

Justice for Reconciler

P.O. Box 39843 • Birmingham, AL 35208 • JusticeForReconciler.com

An open letter to our fellow United Methodists:

We are writing to you today out of a deep love and concern for our church, Church of the Reconciler, and for the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Our church, an intentionally multicultural, multiracial church in downtown Birmingham, Ala., has suffered greatly this past year, and we seek your support in ensuring the continuation of our vital and unique ministry. Our church has been a fully chartered United Methodist church since 1996.

Over the last 14 months, a series of events has occurred that were not in accordance with the Book of Discipline. Among those events was the removal of our pastor and dismantling of the lay leadership. Bishop William Willimon and District Superintendent Ron Schultz have removed the church board, refused to let committees meet or function, and have appointed a board of directors. Founding members of the church and many long-time, active members have been denied an opportunity to sit on the board, which is now made up primarily of people who are not members and have not historically been active in our ministry.

Church members have been denied the opportunity to sit on the appointed board of directors. It is clear that this decision is retaliation, because we signed a letter of complaint about the developments in our church this past year.

Our basic rights of leadership and self-determination as a church have been denied. We have asked for meetings with the bishop and district superintendent and been denied. We have sought restoration through the Discipline and been denied.

Now we are asking for your help. We need your support as we ask for a vote to review the situation during the 2012 North Alabama Annual Conference.

We believe many of actions taken against our church are a direct violation of portions of the Book of Discipline:

- **Paragraph 432** states that *Consultation is not merely notification*. When our pastor was removed in April 2011, and other pastors were appointed we were merely notified. There have been no meetings, and communication has come only from the top down. There has been no consultation concerning changes, despite the fact that we have had five senior pastors in the past 14 months.
- **Section 249** states that *the charge conference shall elect leadership within the church*, not the bishop or district superintendent. The lay leadership has been replaced without consultation and without following proper proceedings as outlined in the Book of Discipline.

We have attached a brief summary of the events of the past year. More detailed information is available at www.JusticeForReconciler.com.

Key Points

- Despite repeated requests, District Superintendent Ron Schultz has not met with us since a closed meeting with the Staff Parish Relations Committee in April 2011.
- Bishop Willimon has not met with us either, and we have not been included in any of the decisions made about this ministry.
- There has been no consultation at any point in this process.
- We were denied a charge conference.
- We have not been provided an opportunity to be heard.

We believe we have followed the appropriate steps, per the Discipline, for a hearing in this case, yet we continue to be silenced. Therefore, our only option is to take the following steps. We ask for your support:

1. We have created a website, www.JusticeForReconciler.com, in order to share more details of the events, copies of communications, timelines, etc. You will see that although we have tried to resolve this within the Discipline, we have been consistently dismissed and disregarded. Please take a moment to visit the site and review the detailed information to fully understand what we've been challenged with. Help us insist on openness and accountability.
2. During the upcoming annual meeting of the North Alabama Conference, we are prepared to ask for an Episcopal Ruling and to clarify our status as a chartered congregation. If you are clergy or a voting lay member to annual conference, we ask for your support on these votes. If you are not, please talk to your lay member to annual conference and encourage him or her to support us.

We are asking for an open and honest exchange between all parties, in order to achieve justice and healing, and in order that we might move forward with this ministry.

We believe our ministry can emerge from this. While these are difficult days, we stand firm every day in the belief that because God called us to this ministry, God will provide the resources necessary for it to succeed. We are committed to keeping the wide open door of Church of the Reconciler open in a true spirit of love. We will hold firm to our commitment to peace and nonviolence, to speaking truth to power and serving the social gospel, to being a beacon of light and love in a world of hate and anger.

Grace, peace, and justice to you all,

Members of Justice for Reconciler

(for a listing of who we are, visit our web site,

www.JusticeForReconciler.com)

P.S. We continue to seek your support for the continuation of our ministry. We are still active members of our church and support it financially. **Our annual fundraising banquet will be held on June 28 at Vestavia Hills UMC, and we urge you to attend.**