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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR LIFE AND LIBERTY

Response from the NCLL Regarding the Ruling in North Carolina Case

MARCH 23, 2023 – CLEARWATER, FL: The National Center for Life and Liberty appeared on Monday, March 20, in civil Superior Court in Iredell County, North Carolina, on behalf of thirty-six churches who have filed suit against the Western North Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to disaffiliate from the denomination and retain their church properties, properties that the churches have already paid for once.

Surprisingly, the judge issued a ruling against the churches and granted the conference's motions to dismiss. The NCLL does not believe that this ruling properly reflects North Carolina law.

North Carolina law provides that “while the civil courts have no jurisdiction over and no concern with purely ecclesiastical questions and controversies due to constitutional guarantees of freedom of religious profession and worship, the courts do have jurisdiction to determine property rights which are involved in, or arise from, a church controversy.” *Looney v. Cmty. Bible Holiness Church*, 103 N.C. App. 469, 473, 405 S.E.2d 811, 813 (1991).

The NCLL presented to the court that the issues raised by the churches do not involve ecclesiastical determinations, but rather neutral issues of trust, property, contract, and equity law and that similar disputes have been handled by North Carolina courts for decades.

On Wednesday, prior to entering a finalized written order, attorneys for the Plaintiff Churches asked the judge in this case to recuse himself because it was discovered that he serves as the Treasurer and on the Administrative Council of Sparta United Methodist Church and that the District Superintendent that oversees his church is Lory Beth Huffman, who is married to Gregory Huffman, an attorney representing the Conference in this case. The judge denied this request and refused to recuse himself and entered a final written order dismissing the Complaint.

The NCLL plans to appeal his decision immediately to the North Carolina Court of Appeals in Raleigh. The NCLL believes this ruling to be in error, and our firm will work diligently to see this decision overturned so that the churches have their day in court and see their case go before a jury in North Carolina.

Please direct all media inquiries to info@ncll.org. Also, [click on this link to download](#) the brief that was filed in opposition to the Annual Conference's Motion to Dismiss.