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#### 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" (§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 (§413 and §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 (§2702.1.f) and conducting a ceremony to celebrate the marriage of a same-gender couple (§2702.1.b) within the

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 (§105, p. 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."

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#### BISHOPS CALLED TO EMBRACE "TEAM SPIRIT"

As they met in Lake Junaluska, active and retired UM bishops clearly are not of one mind regarding human sexuality and other issues the denomination faces. But bishops need to talk and listen to one another "in an attitude of team spirit," Germany Area Bishop Rosemarie Wenner said in her presidential address to the Council.

She said the bishops need to bring their disagreements to the table, all voices must be heard and they must search for compromise. The leading question has to be missional, she said, and address how not to hinder the Holy Spirit from saving human beings. Finally, she said, the bishops will have to recognize that conflicts are an ongoing reality in the church.

"Because the church of Jesus Christ is composed of many diverse people, unity is not a static agreement, but a constant move, where we engage with one another in discerning God's will for all," she said.

Wenner said the bishops must speak publicly and lead: "We have to avoid, however, that through our speeches we multiply the anxiety and even the fights many groups in the church are living in. . . . We need an invitation to prayer, biblical and theological reflections, mutual awareness and humble service for the people in need." -Heather Hahn, UMNS

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#### FRANK ASKS BISHOPS TO "STOP THE TRIALS"

In a Nov. 12 open letter <<http://umconnections.org/2013/11/13/commentary-franks-asks-bishops-stop-trials/>> to the Council of Bishops, the Rev. Thomas E. Frank, an expert on UM polity, urges the Council, for the sake of church unity, to stop church trials of elders accused of violating the denomination's stance on homosexuality. Frank is a historian of Methodism and professor at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C. He is the author of the frequently used textbook Polity, Practice, and the Mission of The UMC <<http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=444154>>. His letter says, in part:

"I ask you, for the sake of the unity of the church, to stop the trials. We need to engage our differences through 'Christian conversation' within our conferences and particularly within our orders of elders. Church trials are 'an expedient of last resort' and are not the way forward. . . . "Nothing in the Book of Discipline <<http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=1113020>> requires that you refer complaints to counsel for the church and subsequent trial. You have discretion as the chief pastors of the church over the manner, purpose and conduct of any supervisory response and just resolution under 'fair process.' . . . "Our church is desperately in need of open conversation on these pastoral issues. We are retreating into our various camps and avoiding the hard work of engaging each other's views. You as a Council and as individual bishops can set a new tone in which we can speak together openly and honestly, without fear of retribution. As Wesley's Large Minutes began, 'It is desired, that all things be considered as in the immediate presence of God; that every person speak freely whatever is in his heart.' This is the collective spirit in which the Holy Spirit is welcomed, and the conversation flourishes. Please lead us in that spirit."

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner indicated that the bishops considered Frank's letter and other public reaction in the deliberations at Lake Junaluska that led to their joint statement (see above article). -UMNS