
Union Point First UMC
Washington First UMC
Wesley Chapel UMC Eatonton
Young Memorial UMC Thomson

South West District:

Aldora UMC Thomaston
Bethany UMC Fayetteville
Big Springs UMC
Caney Head UMC Roopville
Christ UMC Forsyth
Concord UMC Pike County
Culloden UMC
Ebenezer UMC Barnesville
Ebenezer UMC Fayetteville
Ebenezer UMC Forsyth
Harmony UMC LaGrange
Highland UMC Griffin
Hillcrest UMC LaGrange
John Wesley UMC Grantville
Korean UMC of LaGrange
Korean UMC of Newnan
Life Springs UMC Zebulon
Mountville UMC
Mt Zion UMC Campground
Pomona UMC
Prospect UMC Mansfield
Providence UMC Fayetteville
Stark UMC Butts County
The Rock UMC
Thomaston First UMC
Trinity On The Hill UMC LaGrange
Turin UMC
Welcome UMC Roopville
Williamson UMC
Woodbury UMC
Yatesville UMC

Break. Bishop Dease called for a break.

The conference sang “Marching to Zion.”

Bishop Dease called the conference back into session.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Norcross First UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification.

Bishop Dease opened the vote.

The conference voted. The motion was approved. Yes: 776 No: 698 Abstain: 61

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of The Fountain at Sugarloaf UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification. Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was not approved. The vote was Yes; 698 No: 781 Abstain: 49

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Alpharetta First UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification. Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was approved. Yes: 986 No: 495 Abstain: 52.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Mt. Pisgah UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification.

CR Hill, clergy, retired, asked a question. How often may people speak? Chancellor Buckley reminded the conference that members may speak once for each church.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The motion was approved. Yes: 919 No: 555 Abstain: 40

Lunch. Bishop Dease called for a lunch break. Max Vincent offered instructions.

Before reconvening, the conference sang, “Standing on the Promises.” The conference also sang, “Happy Birthday” to Bishop Dease, whose birthday is this weekend.

Reconvening of Conference. Bishop Dease reconvened the conference at 1:25pm.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of St. John UMC - Atlanta was before the conference.

There were speeches for and against ratification.

The bishop opened the vote. Yes: 1030 No: 365 Abstain: 39. The motion was approved.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of St. James UMC - Alpharetta was before the conference.

There were speeches for and against the disaffiliation.

Request for Ruling of Law. Matt Daigle, lay, Central North, requests a ruling of law. He asks:

I rise seeking a ruling of law.

Paragraph 2553 provides a limited right specifically related to reasons of conscience related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals.

Judicial Decision 1480, issued April 25 of this year states as follows:

It will be unlawful for an annual conference to ratify a local church disaffiliation for any reason other than those specified in ¶ 2553.1 of *The Book of Discipline*.

While the decision affirms the Conference Trustee's decision not to question the reasons of conscience behind a church's decision to disaffiliate, it also holds that the validity of a church's statement is not absolute and must be weighed against other protected rights in Church law, including "the rights of individual members of the conference to be informed on and to participate fully in all legislative decisions" as described in Judicial Decision 367.

The Conference's decision to not solicit the reasons of conscience is not the same as ignoring evidence to the contrary.

I ask the Bishop to rule definitively whether the existence of evidence showing that the conference unlawfully ratified the disaffiliation of a local church pursuant to paragraph 2553 would nullify the North Georgia Conference's ratification.

Bishop Dease noted that she has 30 days to respond, and because of the complexity of the question she will need that time. She will respond.

Point of information: Carter Posey, Central North, lay, point of information. What is the membership of St. James Alpharetta? The membership was 3726. The number of votes was 249.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was approved. Yes: 730 No: 672 Abstain: 52.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of McEachern Memorial UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against ratification.

Point of Information: Jan Harwood, lay, Central West, point of information. Was there an issue with the membership rolls submitted by McEachern for their vote? District Superintendent, Jessica Terrell shared that McEachern reported 3603 in membership. On the roll, there were 3025 listed in membership. She said that according to some present that day, some confirmation classes were left off of the roll.

Point of Information: Jeff Jernigan, lay, Central West, point of information. We did have 50-70 who were disenfranchised. The council voted to have them reinstated. The vast majority were members of the Hispanic congregation and confirmands.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was not supported. Yes: 632 No: 778 Abstain: 54.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Trinity UMC - Rome was before the annual conference.

There were speeches for and against ratification.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. Yes: 695 No: 694 Abstain: 51. The chair determined that the motion failed, noting that the vote has to be 50% +1 to ratify.

Nanci Hicks, asked if she could pray for the annual conference. Bishop Dease invited Hicks to pray.

Break. Bishop Dease called for a five-minute break.

Bishop Dease called the conference back into session.

Cindy Hicks, lay, North West district, made a **motion to reconsider Trinity UMC.** Bishop Dease ruled the motion out of order.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Forsyth First UMC was before the annual conference.

There were speeches for and against ratification.

Point of Information. Carter Posey, lay, Central North district. What is the membership of this church according to the roster? Susan Landry shared membership statistics.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was supported. Yes: 756 No: 654 Abstain: 26

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Griffin First UMC was before the annual conference.

There were three speeches for and three against the disaffiliation.

Bishop Dease opened the vote. The conference voted. The motion was not supported. Yes: 656 No: 737 Abstain: 32.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation request of Snellville UMC was before the annual conference.

There were speeches for and against the ratification.

Point of Information. Carter Posey, Central North, lay, asked about church membership statistics. 2763 members. The number of votes cast was 299.

Bishop Dease called for the vote. The conference voted. The motion was supported. Yes: 696
No: 681 Abstain: 38

Point of Information. Carolyn Moore, South East, clergy, asked why Trinity UMC was not approved when a majority of the conference voted to support it. Buckley responded with a calculation, saying that one more person voted to leave rather than to stay. This is not how we calculate “50% +1.”

Request for a Ruling of Law. Joe Whittemore, North West, lay, requested a ruling of law on the decision of the chair regarding Trinity UMC.

“Did the Annual Conference Chair err in ruling that a vote of 695 ayes to 694 nays failed to constitute the “simple majority” threshold required to ratify Trinity United Methodist Church – Rome’s disaffiliation request?”

Bishop Dease will respond within 30 days.

Point of Information. Bill Burch, clergy, Central North, noted that the Trustees process says “simple majority.”

Point of Information. Jacob Shepherd, lay, South West, how are abstentions factored into the vote counts? Buckley, the chancellor, noted that votes to abstain are not counted as yes or no.

Point of Information. Betty Williams, lay, Snellville. Was Snellville ratified? Yes.

Moment of personal privilege. Terry Walton, asked for a moment of personal privilege. Our Bishop and district superintendents have done an amazing job in the midst of difficult situations. He asked the conference to thank them for their work. The conference applauded.

Announcements. Max Vincent, conference secretary, asked members of the conference to leave their voting devices behind. He thanked the conference for its work.

Jennifer Hansen, clergy, Central South, asked if we could reconsider the vote for Norcross. Bishop Dease ruled that out of order.

Sung Won Nam, clergy, South West, asked to make a motion regarding the Korean Church of Atlanta. Bishop Dease ruled the motion out of order.

Moment of personal privilege. Nate Abrams, lay, Central West, asked for a moment of personal privilege. Nate thanked the district lay leaders for their work in the disaffiliation process.

Closing Litany. Bishop Dease led the closing litany. She thanked the conference for its work. She acknowledged the sadness of the day.

Bishop Dease: Like Peter and Paul, Paul, and Barnabas, and the first ecumenical council of the first-century church, we have reached the point at which we feel called to continue our faith journeys separately. Though our paths diverge, we acknowledge that

All: There is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Eph. 4:4-7) As we part, we do so with mercy, recognizing the grace entrusted to each in our Lord Jesus Christ and extending to one another the right hand of fellowship.

UMC members: In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our siblings in the Holy Spirit.

Departing Members: In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our siblings in the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Dease: Let us pray. Loving Creator, through Jesus Christ you reconcile all people and raise us to new life in you. As we scatter to spread the good news, in different places, heal the scars of our division. Bind up the wounds of the brokenhearted and gather us all beneath your healing wings of compassion that we may all stand as witnesses to your great love in Jesus Christ. Hear us now as we pray for one another. (Space is given people to pray)

All: The Lord's Prayer

The conference sang the closing hymn, "Shalom to You."

Charge and Blessing

Bishop: As we depart, may we do so like the disciples released from the fear of the upper room with the words of our risen Lord ringing in our ears, "Peace be with you! As the Father sent me. I am sending you." May we go in love, may we go in faith, may we go in hope, may we go in joy and may we go in peace to love and serve the Lord. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord be kind and gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Amen. (Num. 6:24-26)

The session was adjourned at 3:19pm.

Editor's Note: Attendance was 1836.

Docket 0424-3

Interested Parties & Persons to Whom Copies Should be Transmitted North Georgia Annual Conference

INTERESTED PARTIES & PERSONS

Rev Max Vincent [Conf Secretary] <max.vincent@ngumc.net>,
Julie Childs [Conf Trustees Chair] <juliechilds67@gmail.com>,
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Catherine Boothe Olson [Rules Committee Chair] <catherine.boothe@ngumc.net>,
Bishop Robin Dease [Presiding Bishop] <bishop@ngumc.org>,
Terry Walton [Bishop's Exec Asst] <terry.walton@ngumc.net>,
Harold Buckley Jr [Chancellor] <hbuckley@wbilegal.com>,

COPY

Sybil Davidson [Conf Communications] <sdavidson@ngumc.org>,
Ellen W Jugar [Chancellor's Paralegal] <ejugar@wbilegal.com>,

Courtesy Copy Of Decision /Memorandum

Only United Methodists have standing in Judicial Council matters. Persons who are not members – or are no longer members – of The United Methodist Church are not permitted to appear, participate, or make any submissions in Judicial Council matters.

However, as a courtesy concerning *currently pending docket items*, if a **former** United Methodist was the person who made the underlying **request for an episcopal ruling** (or motion for a declaratory decision) **and** was United Methodist at the time that the request was made, then as a discretionary courtesy the Judicial Council will copy the former United Methodist (at his or her last known email address) when the digital copy of the Decision/Memorandum is distributed to the interested parties on that docket item. Please note that this is a **strictly temporary** measure. This provision **does not extend to any future dockets** and **will not apply to any future distributions** of Judicial Council Decisions.

As to the above-referenced Docket Item 0424-3, the Judicial Council will transmit a copy of its Decision or Memorandum to the **former United Methodist** that submitted the request for the episcopal ruling that was subsequently issued by the Bishop, received by the Secretary of the Judicial Council, and docketed for the Judicial Council's automatic review (as required by the *Discipline*).