

STATEMENT
OF
THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

On October 26, 2013, retired Bishop Melvin Talbert conducted a ceremony celebrating the marriage of a same-gender couple in Center Point, Alabama. Prior to October 26, 2013 Bishop Talbert advised Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, resident bishop of the North Alabama Conference, of his intention. Bishop Wallace-Padgett requested that Bishop Talbert not perform the ceremony in the area in which she serves. After conversation with Bishop Wallace-Padgett, Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, president of the Council of Bishops, engaged the Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops in a discussion about the proposed action. On October 21, 2013, the Executive Committee issued a statement requesting Bishop Talbert not to perform the ceremony in Bishop Wallace-Padgett's area. They said, in part,

"The bishops of the church are bound together in a covenant and all ordained elders are committed to uphold the Book of Discipline. "Conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies" are chargeable offenses in the United Methodist Church (§2702.1.b).

The actions of Bishop Talbert raise considerable concerns and have stimulated much conversation, reflection, and prayer among the members of the Council of Bishops. The Council recognizes the deep divisions and pain in our church over these issues. United Methodists are not of one mind, and followers of Christ and people of conscience hold conflicting views. These issues require continuing honest and respectful conversation as well as prayer throughout the church.

The purpose of the Council of Bishops is to lead the church in its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. To that end, bishops are also required to "uphold the discipline and order of the Church.....and to share with other bishops in the oversight of the whole church." (Para 403.1.f) When there are violations of the Book of Discipline, a response is required. However, the General Conference has given the Council of Bishops limited authority for the task of holding one another accountable. Such authority and accountability resides in the College of Bishops and the Jurisdiction or Central Conference Committees on Episcopacy. (Paragraph 413.and Paragraph 403.1.f)

Therefore, the Council of Bishops, after much prayer and conversation, takes the following actions:

We acknowledge that we, the Council of Bishops, and the Church are not of one mind in matters of human sexuality; pain exists throughout the connection, including persons who support Bishop Talbert's actions and persons who object to them. We express our pastoral concern and care for all people.

We affirm the October 21, 2013 action of the Executive Committee which requested that Bishop Talbert not conduct a ceremony celebrating the marriage of a same gender couple in the North Alabama area.

We respectfully request that Bishop Wenner, President of the Council of Bishops, and Bishop Wallace-Padgett, Resident Bishop of the North Alabama Conference, address the action of Bishop Talbert and file a complaint under the provisions of Paragraph 413 for undermining the ministry of a colleague (Paragraph 2702.1f) and conducting a ceremony to celebrate the marriage of a same gender couple (Paragraph 2702.1b) within the bounds of the North Alabama Conference.

We recommend that the Executive Committee initiate a task force to lead honest and respectful conversations regarding human sexuality, race and gender in a world-wide perspective in our shared commitment to clear theological understanding of the mission and polity of the United Methodist Church.

As a Council of Bishops, we affirm the theological task articulated in the Book of Discipline (Paragraph 105, page 87). "United Methodists as a diverse people continue to strive for consensus in understanding the gospel. In our diversity, we are held together by a shared inheritance and a common desire to participate in the creative and redemptive activity of God. Our task is to articulate a vision in a way that will draw us together as a people in Mission..... We proceed with our theological task, trusting that the Spirit will grant us wisdom to continue our journey with the whole people of God."