

Request for a Ruling of Law related to Clergy Executive Session

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I rise to ask for a ruling of law regarding the actions of the Clergy Executive session of the 2019 Annual Conference of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

On Wednesday afternoon we voted to receive two candidates, one for commissioning and one for ordination, who are according to what we know in same sex relationships within same sex marriages and therefore ineligible for ordination. My question, Bishop Easterling is based on the Discipline of the United Methodist Church and the specific history of this case. To explain:

At the Clergy Session of the 2018 Annual Conference you were asked as a question of law - *"Must this session of the clergy exclude these two candidates (the ones we are discussing today) on the basis of Dr. Hunt's report and on the basis of the Discipline ¶ 304.3?"*

You ruled that *"these two individuals are not able to come forward as candidates either for commissioning or for ordination."*

But then in 2019 the Judicial Council ruled in decision #1368; *"The Bishop's ruling of law violated the separation of powers by intruding on the responsibilities and rights of the Executive Session. It is not within the authority of a bishop to prevent the Executive Session from fulfilling its responsibilities. The Bishop's decision to exclude the candidates prematurely interfered with the body's right to question the Board concerning its claims and to question the two candidates directly. The Judicial Council reverses the ruling on the second question of law."*

Now that said: The Judicial Council ruled in decision #690 that *"The clergy session is not limited to those matters brought before it by the Board of Ordained Ministry. Clergy members in full connection may consider all clergy business matters, with or without Board of Ordained Ministry recommendation. (AND) They may not vote to admit or ordain any candidate who has not met all the disciplinary requirements."*

So my question is:

In light of the fact that paragraph 304.3 states that self-avowed practicing homosexuals¹ are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church,

And in light of Judicial Council Ruling #690 which says that clergy members may not vote to ordain any candidate who has not met all disciplinary requirements...

And in light of the fact that Judicial Council rulings #690 and 1368 as well as other relevant church law state that the authority of voting on candidates for commissioning and ordination

resides with the clergy session of the Annual Conference and not the Board of Ordained Ministry

And given the fact that contrary to the intent of Judicial Council Rulings #690 and #1368 the latter of which overturned your original ruling, the executive session still was denied an opportunity to *“individually question the Board of Ordained Ministry and the two candidates about whom the ruling was made directly...”*

And in light of the facts that the powers of the General Conference included in paragraphs 16.2,3 and 16 include the authority to “define and fix” the powers of Annual Conferences and clergy and to enact related legislations

And that in paragraphs 322, 324, 330, 335 (Cf 315.6d) the General Conference has made it necessary that candidates for commissioning, ordination and becoming a local pastor receive a 3/4th vote of approval,

But in the clergy session we were prevented from doing so by a procedural maneuver that argued that the clergy in the clergy session should simply accept the work of the Board of Ordained Ministry and vote on candidates as a block without questioning them individually, thus effectively thwarting the intent of Judicial Council Ruling 1368 and other relevant church law,

And this procedural maneuver was acted upon based on a 2/3rds vote of the clergy present which did not rise to the standard of 3/4ths vote.

I want to ask for a ruling of law as to whether:

- 1) The process of using block voting to approve of a group of candidates for ordination or commissioning violated the Disciplinary requirement for a 75 percent affirmative vote for each candidate and prevented the clergy session from questioning the two candidates about whom Judicial Council Ruling 1368 was made
- 2) Whether the vote to affirm the candidates was consistent with church law, in that only 2/3rds of the clergy session voted to affirm the process of voting for all candidates as a block.
- and 3) Whether the two candidates in question are properly candidates for commissioning and ordination.

See Judicial Council Rulings: #690, #886, #1343 and #1368 and Disciplinary Paragraphs: 304.3, 322, 324, 330, 335 (Cf 315.6d) and all other relevant church law.