

A response from authors of the amended Resolution #506:

In Judicial Council Decision 1120, we find that annual conferences may “adopt a resolution on human sexuality that is aspirational in nature; however, an annual conference may not negate, ignore or violate the Discipline, even when the disagreements are based upon conscientious objections to those provisions.”

Such an aspirational effort is contained in the amended text of Resolution #506 as it was adopted by the Iowa Annual Conference on June 11, 2019. The authors of both the original resolution and the amendment wanted to give the conference the opportunity to express their perspective not only on the Traditional Plan, but also as to the kind of witness The United Methodist Church is called to offer to the world.

This resolution notes our diversity of perspectives, the harm we have done, and reminds us of our call to affirm that all persons are of sacred worth. It invites us to put our mission first and to share in a positive witness to our world. 68% of the delegates to the Iowa Annual Conference affirmed this statement.

We believe the question raised in this request for a Decision of Law hinges on whether or not the final paragraph of the resolution is a mandate or a suggestion.

The Bishop’s Decision of Law itself is contradictory in this regard. Bishop Haller’s decision claims the resolution violates The Book of Discipline in that an annual conference cannot impose financial controls or limit funding for expenses related to trials and investigations (Decision 1340). Yet, the bishop also notes that “this paragraph suggests conference prioritization.” A suggestion is not a mandate. We believe the text of the resolution has no authority to mandate the conference eliminate funding for processes within the Book of Discipline, so inquiry was made during discussion of the funds of the Episcopal Office as to the funds available for this work. The information shared during that discussion made us aware that the conference already turns to the use of reserve funds, rather than budgeted funds, when such mandated expenses occur. Nothing within this paragraph of the resolution would limit or control the ability of the conference to expend such funds.

The request for a Decision of Law notes that the paragraph uses the word “should,” but also notes this is a recommendation. Words do have meaning and the difference between the words “shall” and “should” affect the intensity of the proposal. The use of “shall” in this instance would indicate that the conference must respond and that a deviation is non-compliance. However, the use of “should” is a recommendation by the body. Those who receive the resolution and implement it have the authority to interpret and make their own judgment calls.

The annual conference budget is a moral document which speaks to the priorities of our body. Our most recent budgets have not set aside funds specifically for investigations, complaints, just resolutions or clergy trials. That does not mean, however, that we are in violation of the Book of Discipline. When needed, the conference treasurer noted that the reserve funds of our conference would be used for such a purpose. In light of new processes within our Book of Discipline starting January 1, 2020, this resolution is a recommendation that those who will undertake our future budgetary work should prioritize conference missions, new ministry starts, and clergy support.

Further, the resolution does not advocate for eliminating or even reducing the funds for investigations, complaints, just resolutions, or clergy trials. In reality, we have already not made

adequate provision for these expenses in our budget. This resolution simply requests that the conference prioritize our missional efforts first. The Book of Discipline is clear in ¶601 that “the purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church; all to the glory of God.” This is our very reason for being and as an annual conference we should prioritize our funding for these purposes.

In response, a brief will be submitted to the Judicial Council opposing the Bishop’s Decision of Law on this matter. No matter the final effect of the Decision of Law or whether the Judicial Council upholds it or reverses it, the Iowa Annual Conference voted by 68% to be a witness for the sacred worth of LGBTQIA+ people and to reject the route of punitive action towards our siblings.