

SUBJECT TO FINAL EDITING

**JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**MEMORANDUM 1300**

***IN RE: Review of a Bishop's Decision of Law in the Metropolitan Nueva Ecija District of the Middle Philippines Annual Conference Regarding the Appointment of a District Superintendent***

**STATEMENT OF FACTS**

On September 27, 2014, a meeting was convened in the Metropolitan Nueva Ecija District of the Middle Philippines Annual Conference. This district meeting was held in The United Methodist City Temple in Cabanatuan City. Bishop Rodolfo A. Juan was present for the meeting. District Superintendent Wilfredo B. Pronto was not present for the meeting.

During or following the meeting, Bishop Juan sent a text message to The Rev. Pronto. Two versions of that text message exist in the record. One version was provided by the Bishop, as follows:

Blessed pm, Rev. Pronto, after fervent prayers asking for wisdom, careful consideration and consultations, I am informing you that I have replaced you DS of Metropolitan District bsd of BOD Par. 419 (12), I tried to contain the pain and disappointment due to some acxts you committed.

The other version was provided by The Rev. Pronto, as follows:

Blessed pm, Rev. Pronto, afr [sic] fervent prayers asking for wisdom, careful consideration and consultations, I am informing u that I have replaced you DS of Metropolitan District bsd of BOD 419 para 12. I tried to contain the pain n disappointment due to some acts u comted wt compassion, but bec of a serious complaint n a petition, I had to make this courageous decision. I pryd for u as u move... (underscoring in original)

On March 28, 2015, the annual District Conference of the Metropolitan Nueva Ecija District met at Camp Tinio United Methodist Church in Cabanatuan City. Minutes of the meeting, provided by the District Conference Secretary, record that the District Superintendent Wilfredo Pronto convened the meeting and presided. According to the

Minutes, after “a lengthy discussion,” the District Conference voted to approve the following action:

That the District Conference sends a Petition to the Judicial Council requesting the Supreme Court of Methodism to pass upon the **Decision of Bishop Rodolfo A. Juan based on Paragraph 419.12** [emphasis in original] of the 2012 Book of Discipline which was used by Bishop Juan in terminating the term of District Superintendent Rev. Pronto without any iota of due process, without his presence, and without any consultation.

In addition, the District Conference voted to designate a clergy member to prepare and submit the petition to the Judicial Council through the District Conference Secretary.

Briefs in the matter were submitted by the bishop, the superintendent, the clergy member designated by the District Conference, and the District Conference Secretary.

The brief from the District Conference cites, as the applicable provision of the 2012 *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 2609.6. In fact, it quotes the following from that portion of the *Discipline*, as it existed before the Judicial Council issued Decision 1244, which declared an action by the 2012 General Conference that amended this paragraph unconstitutional.

¶ 2609.6 *The Judicial Council shall pass upon and affirm, modify, or reverse the decisions of law made by bishop [sic] in central, district, annual, or jurisdictional conferences upon questions of law submitted to them in writing when such appeal has been made by one-fifth of that conference present and voting in the regular business of a session... (underscoring supplied)*

While the record clearly shows that the Bishop changed the appointment of The Rev. Pronto, there is no evidence in the record that a question of law was ever submitted to the Bishop, as required in ¶ 2609.6. While the designated representatives of the Metropolitan Nueva Ecija District Conference and The Rev. Pronto choose to view the Bishop’s change of The Rev. Pronto’s appointment as a decision of law for review by the Judicial Council, there is no evidence in the record that supports such an assertion. While a District Conference might vote to appeal a decision of law by a bishop, under ¶ 2609.7, there is no evidence in the record that such a decision of law was requested, that such a decision of law was delivered, or that such a decision of law was appealed. What the record shows is that the Bishop had changed the appointment of The Rev. Pronto, removing him from the office of District Superintendent. What the record does not show is how he remained the district superintendent six months after the Bishop had changed his appointment.

Any considerations about assertions advanced by the interested parties in this matter must be set aside in light of the fact that no request for a decision of law by the Bishop was submitted. The Bishop made no decision of law. Hence, there is no decision of law for the Judicial Council to “pass upon and affirm, modify, or reverse” as required in ¶ 2609.6 of the 2012 *Book of Discipline*.

## **JURISDICTION**

The Judicial Council does not have jurisdiction in this matter.

## **DIGEST**

In this matter, a bishop announced a change in a clergy member’s appointment, but the bishop was not asked to issue—and did not issue—a decision of law. Lacking a decision of law to review, the Judicial Council has no jurisdiction. A bishop’s decision to change the appointment of a clergy member of an annual conference is not the same as a decision of law. A bishop must make a decision of law when a request is submitted in writing; and the Judicial Council must pass upon a properly requested decision of law by a bishop. But those facts do not exist in this case. So the Judicial Council is without any jurisdiction in this matter.

Beth Capen was absent.

Kabamba Kiboko was absent.

Randall Miller, first lay alternate, participated in this decision.

Timothy K. Bruster, first clergy alternate, participated in this decision.

October 24, 2015