



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
CONSEIL JUDICIAIRE DE L'EGLISE METHODISTE UNIE
RECHTSHOF DER EVANGELISCH-METHODISTISCHEN KIRCHE
CONSELHO JUDICIAL DA IGREJA METODISTA UNIDA
CONSEJO DE LA JUDICATURA DE LA IGLESIA METODISTA UNIDA



Petition for Declaratory Decision

This form is to be used by the Secretary of the body authorized to petition the Judicial Council for a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision as to the constitutionality, meaning, application, or effect of (please check one):

- ☒ *The Book of Discipline 2016* or any portion thereof (§ 2610.1)
☐ any act or legislation of a General Conference (§ 2610.1)
☐ any proposed legislation (§ 2609.2)

Name of body authorized to make a Petition (§ 2610.2): The Denmark Annual Conference

Date of session: May 13, 2017 (month/day/year) Location: Copenhagen, Denmark

Name of Secretary: Rev. Christina Kjær Preisler

Address: Mandalsvej 16B, City: Aarhus N

State/Province: _____ ZIP/Postal Code 8200 Country: Denmark

Phone: +45 29821262 Fax: _____ E-mail: sekretaer@metodistkirken.dk

To be reviewed (indicate paragraph number, title of legislation and/or act where applicable):

Book of Discipline: ¶ 161. G) Human Sexuality

Legislation: Legality of sentence: "... and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."

Act of General Conference: 1972

Signature: 
Secretary of the Conference/Body

Date: May 24, 2017
(month/day/year)

The following must be attached:

- Text of the written Petition for Declaratory Decision as originally presented
- Minutes of proceedings (relevant portions only)
- List of names and addresses of interested parties, including e-mail
- Other relevant materials (e.g. conference rules, resolutions, policies, reports)

Send electronic copy of this form and all materials in PDF and Microsoft Word format to:
secretaryjudicialcouncil@gmail.com

Mail four (4) sets of hard copies to: Secretary of the Judicial Council, 5556 North Sheridan
Road, # 610; Chicago, IL 60640 U.S.A.



NORDIC AND BALTIC EPISCOPAL AREA
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

BISHOP CHRISTIAN ALSTED

The Denmark Annual Conference

Denmark
Estonia
Finland
Latvia
Lithuania
Norway
Sweden

The Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church
The Secretary Rev. Luan-Vu "Lui" Tran
secretaryjudicialcouncil@gmail.com

May 24, 2017

Dear Rev. Tran,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

Meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Saturday, May 13, 2017, and with a quorum present, the UMC Denmark Annual Conference passed (by majority vote) a motion made by District Superintendent and clergy delegate, Dr. Jørgen Thaarup, requesting a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council. The motion was as follows:

MOTION FOR A DECLARATORY DECISION

The UMC Denmark Annual Conference hereby petitions the Judicial Council for a declaratory decision on the legality of the sentence added to the Book of Discipline ¶ 161. G) "... and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."

We claim that this sentence is unconstitutional, and consider the rendering of a declaratory decision by the Judicial Council clarifying the legality of the text contained in the current Social Principles, as well as the list of criteria for ordination listed in the Book of Discipline ¶ 304.3 to be essential to the discussion of human sexuality within the United Methodist Church.

The term "Christian teaching" is used synonymously with "Christian doctrine," that is, our theological position according to our standards of confession. The Constitution ¶ 3 defines the doctrinal standards for the United Methodist Church, naming both the former Methodist "Articles of Religion" and the EUB "Confession of Faith." The Constitution ¶ 17 and ¶ 18 and ¶ 21 further state the restrictive rules that the General Conference shall neither change or revoke our doctrinal standards of the "Articles of Religion," the "Confession of Faith" and the "General Rules," nor shall the General Conference add any new standards or rules of doctrine.

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¶ 102 in the Book of Discipline articulates the history of doctrinal standards, as well as the understanding of our theological task. “Doctrinal statements in form of creeds, confessions of belief, and articles of faith were officially adopted by churches as standards of Christian teaching.” Our distinctive heritage as United Methodists is inspired by the “Christian teaching” contained in the Standard Sermons of John Wesley, the liturgical formative texts, and the Hymnals and Sunday Service, and the General Rules. These documents are resources in determining the doctrinal positions of the United Methodist Church. The Book of Discipline ¶ 102 is the primary source where the wording “Christian teaching” is mostly used and defined. Six times “Christian teaching” is used as a synonym for doctrinal standard, our theological standard of faith. In the international ecumenical theological literature, we find the same understanding of “Christian teaching” as a technical term for doctrinal and confessional standards.

The Book of Discipline ¶ 103 ends with a clarification of the “standards or rules of doctrine” and a protection of the same in the restrictive rules “that our doctrinal standards shall not be revoked, altered, or changed. The process of creating new ‘standards or rules of doctrine’ thus continues to be restricted, requiring either that they be declared ‘not contrary to’ the present standards or that they go through the difficult process of constitutional amendments.”

In regard to the ongoing interpretation of our theological position in any particular time, the Book of Discipline ¶ 105 presents the so-called Quadrilateral as a Methodist theological method. This method of using Scripture, Tradition, Experiences and Reason as instruments and sources for new theology is nowhere understood in the Book of Discipline to be in contrast to the “Articles of Religion” or the “Confession of Faith” or to add any new position. The description of the Theological Task in the future is not in conflict with the restrictive rules of the Constitution defining and protecting our doctrinal standards, or our standards of Christian teaching.

If the added sentence “... and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching,” should be in disharmony with or a violation of our standards of Christian teaching, then our standards of Christian teaching, as listed in the Constitution ¶ 3 and protected in the Constitution ¶ 17 and ¶ 18 and ¶ 21, and all the listed documents, most of which are contained in ¶ 102-105, should have had texts on human sexuality, or texts that defines sexual identity or sexual orientation as part of Gods order of creation, or other doctrinal texts dealing with sexuality. However, our standards of Christian teaching as contained in our doctrinal documents do not have any text or part of text that the homosexual praxis can be incompatible with.

The question of homosexuality is not addressed in the doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church. Therefore, the question of homosexuality is not a question of doctrinal standards or standards of faith.

If the term “Christian teaching” has a different meaning than what is defined in ¶ 102 as “doctrinal statements in form of creeds, confessions of belief, and articles of faith, which were officially adopted by churches as standards of Christian teaching,” then the content of Christian teaching diverges from the “Articles of religion” and the “Confession of Faith.” In this case, Christian teaching is not in accordance with Wesley’s Standard Sermons and “General Rules,” and the content is not defined or qualified. It can include whatever or nothing, and it is not possible to use as an instrument or guideline for accepted theological positions. The term “Christian teaching” used with no definition or with an open definition where anyone can add his or her own content has no authority regarding the issue of human sexuality. It is very difficult to understand the term “Christian teaching” in any way other than what is given in ¶ 102, defined in ¶ 3, and restricted in ¶ 17, ¶ 18 and ¶ 21 of the *Book of Discipline*. The *Book of Discipline* itself defines the meaning of “Christian teaching,” and the meaning of this wording in one paragraph should not be different from the meaning of the same wording in another paragraph.

Could the understanding of adding the sentence “... and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching,” be that a new piece of doctrinal standard is added to the corpus of doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church? “Christian teaching” has been expanded by the theological position on human sexuality. The restrictive rules in ¶ 17 and ¶ 18 will put a full stop for such interpretation. No new standards or rules and no revocation or change in our present standards of Christian teaching is allowed.

The United Methodist Church can condemn the practice of homosexuality for a number of reasons. The 1972 General Conference did so by stating that “the United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality.” But we contend that the reason for the condemnation, that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with “Christian teaching,” is illegal, unconstitutional and theologically misguided in accordance with the United Methodist standards of doctrine and Christian teaching.

Therefore, we argue that the sentence added to the Book of Discipline ¶ 161. G) “... and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching” is unconstitutional.

Likewise, we contend that all other passages in the Book of Discipline where the wording is added "... practice incompatible with Christian teaching" are unconstitutional.

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This petition is submitted on behalf of the UMC Denmark Annual Conference under the authority of the United Methodist Book of Discipline 2016 ¶ 2610.2.j where the annual conference is authorized to make the petition for declaratory decisions on matters relating to annual conferences or the work therein. The sentence "... and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching" deeply impacts the UMC Denmark Annual Conference in regard to our context in a country where same sex marriage was fully accepted by law in 1989 and in the Lutheran State Church of Denmark in 2012. Furthermore, it cannot be ignored that the legal system of our country most likely would determine that the sentence under consideration is discriminatory toward people due to sexual orientation, and therefore in conflict with human rights and national law.

Respectfully submitted,

The Denmark Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church
The Bishops Office Copenhagen



Rev. Christina Kjær Preisler
Secretary of the Denmark Annual Conference



Christian Alsted
Bishop and president of the Denmark Annual Conference

Attachment to this letter:

- Form of "Petition for Declaratory Decision" send by the Denmark Annual Conference
- Minutes of the Denmark Annual Conference May 13, 2017 in Copenhagen

METHODISTKIRKEN I DANMARK

The United Methodist Church in Denmark

The Denmark Annual Conference

Extract of Minutes from May 13, 2017

Agenda item D

Meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Saturday May 13, 2017, in ordinary session, registered lay and clergy members with a quorum present, the Annual Conference, under the presidency of Bishop Christian Alsted, passed by overwhelming majority a motion made by District Superintendent and clergy member, Dr. Jørgen Thaarup, requesting a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council on the constitutionality of the added sentence to the Book of Discipline § 161. G) “... and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.

The conference authorized the Annual Conference secretary to submit the motion to the Judicial Council.



Rev. Christina Kjær Preisler

Secretary of the Denmark Annual Conference



Rev. Ole Birch

Witness the signature

List of Interested Parties in Docket No. 1017-1

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