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STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA **COUNTY OF GREENVILLE** The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, Plaintiff, vs. Simpsonville United Methodist Church, The Methodist Church of Simpsonville, and Michael Smith, Defendants.	**IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS** **THIRTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT** Case No.: 2024-CP-23-06475 **ORDER GRANTING DEFENDANTS' MOTION TO DISMISS**

This matter comes before the Court on the Motion to Dismiss filed by Defendants the Methodist Church of Simpsonville (f/k/a Simpsonville United Methodist Church) and its pastor, Michael Smith (collectively, "Simpsonville Methodist") on December 6, 2024. Pursuant to the South Carolina Supreme Court's Order dated August 13, 2025, this Court was assigned to handle, *inter alia*, all pretrial motions in the various Methodist Church cases in South Carolina. On August 31, 2026, the Court held a hearing on this and related matters wherein the Court heard extensive oral arguments by all parties. After reviewing the record and all memoranda and citations offered, the Court issued its Instructions for Order, granting Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss. For the reasons that follow, the Court finds that: this action is barred by the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine and judicial estoppel; Plaintiff the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church (the "Conference") lacks standing to bring this action; and the Conference has failed to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. The Court **GRANTS** Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss and **DENIES** the Conference's Motion to Amend.

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ALLEGED FACTS

The Methodist Church of Simpsonville, founded in 1916, is a South Carolina nonprofit corporation located in Simpsonville, South Carolina. The Conference alleges that, prior to the events leading to this lawsuit, the church was associated with the United Methodist Church (the "UMC") and governed by the Conference.

Over the years, Simpsonville Methodist acquired and owned several parcels of land in Simpsonville. The Conference alleges that the church's property is subject to a denominational trust clause found in the UMC Book of Discipline. Most of the church's properties' deeds, however, do not contain a trust clause.[1] A few contain trust language that was inserted in 2016 via quitclaim deeds. Notably, the trust clause found in those deeds does not include any language of irrevocability.[2]

In 2024, after more than a decade of tension within the UMC over doctrinal matters, Simpsonville Methodist concluded it had no choice but to part ways with the denomination. Accordingly, the church council took a series of steps to disaffiliate from the UMC by amending the church's Articles of Incorporation, changing the church's registered name, changing its registered agent, adopting and filing Restated Articles of Incorporation, adopting Bylaws, and adopting and filing with the Register of Deeds a resolution revoking the purported trust language

[1] The deeds are public records that are incorporated by reference in the Complaint, *see* Compl. ¶¶ 12, 18–19, 33(a), and Prayer for Relief (a)(1), meaning the Court may rely on them at this stage of the litigation without converting the Motion to Dismiss into one for summary judgment.

[2] Simpsonville Methodist argues that these quitclaim deeds and trust language were not authorized by or known to the church's directors. The Court need not resolve that dispute today, however, since the legal principles described below, when applied to the facts alleged in the Complaint, independently compel the dismissal of the suit without considering whether the quitclaim deeds were authorized and valid or not.

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in the 2016 quitclaim deeds.[3] Five months after Simpsonville Methodist notified the Conference that it had discontinued its affiliation with the denomination, the Conference filed this lawsuit.

The Conference alleges that, pursuant to a Trust Clause contained in the UMC Book of Discipline, Simpsonville Methodist's property and assets were (and, the Conference alleges, still are) held in trust for the UMC. The Complaint also alleges that Simpsonville Methodist violated the UMC Book of Discipline in its effort to disaffiliate from the UMC and the Conference by amending the church's corporate filings, changing the church's name, and updating its accounts and real property filings to reflect the corporation's name change.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On November 5, 2024, the Conference filed its Summons and Complaint for Declaratory Judgment and Injunction. The Conference sought, *inter alia*, a declaration that Simpsonville Methodist had improperly separated from the Conference, could not disaffiliate from the denomination, and could not retain its property and assets following any separation. The Conference further sought an injunction ordering Defendant Michael Smith to vacate the church's parsonage and cease communications with its members regarding separation. The Conference also requested relief related to Simpsonville Methodist's property and assets.

On December 6, 2024, Simpsonville Methodist moved to dismiss the Complaint because, *inter alia*: (1) the Conference lacks standing; (2) the Complaint would require the Court to resolve disputes about religious law, principle, doctrine, discipline, custom, or administration over which the Court has no jurisdiction under the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine; (3) the Complaint is barred by judicial estoppel; and (4) the Conference's Complaint failed to state a claim upon which

[3] These filings, including the resolution revoking the trust language in the 2016 quitclaim deeds, are referred to and relied upon in the Complaint, *see* Compl. ¶ 18, and are therefore appropriate for the Court to consider at this stage of the litigation.

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relief can be granted. Simpsonville Methodist filed its Memorandum in Support of its Motion on February 24, 2026. On that same day, the Conference filed its Memorandum in Opposition to the Motion. The Conference also filed its Motion to Amend the Complaint on February 24, 2026.

On March 5, 2025, the Conference filed a Motion with the South Carolina Supreme Court, requesting that this and associated actions be assigned to a single trial judge. On August 13, 2025, the South Carolina Supreme Court ordered that the Honorable Brian M. Gibbons be vested with exclusive jurisdiction to hear and dispose of all pretrial motions. This Order was thereafter filed in this action on February 9, 2026. On January 21, 2026, the Conference revised and supplemented its Motion to Amend.

On August 31, 2026, the Court held a hearing in Darlington, South Carolina, wherein the Court heard oral arguments on Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss and the Conference's Motion to Amend. Following the hearing, the Court left the record open for additional filings. On September 10, 2026, the Conference filed its Supplemental Memorandum in Opposition to Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss, and Simpsonville Methodist filed its Reply in Support of the Motion to Dismiss. One week later, on September 17, 2026, Simpsonville Methodist filed its Supplemental Reply in Support of the Motion to Dismiss. This Order followed.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

Under Rule 12 of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure, the Court has the authority to dismiss actions for, *inter alia*, lack of subject matter jurisdiction and insufficient pleading. SCRCP, Rule 12(b)(1), (b)(6), (h)(3).

As to the former, "[w]henever it appears . . . that the court lacks jurisdiction of the subject matter, the court shall dismiss the action." SCRCP, Rule 12(h)(3). A court without subject matter

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jurisdiction "only has authority to dismiss the action." *Ross v. Richland Cnty.*, 270 S.C. 100, 101, 240 S.E.2d 649, 650 (1978).

As to the latter, a complaint must be dismissed under Rule 12(b)(6) of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure if the plaintiff fails to allege facts sufficient to state a cause of action. In considering a motion to dismiss based on insufficient pleading, the trial court relies on and assumes the truth of all well-pleaded allegations. *Doe v. Marion*, 373 S.C. 390, 395, 645 S.E.2d 245, 247 (2007). The court may evaluate the sufficiency of a pleading by reviewing materials attached to or incorporated by reference in the pleading. *S.C. Coastal Conservation League, Inc. v. Charleston Cnty.*, 442 S.C. 409, 414–15, 899 S.E.2d 609, 612 (Ct. App. 2024). Dismissal is proper when the facts alleged and inferences reasonably deducible therefrom, viewed in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, would not entitle the plaintiff to relief on any theory asserted in the complaint. *Marion*, 373 S.C. at 395, 645 S.E.2d at 247.

DISCUSSION

I. Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss is GRANTED.

Simpsonville Methodist moved to dismiss the Complaint on the grounds that it was barred by the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine, the Conference was judicially estopped from taking a contrary position, the Conference lacked standing to bring this action, and the Complaint failed to allege facts sufficient to entitle the Conference to relief on any theory. The Conference opposed dismissal by arguing that the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine and judicial estoppel did not apply to this action, the Conference had standing, and the Complaint stated a sufficient claim. After reviewing the parties' respective motions, oral arguments, memoranda and associated citations, the Court **GRANTS** Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss for the following reasons.

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A. The Court lacks jurisdiction over the Conference's Complaint pursuant to the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine.

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution, incorporated against the states through the Fourteenth Amendment, guarantees religious liberties and prevents the government from inhibiting, coercing, or improperly interfering with religious belief, exercise, practice, or doctrine. Likewise, the South Carolina Constitution affirms these principles in Article I, Section 2. The ecclesiastical abstention doctrine, which is sometimes referred to as the church autonomy doctrine, is one mechanism by which courts enforce the protections and limitations of the First Amendment. Under the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine, civil courts cannot entertain disputes involving "theological controversy, church discipline, ecclesiastical government, or the conformity of the members of the church to the standard of morals required of them." *Serbian E. Orthodox Diocese for U.S. & Can. v. Milivojevich*, 426 U.S. 696, 714 (1976) (quoting *Watson v. Jones*, 80 U.S. 679, 733 (1871)); *see also All Saints Par., Waccamaw v. Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of S.C.*, 385 S.C. 428, 445, 685 S.E.2d 163, 172 (2009) ("Courts may not engage in resolving disputes as to religious law, principle, doctrine, discipline, custom, or administration.") (quoting *Pearson v. Church of God*, 325 S.C. 45, 54, 478 S.E.2d 849, 853–54 (1996)). Courts are further barred from deciding cases which necessitate extensive inquiry into religious law and polity. *Serbian E. Orthodox*, 426 U.S. at 709–10; *Pearson*, 325 S.C. at 54, 478 S.E.2d at 853–54.

To be sure, the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine does not prevent the Court from exercising jurisdiction over purely secular disputes among or between religious persons or entities. Under South Carolina law, civil courts retain jurisdiction over controversies involving civil, contract, and property rights that can "be resolved using solely legal principles without examining any religious questions." *Banks v. St. Matthew Baptist Church*, 391 S.C. 475, 481, 706 S.E.2d 30, 33 (Ct. App. 2011), *aff'd* 406 S.C. 156, 750 S.E.2d 605 (2013); *Jenkins v. Refuge Temple Church of God in*

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Christ, Inc., 424 S.C. 320, 328, 818 S.E.2d 13, 17 (Ct. App. 2018). As explained below, however, this case is not a merely secular suit that can be resolved without examining, applying, deciding, or enforcing religious questions, texts, or doctrines.

Ecclesiastical abstention is a jurisdictional bar—when the doctrine applies to a case, it mandates dismissal. *See Pearson*, 325 S.C.at 51, 478 S.E.2d at 852 (noting that "civil courts . . . have no jurisdiction of ecclesiastical questions and controversies") (cleaned up) (internal citation omitted); *see also Serbian E. Orthodox*, 426 U.S. at 713–14 ("civil courts exercise no jurisdiction" over "a matter which concerns theological controversy, church discipline, [or] ecclesiastical government"); *Watson*, 80 U.S.at 733 (stating that "where a subject-matter of dispute[is] strictly and purely ecclesiastical in its character," it is "a matter over which the civil courts exercise *no* jurisdiction") (emphasis added). Just a few months ago, the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina recognized and applied this principle, ruling that civil courts lack subject matter jurisdiction over ecclesiastical disputes and must dismiss any lawsuit to which the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine applies. *See Jurisdiction of the Armed Forces & Chaplaincy v. Anglican Church of N. Am.*, No. 2:25-cv-12848-BHH, ECF No. 56, at *4–5, *19 (D.S.C. Sep. 28, 2026).

Accordingly, when a court lacks subject matter jurisdiction, the only action it may take is to announce that fact and dismiss the case. *See Ross*, 270 S.C. at 101, 240 S.E.2d at 650; SCRCP Rule 12(h)(3) ("Whenever it appears . . . that the court lacks jurisdiction of the subject matter, the court shall dismiss the action."); *Steel Co. v. Citizens for Better Env't*, 523 U.S. 83, 94 (1998) ("Without jurisdiction the court cannot proceed at all in any cause. . . . [W]hen [jurisdiction] ceases to exist, the only function remaining to the court is that of announcing the fact and dismissing the cause") (quoting *Ex parte McCardle*, 7 Wall. 506, 514 (1869)).

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The ecclesiastical abstention doctrine applies here and deprives the Court of jurisdiction because the Conference's Complaint asks this Court to interpret and apply its religious doctrine, as set forth in the UMC Book of Discipline, and to find that Simpsonville Methodist has violated the religious text. The first full sentence of the Complaint plainly states that "Plaintiff seeks a Declaratory Judgment and adjudication regarding the obligations of the Defendants pursuant to The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church." The remainder of the Complaint is similarly clear. The factual allegations, the causes of action, and the requested relief all rest on the interpretation, application, and enforcement of the UMC Book of Discipline.

The Complaint does not assert any state law claims, nor does it raise any controversy that could be resolved without examining religious questions outside the ambit of this Court's authority. To consider the Complaint's claims, the Court would have to conduct extensive inquiry into religious law and polity. This is something the Court cannot do without violating the First Amendment and South Carolina precedent.

In its oral arguments and associated filings, the Conference argued that the Complaint does not implicate ecclesiastical abstention because, in a few past instances, South Carolina courts have discussed a religious text to decide civil property or corporate rights. *See Pearson v. Church of God*, 325 S.C. at 51, 478 S.E.2d at 852; *Turbeville v. Morris*, 203 S.C. 287, 26 S.E.2d 821, 824 (1943); *Jenkins*, 424 S.C. at 328, 818 S.E.2d at 17; *Banks v. St. Matthew Baptist Church*, 391 S.C. 475, 481, 706 S.E.2d 30, 33 (Ct. App. 2011). One of these cases, *Turbeville*, was decided before South Carolina courts adopted the ecclesiastical abstention framework in *Pearson* and *All Saints*. The remaining cases involved controversies with civil, contract, or property rights and asserted causes of action that could be decided solely by neutral principles of law and did not require the Court to examine or decide religious questions. The same is not true of the Conference's

Complaint. The Conference does not allege any property or corporate right that arises from a source independent of the UMC Book of Discipline, nor is there any controversy that can be resolved without improper adjudication of religious issues.

For these reasons, the Court lacks subject-matter jurisdiction over the Complaint and must grant Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss under Rules 12(b)(1) and 12(h)(3) of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure.

B. The Conference is judicially estopped from arguing that the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine does not apply to this action.

An additional reason the Conference cannot avoid the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine in this case is that the Conference has previously taken the position that the doctrine applies to bar jurisdiction in every instance the Court can find in which the Conference has been sued in this state's courts. The Conference is, therefore, judicially estopped from maintaining a contrary position in this action.

Judicial estoppel "precludes a party from adopting a position in conflict with the one previously taken in the same or related litigation." *Quinn v. Sharon Corp.*, 343 S.C. 411, 414, 540 S.E.2d 474, 475 (Ct. App. 2000); *see also id.* at 416, 540 S.E.2d at 476 (Anderson, J., concurring) ("Under the doctrine of judicial estoppel, a party that has assumed a particular position in a judicial proceeding, via its pleadings, statements, or contentions made under oath, is prohibited from adopting an inconsistent posture in subsequent proceedings."); *Hayne Fed. Credit Union v. Bailey*, 327 S.C. 242, 251–52, 489 S.E.2d 472, 477 (1997). Consistently, the Conference has argued that, under the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine, courts cannot exercise jurisdiction over disputes involving Methodist church governance, operations, and policy—including in a recent suit

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remarkably similar to the facts of this case, in which the Conference was the defendant.[4] The Conference is thus judicially estopped from asserting a contrary position in this action.

C. The Conference does not have standing.[5]

Even if the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine did not bar the Conference's Complaint, the Court must dismiss the suit for another reason: the Conference lacks standing to bring its claims. *See Sloan v. Greenville Cnty.*, 356 S.C. 531, 547, 590 S.E.2d 338, 347 (Ct. App. 2003) (explaining that a plaintiff must have standing to maintain a claim). Simpsonville Methodist is a South Carolina nonprofit corporation subject to the South Carolina Nonprofit Corporation Act (the "Act"). Under the Act, the authority to manage, govern, and control a nonprofit corporation is vested in its directors. S.C. Code Ann. § 33-31-801. The corporation has the legal right to operate, buy, sell, govern itself, and associate with other entities. *Id.* § 33-31-302. A challenge to a nonprofit corporation's power to act may only be brought by a director, a member in a derivative proceeding, the trustee, the corporation itself, or the Attorney General. *Id.* § 33-31-304. The Complaint does not allege that the Conference is any of these.[6] The decisions made by a corporation's board of directors are not subject to judicial challenge by third parties absent exigent circumstances not

[4] *See, e.g.*, Answer, *Stilwell et al. v. S.C. Conference of the United Methodist Church*, No. 2024-CP-23-03486 (S.C. Ct. Com. Pl. Greenville Cnty. Aug. 6, 2024) (in which the Conference argued that the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine barred a suit filed by a Methodist church seeking a declaration that the Conference has no interest in the local church's property).

[5] As noted above, the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine is a jurisdictional bar, and when it applies, the Court can and should dismiss on that basis alone. Nevertheless, for the sake of judicial economy and efficiency on appeal, the Court notes two additional, independent, alternative bases for dismissal of this lawsuit—the Conference's lack of standing (Section I.C of this Order) and the Conference's failure to state claims on which relief can be granted (Section I.D of this Order).

[6] To be clear, the Complaint is not brought by or on behalf of church members. Although church members may seek a judicially-called corporate meeting or bring a derivative suit alleging ultra vires action, *see id*. §§ 33-31-160(a), -304(b), the Code does not permit a corporation like the Conference to bring an ultra vires suit *in a representative capacity* on behalf of its members, nor has the Conference pled or argued that it can rely on associational standing to stand in their shoes.

alleged here. *Id.* § 33-31-304. The Complaint does not allege that Simpsonville Methodist acted inconsistently with South Carolina law or otherwise took actions that would subject its directors' decisions to judicial review. *See Kuznik v. Bees Ferry Assocs.*, 342 S.C. 579, 599, 538 S.E.2d 15, 25 (Ct. App. 2000) (explaining that the business judgment rule insulates the decisions of a corporation's directors from judicial review absent circumstances inapplicable here). Thus, as a third party, the Conference does not have standing to maintain this lawsuit.

The Conference cited *Joseph v. S.C. Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation* for the threshold requirements for any party to have standing. 417 S.C. 436, 449, 790 S.E.2d 763, 769–70 (2016). In *Joseph*, the South Carolina Supreme Court explained that the "constitutional minimum of standing" requires that a party have suffered an injury in fact caused by the complained-of conduct that is likely to be redressed by a favorable decision of the court. *Id.* Regardless of whether the Conference sufficiently alleged this threshold requirement, the Act establishes different statutory requirements for third parties challenging the actions of a corporation's directors. Because the Conference has not satisfied the Act, the Conference lacks standing and cannot maintain its claims. For these and other reasons set forth in this Order, the Court grants Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss.

D. The Conference has not sufficiently alleged facts under which relief can be granted.

The Court further concludes that the Conference failed to adequately plead facts upon which relief can be granted and that the Complaint must, therefore, be dismissed on that independent ground, too. The Complaint seeks the recognition of a trust in favor of the UMC over Simpsonville Methodist's property and assets. But the trust they attempt to impose on the property is not compliant with South Carolina law. Under the South Carolina Trust Code, "a trust of real property . . . must be proved by some writing signed by the party creating the trust." S.C. Code

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Ann. § 62-7-401(a)(2). The Trust Code further clarifies that a "trust is only created if . . . the settlor indicates an intention to create the trust." *Id*. § 62-7-402(a)(2). The Complaint fails to allege facts from which the Court could reasonably infer that the South Carolina Trust Code's requirements have been satisfied for at least three reasons.

First, for several of the at-issue properties, there is no language in the deed supporting the creation of a trust,[7] and the Complaint alleges no other writing signed by the settlor which could have created a trust. *See* S.C. Code Ann. § 62-7-401(a)(2). Thus, the Complaint fails to state a claim for any trust-related relief for those properties.

Second, for the parcels where the 2016 quitclaim deeds contained trust language, those deeds did not contain language of irrevocability, and Simpsonville Methodist subsequently revoked these deeds.[8] Accordingly, under South Carolina law, the 2016 quitclaim deeds do not create a trust that the Court can impose or enforce. *See* S.C. Code Ann. § 62-7-602 ("Unless the terms of a trust expressly provide that the trust is irrevocable, the settlor may revoke or amend the trust."); *see also Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of South Carolina v. Episcopal Church*, 439 S.C. 284, 315–16, 887 S.E.2d 508, 524 (2022) (holding in a case similar to this one that such revocations were effective and meant that there was no denominational trust in place).[9]

[7] Because the Complaint incorporates references to filed deeds for Simpsonville Methodist's property to which alleged trust applies, the Court may properly consider the deeds for these parcels on a motion to dismiss.

[8] As already noted, both the deeds and the resolution of revocation are incorporated by reference in the Complaint and are public documents, and the Court may consider them at this juncture.

[9] Although the Supreme Court noted that its 2022 opinion in *Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of South Carolina v. Episcopal Church* is not binding precedent in future cases, that opinion is nevertheless an instructive and persuasive example of the legal principles and type of analysis that apply in suits between a denomination, state affiliate, and disaffiliating local churches.

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Third, the Court cannot impose the trust clause from the UMC Book of Discipline onto Simpsonville Methodist's property merely because the local church participated in denominational life and submitted generic annual affirmations. Those actions do not evince a present intent by the local church to create a trust, nor do they constitute a writing demonstrating a present intention as required by S.C. Code Ann. § 62-7-401(a)(2).

This conclusion is consistent with persuasive authority from the South Carolina Supreme Court. As noted explicitly in the opinion itself, *Protestant Episcopal Church in Diocese of S.C. v. Episcopal Church* is not binding precedent. 439 S.C. 284, 887 S.E.2d 508 (2022). Nonetheless, it is instructive on how the South Carolina Supreme Court considered a similar trust dispute between a conference and a local church. In *Episcopal Church*, the South Carolina Supreme Court considered what actions were required by a local church to create a trust over church property. *Id.* at 298, 887 S.E.2d at 515. In that case, the denomination adopted a canon purporting to create a trust over church property for the benefit of the diocese. *Id.* at 298–301, 887 S.E.2d at 515–17. The South Carolina Supreme Court determined that the denominational trust would not be imputed to local a church's deed merely by the local church's continued participation in denominational life and affirmations. *Id.* at 302–03, 887 S.E.2d at 517–18. Instead, the trust would be imputed only if the local church took "present actions—in writing—documenting both the creation of a trust and the placing of specified property in it" and "the documents creating the trust indicate the owner had the present intent for the writings to create a trust for the particular beneficiary." *Id.* (citing S.C. Code Ann. § 62-7-402(a) (2022)). As applied to different local Episcopal churches, this meant that the church had to take some affirmative action beyond merely remaining part of the denomination and signing annual form documents affirming adherence to church doctrine. *Id.* at

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313–14, 887 S.E.2d at 523–24. The local church had to expressly, knowingly, and intentionally adopt the cannon in an official, written document with a present intent to create a trust. *Id.*

The Conference does not allege facts sufficient for the Court to reasonably infer that Simpsonville Methodist expressly, knowingly, and intentionally adopted the UMC Book of Discipline's Trust Clause. For this reason and for the deficiencies discussed above, the Court grants Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss and dismisses the Complaint pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6) of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure.

II. The Court DENIES the Conference's Motion to Amend.

Because this Court lacks subject matter jurisdiction over this action, it also lacks jurisdiction to allow the Conference to amend its Complaint. *Griggs v. S.C. Elec. & Gas Co.*, 320 S.C. 127, 130, 463 S.E.2d 608, 610 (1995). Therefore, the Conference's Motion to Amend is denied.[10]

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, **IT IS ORDERED** that:

1. Simpsonville Methodist's Motion to Dismiss is **GRANTED**, and the Complaint is **DISMISSED**.

2. The Conference's Motion to Amend its Summons and Complaint and for Joinder and Realignment of the Parties is **DENIED**.

3. Any Notice of Lis Pendens filed by Plaintiffs, if any, is cancelled.

[10] In any event, amendment would be pointless because the proposed amended pleading continues to depend on the UMC Trust Clause and alleged violations of the Discipline. That pleading, like the essentially identical ones asserted in the 68 consolidated suits dismissed concurrently with this one, is barred by the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine, lack of standing, and failure to state a claim, too.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Judge's Signature to Follow

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Greenville Common Pleas

Case Caption:	South Carolina Conference Of The United Methodist Church vs. Simpsonville United Methodist Church , defendant, et al
Case Number:	2024CP2306475
Type:	Order/Dismissal and Cancellation of Lis Pendens

So Ordered

Brian M Gibbons