

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



Notice of Appeal

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☐ Appealing the decision of a Codays (¶ 2718.3-4 <i>The Book of Discip</i>	• •	administrative process within thirty (30)
APPELLANT: Rev. Gregory D. S	Stover	
Address: 28 Seminole Cove	Ci	_{ty:} Lake Waynoka
State/Province: OH	ZIP/Postal Code 45171	Country: USA
Address: 28 Seminole Cove State/Province: OH Phone: 513-313-8486 Fax:	None E-mail: gs	stover51@gmail.com
RESPONDENT: Rev. David Way Committee on Appeals of the Nor Date of decision of Committee on Appe	th Central _{Appeals:} <u>March 19, 2018</u> _{eals:} Rev. Beverly Wilkes	_Central/Jurisdictional Conference (month/day/year) s-Null
Address: 12846 Daiber Road	Ci	_{ty:} Highland
State/Province: IL	ZIP/Postal Code 62249	Country:USA
Address: 12846 Daiber Road State/Province: IL Phone: 618-654-8434 Fax:	None E-mail: pa	astorbev@highlandhope.org
Authorities Cited (indicate paragra Constitution: See attached Judicial Council Decision(s): See a	ph or decision number wher Book of Discipline: See	re applicable):
Signature: Rev. Deegung.	D. Stover Da	nte: 04/06/2018 (month/day/year)
Appengnt		(monunay/year <i>)</i>

The following must be attached on separate sheets:

- **Grounds of Appeal**
- Decision of Committee on Appeals, including facts, rationale and ruling
- Eight (8) hard copies must be submitted via USPS or other delivery service to: Secretary of the Judicial Council, 5556 N. Sheridan Road, #610, Chicago, IL 60640, USA
- > Electronic copies in both Word and PDF (with security features disabled) must be submitted to: secretaryjudicialcouncil@gmail.com

Attachment to Notice of Appeal from Rev. Gregory D. Stover, Counsel for the Church

Constitution: № 20, №58

Discipline: \$\mathbb{P}\$ 362, \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2701 - 2719, \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2701, \$\mathbb{P}\$2715.1, \$\mathbb{P}\$27216.2, \$\mathbb{P}\$2717.1, \$\mathbb{P}\$2718.2, \$\mathbb{P}\$2716.4,

₽ 2706.2b

Judicial Council Decisions: 980, 144, 1052, 1111, 1120, 1218, 1220, 1292, 571, 767,1148,

1198, 1222, 1224.

AN APPEAL OF THE DECISION OF THE NORTH CENTRAL JURISDICTION COMMITTEE ON APPEALS

In the Matter of

The Rev. David Wayne Meredith

Statement of Grounds for Appeal

By

Rev. Gregory D. Stover, Counsel for the Church, West Ohio Conference

Submitted to:

Secretary of the Judicial Council 5556 North Sheridan Road, #610 Chicago, Illinois 60640 secretaryjudicialcouncil@gmail.com

Submitting Party:

Rev. Gregory D. Stover Counsel for the West Ohio Conference of the UMC 28 Seminole Cove Lake Waynoka, Ohio 45171 gstover51@gmail.com

Opposing/Interested Parties:

Rev. Beverly Wilkes-Null Chairperson/President of the North Central Jurisdiction Court of Appeals Highland Hope United Methodist Church 12846 Daiber Road Highland, Illinois 62249 pastorbev@highlandhope.org

Philip Moots
Counsel for the Committee on Investigation
3600 Olentangy River Road
Columbus, Ohio 43214-3913
pmoots@mchlaw.us

Rodger N. Walk
Co-Counsel for the West Ohio
Conference of the UMC
917 Main Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
rwalk@rwalklaw.com

Rev. Benton Heisler Secretary of the North Central Jurisdiction Court of Appeals P.O. Box 6247 Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516 benton@wmcumc.org

Rev. Dr. Randy W. Stearns Chairperson of the Committee on Investigation of the West Ohio Conference of the UMC 1490 Cereal Avenue Hamilton, Ohio 45013 stearnsrandy@yahoo.com

Respondent/Opposing Party:

Dr. Pamela R. Lightsey Counsel for Rev. David W. Meredith Boston University School of Theology 745 Commonwealth Avenue Boston, Massachusetts 02215 pamelarlightsey@gmail.com Rev. David W. Meredith 3416 Clifton Avenue Cincinnati, Ohio 45220 dmeredith@cliftonumc.com

Rev. William Scott Campbell
Assistant Counsel for Rev. David W. Meredith
439 Paris Hill Road
South Paris, Maine 04281
campbellwscott@aol.com

Conference of Original Jurisdiction:

West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church

Attached electronically with hard copy enclosures to follow to the Judicial Council are:

1. the Notice and Grounds of Appeal to the North Central Jurisdiction Committee on

Appeals (hereinafter "NCJ") (without exhibits)

- 2. the Appeal Brief of Counsel for the Church to the NCJ (without exhibits)
- 3. Appeal Exhibits to NCJ in support of the above
- 4. Decision of NCJ dated March 19, 2018
- 5. Transcript of NCJ Hearing dated March 9, 2018

I. Procedural History

Rev. Gregory D. Stover was appointed Counsel for the Church September 30, 2016

The Judicial Complaint in the matter of David Wayne Meredith was sent by certified mail August 14, 2017

The Judicial Complaint was received by the chair of the Committee on Investigation August 16, 2017.

The Preliminary meeting was held October 5, 2017

The Hearing was held October 15, 2017

The Adopted Bill of Charges was sent from the Committee on Investigation October 18, 2017

The Appeal that is before this body was sent November 6, 2017

This brief is being sent January 19, 2018

The Appeal Hearing is set to be in Indianapolis, Indiana March 9, 2018

North Central Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals Decision dated March 19, 2018

II. Factual History

On Sunday, October 15, 2017, the West Ohio Conference Committee on Investigation conducted a hearing based on an Amended¹ Judicial Complaint (hereinafter "AJC") in the matter of Rev. David Wayne Meredith. Three charges with specifications were set forth against Rev. Meredith in the AJC. The three charges without specifications follow: (See NCJ Appeal Exhibit 2.)

- 1. <u>Charge I</u>: Willfully engaging in practices not compatible with Christian teaching by being a self-avowed practicing homosexual in violation of \$\bigsep\$ 2702.1.(b) of the 2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church.
- Charge II: Immorality, including, but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in heterosexual marriage pursuant to ₱ 2702.1.(a) of the 2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church.
- 3. <u>Charge III</u>: Dis-obedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church pursuant to \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2702.1.(d) of the 2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church.

¹ The amended judicial complaint was submitted to the Committee on Investigation only to correct scrivener's error in the original judicial complaint, correcting and clarifying paragraph and page references to <u>The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2012</u>, upon which the Judicial Complaint is based. The amended judicial complaint contained no changes in the substance of the original complaint.

On Wednesday, October 18, 2107, Rev. Dr. Randy Stearns, Chair of the Committee on Investigations of the West Ohio Conference, reported the findings of the Committee. (See NCJ Appeal Exhibit 3.) The Committee on Investigation dismissed Charge I and Charge II in their entirety, but certified a Bill of Charges based in part on Charge III, after stripping out Specification "a" which reads:

a. ¶ 304.3., p. 220 of the 2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, specifies that "self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." Rev. Meredith's continuation as an ordained minister within The United Methodist Church represents a direct contradiction to and violation of the discipline of the United Methodist Church and the ordering of ministry."

On November 6, 2017, the Counsel for the Church forwarded an appeal to the North Central Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals. (See attachments 1 and 2.)

The appeal of the Counsel for the Church was based on the contention that the Committee on Investigation committed egregious errors of law in not applying the provisions of the 2012 Discipline (PP 2702.1. (a), (b), and (d), 304.2, 304.3, 341.6) and Judicial Council Decision 1341 and other decisions. These egregious errors resulted directly in the dismissal of Charge I, II and Specification "a" of Charge III.

The North Central Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals held a hearing on March 9, 2018 and issued its ruling on March 19, 2018. The NCJ Committee on Appeals found egregious errors of law in the failure of the Committee on Investigation to certify Charge I and Specification a of Charge III. The Committee on Appeals remanded the matter to the Committee on Investigation for a new hearing. (See attachments 4 and 5.) Additionally, the Committee on Appeals ruled:

In fairness to all parties, we order, pursuant to \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2716.4 & \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2706.2b that the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church pause this judicial proceeding until after the proceedings of the Special Called Session of the General Conference in 2019 are concluded.

This order from the NCJ Committee on Appeals to pause judicial proceedings until after the Special Called Session of General Conference in 2019 is the focus of this appeal to the Judicial Council.

III. Jurisdiction

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction in this matter under \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2715 and \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2716 of The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2012.

IV. Standing

The Counsel for the Church has standing to bring this appeal under $\rat{1}$ 2701.3a, $\rat{2}$ 2715.9 and $\rat{2}$ 2716.1.

V. Ground for Appeal

Counsel for the Church contends that the North Central Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals, in ordering all judicial proceedings in the matter of Rev. David Wayne Meredith "pause" until after the completion of the 2019 Special Called Session of the General Conference, committed an egregious error of law unfairly denying expeditious process to all parties concerned.

The Preamble to the portion of the <u>Discipline</u> which provides the purpose and delineates the judicial process, found in \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2701 states: "special attention should be given to ensuring racial, ethnic, age and gender diversity of boards, committees and courts and the timely disposition of all matters." (Emphasis added.) Further, in JCD 980, in a case parallel in many ways to the instant matter before us, the Judicial Council remanded the matter to the Western Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals ordering that body to remand the case to the Pacific Northwest Committee on Investigation. In issuing the remand the Judicial Council ordered, "the remand must occur expeditiously."

In ordering an unnecessary pause in judicial proceedings the North Central Jurisdiction

Committee on Appeals has committed egregious error, has unlawfully interfered with the pattern

of expeditious dealing with judicial matters and delayed justice to all parties in this matter.

Several arguments in support of this ground of appeal are stated briefly in the following paragraphs. Counsel for the church reserves the right and intend to further develop these arguments in a brief to be submitted at the appropriate time.

VI. Supportive Arguments

 The pause of judicial process ordered by the Committee on Appeals represents an unlawful and unnecessary delay in the timely disposition of judicial proceedings mandated in the Discipline.

As referenced above the <u>Discipline</u> focuses "special attention" on "the timely disposition of all matters" in judicial process. This "special attention" is illustrated in the strict deadlines and time requirements imposed by the <u>Discipline</u> in the pre-judicial (cf. **P** 362) and appeals process (cf. **P** 2715.1, 2716.2, 2717.1, 2718.2).

The order to pause judicial proceedings a minimum twelve-month hiatus before this matter can be re-heard by the Committee on Investigation and significantly more time until the matter can be resolved. This egregious error represents an unnecessary impediment to the timely disposition of this matter and unfair and unlawful delay of the opportunity for all parties to seek justice, reconciliation and healing.

The order for pause of proceedings from the Committee on Appeals is based on an
 "aspirational" statement of the Council of Bishops and not on any foundation or necessity
 in the Discipline or church law.

The Committee on Appeals offered as rationale for its order to pause proceedings the "aspirational" statement of the Council of Bishops' which was included in a larger resolution approved by the 2016 General Conference establishing *The Commission on a Way Forward*. The Bishops' "aspirational" statement read: "We will continue to explore options to help the church live in grace with one another – including ways to avoid further complaints, trials and harm while we uphold the Discipline."

For the Council of Bishops to state that they "will continue to explore options ... to avoid further complaint, trials and harm ..." is not a statement of law, but of aspiration.

Such aspirational statements do not have the force of law in the United Methodist Church and cannot properly be used as a ground for interrupting the expeditious movement of judicial processes described in the <u>Discipline</u> and supported in Judicial Council rulings. Judicial Council has ruled repeatedly that "aspirational" statements, while lawful as statements of desire or hope-for change, cannot override church law and cannot "negate, ignore, or violate" church law. (See JCD's 1044, 1052, 1111,1120, 1218, 1220 and 1292.)

Further, the disciplinary paragraphs cited by the Committee on Appeals in support of the order to pause proceedings (\$\mathbb{P}\$ 2716.4 and \$\mathbb{P}\$ 2706.2b) do not relate to, speak to or support the order for a pause of judicial proceedings.

Additionally, in ordering a pause in judicial proceedings until after the completion of the 2019 Special General Conference the Committee on Appeals inadvertently has inserted itself into the political turmoil of the United Methodist Church and appears to have taken the side of those who wish to delay accountability. The 2019 Special Session of General Conference may or may not change the law of the church regarding same-sex

relationships. There is no way to know that decision in advance. Until that decision is made the law of the church must be upheld.

The Committee on Appeals errored egregiously in basing their order to pause judicial proceedings on an "aspirational" statement rather than church law.

3. The "pause" of judicial process ordered by the NCJ Committee on Appeals is highly irregular and stands in bold contradiction to United Methodist judicial practice reflected in other orders for "remand."

In searching Judicial Council decisions, Counsel for the Church has been unable to find a situation in which a committee or court has used a remand order to delay judicial process. To the contrary, in each case in which a remand was used the emphasis was on moving proceedings forward as expeditiously as possible depending on the body which was required to make response to the remand. (See JCD's 571, 767, 980, 1148, 1198, 1222, and 1224.)

The Judicial Council's own decision have been designed to bring about the "timely disposition of all matters" (\$\mathbb{P}\$ 2701). The order of the North Central Committee on Appeals committed egregious error in ignoring previous judicial practice and the pattern of church law which bends toward expeditious resolution of judicial matters.

4. The order to pause creates a harmful and potentially far-reaching precedent.

The instant matter before this Council involves one of the most controversial and contentious issues in this season of the United Methodist Church. If the "pause" order of the North Central Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals is permitted to stand it will provide precedent for other Committees on Investigation and/or other Committees on Appeals also to seek to delay unlawfully and unnecessarily the judicial processes specified in the

Discipline, thus delaying accountability and the timely disposition of judicial matters.

Further, once established as a precedent the practice of unnecessary delay could be

applied in other instances where it is believed or hoped that General Conference will

enact a change of Discipline.

VII. Summary

The "pause" of judicial proceedings ordered by the North Central Conference Committee

on Appeals was an egregious error of law in that it:

1. Unlawfully and unnecessarily delays the "timely disposition" of the matter of Rev. David

Wayne Meredith.

2. Is based on an "aspirational" statement of the Council of Bishops and not on any foundation

or necessity in the Discipline or church law.

3. Is highly irregular and stands in bold contradiction to United Methodist judicial practice

reflected in other orders for "remand.

4. Creates a harmful and potentially far-reaching precedent which may be used more broadly to

delay the expeditious and timely resolve of judicial matters.

The Counsel for the Church reserves the right to more fully explore our objections to the

order for pause and to request remedy in a brief to be filed at the appropriate time.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Gregory Destower

Counsel for the Church, West Ohio Conference

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Gregory D. Stover, Counsel for the Church, certify that I have served a copy of the foregoing Statement for Grounds of Appeal of the Decision of the North Central

Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals, on this 6th day of April, 2018, upon the following persons by electronic mail:

Rev. Beverly Wilkes-Null Chairperson/President of the North Central Jurisdiction Court of Appeals Highland Hope United Methodist Church 12846 Daiber Road Highland, IL 62249 pastorbev@highlandhope.org

Rev. Benton Heisler Secretary of the North Central Jurisdiction Court of Appeals P.O. Box 6247 Grand Rapids, MI 49516 benton@wmcumc.org

Rev. Dr. Randy W. Stearns Chairperson of the West Ohio Conference Committee on Investigation 1490 Cereal Avenue Hamilton, OH 45013 stearnsrandy@yahoo.com

Philip Moots
Counsel for the West Ohio Conference Committee on Investigation
3600 Olentangy River Road
Columbus, Ohio 43214-3913
pmoots@mchlaw.us

Rev. David W. Meredith 3416 Clifton Avenue Cincinnati, OH 45220 dmeredith@cliftonumc.com

Dr. Pamela R. Lightsey (Counsel for Rev. David W. Meredith) Boston University School of Theology 745 Commonwealth Avenue Boston, MA 02215 pamelarlightsey@gmail.com

Rev. William Scott Campbell (Assistant Counsel for Rev. David W. Meredith) 439 Paris Hill Road South Paris, ME 04281 campbellwscott@aol.com

Bishop Gregory Vaughn Palmer (Resident Bishop, West Ohio Conference of the UMC) West Office Conference Center 32 Wesley Boulevard Worthington, OH 43085 wocbishop@wocumc.org

Rev. Gregory D. Gover

Counsel for the Church, West Ohio Conference

COMMITTEE ON APPEALS NORTH CENTRAL JURISDICTION OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

In the Matter of the Decision of the West Ohio Conference Committee on Investigation in the Matter of Rev. David Wayne Meredith

(Original Jurisdiction: West Ohio Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church)

OPINION ON APPEAL

This matter was heard on March 9, 2018. Upon consideration of the record on appeal, the briefs of the parties, oral argument, and deliberations of the North Central Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals (hereinafter Committee), the Committee concludes that the weight of the evidence using the standard set forth in the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (2012) of egregious error requires that charges 1 and the uncharged specification of charge 3 be remanded to the West Ohio Conference Committee on Investigation to comply fully with the instruction set forth below.

I. Factual and Procedural History

The appellant, the West Ohio Conference of United Methodist Church, contends that the West Ohio Conference Committee on Investigation (hereinafter West Ohio Committee on Investigation) failed to discharge their duties under the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (2012) (hereinafter Discipline – 2012). The West Ohio Conference of United Methodist Church contends that the West Ohio Committee on Investigation failed to adhere and apply the Discipline – 2012 as interpreted by the decisions of the Judicial Council specially Judicial Council decision 1341 (hereinafter JCD 1341) to the facts contained in the Charges and Specifications of the Judicial Complaint submitted in the matter of Rev. David Wayne Meredith. The West Ohio Committee on Investigation contends that they reviewed the charges in a thorough thoughtful matter and fulfilled their duty and fully and deliberately considered the Discipline – 2012 and the Judicial Council Decisions.

II. Jurisdiction

The Committee has jurisdiction under \P 2715 and \P 2716 of the *Discipline* – 2012.

III. Appeal Procedures

 \P 2715(1) of the *Discipline* – 2012 provides, in pertinent part, as follows:

In all cases of appeal, the appellant shall within thirty days give written notice of appeal and at the same time shall furnish to the officer receiving such notice (¶ 2716.2, 2717.1, 2718.2) and to the

counsel a written statement of the grounds of the appeal, and the hearing in the appellate body shall be limited to the grounds set forth in such statement. [Footnote omitted.]

¶ 2715(10) provides, in pertinent part as follows:

The Church shall have no right of appeal from findings of the trial court. In regard to cases where there is an investigation under ¶ 2702, but no trial is held, egregious errors of Church law or administration may be appealed to the jurisdictional committee on appeals by counsel for the Church. The committee on investigation's decision not to certify a bill of charges does not alone constitute an egregious error of Church law or administration. When the committee on appeals shall find egregious errors of Church law or administration under this part, it may remand the case for a new hearing, in which event it shall return to the chair of the committee on investigation a statement of the grounds of its action. This is not to be double jeopardy.

Counsel for Rev. David Wayne Meredith has maintained that he is properly the respondent in this action. This position was not advanced by either the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church or the West Ohio Committee on Investigation. This appeal is very narrow in its scope and defined by the specific provisions of the Discipline - 2012 ¶ 2715. The only remedy allowed is a remand with instructions to the West Ohio Committee on Investigation or to affirm their decision. A respondent must be the entity which can be guided, governed or instructed by the appellate body. Our sole duty is to review the record as present and address one specific issue. We cannot guide, govern or instruct Rev. David Wayne Meredith. While we appreciate if these charges result in a church trial and if there is a verdict by that fact finding body then he would then be an appellant in that appeal. We do not believe that at this time he can be considered a respondent. Rev. Meredith does not have standing in this appeal. Charge 3 and specifications a, b, c, d and e as found by the West Ohio Committee on Investigation are not before us. Only the presented specification 3a which was not charged is before us. This further supports the position that Reverend Meredith is not a respondent as this action did not allow him to appeal from this decision to certify this charge.

IV. Analysis

The West Ohio Committee on Investigation was forwarded three charges each supported with documents and specifications. These charges were:

CHARGE I Willfully engaging in practices not compatible with Christian teaching by being a self-avowed practicing homosexual in violation of ¶ 2702.1(b) of the Discipline - 2012, relating to the Complaints by the following

complainants noted above: Alice, Greenway, Pees, Roland, Russell, Slack, G. Wood, and K. Wood.

- CHARGE II Immorality, including, but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage pursuant to ¶ 2702.1.(a) of the Discipline 2012, relating to the complaint by the following complainants noted above: Alice, Greenway, Pees, Roland, Russell, Slack, G. Wood, and K. Wood.
- CHARGE III Dis-obedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church pursuant to ¶2702.1.(d) of Discipline 2012, relating to the Complaints by Alice, Brown, Greenway, Pees, Roland, Russell, Slack, G. Wood, and K. Wood.

The West Ohio Committee on Investigation did not forward charges 1 or 2 and did forward charge 3 but deleted specification a) from the cited specifications.

Specification a) of Charge 3 stated:

(a) ¶ 341.6 of the *Discipline* – 2012 states that, "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." Rev. Meredith's celebration of his homosexual union with his partner held at Broad Street United Methodist Church on May 7, 2016, was held in direct violation of the *Discipline* – 2012 which forbids the celebration of a homosexual union in a United Methodist Church.

Discipline – 2012 ¶ 2706 governs the West Ohio Committee on Investigation. This section provides that the options available to the West Ohio Committee on Investigation which are to find that there are reasonable grounds and to refer the bill of charges and specifications for trial or to find that there are not reasonable grounds. Each of these results require an explanation with reasoning. To do otherwise places this Committee in a position to speculate. From the record presented to us it is not possible to tell which of the actions set forth in Discipline – 2012 was intended. It is our conclusion that the West Ohio Committee on Investigation is required to be more diligent in either the forwarding or dismissing of each of the charges and specifications, by providing clear rationale and identifying the specific steps taken in the process of a new hearing that leads them to the conclusions they reach and addressing the alternative actions set forth in Discipline – 2012 ¶ 2706.5(c).

Under the facts of this case and $Discipline - 2012 \, \P \, 2715$ these acts in light of duties of the Committee are evidence of an egregious error of church law. A reasonable person is unable, due to the absence of information and rationale, to determine how conclusions were reached.

Further, the Committee is bound by the language of JCD 980 that "where the facts concede a practice which the discipline declares to be incompatible with Christian teaching, reasonable grounds exist to bring a bill of charges and specifications and it is egregious error of Church law not to bring such a bill of charges and specifications."

The Committee does agree that even with the lack of rational based on the transcript of the hearing alone that there was not egregious error in failing to refer charge number 2 in light of JCD 1341.

V. Decision

- 1. The Committee finds with clarity that the West Ohio Committee on Investigation was the respondent, i.e., the body that would be directed by the decision. Rev. David Meredith was not the body or person whom the West Ohio Committee on Appeals would direct. Further, the communications by the Committee to Rev. Meredith and his counsel were done as a courtesy. As we have deliberated we have been mindful that we are all the Church and no one party has that label exclusively.
- 2. The Committee affirms the West Ohio Committee on Investigation's decision not to refer for trial Charge 2, Immorality, in light of JCD 1341.
- 3. The Committee finds that there are "egregious errors of church law" as noted which constitute grounds for remanding to a new hearing pursuant to *Discipline* 2012 ¶ 2715.10:
 - The Committee finds that there has been a failure of the West Ohio Committee on Investigation to apply ¶ 304.3 and ¶ 2702 of the Discipline 2012 and JCD 886, 920, 980 and 1341 to the uncontested facts stated in the bill of charges and specifications numbers 1 and 3 specification a. which constitutes an egregious error of Church law.
 - The Committee finds there was a failure exhibited by the West Ohio Committee on Investigation that rose to the level of egregious errors of law. The conclusions reported by the West Ohio Committee on Investigation were done so without discernable rationale supported by church law as noted in *Discipline* 2012 & 2016 and Judicial Council Decisions.
 - The Committee finds the West Ohio Committee on Investigation failed to provide evidence to demonstrate their position for refusal to refer charges and specifications 1 and 3.a,
 - Pursuant to ¶ 2716.4 & ¶ 2706.2.b, the Committee orders the West Ohio Conference of United Methodist Church to engage competent counsel for the West Ohio Committee on Investigation so that thorough and applicable work is completed.

4. The Committee is aware of the current dynamics of conflict in regard to human sexuality in the UMC and culture. Mindful of the Statement of the Council of Bishops delivered and adopted as the way forward at the 2016 General Conference which concludes with this language:

"We will continue to explore options to help the church live in grace with one another - including ways to avoid further complaints, trials and harm while we uphold the Discipline. We will continue our conversation on this matter and report our progress to you and to the whole church. Today, as a way of beginning to find our way forward, we suggest that in place of the allotted legislative time we spend 1-2 hours of plenary time in prayer, confession and exploration of a creative way forward. The bishops are prepared to provide questions to guide your conversations. Your conversations will be the first step to a way forward".

In fairness to all parties, we order, pursuant to, ¶2716.4 & ¶2706.2.b that the West Ohio Conference of United Methodist Church pause this judicial proceeding until after the proceedings of the Special Called Session of the General Conference in 2019 are concluded.

IT IS SO FOUND AND SO ORDERED.

DATED: March 19, 2018

Rev. Benton R. Heisler, Secretary, NCJ Committee on Appeals

[SIGNATURES ON FOLLOWING PAGE]

VOTING PAGE: 0Appeal of the October 18, 2017 Decision of the West Ohio Conference Committee on Investigation in the matter(s) of Rev. David Wayne Meredith.

DATED: March 9, 2018

COMMITTEE MEMBERS JOINING IN ALL PARTS OF THE OPINION:

Reverly Wilkes-Null Chairnerson

Benton Heisler, Secretai

Sandy Harlan

Edwin Vargas.

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Randy Cross

Tim Ottmar

John Rothlisberger

Cindv Patterson

COMMITTEE MEMBERS NOT JOINING IN ALL PARTS OF THE OPINION:

Lonnie Chaffin