

Methodist court upholds right to bar gays from membership: Rejects attempts to evade 2005 decision

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The United Methodist Church's top court has rejected two separate attempts by regional conferences to evade a 2005 decision that allows pastors to bar gays and lesbians from joining the church.

The nine-member Judicial Council reviews the decisions of bishops and regional conferences to determine whether they accord with church rules and court decisions. Seven members of the council were present at the October 25-28 session, according to United Methodist News Service.

The court said a petition by the Kansas East Annual Conference that said pastors could not deny church membership "solely" on the basis of "the candidate . . . being a self-avowed homosexual" was contrary to the high court's 2005 decision. While regional conferences and bishops are allowed to express opinions contrary to church rules, they may not direct pastors or lay members to disobey the rules, the court said.

The court also ruled that Bishop Edward Paup of the Pacific Northwest Conference was correct to reject a petition that urged pastors to "voluntarily relinquish" their right to deny membership to homosexuals.

In a separate decision, the judicial council ruled that the denomination may limit the Methodist Church of the Ivory Coast to two delegates at its General Conference legislative meeting. Four members of the court dissented, arguing that the denomination has "acted in a way which substantially disenfranchises what statistically is the largest annual conference in the United Methodist Church." The council needs six votes, however, to declare an act of the General Conference unconstitutional.

In another ruling, the court rejected the ability of local congregations to choose which church ministries to support financially. It also held that the Minnesota Conference can officially join the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice “even if some of the group’s stances disagree with the position of the United Methodist Church.” *-Religion News Service*