

July 19, 2012

Dear Bishop _____ ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! We uphold you in our prayers for the important work that God has entrusted to you on behalf of His church.

We are compelled to write this open letter to you out of deep love for The United Methodist Church. Our unity is once more challenged by the remarks of one of your number and we ask that you take appropriate action to respond.

According to the websites of Methodists In New Directions (<http://www.mindny.org/2012/05/general-conference/>) and the Reconciling Ministries Network (<http://www.rmnetwork.org/gc-2012-altar-for-all/>) Bishop Melvin Talbert made the following comments on May 4, 2012, at the Love Your Neighbor Tabernacle in Tampa, Florida:

"The derogatory rules and restrictions in the Book of Discipline are immoral and unjust and no longer deserve our loyalty and obedience. Thus the time has come for those of us who are faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to do what is required of us....

The time has come to join in an act of Biblical obedience. I call on the more than 1,100 clergy [who have signed marriage initiatives] to stand firm in their resolve to perform marriages for same-sex couples and to do so in the course of their normal pastoral duties, thus defying the laws that prohibit them from doing so....

The time for talking is over. It's time for us to act in defiance of unjust words of immoral and derogatory discrimination and laws that are doing harm to our GLBT sisters and brothers."

The Reconciling Ministries Network reports that standing with Bishop Talbert were retired Bishops Judy Craig, Violet Fisher, Elias Galvan, Susan Hassinger, Don Ott, Sharon Rader, Roy Sano, and Jack Tuell; and active Bishops Warner Brown, Sally Dyck, Grant Hagiya, Bob Hoshibata, John Schol, and Mary Ann Swenson.

Each bishop of The United Methodist Church has agreed to live within the covenant defined by our Book of Discipline. Each bishop is charged in the Book of Discipline "to uphold the discipline and order of the Church." We are deeply concerned that Bishop Talbert has undercut that very discipline and order, by encouraging dissension, disunity and disobedience, and advocating anarchy and chaos in response to

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the actions of the 2012 General Conference, taken after focused prayer, study, and holy conferencing. Sadly, Bishop Talbert reiterated his call for UM pastors to disobey the *Book of Discipline* and pledged to do so himself, if given the opportunity, when he preached at the ordination service on June 16 at the California-Pacific Annual Conference.

(http://adot.s3.amazonaws.com/E6C471CE963F40D09FF2C9A3F9CD72EE_Talbert_DoTheRightThing_notes.pdf)

By their action in standing with Bishop Talbert as he made his statement at the Love Your Neighbor Tabernacle, the other bishops appear to have lent their credibility and influence to his call for disobedience. We have corresponded with all the bishops who stood with Bishop Talbert and received replies from most of them. Some did not know ahead of time what Bishop Talbert was going to say and do not support his call for disobedience. Others did know and do support that call. Without a public statement clarifying where those bishops stand, however, it appears to our church that all were supportive.

In its November 10, 2011 letter to United Methodist Sisters and Brothers in Christ, this Council of Bishops declared:

At times like these we call upon each other to remember and renew our covenant with God and with one another as United Methodist Christians. As bishops chosen, consecrated and assigned by the Church, we declare once again our commitment to be faithful to this covenant we have made. As the Council of Bishops we will uphold the *Book of Discipline* as established by General Conference.

The actions of Bishop Talbert specifically, and any of those retired and active bishops who stood with him, knowing what he was prepared to say, directly contravene this commitment made by the Council of Bishops as a whole.

We commend the commitment of the Council of Bishops to be intentional in holding one another mutually accountable to the office and responsibilities of bishops as outlined in our *Book of Discipline*. Now is the time for you to demonstrate your commitment by acting to hold these who have been disobedient to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church accountable for their inflammatory actions. We ask that:

the executive committee of the Council of Bishops and the colleges of bishops in the various jurisdictional and central conferences when they next meet publicly censure Bishop Talbert for his statement;

the executive committee of the Council of Bishops request that those retired and active bishops who stood with Bishop Talbert as he called for disobedience to the *Book of Discipline* issue specific statements repudiating Bishop Talbert's call to perform same-sex unions, and should they fail to do so, publicly censure them for their actions;

the executive committee of the Council of Bishops file a formal complaint against Bishop Melvin Talbert under ¶ 2702 (e) [disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church in violating his responsibility to uphold that order and discipline], ¶ 2702 (f) [dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established

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standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church], and ¶ 2702 (g) [engaging in behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor];

We acknowledge that these are challenging days in The United Methodist Church. We affirm our commitment to the *Book of Discipline*, including its statement “that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self.” We fully support the *Discipline’s* affirmation “that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

We will continue to uphold you in prayer. We will continue to work together to preserve the unity and integrity of The United Methodist Church, and to make disciples for the transformation of the world. We look forward to the actions you will take in response to this open letter.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Ed Robb III, The Woodlands United Methodist Church, The Woodlands, TX
Rev. Thom Abrahamson, Armona UMC & Lemoore UMC, Lemoore, CA
Rev. John Allen, Flower Mound Trietsch Memorial United Methodist Church, Flower Mound, TX
Rev. Scott Allred, Aldersgate UMC, Chico, CA
Turner Arant, Confessing Movement Board, Sunflower, MS
Rev. Larry Baird, Trinity UMC, President of Confessing Movement Board, Grand Island, NY
Rev. Richard Bayard, Retired Elder, Visalia, CA
Rev. Bill Bouknight, Associate Director, Confessing Movement, Columbia, SC
Rev. Keith Boyette, Wilderness Community UMC, Chair of Good News Board, Spotsylvania, VA
Rev. James Buskirk, Confessing Movement Board, Tulsa, OK
Rev. Riley Case, Associate Director, Confessing Movement, Kokomo, IN
Rev. Bryan Collier, The Orchard United Methodist Church, Tupelo, MS
Rev. Robert Collins, Jr., Centenary UMC, Modesto, CA
Robert Draper, Good News Board, Hot Springs, AR
Rev. Maxie Dunnam, Confessing Movement Board, Memphis, TN
Mickey Ellis, Confessing Movement Board, Houston, TX
Rev. Charles Ferrara, New Life Community Church United Methodist, New Fairfield, CT
Rev. Scott Field, Wheatland Salem UMC, Good News Board, Naperville, IL
Rev. John Gerlach, Trinity UMC, Windsor, CT
Rev. Robert Gorrell, Church of the Servant, Oklahoma City, OK
Judy Graham, Confessing Movement Board, Houston, TX
Rev. Ronald Greulich, Elder, Retired, Clovis, CA
Rev. John Grenfell, Jr., Good News Board, Fort Gratiot, MI
Rev. Randall Hageman, Gateway Community United Methodist Congregation, Houston, TX
Rev. Rick Hanse, West Hartford UMC, West Hartford, CT
Rev. Chet Harris, Dueber UMC, Canton, OH
Rev. Tom Harrison, Asbury United Methodist Church, Tulsa, OK
Rev. Matthew Hartsfield, Van Dyke United Methodist Church, Tampa, FL

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Rev. Tony Holifield, Central United Methodist Church, Fayetteville, AR
Rev. Godfrey Hubert, Foundry United Methodist Church, Houston, TX
Rev. Kent Jackson, Branford UMC, Branford, CT
Tom Junk, Confessing Movement Board, Tulsa, OK
Joe Kilpatrick, Confessing Movement Board, Tucker, GA
Rev. Chong IL Kim, Bible UMC of New York, Dix Hills, NY
Katy Kiser, Good News Board, Carrollton, TX
Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, Vice President, Good News, Spring, TX
Rev. Charles Kyker, Christ United Methodist Church, Confessing Movement Board, Hickory, NC
Rev. James Leggett, Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church, Katy, TX
Rev. Kenneth Levingston, Jones Memorial UMC, Houston, TX
Rev. Joseph MacLaren, University Carillon United Methodist Church, Oviedo, FL
Rev. David Mantz, First UMC, Port Jefferson, NY
Rev. Jim Martin, The River UMC, Richmond, TX
Rev. John Ed Mathison, Confessing Movement Board, Montgomery, AL
Rev. Gregory McGarvey, Carmel UMC, Confessing Movement Board, Carmel, IN
Rev. Randell Mickler, Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church, Marietta, GA
Dan Moore, Confessing Movement Board, Martinsville, IN
Rev. Delroy Murdock, St. Paul's UMC, Brooklyn, NY
Norman Neel, Good News Board, San Augustine, TX
Rev. Allen Newton, St. James UMC, Montgomery, AL
Rev. Randy Paige, Christ Church United Methodist, Port Jefferson Station, NY
Rev. James Presig, Lee's Summit United Methodist Church, Lee's Summit, MO
Rev. Glen Raley, First UMC, Marysville, CA
Rev. Robert Renfro, The Woodlands United Methodist Church, President of Good News,
The Woodlands, TX
Donna Schlitt, Confessing Movement Board, Houston, TX
Rev. Mike Schreiner, Morning Star Church, O'Fallon, MO
Donald Shell, Good News Board, Houston, TX
Rev. Dan Slagle, FaithBridge Church, Good News Board, Spring, TX
Rev. Ralph Sigler, Harvest Church UM, Dothan, AL
Rev. Roger Spahr, Cornerstone Church, Watertown, SD
David Stanley, Confessing Movement Board, Muscatine, IA
Helen Rhea Stumbo, Good News Board, Fort Valley, GA
Rev. Jeff Switzer, Sandtown UMC, Confessing Movement Board, Sandtown, MS
Rev. Alpher Sylvester, Bethany UMC, Brooklyn, NY
Rev. Richard Thompson, First UMC, Good News Board, Bakersfield, CA
Rev. Robert Thompson-Gee, Poughkeepsie UMC, Poughkeepsie, NY
Rev. Doug Thrasher, Hillside United Methodist Church, Woodstock, GA
Rev. Robert Tindale, Killearn United Methodist Church, Tallahassee, FL
Rev. Kirt Watkins, Sea Cliff UMC, Sea Cliff, NY
Rev. Stephen Wende, First United Methodist Church, Confessing Movement Board, Houston, TX
Rev. Ken Werlein, FaithBridge Church, Spring, TX
Rev. Alice Wolfe, Christ UMC, Baltimore, OH
Rev. Steve Wood, Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church, Confessing Movement Board, Alpharetta, GA
Marianne Wright, Good News Board, Valdosta, GA
Rev. Harold Zimmick, Asbury UMC, Madison, WI