



The United Methodist Church
The Philadelphia Area Episcopal Office
(Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences)



Bishop Peggy A. Johnson

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Statement by Bishop Peggy A. Johnson in response to the United Methodist Judicial Council's ruling in Decision 1270 affirming the Rev. Frank Schaefer's reinstatement as an Elder in full connection:

I have received and reviewed the ruling by the United Methodist Church's Judicial Council on the appeal of the Rev. Christopher Fisher, Counsel for the Church, who challenged the Northeastern Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals' reinstatement of the Rev. Frank Schaefer's ministerial credentials. That reinstatement effectively modified the penalty enacted by a jury of the Eastern PA Conference that led to the termination of the Rev. Schaefer's credentials.

The NEJ Appeals Committee retained Rev. Schaefer's 30-day suspension for officiating at the same-gender wedding of his son, Tim; but it vacated the jury's conditional termination of his credentials that took effect when he could not assure our Board of Ordained Ministry that he would in the future "uphold the Book of Discipline in its entirety." The Judicial Council rejected the Rev. Fisher's questions and arguments challenging the Appeals Committee's actions; and it thus, rejected his appeal. This judicial matter is now considered closed.

I thank the Judicial Council, the Rev. Fisher and all other involved parties for their conscientious labors in this important case and for upholding the laudable principles and processes of our church's judicial system, especially its ultimate goal of achieving just resolution of any charges brought against clergy members of our church. I recognize and indeed, rejoice that God is the ultimate judge of all that we do and say, especially in God's name, and that God's judgment is certain but measured in grace and mercy toward those who worship and serve our all-wise Jehovah and who claim Christ as Lord and Savior.

This has been a painful season for me and many members of our conference; and while this Judicial Council decision offers a partial resolution, the season is not yet fully passed. During this busy October we have also thankfully announced a just resolution in the complaint brought against a group of clergy who co-officiated in another, symbolic same-gender wedding in November 2013. And we have just concluded a month of enlightening small-group dialogues about human sexuality, clergy responsibility and church law that involved clergy members on each of our six districts, as well as plenary discussions among lay members.

This difficult journey continues, as our dialogues will continue. But my ardent hope and belief is that they will lead us eventually toward revelatory wisdom, perhaps even compromise, and toward becoming a stronger, more loving, more united and cooperative people of faith serving Christ and witnessing to God's grace and glory in all that we do. And as for all the people who witness our words and actions as we walk this journey together, my hope and belief are that "They shall know us by our love."

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

October 27, 2014
Bishop Peggy A. Johnson
Philadelphia Episcopal Area
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Peggy A. Johnson

Peggy A. Johnson, Bishop