

BISHOP'S RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR RULING OF LAW  
ON PETITION #1-10 ADOPTED IN THE  
PACIFIC NORTHWEST ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON JUNE 17, 2005

\*\*\*\*\*

In response to the request for a ruling of law made in writing by The Rev. Rick Vinther in the regular business of a session of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference, I submit the following:

1. The request was properly made in writing under the provisions of Par. 2609.6, The 2004 Book Of Discipline.

2. The two questions raised are questions of theological interpretation. The Judicial Council has ruled in Decisions 59 and 243 that "The Judicial Council was not set up as an interpreter of doctrine but as an interpreter of law from the strictly legal viewpoint." In Decision 243 it is stated further, "The Judicial Council...judges the General Conference the only body competent to make such an interpretation." That is, doctrinal interpretation is not a matter of law; therefore, it is not appropriate as a "decision of law" (2609.6) which bishops are called upon to make.

It is, therefore, my ruling, based on Judicial Council Decisions 59 and 243, that theological interpretations are not "decisions of law" under Par. 2609.6, and are outside the scope of legal decisions a bishop is required to make under that paragraph.

3. Even in the event the two questions were considered to be "questions of law"; there is a further obstacle to considering Question #1, which reads:

"Is the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference empowered to 'confess and proclaim' diversity on important matters of faith and practice in The United Methodist Church?"

The sentence in the resolution to which this question refers states something substantially different:

"Resolved, that the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church confess and proclaim that diversity of opinion on important matters of faith and practice have always characterized the Christian community."

The statement in the resolution is an historical statement about the Christian Church, while the wording of Question #1 states that the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference is now proclaiming diversity of opinion on important matters of faith and practice.

Therefore, since Question #1 asks a question not raised in the resolution, it is moot and hypothetical and I decline to rule on it.

4. Even if my rulings in points 2 and 3 above were held to be incorrect, and the resolution were to be considered on its merits, there appears to be no basis for finding it to be in violation of the Constitution or The Book Of Discipline.

The resolution is essentially an echo of the "Unity Resolution" adopted by a 95% favorable vote at the 2004 General Conference. It takes the position that there have been and continue to be differences of opinion in the Church on important matters of faith and practice. Further, that acknowledging such differences is healthy and a sign that God is at work among us. It states that neither belief nor practice can separate us from the love of God – but, no claim is made that there are not beliefs and practices which may subject a person to the judicial process of The Book Of Discipline. The resolution ends with a call for respectful dialogue among persons of differing opinions and viewpoints.

Therefore, my ruling in response to Questions #1 and #2 would be:

There is nothing in Resolution #1-10 which violates the Doctrinal Standards and General Rules or the Constitution, and nothing in the Resolution is incompatible with the various provisions of The Book Of Discipline cited in Question #2.

Submitted by

Bishop Edward W. Paup  
July 15, 2005