

Chapter 3

CLASSIFICATION OF CHURCH LAW

A. Constitutional Law

125. Relationship to Essentials. The Essentials of The Wesleyan Church consist of an historic statement of faith and practice and are set forth in the Charter of the International Conference of The Wesleyan Church (see Appendix A). Each general conference of the International Conference must subscribe to the Essentials' pronouncements and must not contravene any of its provisions in its constitutions, articles of religion, or discipline. The North American General Conference does so subscribe. The Articles of Religion and other statements of faith and practice which are a part of the Constitution of the North American General Conference are in accord with the Essentials of The Wesleyan Church and are not intended to contravene or contradict them at any point.

135. Identification. The Constitution of the North American General Conference of The Wesleyan Church consists of Articles 1 through 12, paragraphs 200 through 385, including the Preamble, Name, Articles of Religion, Covenant Membership Commitments, Elementary Principles, Observance of Sacraments, Membership, The Ministry, Organization and Government, Powers and Restrictions of the General Conference, The Supreme Judiciary, and Amendments to the Constitution. The Constitution may be amended as set forth in paragraph 385.

145. Function. The Constitution is that body of laws (cf. 135) that sets forth fundamental doctrines and practices, the basic laws, principles, and restrictions by which the Church is governed, and guarantees certain rights to its members and ministers. The Constitution takes precedence over statutory law, ritual, and all other laws and official actions of the governing bodies and officers within its jurisdiction (cf. 185). It is the law to which all statutory law, ritual, and any other legislative or official actions must conform.

B. Statutory Law

155. Statutory law consists of legislation passed by the General Conference by a majority vote in fulfillment of its duties as set forth in the

Constitution and in keeping with its provisions and restrictions and printed by order of the General Conference in *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church*. Such statutory law is the authority for all of the North American General Conference of The Wesleyan Church, including its members, ministers, churches, districts, institutions, auxiliary organizations, corporations, general departments and offices, agencies, and any other official bodies (cf. 185). Statutory law remains in effect until amended, rescinded, or declared unconstitutional.

165. All changes in or additions to the statutory laws take effect when *The Discipline* is published following the adjournment of the General Conference unless an earlier time is ordered by a two-thirds vote of the General Conference.

C. Ritual

175. The ritual of The Wesleyan Church consists of those rites and ceremonies contained in *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church* (cf. 5500-5999), officially approved by the General Conference by a majority of those present and voting. The “Reception of Covenant Members,” “Covenant Questions,” and “Declaration of Purpose,” in the ritual for the “Reception of Covenant Members” (5565-5567); the “Examination of Candidates” in the rituals for the “Ordination of Ministers” (5772); and the “Commissioning of Ministers” (5825) have the authority of statutory law and must be followed as prescribed. In the remainder of the Ritual, a measure of flexibility is permitted as long as nothing contradicts the Articles of Religion or any other part of the Constitution.

D. Current Authority

185. The current issue of *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church* is the only valid authority for the North American General Conference and its subordinate units, with the exception of those units under the General Department of World Missions which have been authorized to have their own disciplines by the General Board (cf. 340:2; 2500:4-5; 2610:6).

E. Scripture References and Explanatory Notes

190. Listings of Scripture references and explanatory notes have been appended in support of the Articles of Religion and Covenant Membership Commitments. These have the status of statutory law (155).