



Separation Litigation Update

October 13, 2026

On Monday, the South Carolina Conference learned that Circuit Court Judge Brian M. Gibbons intends to issue an order dismissing the cases brought by the Conference and local United Methodist churches involving the 70 churches that have sought to separate from The United Methodist Church.

The final orders have not yet been written or entered. Attorneys representing the separating churches have been asked to prepare proposed orders for the judge's consideration and signature.

We recognize that this news may bring disappointment, concern and questions for many across our Connection. In moments such as these, we are reminded that our trust rests not in any single court decision or legal proceeding, but in the God who continues to lead the church through seasons of uncertainty and change.

At the same time, we remain committed to faithfully stewarding the responsibilities entrusted to us. We continue to consult closely with our legal counsel, and we intend to appeal these rulings to the South Carolina appellate courts. Our hope is to bring these matters before the appellate courts, potentially including the South Carolina Supreme Court, at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

We have long understood that, regardless of the trial court's decision, an appeal was likely. While we had hoped to approach that next step from a different position, this ruling provides an opportunity for the appellate courts to consider the important legal issues involved in these cases.

We continue to believe strongly in the factual and legal basis of our position, and we remain confident as the appellate process moves forward. These cases are not concluded by this ruling, and we believe the appellate courts will have an important opportunity to provide guidance consistent with applicable federal and state precedent.

As United Methodists, our calling extends beyond the courtroom. Even amid disagreement and uncertainty, we are called to remain people of grace, prayer and hope. We ask our clergy and laity to pray for all those involved – including the congregations on every side of these proceedings – and to resist allowing legal disputes to distract us from the mission Christ has given us.

"There remains much ministry before us," said Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference. "People are hungry for the Gospel. Communities need healing and hope. Children and young people need places where they can discover the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Our neighbors need the church to be present with compassion, courage and grace.

"So, we will continue to seek justice faithfully, pursue the appropriate legal avenues available to us, and trust God with what lies ahead. And through it all, we will remain focused on our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

South Carolina United Methodists will move forward together – prayerfully, faithfully and with hope – trusting that God is still at work among us.