

PETITIONS & RESOLUTIONS – EDUCATIONAL PIECE #1 2024

Intent: To help annual conference members properly understand the difference between “prescriptive” and “aspirational” petitions and resolutions. This is an important nuance since, “*an annual conference resolution is proper under Church law if its language does not cross the line between aspirational and prescriptive*” [quoted from JCD #1468].

Definitions of Petitions and Resolutions

A **Resolution** is any request for the Indiana Annual Conference to make a change, take action or recognize a formal expression of opinion on an issue.

A **Petition** is any request for the General Conference to take an action ¶1507.4, alter the wording of The *Book of Discipline* ¶1507.2 or affirm a formal expression on an issue. Such petitions may be submitted to the Indiana Annual Conference seeking Conference support/sponsorship.

Explanation of “Prescriptive” and “Aspirational”

There are problematic prescriptive resolutions and non-problematic ones. A “prescriptive” resolution (which is problematic) is one which requires or mandates action contradictory to the *Book of Discipline*. This would add a requirement which the annual conference or local churches or pastors would have to do (or not do) contrary to the *Book of Discipline*.

Example Non-Problematic Prescriptive Resolution: “*We shall all smile on Thursdays.*” This mandates an action using the word “shall” and is thus prescriptive, but it IS NOT Problematic since it doesn’t violate any part of the *Book of Discipline*.

Example Problematic Prescriptive Resolution: “*We shall allow the district committee on ordained ministry chairperson to pick their own team members.*” This IS PROBLEMATIC since it contradicts the *Book of Discipline* par. 665.1 which mandates a different process for forming the district committees on ordained ministry.

The Judicial Council writes . . .

In determining whether an annual conference resolution is proper under Church law, the Judicial Council distinguishes between aspirational and prescriptive language. The Council consistently held that “annual conferences are free to adopt resolutions that are aspirational in nature, and to express their ideals and opinions so long as they do not attempt to negate, ignore, or contradict The Discipline.” JCD 1044, 1052, 1111. Conversely, they are prohibited from passing resolutions that are prescriptive in nature. Prescriptive is a resolution if it “was meant to be a call to action that runs counter to The Discipline. JCD 1340” [quoted from JCD#1468].

Aspirational statements are future oriented. They look to and express a yearning for something new or different. It is permissible for a conference to publicly endorse moral-ethical principles or take a theological stance in the hope that they become reality someday. “By their very nature, aspirational statements express a hope for a United Methodist Church different from the current church as defined by the Discipline.” JCD

1 1406. While they are free to adopt resolutions with aspirational content, conferences are prohibited from
2 passing resolutions that are prescriptive in nature running counter to the Discipline." JCD 1468, quoting JCD
3 1340 [quoted from JCD #1483].
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5 **Conclusion:** The Indiana Conference may approve resolutions which are aspirational in nature but may
6 not pass any which mandate or require us to violate the Book of Discipline.
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8 Rev. Paul Wagner

9 INUMC Parliamentarian 2024