



"From Where I Sit ..."

The Conference of Authority ... For the Minority regarding Retirement

This may seem like a strange topic to you as the reader of this article, but that is mainly because you are not a part of this intended "minority." The minority to which I am referring to are the five clergy general officers. And the situation to which I am referring is the matter of retirement for clergy general officers who are both Connectional by General Conference election and (traditionally) itinerant by membership in an annual conference.

This concern arises from two different sections of The Book of Discipline of the CME Church (2014). The first is ¶450 §2 (p. 119) which states, "Members of the Judicial Council, General Officers, Presiding Elders, Pastors and all other of the clergy rank shall be automatically retired at the Conference of authority nearest their seventy-fourth (74th) birthday; ..." Inherent in this section is an apparent acknowledgement that a "clergy" general officer does have one conference of authority as a general officer and another conference of authority as a member of the "other clergy rank." It is also apparent that the meeting of these respective conferences of authority may not occur at the same time or even within the same year. Depending on his or her birthdate, a clergy general officer between age 72 and 76 may be required to retire at the General Conference nearest their 74th birthday. But that same general officer may also be required to retire between age 73 and 74 at the annual conference nearest their 74th birthday.

Now for the purpose of ceremony, the difference in these dates and/or years may not appear to be any cause for concern. However, when you consider ¶1039.4 (p. 218) which states, "A serving General Officer who retires in office, pursuant to the retirement laws of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, shall be entitled to benefits ...", it paints an entirely different picture.



It is my understanding of these two laws that a clergy general officer may retire from the itinerancy at age 74 and yet not retire as a general officer until age 75 or 76 depending on his or her birthdate. On the other hand, a clergy general officer may formally retire from his or her General Office at age 72 or 73 and yet not retire from the itinerancy until age 74 again depending on his or her birthdate.

What this means is that a clergy general officer has two retirement dates that occur at different times and, for all intents and purposes, are also for different reasons. The clergy general officer who retires at a General Conference with 8 years of service may receive 1/3 salary as a pension and with 12 years of service may receive ½ salary as a pension. The pension is paid from the annual budget administered by the Department of Finance. However, the general officer who retires at his or her annual conference is eligible to draw down or roll over their accumulated 12% retirement benefits. Their 12% retirement benefits are paid from the investments administered by the General Board of Personnel Services. These are two separate occurrences with two separate procedures.

I believe that some of the confusion around this matter arises from the fact that these two retirement actions are located in different places of the discipline. At the General Conference of 2014, I sought to have ¶1039.4 (*located in a section of the Discipline entitled "The Retirement Plan of the CME Church" but is not a part of The*

Retirement Plan) relocated to be nearer to ¶450 in Chapter 29, the “retirement” section, but the Conference closed before my recommendations could be acted upon.

In the meantime, it falls to us to articulate these nuances, these differences even for the benefit of the minority of the five clergy general officers. Someone might say that it is self-serving of me to make such a point. However, I believe the understanding of these provisions is a matter larger than the interest of one person or even five. It is important because any clergy person who seeks to be elected to a general office in the future needs to understand all of their options and opportunities. In fact, even the clergy general officers in office at this time need to understand these provisions.

At the writing of this article, an election for a bishop in 2018 based on a vacancy is not expected. Accordingly, the major election emphasis will be focused on general offices and on judicial council positions. We need to know our laws and how they are intended to be applied and we should not wait until a General Conference has convened to seek such an understanding. ...Or at least that’s the way it looks to me ...

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