



Oklahoma Conference

of The United Methodist Church

On Monday, August 21, Oklahoma County District Judge Aletia Haynes Timmons issued a ruling regarding the litigation brought by Church of the Servant against the Conference Board of Trustees, Bishop Nunn and Crossroads District Superintendent Rev. Dr. Sam Powers.

In that ruling, Judge Timmons ordered the Oklahoma Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to facilitate a third disaffiliation vote at Church of the Servant before the September 6 deadline to provide Church of the Servant a third opportunity to vote on disaffiliation and, in the event of a successful vote of support, to have their disaffiliation considered for ratification at the special October 2023 annual conference.

Church of the Servant voted twice on disaffiliation on September 11, 2022, and in both instances failed to obtain the required two-third's support from its professing membership for disaffiliation.

Judge Timmons' order that a third disaffiliation vote be scheduled is in direct conflict with the disaffiliation agreement that states that in the event the vote to disaffiliate fails to obtain the necessary two-thirds (2/3) support in the vote, then the Local Church cannot again request such a conference and vote without approval of and consultation with the District Superintendent, or until the passage of twelve (12) months from the date of the conference of

the Local Church at which the vote was taken and received insufficient support.

Church of the Servant did not obtain the consent of the District Superintendent to schedule such a church conference vote, and 12 months have not passed since September 11, 2022.

This is the second time Judge Timmons has ordered the annual conference to proceed with actions that conflict with the UMC Book of Discipline and documented church polity. The first ruling, which came on July 17 in the case of First UMC of Oklahoma City vs. the annual conference, has been stayed on appeal and is set for appellate hearing before the Oklahoma Supreme Court on August 29.

As we did in the First UMC of Oklahoma City case, we will also appeal the ruling in the Church of the Servant Case.

It should be clearly understood that the orders from Judge Timmons only apply to the specific hearings and those specific churches. The rulings do not apply to any other churches going through the disaffiliation process this summer in preparation for the October special annual conference. If you are involved in those processes, please continue as you have been. These two rulings **do not** apply to other churches.

In both cases, the rulings blatantly interfere with an internal matter of church self-governance that should be protected under the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

The Oklahoma Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is committed to adhering to church law, following the disaffiliation process and representing the conference. We have consistently honored the documented and approved disaffiliation process for every church that has expressed interest in disaffiliating.

We believe the courts have no role to play in the management of church affairs including local church disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church. The interpretation of the Book of Discipline and the documented disaffiliation agreement should be left to the UMC processes.

Unfortunately, this ruling takes away the rights of the Church of the Servant members who have twice voted to remain a part of the United Methodist Church. The ruling also unfairly directs the Oklahoma Annual Conference to modify the disaffiliation process it has been using for all other churches seeking disaffiliation.

As we do with other unfounded and unnecessary litigation, the Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church will represent the conference and defend church polity. Distractions like these are unfortunate, though, because we would much prefer to spend every bit of our energy making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The conference will continue to defend its rights as a religious organization and the rights of its members and local churches to the free exercise of their religion without interference from secular courts.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Dr. Joe Harris
Rev. Derrek Belase
Joe Holt, CPA
Rev. Dr. Tish Malloy
Rev. Connie Gibson

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