

AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

**GENERAL SECRETARY  
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER**



GENERAL BOARD  
**REPORT**

2022

REV. DR. JEFFERY B. COOPER, SR.







**REPORT OF THE  
GENERAL SECRETARY/  
Chief Information Officer  
Rev. Dr. Jeffery B. Cooper, Sr.**



**General Board Meeting  
African Methodist Episcopal Church  
Marriott Marquis Hotel  
Atlanta, Georgia  
June 28 - 29, 2022**

**Bishop Paul Jones Mulenga Kawimbe, *President***  
**Bishop James Levert Davis, *First Vice President***  
**Bishop David Rwhynica Daniels, Jr., *Second Vice President***  
**Bishop Samuel Lawrence Green Sr., *Third Vice President***

**Bishop Adam Jefferson Richardson, *Senior Bishop***  
**Bishop Samuel Lawrence Green Sr., *Chair, Commission on Statistics and Finance***  
**Rev. Dr. Jeffery B. Cooper Sr., *General Secretary/CIO***  
**Mr. Marcus Henderson Sr., *Treasurer/CFO***



**Rev. Dr. Jeffery B. Cooper, Sr.**  
General Secretary and CIO

## Report of the General Secretary/CIO

**TO:** Bishops of the AME Church, President of the Council of Bishops, President of the General Board, Chairman of the Commission on Statistics and Finance, and members of the General Board.

**FROM:** Rev. Dr. Jeffery B. Cooper, General Secretary/Chief Information Officer, AME Church

I am pleased to make this report to the General Board of the AME Church outlining my work and labors as General Secretary and Chief Information Officer. At the writing of this report, we continue to settle into our new offices in the newly erected and dedicated Sunday School Union Building in Nashville, TN. I salute and congratulate my colleague, Dr. Roderick Belin, president/publisher, for his leadership in bringing this project to completion. To God be the Glory! My thanks and appreciation is extended to my staff as they continue to perform with excellence.

I also, take this opportunity to welcome General Officers Marcellus Norris, Marcus Henderson, James Miller, and John Green to their respective offices and responsibilities. May your work be blessed with much success.

I am pleased to report that the AME Website has been redesigned and should be up and running at the making of this report. Continued improvements are expected in the days ahead. Every attempt has been made to make the site more inviting and responsive to the needs of the Church.

I can also report that we have enhanced our ZOOM meeting capabilities in light of the Covid environment we have operated in. This includes enhanced abilities to connect with Districts 14 – 20. However, the availability of internet services in some countries remains a challenge.

In this report, I would like to introduce two new initiatives for the Office of the General Secretary. In light of the increasing cybersecurity concerns within our church, we will seek to develop a set of best practices and plans to protect information of the AME Church at all levels. Concerns in this area will only increase in the days to come. Hopefully, our efforts will help prepare the church for current and future cyber-attacks.

In addition, Initiative Two will involve the creation of a pilot program known as the Association of Administrative Support Personnel in the office of the General Secretary as a part of the overall AMECONNECT component of the office. This group will give recognition and support to support personnel that facilitate the daily operation of our Zion. This collaborative effort will not only highlight the very important work that they do, but they will be able to develop a model of best practices to be followed at all levels of AMEC administration.

## Cybersecurity Initiative

During the past five years, the planet has seen a significant increase in the number of instances of attempted or successful cyberattacks, as well as known instances of ransomware having been used. As the Connectional Church exists as a vast network of ties that bind one church, its leadership, and its congregation to those of another, so too are the informational ties that connect Conferences, Districts, and even the nations within them. For this reason, the Office of the General Secretary has partnered with the Office of the Treasurer to begin a combined effort to identify cybersecurity vulnerabilities, begin offering training for all to improve their cybersecurity postures, and establish a path forward to better fortify ourselves from potential attacks.

While it should be in no way be construed as a commentary on the political or economic relationships that one nation of the world may have with another, there appear to be clear links that identify certain nations to have been the locus of origin from which certain cyberattacks have occurred. In some instances, there even seem to have been possible state-sponsored actors involved in these attacks. Some of these nations may even purport to be giving aid and infrastructure support, while pursuing an entirely different agenda through the exploitation of created network vulnerabilities. By attacking networks and databases that contain sensitive information, malicious actors have claimed to hold this information and access to this information restricted from those who need and control this information. However, to best understand the importance of this to our Connectional Church, we must first understand the nature of why this is sensitive for us.

Certain types of information that identify us and correspond directly to us constitute that which is known as Personally Identifiable Information (PII). Examples of this include, but are not limited to: name, personal email address, home mailing address, personal or mobile phone number. Even more sensitive information, if exploited, may include the routing and account numbers associated with our banks from which we make our offerings and tithes. Additionally, in some instances, electronically maintained records of counseling could also constitute highly sensitive information. To protect these things, we must change some of our information security practices and employ protective countermeasures, such as firewall software, to harden our systems against intruders.

Working in conjunction with the Director of Global Security, from the Office of the Treasurer, we have begun sharing information about cybersecurity threats and training opportunities. A plethora of information has been made available including presentations, self-assessments, training, announcements of trends observed, and even cyber-hygiene recommendations. Although we have only begun cultivating this professional relationship with the Department of Homeland Security over the past half year, we will continue growing with them and expanding our offerings as well as notices/ communications in the coming months and years.

Lastly, yet intertwined with the aforementioned items is how we must establish and maintain a clear system to protect our information. We live in an era in which we rely upon the speed and utility of information; we must also secure it properly. Anti-virus software, use of data-encryption, training and retaining experts, and employing countermeasures to monitor anomalies in network activity can all be used to protect us as a global church. This is my duty and my vision as the Chief Information Officer.

## ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT PERSONNEL INITIATIVE



In support of the revolutionary strides made by AMECONNECT, the new data management system of the office of the General Secretary for the AME Church, this is a summary of the proposed voluntary AASP, an Association of Administrative Support Personnel presented as a solution to office isolation for unification through team efforts of administrative support staff on every level throughout the Connection.

Through an inclusive three-to-five-year curriculum of collaborative training, standard operating procedures, and networking, the AASP will allow for greater collaboration between staff on various experience levels throughout the Connection, so the AASP motto “*No office left behind*” can be realized. The roll-out of the AASP will occur in the following three stages:

**Stage One:** Identification of an Advisory Board of Directors & Leadership comprised of representatives (admin support staff) from each episcopal district (July-August; First AASP Virtual Board meeting in September 2022; December 2022; March 2023; June 2023).

**Stage Two:** Recruitment of Membership & Team Partnership Facilitators per team (July-September 2022; All Teams will meet virtually in October-November 2022 and separately as needed).

Team 1: Districts 1-3; 14-15    Team 3: Districts 7-10; 18-19    Team 5: Advocacy Team \*

Team 2: Districts 4-6; 16-17    Team 4: Districts: 11-13; 20    Team 6: Virtual Support Team\*\*

\*Advocacy Team: Legal counsel (to address compensation, work conditions, contracts, harassment, discrimination, abuse, etc.) will review work situations as requested within the best interests of the administrative support personnel.

\*\*Virtual Support Team: Ready team of administrative support personnel to assist with offices without adequate staffing (Outreach Component); any level of available administrative support personnel will be able to assist as needed.

**Stage Three:** Certification/Training Tracks (Quarterly trainings beginning January 2023; April 2023; July 2023; October 2023).

- a. Administrative Support Personnel (Track One) 1-4 year experience  
Open to all new support staff interested in becoming an administrative support staff member with a curriculum designed to provide a foundation in church history, polity, and theology, as well as training in interpersonal skills, organization, office skills, and technology, etc.
- b. Peer to Peer Empowered Facilitators (Track Two) 5-9 year experience

Open to those who have served five or more years who will be certified to serve as skilled facilitators to assist other administrative offices.

- c. Ambassadors of Servant Leadership--Mentorship Team (Track Three) 10+ year experience Mentorship training for administrative support staff who have gained skills and experience to train other staff.
- d. Diamond Ambassadors of Lifetime Excellent Service (Track Four) 20+ year experience Recognition and celebration of administrative support personnel who have served faithfully over 20 years (retired or active) whose witness and invaluable impact shine as “diamonds” that glorify God; these servant leaders will serve as mentors to less experienced administrative staff. Suggested First Annual Diamond Ambassadors Lifetime Recognition & First AASP Meeting: April 2023 during Administrative Professionals Week, the last week of April 2023---Location, TBD.

**For more information, send your inquiries and administrative support personnel recommendations or nominations for Diamonds of Lifetime Excellent Service to [aaspmembership.certification@gmail.com](mailto:aaspmembership.certification@gmail.com) or contact Dr. BBCalloway, AASP Founding President at 404-245-5575.**



# STEWARDSHIP

## Office of the General Secretary

### Financial Statement

4/1/2021 – 3/31/2022

Expenditures	Current Year Actual	Prior Year Actual
Salaries	61,911.39	44,222.36
FICA Expense	4,398.60	3,383.00
Web Site Admin.	18,524.00	16,840.00
Rent	11,484.00	10,440.00
Staff	28,813.00	26,193.00
Office Administration	30,076.00	26,572.88
Housing	16,405.61	11,718.33
Travel	22,050.00	15,750.00
Annuities	7,031.38	5,704.70
Total	\$200,693.98	\$160,824.27

\*Per African Methodist Episcopal Church, Inc.

Finance Department Audit Report for year ended March 31, 2022

**African Methodist Episcopal Church**  
**Judicial Council Decisions**

No. 2021 – 2024 - 01  
Through  
No. 2021 – 2024 -10



**Judge Patricia M. Mayberry, Esq.**  
*(President) \**

**Judge Tania E. Wright**  
*(Acting President)*

**Judge Derek H. Anderson**  
*(Secretary)*

**Judge Eduardo Curry**  
*(Asst. Secretary)*

**Judge Thomas Bess**  
*(Chaplain)*

**Judge Warren Hope Dawson**  
*(Member)*

**Judge Jonathan C. Augustine**  
*(Member)*

**Judge Oscar Jerome Green**  
*(Member)*

**Judge Thabule M. Ngubeni**  
*(Member)*

**Judge Starr Battle**  
*(Member)*

**Rev. Jeffery B. Cooper, II**  
*(Clergy Alternate)*

**Ms. Monice Crawford**  
*(Lay Alternate)*

**Rev. Jimmie Williams, III**  
*(Clergy Alternate)*

\*Deceased

**No. 2021-2024-01**

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF THE  
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: IN THE MATTER OF REV. DR. KARY WILLIAMS, JR.**

Patricia M. Mayberry, President, renders the opinion of the Judicial Council.

**HOLDING**

The Judicial Council DENIES the Petitioner's appeal. The Pittsburgh – West Virginia Annual Conference did not err in suspending Petitioner based on his habitual failure to pay designated apportionments for his assigned charges during the 2019-2020 Conference year.

**PARTIES**

The Petitioner is Rev. Dr. Kary Williams, Jr., Third Episcopal District, Pittsburgh-West Virginia Annual Conference. The Respondents are Bishop Frank Madison Reid, III, Presiding Prelate of the Third Episcopal District, and the Pittsburgh-West Virginia Annual Conference.

**JURISDICTION**

As it pertains to appeals, the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council is provided in *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2016, hereinafter "*Discipline*," Part XVI. Judicial Administration, Section XVI. The Judicial Council, Paragraph A. Jurisdiction, page 361 states:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to (except as may be set under "Duties" hereinafter set out) all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group, pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which affects the right of any member or Church body of the AME Church.

**STATEMENT OF ISSUE**

Whether the Pittsburgh-West Virginia Annual Conference violated the 2016 *Discipline* by suspending Petitioner for failing to fully pay his apportionments for St. Paul AME Church, Washington, PA and Payne Chapel AME Church, Canonsburg, PA?

**STATEMENT OF FACTS**

1. The Pittsburgh-West Virginia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church met for its 153<sup>rd</sup> Session from September 16-19, 2020.
2. Petitioner held appointments as pastor of St. Paul, Washington, PA and Payne Chapel, Canonsburg, PA during the 2019-2020 conference year.
3. The budget apportionment due to be reported at Annual Conference from St. Paul was \$12,374. The apportionment due to be reported from Payne Chapel was \$2,941.
4. Petitioner reported \$1,200 for St. Paul and \$964 for Payne Chapel.
5. Previously, Petitioner failed to report the apportionment due at Annual Conference for St. Paul and Payne Chapel in 2018 and 2019.
6. Petitioner failed to report the apportionment due at Annual Conference for Young Chapel, Huntington, WV, and St. James, Erie, PA, where he served in the past before being appointed to serve at St. Paul and Payne Chapel.
7. Based on his failure to pay the entire apportionment, Bishop Reid referred Petitioner to the Ministerial Efficiency Committee (MEC) for review pursuant to the *Discipline* 2016.
8. The Ministerial Efficiency Committee contacted Petitioner to appear before it on September 17, 2020. Petitioner denied receiving the email and the voice mail messages scheduling his appearance with the MEC for the above date.
9. Petitioner appeared before the MEC on September 18, 2020. Petitioner complained to the MEC about the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of his churches to raise the apportionments through their traditional fundraisers
10. The Ministerial Efficiency Committee reported to the Annual Conference that Petitioner failed to raise the apportionment due to the Annual Conference for St. Paul AME and Payne Chapel AME. The MEC further determined Petitioner habitually failed to do so in the past. Based upon the finding, the MEC recommended to the Annual Conference that, pursuant to *Discipline* 2016, Part XIV – Conferences, Section II-Annual Conference, subsection H-Finances, paragraph 2 and 3, pp. 270-271, Petitioner be suspended from itinerant work. Additionally, the Ministerial Efficiency Committee recommended that Petitioner be reinstated, if he paid the shortages by the Planning Meeting scheduled to convene October 29-31, 2020.
11. The Annual Conference approved the recommendation of the Ministerial Efficiency Committee and suspended Petitioner from ministerial duties.



12. Prior to the Planning Meeting, Petitioner raised \$8,000 for St. Paul's apportionment reducing the shortfall to approximately \$2400. He reported an additional \$400 toward Payne Chapel's apportionment reducing the shortfall to approximately \$1577. Petitioner failed to pay the apportionment shortages in full in compliance with the recommendation adopted by the Annual Conference, which would have resulted in Petitioner's reinstatement.
13. On or about November 29, 2020, Petitioner appealed the decision of the Annual Conference

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Petitioner repetitively failed to pay the apportionments for his assigned charges in 2018, 2019, and most recently 2020. He attributed the Corona Virus pandemic as the reason for his inability to pay his apportionments for 2020. Pursuant to the *Discipline*, the Bishop shall report any minister failing to raise his/her designated apportionment or a fair part of it during the conference year to the Ministerial Efficiency Committee for inquiry. See, *Discipline* 2016, Part XIV – Conferences, Section II-Annual Conference, subsection H-Finances, paragraph 2, page 270. At the time of the Annual Conference, Petitioner reported \$1200 toward the apportionment for St. Paul AME Church and \$964 toward the apportionment for Payne Chapel AME Church. The funds provided fell significantly short of the designated amount for each church.

The MEC reported to the Annual Conference the fact of Petitioner's previous failures to report the designated apportionments for the charges, where he served as pastor in 2018 and 2019. His 2020 shortage equated to a third failure to provide designated apportionments. Based on his third failure, the MEC recommended to the Annual Conference that Petitioner be suspended from itinerant work due to his habitual failures. However, the recommendation included a provision of reinstatement, if Petitioner paid the full apportionment by the Planning Meeting scheduled for October 31, 2020. On September 18, 2020, the Pittsburgh – West Virginia Annual Conference approved the report of the MEC in its entirety, which included the recommendations pertaining to Petitioner. The action of the Pittsburgh-West Virginia Annual Conference regarding the suspension of Petitioner occurred in accordance with the *Discipline* 2016, Part XIV – Conferences, Section II-Annual Conference, subsection H-Finances, paragraph 3, pp. 270-271.

Even though Petitioner received an opportunity to raise the remainder of his apportionment by the convening of the October 29-31, 2020 Planning Meeting, he failed to raise the full apportionment. Plaintiff argues that he raised a substantial portion of the apportionment and submitted at the Planning Meeting. However, the approved recommendation by the Annual Conference required the full apportionment be paid for the lifting of Petitioner's suspension and his reinstatement to itinerant work. Petitioner failed to meet this requirement. Under these circumstances, his suspension remains unaffected by his subsequent actions.

**CONCLUSION**

The Judicial Council finds Bishop Reid properly referred Petitioner to the Ministerial Efficiency Committee. The Pittsburgh-West Virginia Annual Conference did not err by approving the recommendation of the MEC to suspend Petitioner for habitually failing to pay apportionments for his assigned charges. Therefore, the Judicial Council DENIES the appeal of Petitioner.

Opinion rendered this 16th day of February 2020.

  
PATRICIA M. MAYBERRY

Concurring: Judge Tania E. Wright, Judge Derek Anderson, Judge Thomas L. Bess, Judge Vernon R. Byrd, Judge TaShun Bowden-Lewis, Judge Warren Hope Dawson, and Judge Eduardo K. Curry

Judge Glenda F. Hodges did not participate in this decision.

No. 2021-2024-02

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF THE  
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: IN THE MATTER OF REV. LEON VASS**

Judge Warren Hope Dawson, Member, delivers the opinion of the Judicial Council.

**HOLDING**

The Judicial Council DENIES Petitioner’s requested relief for failure to first seek Conciliation of the matter.

**PARTIES**

Rev. Leon Vass (“Petitioner” or “Rev. Vass”) is an itinerant elder and former Presiding Elder of the Eastern Cape Conference of the Fifteenth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Bishop David Rwhynica Daniels, Jr. (“Respondent” or “Bishop Daniels”) is the Presiding Prelate for the Fifteenth Episcopal District.

**JURISDICTION**

As it pertains to appeals, the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council is provided in the 2016 *Discipline*, Part XVI. Judicial Administration, Section XVI. The Judicial Council, Paragraph A. Jurisdiction, page 361 states:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to (except as may be set under “Duties” hereinafter set out) all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group, pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which affects the right of any member or Church body of the AME Church.

### **BACKGROUND**

1. Rev. Vass joined the ministry of the AME Church in October 1992 and was ordained as an Itinerant Elder in 1996 in the Eastern Cape Conference. He states that he holds theological qualifications with a Diploma in Theology as well as an Honors Degree in Theology (Postgraduate). He further states that he was elevated to the position of Presiding Elder on January 13, 2001 and served in this position till September 2020, when he requested to be relieved from it. He was serving the Graaff Reinet District at the time that he requested to be relieved of his position as a Presiding Elder. The said district is about 800 kilometers (497.097 miles) from the place of his residence.
2. Summarized, Rev. Vass claimed a laundry list of complaints against Bishop David Rwhynica Daniels, Jr., the Respondent. – they included:
  - a. the purpose and use of the Social Responsibility Fund of the 15<sup>th</sup> Episcopal during the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic.
  - b. the text of an email from the Bishop to him which suggested that the Covid-19 Pandemic was the “perfect excuse” for failing to submit the Media and Annual Conference Budget.
  - c. pension fund accumulation.
  - d. Bishop’s *inappropriate* tone in response to his several concerns.
3. As a result of his view that the above concerns had not been adequately addressed by the Bishop, Rev. Vass informed the Bishop in writing, via text message, that he [desired] to be relieved from the position of Presiding Elder. Most recently, Rev. Vass complained of the failure of the Bishop to give him a Pastoral assignment.
4. On or about November 30, 2020, Rev. Vass filed (by and through private counsel) a formal complaint, in a letter dated 24 November 2020, with the General Secretary against the Bishop. Said letter alleged maladministration by the Bishop and claimed he had been humiliated and his dignity and personhood had been negatively affected by the conduct of the Bishop in violation of the Ministers’ Bill of Rights, Section III, number 6 Dignity and Personhood, paragraph 1, page 142, of the *Discipline*, which states:

No public or private indignities by the administrative superior against a pastor’s dignity and personhood will be tolerated. Such action would make the bishop subject to the charge of maladministration.



### **STATEMENT OF ISSUES**

- I. Whether Petitioner utilized and exhausted his administrative remedies as provided and required by the *Discipline* prior to seeking relief from the Judicial Council?
- II. Whether the Judicial Council has jurisdiction to grant the requested relief relative to Petitioner's request for a pastoral assignment and/or reinstatement?

### **DISCUSSION**

While this matter involves other procedural problems, they are not analyzed or discussed herein because the Judicial Council determines that Conciliation was required, but not requested in this matter.

PART XVI. JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION, Section I Conciliation Process at page 315 *strongly expresses* the intent of the Church that disputes within the church be resolved peacefully without resort to formal judicial processes. It states in pertinent part:

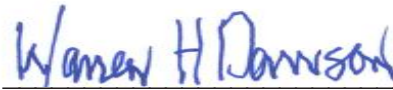
#### A. Purpose of Conciliation

It is the clear intent and purpose of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to encourage, create, and stimulate peace and goodwill among all of its members, societies, local churches, auxiliaries, departments, and commissions. Accordingly, before any charge may be filed, introduced, or conveyed for consideration, all parties to any difference, dispute, claim or controversy shall submit the matters of contention to the Conciliation Committee.

**CONCLUSION**

The Judicial Council has no jurisdiction to intercede at this phase of the proceedings and thus DENIES Petitioner's requested relief: for failure to first seek Conciliation of this matter.

Opinion rendered this 8<sup>th</sup> day of April 2021.



Warren Hope Dawson  
Judge

Concurring: Judge Patricia M. Mayberry, Judge Tania E. Wright, Judge Derek Anderson, Judge Thomas L. Bess, Judge Vernon R. Byrd, Judge TaShun Bowden-Lewis, and Judge Eduardo K. Curry

Judge Glenda Hodges did not participate in the deliberations or decision.

No. 2021-2024-03

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF THE  
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: IN THE MATTER OF REV. DR. BRANDON A.A. J. DAVIS**

Per Curium decision of the Judicial Council of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

**HOLDING**

The Judicial Council DENIES the Petitioner’s request for a Declaratory Decision. The provisions of the Ministers’ Bill of Rights raised are not doubtful in meaning or subject to more than one interpretation. The Judicial Council accepts the matter as an appeal from a decision of Bishop Frank Madison Reid, IITI. The Judicial Council finds no evidence of a request by Petitioner for a transfer to the Seventh Episcopal District. The Petitioner remains a member of the Third Episcopal District. The Judicial Council directs the parties to schedule Conciliation within in fifteen (15) days from the date of this decision to resolve the issues regarding Petitioner’s status within the Third Episcopal District.

**PARTIES**

The Petitioner is Rev. Dr. Brandon A.A. J. Davis, an Itinerant Elder in the Third Episcopal District, North Ohio Annual Conference. The Respondents is Bishop Frank Madison Reid, III, Presiding Prelate of the Third Episcopal District.

**JURISDICTION**

As it pertains to appeals, the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council is provided in the 2016 *Discipline*, Part XVI. Judicial Administration, Section XVI. The Judicial Council, Paragraph A. Jurisdiction, page 361 states:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to (except as may be set under “Duties” hereinafter set out) all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group, pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which affects the right of any member or Church body of the AME Church.

As it relates to a declaratory decision, the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council is provided in the 2016 *Discipline*, Part XVI, Section XVI, The Judicial Council, Subsection I Duties, paragraph 10, page 365 states:

When the General Conference shall have passed an act or legislation that appears to be subject to more than one interpretation, or when a paragraph or paragraphs of the Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church deem to be of doubtful meaning or application ... the Judicial Council shall make a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision and the effect of such act, legislation or paragraph ...

### **STATEMENT OF FACTS**

1. In January 2015, Rev. Davis resigned from his employment with the State of Ohio Department of Corrections, as a contract Chaplain, working at the Noble Correctional Institution in Caldwell, Ohio to pastor St. Andrews AME Church full time. His salary as a pastor became his only source of financial support.
2. In October 2017, Bishop McKinley Young referred Rev. Davis to the Ministerial Efficiency Committee (MEC) for failure to pay his full church assessment. In its report, the MEC determined St. Andrews' aging congregation with depleting funds contributed to the failure to pay the full assessment. According to the MEC, even though they failed to meet their assessment, the St. Andrews congregation did not desire new leadership.
3. Despite the congregation's request to retain Petitioner, Bishop McKinley Young elected to replace Rev. Davis with a pastor who could "inspire both numerical and financial growth."
4. In October 2017, Rev. Davis did not receive an appointment during the 136<sup>th</sup> Session of the North Ohio Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which convened from October 24-27, 2017.
5. Instead of receiving an appointment, Bishop McKinley Young opted to provide Petitioner a stipend of \$500.00 bi-monthly toward his support.
6. In addition to the support from the bi-monthly stipend, Bishop Young arranged for Petitioner to be assigned duties under Rev. Alphonse Allen, Jr., which created opportunities for income as part of Rev. Allen's pastoral staff. Rev. Allen arranged for Petitioner to secure adequate housing through Wilberforce University, at no cost to Petitioner.
7. At the end of the 2018 Planning Meeting, Petitioner neither continued to receive the \$500 bi-monthly stipend nor did he receive an appointment as a pastor, leaving him in an Itinerant Elder status.



8. On October 31, 2020, Respondent transferred Petitioner to the Seventh Episcopal District.
9. According to Respondent, Petitioner's transfer occurred at his request in order to make himself available for opportunities in the Seventh Episcopal District.
10. Respondent denied ever receiving a request to meet with Petitioner, until he received the October 20, 2020 letter which did request that he meet with the Bishop. Respondent argued Petitioner never made any attempts to resolve the issues through conciliation. Bishop Reid characterized Petitioner as a bright and gifted preacher. However, Respondent believed Petitioner's health and well-being significantly impacted his ability to perform duties associated with pastoring.
11. Petitioner denied requesting a transfer to the Seventh Episcopal District or receiving a ninety-day Notice, subjecting him to being moved outside the boundaries of the North Ohio Annual Conference. In fact, at the time of the transfer, Petitioner was no longer living at Wilberforce University, but was instead residing in North Carolina.

### **STATEMENT OF ISSUE**

Whether Respondent violated the Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 2016, hereinafter "*Discipline*" by issuing Petitioner a Certificate of Transfer on October 31, 2020?

### **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### 1. Declaratory Decision

Petitioner alleged Section III. Ministers' Bill of Rights, paragraphs B 1, 4, 5, 6 as being doubtful in meaning and the application being subject to more than one interpretation. Petitioner raised these provisions as being open to more than one interpretation or application. However, Petitioner does not identify any language within any of the provisions raised, which reach the standards required for the granting of a declaratory decision.

The Judicial Council finds Petitioner failed to demonstrate any the provisions cited from the Ministers' Bill of Rights, which can be determined as being doubtful in meaning or application or open to more than one interpretation. The provisions identified can be construed as clear and concise. Therefore, Petitioner's request for a Declaratory Decision must be denied.

## 2. Transfer to the Seventh Episcopal District

After examining the transfer executed by Respondent, various concerns arise. In accordance with the *Discipline*, a bishop cannot move a pastor outside the bounds of his conference, without a ninety-day written notice. See, *Discipline* 2016, Part XI – Duties and Authority of Bishops and General Officers, Section I-Active Bishops, subsection B-Duties, paragraph 13, page 168. Additionally, before a member of the Annual Conference receives a Certificate of Transfer, he must complete the background check and transfer assessment, required pursuant to Part XVI, Section X -C. See, *Discipline* 2016, Part XI – Duties and Authority of Bishops and General Officers, Section I-Active Bishops, subsection B-Duties, paragraph 17, page 165.

From the provisions cited, it becomes clear without the fulfilling of the background check and the transfer assessment, a member of the Annual conference cannot be subject to transfer. Further, the ninety-day letter plays a vital role in the ability to move someone beyond the conference boundaries. No evidence exists that Petitioner requested a transfer to the Seventh Episcopal District or received a ninety-day Notice subjecting him to the aforementioned move. Petitioner resided in North Carolina, not South Carolina. Petitioner vehemently denied requesting a transfer to South Carolina. The record fails to support a request for transfer creating doubt as to the legitimacy of Petitioner’s transfer by Respondent on October 31, 2020. Under these circumstances, the transfer cannot stand.

Respondent alleged Petitioner never engaged in conciliation to resolve ongoing issues. The Judicial Council accepts Respondent’s statement as an acknowledgment of his willingness to engage in conciliation. Therefore, the Judicial Council orders the parties to engage in conciliation as a means for resolving all issues between the parties.

### CONCLUSION

The Judicial Council DENIES the Petitioner’s request for a Declaratory Decision. The provisions of the Ministers’ Bill of Rights raised are not doubtful in meaning or subject to more than one interpretation. The Judicial Council considers the matter as an appeal from a decision of Bishop Frank Madison Reid, III. The Judicial Council fails to find any evidence of a request by Petitioner for a transfer to the Seventh Episcopal District. The Petitioner remains a member of the Third Episcopal District. The Judicial Council directs the parties to schedule Conciliation within fifteen (15) days from the date of this decision to resolve the issues regarding Petitioner’s status within the Third Episcopal District.

Opinion rendered this 8th day of April 2021.

### **PER CURIUM**

Judges Derek Anderson and Glenda Hodges did not participate in this Decision.

**No. 2021-2024-04**

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL**

**OF THE**

**AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

RE: In the matter of Rev. Charles Kapungwe request for an Appeal and Declaratory Decision. Judge Thomas Bess, Chaplain, delivers the opinion of the Judicial Council.

**HOLDING**

The Judicial Council DENIES petitioner's request for an Appeal and/or Declaratory Decision. Petitioner lacks any authority or standing or legal cause, to raise the matters he presents to the Judicial Council.

**PARTIES**

The petitioner is Rev. Charles Kapungwe hereinafter "Petitioner". Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah, Presiding Prelate of the Seventeenth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and Margaret Nkana Mwanza, Presiding Elder, Copperbelt Central District of the South West Zambia Annual Conference hereinafter "Respondents."

**JURISDICTION**

As it pertains to appeals, the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council is pursuant to the *Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016 (Discipline)* Part XVI. Judicial Administration, Section XVI. The Judicial Council, Paragraph A. Jurisdiction, page 361 states:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to (except as may be set under "Duties" hereinafter set out) all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group, pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which affects the right of any member or Church body of the AME Church.

As it relates to a declaratory decision, the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council is provided in the 2016 *Discipline*, Part XVI, Section XVI, The Judicial Council, Subsection I Duties, paragraph 10, page 365 states:

When the General Conference shall have passed an act or legislation that appears to be subject to more than one interpretation, or when a paragraph or paragraphs of the Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church deem to be of doubtful meaning or application ... the Judicial Council shall make a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision and the effect of such act, legislation or paragraph ...

### **STATEMENT OF ISSUES**

- I. Whether Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah or any board, commission, group, pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body of the AME Church, empowered to make a decision, made a decision affecting the rights of Rev. Charles Kapungwe, such that he may appeal to the Judicial Council?
- I. Whether Petitioner, Rev. Charles Kapungwe, has referenced an act or legislation that appears to be subject to more than one interpretation, such that the Judicial Council may issue a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision?
- II. Whether the Judicial Council has jurisdiction or authority to address Petitioner's request for disciplinary action against Bishop Wilfred Messiah and Presiding Elder Margaret Nkana Mwanza?

### **STATEMENT OF FACTS**

1. Petitioner purports to live in Maine but presents himself as a member of Trinity A.M.E. Church in Garneton KITWE Zambia in the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District.
2. Bishop Messiah sent a letter acknowledging and thanking the members of New Covenant Presbyterian Church in the US, who had donated funds to build Trinity A.M.E. Church in Zambia citing a dollar figure provided to him in response to his request in Annual Conference for a report on outside contributions to churches. The Petitioner indicates that there is a significant discrepancy in the dollar amount given and that which was stated in the letter. Petitioner further alleges that he was a major contributor and that he and other sponsors, whose funds he solicited for the building project were not advised of the opening of the church nor given sufficient input, supervision, acknowledgement or credit for the building of the church or permitted to monitor the funds.



3. Rev. Salone Mangwende was appointed to pastor Trinity AME Church by Bishop Paul J.M. Kawimbe in 2011, succeeding Rev. Elasto Mwansa. Rev. Mangwende indicates, in a sworn statement, that she began communicating with Rev. Charles Kapungwe on October 6, 2011. Rev. Mangwende acknowledges receipt of \$1071.42 as the last report of money transferred to Rev. Elasto Mwansa through Presiding Elder Leonard Chola and a total of \$48,254.00 received from March of 2012 to February of 2017. Rev. Mangwende states reports were made regarding each donation from Rev. Kapungwe and US sponsors. Rev. Mangwende states that an estimated figure was given to Bishop Messiah at Annual Conference in that the actual documents were at the church and that no monies from the sponsors has ever been received or handled by Bishop Messiah.
  
4. Petitioner also alleges that Respondent, Presiding Elder Margaret Mwanza, at the direction of Bishop Messiah, sent Petitioner a restraining order relative to Trinity A.M.E. Church. Petitioner indicates that the letter alleges his behavior was “constituting illegal committees.” He alleges that the letter of July 9, 2018 was “a carefully crafted letter that is an expulsion from the A.M.E. Church.” Respondents deny that there are any charges pending against Petitioner or any restraining orders sought.
  
5. Presiding Elder Margaret Mwanza, by sworn statement indicates that she was the secretary of the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District from 1999 to 2016 and states: “I have a duty to inform you that Rev. Charles Kapungwe left the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Garneton, Kitwe, Zambia, in the year 1999; and from that year to 2019, makes a period of 23 years, Rev. Charles Kapungwe has not answered the Roll Call in the South West Zambia Annual Conferences or any other conference in the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District. This makes him not to be in good and regular standing in the Church.”
  
6. In summary, Presiding Elder Margaret Mwanza states that Rev Kapungwe left Trinity A.M.E. Church in 1999 and that Bishop Preston Williams II, then presiding prelate appointed Rev. Elasto Mwansa who served as pastor from 2000-2012. When Bishop Kawimbe appointed Rev. Mangwende to Trinity in 2012, Rev. Leonard Chola who was the Presiding Elder and Bishop’s Administrative Assistant was overseeing the building project. Monies were wired to Rev. Chola and distributed to those on the building committee and reported to Rev. Kapungwe. Presiding Elder Chola requested that Rev. Mwansa continued to oversee the building project along with Trustees from another AME Church, allegedly under the direction of Petitioner, who was domiciled in the United States. In December of 2017 Presiding Elder Chola retired and Presiding Elder Margaret Mwanza was then appointed, Bishop Messiah only became aware of Trinity’s sponsorship after receiving a letter in December of 2017 regarding concerns about the building project at Trinity and the appointment of the current pastor. Presiding Elder Mwansa was asked to respond and copied Bishop Messiah and sponsors on the correspondence. In the letter, Respondent stated that the funds were appreciated and accounted for , but that she did not believe that it was appropriate for Trustees and/or the pastor of another congregation to direct Trinity’s building project and surmised that such action could *lead* to pastoral interference in violation of the AME *Discipline*.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Petitioner claims that on October 23, 2020, Bishop Wilfred Messiah made decisions that affected him. However, after going through the documents presented, it is determined that Bishop Messiah did not render any decision about the funds used to build the New Trinity Church. He only requested pastors with outside support give a report at the annual conference. One of the questions was “How much money did they receive?” The pastor of Trinity gave a number from memory without consulting the records. It is well documented that neither the conference nor Bishop Messiah had any contact with the funds for Trinity. There is no evidence presented of any irregularity or discrepancy in the receipt or application of the donated funds. All funds were handled through an agent who delivered them to the pastor of Trinity. No decision was made from which Petitioner can appeal nor any provision of the *Discipline* deemed to be doubtful or subject to more than one interpretation.

The Petitioner also claims to still be a member of Trinity AME Church, but has been living out of the country, since 1999. The Petitioner states that he lives in Maine, where there are no AME churches. He has not answered to the Annual Conference roll in the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District in that period.

In the Response to Petitioners allegations, in a sworn statement Presiding Elder Margaret Mwanza indicates that she has been the secretary of the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District from 1999 to 2016 and states:

I have a duty to inform you that Rev. Charles Kapungwe left the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Garneton, Kitwe, Zambia, in the year 1999; and from that year to 2019, makes a period of 23 years, Rev. Charles Kapungwe has not answered the Roll Call in the South West Zambia Annual Conferences or any other conference in the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District. This makes him not to be in good and regular standing in the Church.

After review of the facts, the Judicial Council finds that Petitioner has no standing or legal cause to bring this matter before the Judicial Council.

## CONCLUSION

- I. Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah or any board, commission, group, pastor, nor any other regularly constituted party or body of the AME Church, empowered to make a decision, made a decision which affects the rights of Rev. Charles Kapungwe; therefore, Petitioner lacks standing to appeal to the Judicial Council.
- II. Rev. Charles Kapungwe referenced no act or legislation that appears to be subject to more than one interpretation; therefore, the Judicial Council may not issue a ruling in the nature of a Declaratory Decision.

- III. The Judicial Council lacks jurisdiction to address Petitioner's request for disciplinary action for alleged malfeasance against Bishop Wilfred Messiah and/or Presiding Elder Margaret Nkana Mwanza.

The Judicial Council DENIES Petitioner's appeal, as well as his request for a Declaratory Decision.

Opinion rendered this 7<sup>th</sup> day of July 2021.



Judge Thomas Bess, Chaplain

Concurring: Judge Patricia M. Mayberry, Judge Tania E. Wright, Judge Derek H. Anderson, Judge Vernon R. Byrd, Judge TaShun Y. Bowden-Lewis, Warren Hope Dawson and Eduardo K. Curry

Judge Glenda Hodges did not participate in this decision.

**No. 2021-2024-05**

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF THE  
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: MATTER OF DAVID A.B. PARKER**

TaShun Bowden-Lewis, Esq. Member, delivers the opinion of the Judicial Council.

**HOLDING**

The Judicial Council DENIES Petitioner’s request for a reversal of a final decision of the Bishop.

The Judicial Council DENIES Petitioner’s request for a declaratory decision.

**PARTIES**

The Petitioner is Rev. David A.B. Parker (“Petitioner” or “Rev. Parker”) from the Monrovia District of the Liberia Conference in the Fourteenth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Respondent is Bishop E. Earl McCloud, the Presiding Prelate of the Fourteenth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

**JURISDICTION**

As it pertains to appeals, the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council is provided in the 2016 *Discipline*, Part XVI. Judicial Administration, Section XVI. The Judicial Council, Paragraph A. Jurisdiction, page 361 states:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to (except as may be set under “Duties” hereinafter set out) all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group, pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which affects the right of any member or Church body of the AME Church.

As it relates to a declaratory decision, the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council is provided in the 2016 *Discipline*, Part XVI, Section XVI, The Judicial Council, Subsection I Duties, paragraph 10, page 365 states:

When the General Conference shall have passed an act or legislation that appears to be subject to more than one interpretation, or when a paragraph or paragraphs of the Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church deem to be of doubtful meaning or application ... the Judicial Council shall make a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision and the effect of such act, legislation or paragraph ...

### **STATEMENT OF FACTS**

1. Rev. Parker filed an appeal to the Judicial Council on February 26, 2021.
2. Since 2016 Rev. Parker had been the Presiding Elder of the Monrovia District, Liberia Annual Conference of the Fourteenth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
3. On March 24, 2020 Rev. Parker was removed as the Presiding Elder by Bishop McCloud.
4. Rev. Parker was removed as the Chairperson of the Board of Directors.
5. Rev. Parker was removed as the leader of the Rental Collection Committee for properties owned by the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
6. On December 30, 2020, Rev. Parker sent correspondence to Bishop McCloud “to give you the opportunity to rethink and correct the wrong.”
7. On December 31, 2020, Bishop McCloud responded “several attempts have been made by me to respond to your electronic messages...I do not have any plan to reinstate you as the Presiding Elder...the primary reason that I removed you was because you were not keeping in contact or responding to inquiries as requested... you made decisions about the rental property payments for which you had no authority. The AME Church in Liberia has struggled because of some of the decisions you have made...My recommendation is that you follow the judicial proceeding in the Book of Discipline...and, if you are interested in serving a church as a pastor, please notify Presiding Elder Sevee, who will discuss the matter with me...”
8. Rev. Parker responded back to the claims in Bishop McCloud’s December 31, 2020 correspondence.

citing text messages in October and November 2019, a “tour” of the District with Bishop McCloud in December 2019, a text message in January 2020, emails from Bishop McCloud in March 2020 as well as a “fruitful discussion” with Bishop McCloud in March 2020.

10. Rev. Parker failed to serve Bishop McCloud in February 21, 2021 when he filed the appeal before the Judicial Council. Bishop. On June 13, 2021, Bishop McCloud answered the claims in Rev. Parker’s appeal in response to a request from the Judicial Council.
11. Bishop McCloud stated, “it became evident that Presiding Elder David A.B. Parker’s continuance would be injurious to the prosperity of the District...I did not refer Presiding Elder David A.B. Parker to the Ministerial Efficiency Committee (MEC), nor did I prefer charges against him as both matters seemed punitive.”
12. Bishop McCloud stated, “we looked for a pastoral appointment for him but had none...To date, we have not identified an open appointment, but we continue to search for an assignment.”
13. Rev. Parker was removed as Presiding Elder on March 24, 2020 but received his salary until July 1, 2020.
14. All Presiding Elder duties were given to the new Presiding Elder, Charles Sevee.

### STATEMENT OF ISSUE

Whether the due process rights of the Petitioner were violated?

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### Declaratory Decision

The Petitioner does not identify any language which reach the standards required for the granting of a declaratory decision.

#### Final Decision

Bishop McCloud stated the lack of communication with Rev. Parker was so grave that his services “were no longer pleasing and profitable to the pastors and the people of the District” and keeping Rev. Parker as a Presiding Elder in the District would be “injurious to the prosperity of the District.” Allowing Rev. Parker to remain as a Presiding Elder would violate the duties of an active Bishop according to the *Discipline*. Part XI, Section I (B), numbers 8-9 on page 164.



Rev. Parker only cited sparse correspondence from 2019-2020.

Bishop McCloud neither referred Rev. Parker to the Ministerial Efficiency Committee nor preferred charges because it “seemed punitive.” Rev. Parker was able to collect his salary for four months after his removal. Bishop McCloud is still looking for an open appointment for Rev. Parker.

Removing Rev. Parker from the positions as Chair of the Board of Directors and leader of the Rental Collection Committee were natural next steps in light of the fact that Rev. Parker is no longer the Presiding Elder for the Monrovia District of the Liberia Conference.

The Petitioner’s due process rights were not violated.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Petitioner’s request for a declaratory decision is DENIED, in that the Petitioner fails to indicate any “action of any conference, connectional board, or ruling of a Bishop based upon an act of legislation which appears to be subject to more than one interpretation.”


The Petitioner’s request for a reversal of a final decision is DENIED, based on the fact that his due process rights were not violated.

### **ORDER**

The Petitioner’s request for a declaratory decision is DENIED.

The Petitioner’s request for a reversal of a final decision is DENIED.

Opinion rendered this 9<sup>th</sup> day of July 2021



TaShun Bowden-Lewis, Esq.

Concurring: Judge Patricia M. Mayberry, Judge Tania E. Wright, Judge Derek Anderson, Judge Thomas L. Bess, Judge Warren Hope Dawson, and Judge Eduardo K. Curry

Judges Vernon Byrd and Glenda Hodges did not participate in this Decision.

No. 2021-2024-06

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL  
COUNCIL OF THE  
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: TRIAL IN THE MATTER OF THE LOCATION OF BISHOP WILFRED JACOBUS MESSIAH**

Opinion of the Judicial Council

**HOLDING**

We find there is sufficient evidence to support Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah is in violation of the following:

1. Judgement of the High Court of Lusaka found civilly liable for misuse of charitable funds, to which he did not appeal.
2. Inappropriate assessment of the General Conference Delegate and Alternate Registration fees.
3. We decline to rule on the issue of the replacement of delegates for the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference in that the Credentials Committee certified the delegates. However, Bishop Wilfred Messiah was untruthful in his testimony, under oath, on this matter.

**PARTIES**

The Petitioner is Bishop Wilfred Jacobus Messiah. The Respondent is the Judiciary Committee a subcommittee of the Episcopal Committee of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

**JURISDICTION**

The *Discipline*, Part XVI, Section I (23), page 367, states:

At the seat of the General Conference the Judicial Council shall be, and is hereby empowered, to sit as a trial court for the purpose of hearing all such charges, requests or appeals against any bishop or a general officer of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and shall render judgment herewith, consistent with paragraph 12 of this sections.

## FACTS

1. Based upon the recommendation of the Judiciary Committee of the Episcopal Committee to locate Bishop Messiah, the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference voted to locate Bishop Messiah.
2. Bishop Messiah through counsel alleged that the proceedings did not afford him due process.
3. Bishop Messiah requested a trial during the sitting of the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference.
4. The Judicial Council convened a Pre-Trial Conference at 1:30PM EDT and as a Trial Court at 5:00PM EDT on July 9, 2021 and concluded at 2:00AM EDT on July 10, 2021.
5. Bishop Messiah through three (3) attorneys, via Zoom, was permitted to present evidence, witnesses and oral testimony and was afforded the opportunity to cross examine witnesses. He also presented exhibits.
6. Representatives from the Church and the Judiciary Committee of the Episcopal Committee was permitted to present evidence, witnesses and oral testimony and was afforded the opportunity to cross examine witnesses and present exhibits.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### I. Scope of Review

Due process

### II. The Record and consideration of materials for review.

*The Discipline*, Part XVI, Section I(23), page 367, states, “At the seat of the General Conference the Judicial Council shall be, and is hereby empowered, to sit as a trial court for the purpose of hearing all such charges, requests or appeals against any bishop or a general officer of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and shall render judgment herewith, consistent with paragraph 12 of this sections.”

## CONCLUSION

We find there is sufficient evidence to support Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah is in violation of the following:

1. Judgement of the High Court of Lusaka found civilly liable for misuse of charitable funds, to which he did not appeal.

2. Inappropriate assessment of the General Conference Delegate and Alternate Registration fees.
3. We decline to rule on the issue of the replacement of delegates for the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference in that the Credentials Committee certified the delegates. However, Bishop Wilfred Messiah was untruthful in his testimony, under oath, on this matter.

If any bishop shall be condemned both by trial and by review in the Episcopal Committee, such bishop shall have the right of appeal to the General Conference as a body, sitting as a court, to determine guilt or innocence of said bishop, with the Episcopal Committee excluded from the voting.

NO. 2021-2024-07

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: THE MATTER OF JOHAN CLAASEN, PETITIONER, AND EDMUND  
LAWRENCE CHAPEL AME CHURCH-RAVENSMEAD, AND REV. ASHLEY  
GORDON, RESPONDENTS**

The Judicial Council delivers its decision Per curium.

**HOLDING:** The appeal of Petitioner Johan Claasen is hereby sustained. The expulsion of Johan Claasen from Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church, Ravensmead, South Africa, Cape Annual Conference, Nineteenth Episcopal District lacked validity, and is deemed invalid, i.e., null and void, based on his failure to receive due process, during the trial proceedings, as is provided by the *Discipline*.

**I.**

**PARTIES**

Johan Claasen [“Petitioner”] and Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church, Ravensmead, South Africa, (Cape Annual Conference, Nineteenth Episcopal District), Rev. Ashley Gordon, and Presiding Elder Burger [“Respondents”].

**II.**

**JURISDICTION**

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction to hear an appeal based on a final decision pursuant to *The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016* [“*Discipline*”], Part XVI, Section XVI., A., page 361, which states in pertinent part:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to...all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which affects the right of any member or Church body of the A.M.E. Church.

A review of the documentation presented in this matter reveals that an adverse decision exists affecting Petitioner. However, as discussed in more detail below, the actions of the Respondents, in this matter, which were in direct contradiction and in total disregard to the procedures set forth in the *Discipline*, effectively deprived Petitioner of due process.



### III.

#### STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Whether the expulsion of Petitioner from Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church, Ravensmead, South Africa as noticed by Respondent Rev. Gordon in correspondence dated November 9, 2020 for (1) Sowing Dissention, (2) Improper Conduct and (3) Bringing the church in disrepute in the public domain, violated due process, pursuant to the Doctrine and Discipline 2016, Part XVI, Judicial Administration, Section VII, Trials, Subsection E.- Lay Members?

### IV.

#### STATEMENT OF THE FACTS

On or about July 27, 2020, the Steward Board of Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church received a letter of complaint against Petitioner Johan Claasen with regards to (1) his Facebook post in response to a letter addressed to him from Bishop Daniels, and (2) a general letter from Bishop Daniels dated June 24, 2020, implicating Petitioner for Sowing Dissension, and Disobedience to the *Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church*.

On July 29, 2020, the Steward Board presented a complaint to Petitioner, to allow him an opportunity to respond, in a formal meeting scheduled for August 03, 2020. Ultimately, the Pastor relieved Petitioner from his duties as Steward and Caretaker.

On September 14, 2020, the Steward Board, after reviewing the matter agreed to further remove Petitioner from his positions as Trustee, Lay Preacher and Alternate Annual Conference delegate. On October 02, 2020, after receiving information Petitioner orchestrated and participated in a protest in front of the 15th Episcopal District headquarters, Rev. Gordon called an urgent meeting with the officers of the church. The Officers referred the matter to the Steward Board for further investigation.

On October 29, 2020, the Steward Board informed Petitioner of charges against him to include (1) Sowing Dissension, (2) Improper Conduct, and (3) Bringing the church in disrepute in the public domain. The Steward Board scheduled a meeting for November 2, 2020 to discuss the charges and evidence with Petitioner.

On November 02, 2020, the Steward Board presented the charges and evidence to Petitioner. Petitioner refused to comment on the charges, after being denied representation, and alleging the meeting did not constitute a trial. The Pastor and Steward Board excused Petitioner from the meeting and continued their discussion on the matter. During their continued discussion, the Pastor and Steward Board reviewed the following documents: (1) letters from members of the local church expressing their concerns about Petitioner's actions, (2) the agenda & minutes of the Steward Board meeting in which this matter was previously discussed with Petitioner, (3) formal letter addressed to Petitioner Johan Claasen, in which the local Pastor removed him from all his positions, (4)

printouts of the posts and statements by Petitioner on social media (Facebook), (5) pictures of the protest in front of the 15th Episcopal district headquarters showing the participation of Petitioner in the protest, and (6) an original copy of the newspaper article in "Die Son" in which Petitioner made public statements. Based on the documentation, the Steward Board found Petitioner guilty on the charges of (1) Sowing Dissension, (2) Improper Conduct, (3) Bringing the church in disrepute in the public domain leading to Disobedience to the order of the Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

On or about November 8, 2020, Respondent Rev. Gordon called a church conference. During the conference, the "stewards" read a letter of concern pertaining to Petitioner. According to the unsigned minutes, the "stewards" recommended the Church Conference expel Petitioner from the church. After an explanation from Rev. Gordon regarding the process and Petitioner's case, and after discussion, the body voted to expel Petitioner from Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church, Ravensmead.

On or about November 16, 2020, Petitioner filed notice with the Secretary of the Quarterly Conference of Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church, Ravensmead of his appeal regarding the expulsion. On February 22, 2021, Petitioner contacted Rev. Gordon seeking information regarding the status of his appeal to the Quarterly Conference. On March 2, 2021, Petitioner contacted Presiding Elder Burger inquiring about the February 14, 2021, Quarterly Conference, and the status of his appeal. Additionally, he requested documentation evidencing Presiding Elder Burger informed him of the date the Quarterly Conference would entertain his appeal. According to the Quarterly Conference minutes for February 14, 2021, the Quarterly Conference voted to uphold the expulsion of Petitioner. Petitioner asserted he learned of the outcome of the appeal on or about May 21, 2021, after receiving a response to his inquiry from Presiding Elder Burger regarding the status of his appeal.

On May 6, 2021, Petitioner filed an appeal requesting the Judicial Council sustain his appeal "against an unprocedural expulsion, a flawed process and the impartial role of the pastor."

## V.

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

An expelled layperson shall have the right to appeal a trial to the ensuing Quarterly Conference of the station, after giving Notice of appeal to the presiding officer of the tribunal within thirty (30) days, after adjournment of the proceedings on which the appeal is taken. *See, Discipline*, 2016, Part XVI, Judicial Administration, Section VII, Trials, Subsection E, Lay Members, paragraph 17, p. 329. Petitioner correctly concluded the appeal of his expulsion would properly be before the next ensuing Quarterly Conference.

Petitioner raises significant concerns regarding his due process rights. As we ruled in *RE: The Matter of Daisy Brown and Wayman Chapel AME Church and Rev. Ronald L. Glenn, Respondents*, No. 2008-2012-30 (March 23, 2012), *RE: The Matter of Luegene*

*Hill and Rev. Spencer Booker and Bethel AME Church*, No. 2008-2012-12 (December 3, 2010) and *RE: The Matter of Barbara Murdock and Melanie Murdock and Hunter Memorial AME Church*, No. 2008-2012-09 (September 22, 2010) a church must comply with the provisions of the *Discipline* before engaging in the act of expulsion as it relates to members. See, *Discipline*, XVI, Judicial Administration, Section VII-Trials. Subsection E- Lay Members, p. 328 states, in relevant part:

When a lay member is accused of any offense, the pastor of the society to which the accused belongs, shall call together the stewards of the society who shall investigate the case.

Following the requirement to investigate, if the stewards find reasonable grounds for such accusations, they shall prepare charges and specifications turning the same over to the pastor with a copy to the accused at least 30 days prior to trial. The pastor after receiving the charges shall call together members of the society or a committee elected from the same. See, *Discipline*, XIV, Judicial Administration, Section VII-Trials, Subsection E- Lay Members, page 328.

There is nothing demonstrating that Petitioner received notice of any charges against him, until the Steward Board and the Pastor called Petitioner to a meeting to allegedly discuss charges against him. Nothing in the documentation demonstrates the Church afforded Petitioner due process in its attempt to advance an investigation of the offenses specified in the Notice requesting a meeting. On November 2, 2020, the Steward Board failed to function as an investigative body for the purposes of determining whether reasonable grounds existed for the accusations against Petitioner. Instead, the Steward Board focused on whether Petitioner committed the offenses finding him guilty of the offenses alleged. Nothing in the documentation presented even suggests that the Steward Board prepared and signed charges and specifications against Petitioner and turned them over to Respondent Rev. Gordon, as well as a copy to Petitioner. In fact, one can conclude the Steward Board functioned as the trial committee, in lieu of an investigative body as mandated by the *Discipline*., when it found Petitioner guilty of the offenses as alleged.

Even if Petitioner refused to participate in the investigation, due process requires he receive notice of trial, be allowed to interrogate witnesses, and present a defense to the allegations against him. Without the adherence to these fundamental rights, Petitioner never received a fair trial prior to his expulsion from Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church, Ravensmead.

The Steward Board superseded its authority by acting as the trial committee. Instead of referring their findings to a trial committee (either the entire society or an elected committee of the society), the Steward Board served as the trier of facts by finding Petitioner guilty of the offenses. The Church Conference met solely for the

purpose of determining whether Petitioner should be expelled, not whether he committed the charges as alleged. Based on Respondent's gross failure to adhere to the *Discipline*, as evidenced by the November 9, 2020, expulsion letter, the expulsion of the Petitioner lacked validity, and is hereby deemed invalid. As of this date, Petitioner remains a member in good and regular standing of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Further, the Judicial Council vacates the decision of the Quarterly Conference upholding the expulsion. We find Petitioner never received due process, since he never received notice of the convening of the Quarterly Conference to hear his appeal regarding his expulsion from Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church. Based on the finding that Petitioner's expulsion lacked validity, any adverse action resulting from his expulsion must be rescinded. To restore Petitioner to his original status, notice must be provided by the Nineteenth District and the Cape Annual Conference regarding the rescission of Petitioner's expulsion.

## VI.

### CONCLUSION

The Judicial Council finds Petitioner was effectively denied due process, when the Steward Board found him guilty of the offenses, without providing a fair and impartial trial, in accordance with the *Discipline*. We further find that Respondent Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church, Ravensmead failed to comply with the *Discipline* in the expulsion of Petitioner. Based on the failure of the church to follow the established procedures, including the right to be represented, interrogate witnesses, and make a statement on his own behalf, the expulsion lacked validity, and must be deemed invalid. Petitioner's status as a member in the African Methodist Episcopal Church is fully restored.

Based on the nullification of Petitioner's expulsion, the Nineteenth Episcopal District and Cape Annual Conference, through its Presiding Prelate, is ordered to publish the rescission of his expulsion to ensure Petitioner receives all rights and privileges associated with membership in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, including the ability to transfer his membership from Edmund Lawrence Chapel AME Church. All other requested relief is denied as overcome by events (OBE).

Per Curium decision rendered on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of November 2021.

No. 2021-2024-08

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: MATTER OF REVEREND SUZANNE MEMBE MATALE, PETITIONER; AND  
BISHOP WILFRED J. MESSIAH, RESPONDENT**

Judge O. Jerome Green, Member, delivers the opinion of the Judicial Council.

**HOLDING:** Petitioner, Rev. Suzanne Membe Matale, having been denied due process as provided by the *Book of Discipline of the AME Church*, remains in good and regular standing with all the rights of an Itinerant Elder of the AME Church. Her suspension is hereby rescinded.

**I. PARTIES**

Reverend Suzanne Membe Matale, Itinerant Elder, (“Petitioner”) and Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah, former presiding prelate African Methodist Episcopal Church, 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District (“Respondent”).

**II. JURISDICTION**

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction to hear an appeal based on a final decision pursuant to *The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016 (“Discipline”)*, Part XVI, Section XVI., A, page 361, which states in pertinent part:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to ... all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which affects the rights of any member or Church body of the AME Church.

A review of the documentation presented in this matter establishes that an adverse decision affecting Petitioner has been made. Therefore, this Court has jurisdiction over the matter presented for review.

The Respondent has not filed a response to the allegations presented.

### III. STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Whether the suspension from all priestly duties and removal of Petitioner Matale as pastor by Respondent Bishop Messiah on the recommendation of a Ministerial Efficiency Committee chaired by Respondent, based on charges brought by Respondent, without a vote of the Annual Conference or referral for conciliation or trial violated Petitioner's right to due process pursuant to Part XVI, Section II and Section XIII of the 2016 *Discipline*?

### IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

1. Petitioner was the pastor of Bethel AME Church in Lusaka, Zambia, in the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, serving under the leadership of Respondent Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah. On March 1-2, 2021, the 29<sup>th</sup> Session of the South East Zambia Annual Conference was held at Bethel AME Church. Petitioner was the host pastor. During the Annual Conference, Petitioner was referred to the Committee on Ministerial Efficiency. At the time of the referral, Petitioner was advised that she would be informed of the reasons for her referral at a later time. Petitioner was also informed that the Presiding Elder would administer the affairs of Bethel AME Church until April 9, 2021, when the Annual Conference would resume its session and the Ministerial Efficiency Committee would make its report.
2. On March 15, 2021, Petitioner received a letter from the Ministerial Efficiency Committee advising her to appear before it on March 22, 2021, on charges of (1) Disobedience to the *Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* and (2) Maladministration in an office of the Church. When Petitioner appeared before the committee, she was informed that the committee would not act as a Ministerial Efficiency Committee but as an Inquiry Committee.
3. Specific factual allegations supporting the charges against Petitioner were:
  - (a) Petitioner permitted an illegal Annual Conference Meeting to be held at Bethel AME Church contrary to instructions of the Bishop in violation of a pending court injunction.
  - (b) Petitioner appointed new Stewards not confirmed by the Quarterly Conference who locked out the Presiding Elder when he attempted to supervise affairs at the church on an interim basis.
  - (c) The new Stewards appointed by Petitioner allowed an AME preacher (who was suspended) to preach from the pulpit of the church during the same period.



4. Respondent Bishop Messiah served as chairperson of the committee via Zoom. Petitioner was informed that Respondent Bishop Messiah was her accuser, and she would not be allowed to present witnesses on her own behalf.
5. On May 20, 2021, Petitioner received a letter (dated May 18, 2021) from Respondent Bishop Messiah informing her that, based on the recommendation of the committee, she was retroactively suspended from all priestly functions as an itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church from March 2, 2021 until the sitting of the next annual conference. On May 21, 2021, Respondent Bishop Messiah, called for the delegates to return to conclude the 29<sup>th</sup> Session of the South East Zambia Annual Conference and appointed a new pastor at Bethel AME Church to replace Petitioner. Petitioner has essentially been located for the period of one year until the convening of the 30<sup>th</sup> Session of the South East Zambia Annual Conference in 2022.

## V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

*The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (2016), at Part XIV, Section II, (J)(1), page 271 provides that the Ministerial Efficiency Committee shall have the duty to pass upon the efficiency and moral conduct of such ministers as may be referred to it.

In the case where serious charges might be brought against a member of the AME Church which could result in expulsion the *Discipline*, at Part XVI “Judicial Administration”, starting at page 315, provides a process for adjudication beginning with conciliation and ending with trial procedures, in the event the matter cannot be resolved. At Part XVI, Section II “Charges”, page 317, the *Discipline* sets forth specific charges that trigger the application of the procedures. Among the charges listed that trigger the application of the Judicial Administration procedures are (1) Disobedience to the Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and (2) Maladministration in an office in the Church.

In the case now before the Judicial Council, the Petitioner, a pastor in the AME Church, has been charged with (1) Disobedience to the Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and (2) Maladministration in an office in the Church. This fact is established by the letter to Petitioner, dated March 15, 2021, on behalf of the South East Zambia Conference Ministerial Efficiency Committee, signed by Reverend Cosmas Wakunguma as Chairperson for the Bishop (Respondent Bishop Messiah).

Petitioner was not allowed to present witnesses before the Ministerial Efficiency Committee. Petitioner’s case was not presented to the Annual Conference for vote or consideration on the recommendation of the Ministerial Efficiency Committee. Petitioner was suspended for a period of one year without being afforded an opportunity for conciliation or trial.


The punishment imposed upon Petitioner was not mere removal as pastor. Petitioner was suspended from all priestly functions as an itinerant elder. The Petitioner was *located* without the process afforded by the *Discipline*.

The *Discipline*, Part IX, Section I (C) at page 156, provides for a Ministerial Efficiency Committee to recommend location. However, this provision does not permit location to occur without the accused having an opportunity to defend and the vote of the Annual Conference. Petitioner was allowed neither.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Due process requires Rev. Matale be afforded all rights set forth in the AME *Discipline* to assure fairness and a meaningful opportunity to be heard. Rev. Matale's suspension occurred, without being provided those rights. In that Rev. Matale was denied due process, her suspension must be rescinded. Therefore, she remains an active Itinerant Elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in good and regular standing, with all rights associated with her status.

Opinion rendered this 29 day of December 2021.

  
Judge O. Jerome Green

Concurring: Judge Patricia M. Mayberry, Judge Tania E. Wright, Judge Derek H. Anderson, Judge Eduardo K. Curry, Judge Thomas L. Bess, Judge Warren Hope Dawson, Judge Jonathan C. Augustine, Judge Thabile M Ngubeni

No. 2021-2024-09

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: MATTER OF REVEREND FREDRICK CHILOMBO CHAMA , PETITIONER AND  
BISHOP WILFRED J. MESSIAH, RESPONDENT**

Judge Tania E. Wright, Vice President, and Thabile M Ngubeni, Member, deliver the opinion of the Judicial Council.

**HOLDING:** Rev. Fredrick Chilombo Chama’s suspension is hereby rescinded in that he was not afforded due process as provided by *The Book of Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016* and thus remains in good and regular standing with all the rights of an Itinerant Elder of the AME Church.

**I. PARTIES**

Reverend Fredrick Chilombe Chama, Itinerant Elder, (“Petitioner”) and Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah, former presiding prelate African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District (“Respondent”).

**II. JURISDICTION**

*The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016* (“*Discipline*”), Part XVI, Section XVI., A, page 361, provides:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to ... all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which affects the rights of any member or Church body of the AME Church.

Petitioner filed an appeal to the Judicial Council from a decision of Bishop Wilfred Messiah, former presiding prelate of the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District, to suspend Petitioner from itinerant duties in the AME Church and to remove him as the Pastor in charge of Membe Temple AME Church. Bishop Messiah did not file a response to the appeal.

### III. STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Whether the suspension of Petitioner from all priestly duties of itinerant ministry and removal from his pastoral charge, by the Respondent, without recommendation from the Ministerial Efficiency Committee and vote of the Annual Conference nor referral for conciliation or trial, violated Petitioner's right to due process, pursuant to Part XVI, Section II and Section XIII of the 2016 *Discipline*?

### IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

1. Petitioner served as pastor of Membe Temple AME Church in Lusaka, Zambia, in the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District under the leadership of Respondent Bishop Wilfred J. Messiah.
2. On March 1-2, 2021, the 29<sup>th</sup> Session of the South East Zambia Annual Conference met at Bethel AME Church. On March 2, 2021, the Annual Conference adjourned/recessed until April 9, 2021. During the Annual Conference, Respondent referred Petitioner to the Committee on Ministerial Efficiency (MEC) and informed him the charges would follow *in due course*. Further, Respondent removed him from his church advising that the Presiding Elder would administer the affairs of Membe Temple AME Church until April 9, 2021, when the Annual Conference would resume its session and the MEC would furnish its report.
3. On March 15, 2021, Petitioner received a letter from the MEC instructing him to appear before it on March 22, 2021, on charges and offenses of (1) Disobedience to the *Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (2) Maladministration in the office of the church and (3) Interference.
4. On March 20, 2021, Petitioner, through his legal representatives, provided a missive (letter) to the Chairperson of the MEC, Rev. Cosmos Wakunguma, requesting additional particulars regarding the charges against him and a postponement, to prepare appropriately for the hearing. On March 22, 2021, Respondent sent a letter referring Petitioner to page 271 of the *Discipline*, regarding the authority of the MEC. Respondent also advised Petitioner that the *Discipline* did not address extensions before the MEC and stated the proceeding was not a trial and did not require legal representation. The letter again requested Respondent to appear before the MEC on March 26, 2021, at Bethel AME Church, Kabwata. Finally, the letter stated that if Petitioner failed to attend the meeting the *suspension* would remain in place until he met with the MEC.

5. On March 24, 2021, Petitioner again wrote to Respondent requesting further particulars and an extension. Respondent offered no further reply.
6. Respondent issued a circular on April 5, 2021, communicating that based on COVID health protocols and restrictions, the 29<sup>th</sup> session of the Annual Conference would not resume on April 9, 2021, as previously communicated, but would proceed in the subsequent year. It further indicated if *circumstances changed*, the Annual Conference would reconvene and complete its business.
7. On May 19, 2021, Petitioner received a letter from Respondent, dated May 18, 2021, informing Petitioner of his suspension from all priestly functions as an itinerant elder in the AME Church *retroactively* from March 1, 2021, until the sitting of the next annual conference, due to his failure to appear before the MEC.
8. On 21 May 2021, Respondent called for the delegates to return to conclude the business of the 29<sup>th</sup> Session of the South East Zambia Annual Conference. At Session, Respondent appointed a new pastor to Membe Temple AME Church replacing Petitioner.
9. On July 6, 2021, Petitioner filed an appeal before the Judicial Council of the AME Church alleging his suspension from itinerant ministry and removal from his charge violated his rights, pursuant to the *Discipline*. Respondent Bishop Messiah did not reply to the Judicial Council's request for a response to Petitioner's allegations.

## V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Petitioner asserts the Ministerial Efficiency Committee (MEC) of the South East Zambia Annual Conference of the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District has no authority to “summon, try and render a judgment/recommendation against a minister charged with any of the offenses described in **Part XVI, Section II** or **Section XIII** of the *Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal church, 2016* at **pages 317-318** and **pages 356-358.**” Petitioner further asserts Respondent's failure to follow the judicial process of the church infringed upon his rights.

### *Ministerial Efficiency Committee (MEC)*

The *2016 Discipline* at Part XIV, Section II, (J)(1), page 271 provides that the Ministerial Efficiency Committee (MEC) shall have the duty to pass upon the efficiency and moral conduct of such ministers as may be referred to it.

In the case where serious charges might be brought against a member of the AME Church which could result in expulsion, the *Discipline*, at Part XVI. Judicial Administration, starting at page 315, provides a process for adjudication beginning with conciliation and ending with procedures for

trial and appeal. The *Discipline*, at Part XVI, Section II. Charges, page 317, stipulates specific charges that trigger the application of the trial procedures including (1) Disobedience to the Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and (2) Maladministration in an office in the Church. However, the *Discipline* Part XVI Judicial Administration, Section II. Charges at page 318 also provides:

D. Intervening Omissions 1. Failure of the proper officials in the interim of the Annual Conference session to bring any traveling preacher to account in case of offense shall by no means prevent the fullest and fairest investigation of his or her character at the Annual Conference. 2. All accusations against a preacher shall be given in writing before the first examination. In all cases of trial and conviction, the preacher shall be allowed an appeal to the ensuing Annual Conference.

While the MEC has no authority to conduct a *trial* of a clergyperson, this provision makes it clear the MEC can investigate and make inquiry and subsequent recommendations regarding factual allegations, to include charges such as those raised against the Petitioner, as they relate to efficiency and moral conduct. The MEC may investigate matters which may also constitute triable charges and/or offenses to assess the character of the clergyperson. While the *Discipline* does not set forth the specific parameters of the notice, investigation and/or examination before the MEC, when the recommendation of the MEC is presented, voted on and passed by the Annual Conference, that decision is appealable and the process subject to review to safeguard Petitioner's right to due process. Due process must at least include a full and fair hearing and a meaningful opportunity to be heard.

#### *Process Afforded Petitioner*

In the case now before the Judicial Council, Petitioner was referred to the MEC on the floor of the Annual Conference (March 1-2, 2021) and immediately suspended. On March 2, 2021, the Conference was abruptly recessed, relative to health issues, and subsequently reconvened on May 21, 2021. In the interim, Petitioner was advised of the allegations against him by letter, dated March 15, 2021, with a directive to appear before the MEC on March 22, 2021. The letter was on behalf of the South East Zambia Conference Ministerial Efficiency Committee and signed by Reverend Cosmas Wakunguma as Chairperson for the Bishop (Respondent Bishop Messiah). The allegations levied against the Petitioner were referenced as charges and included: (1) Disobedience to the Doctrine and *Discipline* of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and (2) Maladministration in an office in the Church and (3) Interference.

After receiving the notification letter on March 20, 2021, Petitioner requested further particulars and a postponement to enable him to consider the charges, as well as mount a defense. By letter dated March 22, 2021, Respondent denied Petitioner's request for additional information and rescheduled the matter for March 26, 2021. The letter further advised Petitioner the suspension would continue if he failed to appear at the rescheduled hearing. On March 24, 2021, Petitioner again requested a postponement and particulars regarding the allegations/charges. There was no



record provided of a meeting of the MEC on March 26, 2021, or other date, nor recommendations of the MEC to the Annual Conference regarding Petitioner.

On May 19, 2021, Petitioner received a letter from Respondent, dated May 18, 2021, informing Petitioner of his suspension from all priestly functions as an itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church *retroactively* from March 1, 2021, until the sitting of the next annual conference.

On May 21, 2021, Respondent called for the delegates to return to conclude the business of the 29<sup>th</sup> Session of the South East Zambia Annual Conference, where he appointed a new pastor at Membe Temple AME Church to replace Petitioner.

### *Due Process Violations*

We agree Respondent violated Petitioner's right to due process in that Petitioner has essentially been *located* for the period of one year until the convening of the 30<sup>th</sup> Session of the South East Zambia Annual Conference in 2022, without the process afforded by the *Discipline*. Although the *Discipline*, Part IX, Section I (C) at page 156, provides for the MEC to recommend location, this provision does not permit location to occur without prior notice of a least 6 months prior to the sitting of an Annual Conference to which the recommendation for location is to be presented and the accused have an opportunity to defend. The recommendation for location must then be supported by 2/3 vote of the Annual Conference.

The record is void of any evidence demonstrating a recommendation of any nature was made by the MEC or presented to the Annual Conference concerning Petitioner. Even though Petitioner failed to appear before the MEC as directed, Respondent's decision to suspend Petitioner requires ratification by the Annual Conference to effectuate the suspension. Although the Annual Conference reconvened on May 21, 2021, no evidence exists of a vote by the Annual Conference regarding Petitioner's suspension. A suspension for failure to appear before the MEC, without action by the Annual Conference, infringed on Petitioner's due process rights. Petitioner's removal from his pastoral charge and suspension from all priestly functions as an Itinerant Elder in the AME Church clearly violates Petitioner's due process rights in accordance with the *Discipline*.

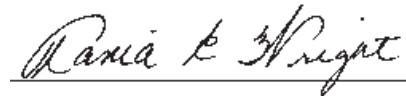
## VI. CONCLUSION

Due process requires Petitioner, Rev. Chama be afforded all rights set forth in the *Discipline* to assure fairness and a meaningful opportunity to be heard throughout the process. Rev. Chama's suspension and removal occurred, without being afforded these rights. In that Rev. Chama was denied due process, his suspension must be rescinded. He remains an active Itinerant Elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in good and regular standing, with all rights associated with his status.

**VII. ORDER**

The Judicial Council hereby rescinds Petitioner Rev. Fredrick Chilombo Chama's suspension based on the denial of due process as provided by *The Book of Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016*. He remains in good and regular standing, with all the rights of an Itinerant Elder of the AME Church.

Opinion rendered this 11<sup>th</sup> day of February 2022.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tania E. Wright". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Judge Tania Wright, Vice President

No. 2021-2024-10

**BEFORE THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**RE: MATTER OF REVEREND SUZANNE MEMBE MATALE, PETITIONER; AND  
BISHOP WILFRED J. MESSIAH, RESPONDENT**

**CLARIFICATION OF DECISION NO. 2021-2024-08**

Judge Patricia M. Mayberry, President, renders the opinion of the Judicial Council

**HOLDING:** In its decision in No. 2021-2024-08, dated December 29, 2021, the Judicial Council *held* Rev. Suzanne Membe Matale, remained in good and regular standing with all the rights of an Itinerant Elder in the AME Church. The Judicial Council now clarifies the use of the phrase “remains in good and regular standing with all rights of an Itinerant Elder in the AME Church.” The aforementioned phrase denotes Rev. Matale’s eligibility to receive an assignment from the presiding Bishop of her Episcopal District. The Judicial Council never intended its decision return Rev. Matale to the pastorate of her previous assignment, Bethel AME Church, Lusaka, Zambia. The Judicial Council lacks authority to appoint, assign, reassign, or issue any pastoral appointments. The power to appoint, assign reassign pastors clearly rests within the authority of the presiding prelate for each Episcopal District.

**I. PARTIES**

The Council of Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, through its president, Bishop Anne Henning Byfield seeks a clarification as to whether the *holding* in Judicial Council Decision No. 2021-2024-08 automatically returns Rev. Matale to her previous charge.

**II. JURISDICTION**

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction to hear an appeal based on a final decision pursuant to *The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016 (“Discipline”)*, Part XVI, Section XVI., A, page 361, which states in pertinent part:

The jurisdiction of the Judicial Council shall relate to and be restricted to ... all final appeals from any adverse decision by any bishop, board, commission, group pastor, or any other regularly constituted party or body empowered to make a decision which

affects the rights of any member or Church body of the AME Church.

This Court had jurisdiction over the matter presented; therefore, it may issue a clarification of its prior decision.

### **III. STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE**

Whether restoration of Rev. Matalé's status as an active Itinerant Elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in good and regular standing, with all rights automatically returns her to the pastorate of Bethel AME Church, Lusaka, Zambia?

### **IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS**

1. In its decision No. 2021-2024-08, dated December 29, 2021, the Judicial Council held Bishop Messiah failed to afford Rev. Matalé, former pastor of Bethel AME Church, Lusaka, Zambia, 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District, due process when issuing a suspension of her status as an Itinerant Elder. The Judicial Council rescinded her suspension restoring her as an active Itinerant Elder in good and regular standing with all rights associated with the status.
2. After receiving the Judicial Council's decision, on a date unknown, Rev. Matalé returned to Bethel AME Church, Lusaka, Zambia as pastor, without receiving an appointment from Bishop Daniels, Presiding Prelate of the 17<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District.
3. The Judicial Council at no time directed or suggested the restoration of Rev. Matalé's status included the right to resume her position as pastor of Bethel AME Church, Lusaka, Zambia.

### **V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

*The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (2016), at Part XVI- Judicial Administration, Section XVI-Judicial Council, Subsection I-Duties, paragraph 4, page 364 precludes the Judicial Council from interfering with the right of the bishop to appoint, assign, transfer or remove pastors. The disciplinary language precluded the Judicial Council from returning Rev. Matalé to Bethel AME Church-Lusaka.


The rescission of Rev. Matalé's suspension and her restoration to active status as an Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church renders her eligible to receive an assignment. Only

Bishop Daniels, the presiding prelate, holds the authority to appoint or assign Rev. Matale to a charge. The Judicial Council's Decision No. 2021-2024-08 was never intended to convey authority to Rev. Matale to automatically resume pastoring her previous charge.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The Judicial Council clarifies its decision No. 2021-2024-08, dated December 29, 2021, regarding the use of the phrase "remains in good and regular standing with all rights of an Itinerant Elder in the AME Church". The reference does not reinstate Rev. Matale to her charge at Bethel AME Church, Lusaka, Zambia. The restoration of status as an active Itinerant Elder in good and regular standing with all rights reinstated her eligibility to receive an assignment from the presiding Bishop of her Episcopal District. The Discipline prohibits the Judicial Council from interfering with a bishop's authority to assign, appoint, or transfer pastors. Based on the lack of authority to effectuate an assignment, the Judicial Council's decision could not return Rev. Matale to her previous charge Bethel AME Church, Lusaka, Zambia.

Opinion rendered this 25<sup>th</sup> day of April 2022.

  
PATRICIA M. MAYBERRY  
President

Concurring: Judge Tania E. Wright, Judge Derek H. Anderson, Judge Eduardo K. Curry, Judge Thomas L. Bess, Judge Warren Hope Dawson, Judge Jonathan C. Augustine, Judge O. Jerome Green, Judge Thabile M Ngubeni





