

## **Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops**

January 5, 2015

### **Just Resolution Achieved in Complaint Process**

Denver, Colorado: Bishop Elaine JW Stanovsky, President of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, announced that a just resolution has been reached regarding a complaint against Bishop Melvin G. Talbert. "I am pleased to share that everyone involved in this process engaged fully in the search for a just resolution. They exhibited high regard and respect for one another, for the Church, and for Christ's life-giving mission to the world. All parties agree to the terms of the resolution and have agreed to make the Joint Resolution Agreement public in its entirety." ([Read Bishop Stanovsky's statement.](#))

Bishop Talbert, who served in the Western Jurisdiction before his retirement, performed a ceremony celebrating the union of two active United Methodist men, Bobby Prince and Joe Openshaw, in Center Point, Alabama in October, 2013. The denomination's Book of Discipline prohibits United Methodist clergy from conducting ceremonies celebrating same-gender unions.

Other parties involved included Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of the Germany Episcopal Area, who was president of the Council of Bishops at the time the ceremony took place, and Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett of the Birmingham Episcopal Area, where the ceremony occurred. Both Bishop Wallace-Padgett and the Council's Executive Committee had requested that Bishop Talbert not perform the ceremony.

The process for addressing a complaint against a bishop begins when a written, signed complaint is received by the president of the appropriate jurisdictional or central conference college of Bishops. As president of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, Bishop Stanovsky led a supervisory team including Bishop Robert Hoshibata, secretary of the College of Bishops, and one clergy and one lay member assigned from the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy. The supervisory response was directed toward achieving a just resolution, focused on repairing harm, achieving accountability by making things right as far as possible and bringing healing to all the parties.

Stanovsky observed that, "The parties to this complaint are all wise and generous leaders who want nothing more than to lead the Church to be more faithful and obedient to God's mission. They wanted to come to an agreement that would help the whole Church learn how to weather conflict while staying in community. The fact that they could come to a just resolution, despite their very different views, is a sign of hope for the whole church."

The confidential supervisory response included facilitated and respectful face-to-face conversation and intentional listening over multiple sessions, with the hope of achieving justice, reconciliation and healing. A written statement of resolution, including terms and conditions, was signed by all parties. The supervisory team is now responsible for monitoring implementation of the resolution.

The full text of the agreement follows:

**Just Resolution Agreement  
Among  
Complainant, Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett  
Complainant, Bishop Rosemarie Wenner**

**Respondent, Bishop Melvin G. Talbert**

**December 30, 2014**

***Preamble***

We acknowledge that we, the parties in this just resolution process, like the Council of Bishops and the church, are not of one mind on matters of human sexuality.

***Today we recognize...***

Whether we were acting in or out of the spirit of the covenantal relationships, we have harmed one another.

We, Bishop Melvin G. Talbert, Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, and Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, further acknowledge and express regret over harm to gay and lesbian sisters and brothers, and all those involved, through the complaint process.

We strongly reaffirm that all are welcome in the church and we express our pastoral concern and care for all people.

Bishop Talbert expresses regret for felt harm and unintended consequences that his actions caused some bishops, pastors, and church members.

Bishop Talbert holds steadfastly to the conviction that his actions were just and right. Bishops Wenner and Wallace-Padgett maintain that the request from the Council of Bishops to file complaints shows the Council's commitment to the Discipline of the church and respect for the ministry of colleagues.

Pain exists throughout the entire connection, including among those who support the actions of Bishop Talbert, and those who object to the actions as well as those who support the request of the Council of Bishops for Bishops Wenner and Wallace-Padgett to file complaints and those who object to the request of the Council.

All parties in this just resolution process agree to live according to the *Book of Discipline*.

***Therefore the parties . . .***

1. ***Affirm*** the work of the Council of Bishops' Task Force on Accountability and Task Force on Human Sexuality, Race and Gender in a Worldwide Perspective to define "living in covenant," community, and accountability. Recognizing its present and future significance for the vitality of the church, we urge the Task Forces to conduct this work expeditiously.
2. ***Encourage*** the Council of Bishops to actively pursue sustained theological conversation especially around human sexuality, race and gender in a world-wide church.
3. ***Request*** that the Council of Bishops and all individual bishops make use of the teaching role of the bishop through preaching, teaching, writing and theological conversation to continue to address our differences and to work for unity in diversity.
4. ***Request*** that the Council of Bishops consider options in addition to the complaint process to address our differences that reflect our Wesleyan heritage, and acknowledge that ways of resolving disagreements within a community of faith should be distinct from those of a civil judicial process.

We agree to this resolution in response to the concerns contained in the complaints brought by Bishop Wenner and Bishop Wallace-Padgett as requested by the Council of Bishops against Bishop Melvin G. Talbert, dated January 15, 2014. Further, we agree to full public disclosure of the Just Resolution Agreement.

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