

## **Judicial Council rules on exit plans, episcopal assignments**

The Judicial Council has issued its rulings from its Fall Docket following its meeting last week in Los Angeles. Several of the decisions have to do with the use of paragraph 2549 (particularly 1512) as a means of exiting the denomination.

Bishops David Bard and Kennetha Bigham-Tsai have issued the following statement regarding these decisions:

"We are in receipt of a copy of the recent Judicial Council decisions regarding the use of paragraph 2549 for church exits. We will need time to review these decisions with our Conference Chancellor to see how it impacts the IGRC Exit Plan which was announced at the 2024 Annual Conference. As an interim measure, we have removed the IGRC Exit Plan from the Conference website as we conduct our review."

In an email sent to churches this week that had begun the Exit Process announced at the 2024 Annual Conference, the message read as follows:

"Bishop Beard led in good faith and with full transparency. While IGRC currently has two new Bishops, Bishop Bard accepted the lead episcopal role for IGRC's Church Closure – Exit Plan. You can have full confidence that the full transparency and good faith you have come to expect in your episcopal leader has not changed under Bishop Bard.

"So, as the team gains understanding of the ramifications from the recent Judicial Council decision and seeks to discern what pathway may be available, please continue to do what I am sure you have been doing:

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit's increasing presence and wisdom for your leaders,
2. Pray for increased peace which passes all understanding,
3. Resist the enemy of our souls desire to damage the witness of your congregation by giving into what John Wesley called "evil surmisings." For Wesley, this is when a person starts presuming the worst of others, and is no longer living in the love of Christ.

Bishop Bard will be seeking additional counsel throughout next week as he gathers with other denominational leaders experiencing the same reality. When additional information is available, it will be announced.

In another decision, the Judicial Council said a committee's recommendation for a bishop to serve in two jurisdictions went beyond what General Conference approved. "The action of the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy in recommending the assignment of a bishop to the West Virginia Episcopal Area in the Northeastern Jurisdiction and the Holston Episcopal Area in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, is not consistent with the allocations approved by the postponed 2020 General Conference."

The Council offered no remedy to the issue and did not speak to a similar arrangement of a bishop having responsibilities in both the South Central and Western Jurisdictions because there was no challenge made to the assignment by the jurisdictional conference. The Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy released a statement, saying, "we did the best we could," and pledged to correct the error in 2028 when new assignments of bishops will take place.