

For Release
September 30, 2013

As United Methodists we have a system that not only connects us for ministry as a worldwide denomination, but also allows us to dialogue and prayerfully discern and make decisions together. Our denomination relies on the integrity of this "order" we have chosen. Throughout our Methodist history we have faced issues where we disagree, but working through our defined processes and respecting one another we have prayerfully discussed and discerned together. Our process for determining church law involves the prayerful discernment of hundreds of delegates who gather every four years representing millions of United Methodists from around the world. Only at this gathering, which we call General Conference, can the church's stance on any issue be changed. As United Methodists we uphold that process as much as we uphold the current result of that process, our *2012 Book of Discipline*. Any disregard for that order puts the integrity of our covenant together in jeopardy.

A retired United Methodist bishop notified me that he plans to travel to North Alabama, the area for which I am responsible, with the intention of breaking church law. He plans in late October to officiate at the celebration of a ceremony of a same-sex couple who were recently married in Washington, D.C. Though the couple are members of a United Methodist Church in the North Alabama Conference, the celebration will not take place in a United Methodist Church. I urged the retired bishop to reconsider as his officiating at this ceremony would be in violation of United Methodist Church law. I am also concerned that it would encourage the public to only define The United Methodist Church in North Alabama by one matter and not by the rich range of ministries of North Alabama local churches such as feeding the hungry, ministry with the poor, offering hope for those in addiction, sharing the gospel with our neighbors and welcoming all people to worship together and celebrate the sacrament of holy communion. For a bishop or any ordained or licensed minister to disregard a law of the church creates a breach of the covenant they made at their consecration, ordination or licensing.

Our culture is divided around our understandings of relationships between same sex partners. Likewise there is much debate, pain and struggle among faithful Christians about interpretations of biblical teaching on same-sex relationships. Our United Methodist *2012 Book of Discipline* affirms that all persons are of sacred worth and that God's grace is available to all. Every person is welcome in our churches. The Discipline of our denomination also states that we consider the practice of homosexuality as incompatible with Christian teaching. Our ministers are not permitted to conduct ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions or perform same sex wedding ceremonies.

As a bishop of the United Methodist Church, I took a vow to abide by and uphold the *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church. I am also committed to continuing to focus those I lead on our mission which is broader than any one issue. The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. I appreciate prayers for all involved in this difficult and painful situation.

This statement is for release in its entirety with no redactions.

Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett
North Alabama Conference