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UNITED METHODIST BISHOP TO OFFICIATE SAME-SEX WEDDING

On October 26, 2013, Bishop Melvin Talbert will be performing a holy wedding ceremony in Birmingham, Alabama for Bobby Prince and Joe Openshaw, two members of The United Methodist Church (UMC). Talbert is a retired bishop in The UMC.

Openshaw and Prince seek to build their lives together and have the church present in that life. They believe that commitment to love in marriage helps bring them toward the fullness of their individual humanities. They believe that marriage strengthens their relationship in ways that benefit the entire community. They have been together for 12 years. Openshaw was born into the Methodist faith, and Prince has been Methodist for a number of years. They are members of Discovery UMC, located near Birmingham. For many reasons outlined in their story, they wanted to get married—not just legally (which they did in DC), but in a religious ceremony. Their story can be found at: www.rmnetwork.org/openshaw-prince

Bishop Talbert takes the work for LGBT justice in The UMC very seriously. As a younger man, he sat in jail with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for three days and was arrested in Atlanta for lunch counter sit-ins. Since that time, he has taken, and continues to take, very bold stances for LGBT persons. He will be the first UMC bishop to publically perform a marriage for a same-sex couple.

Talbert adheres to Biblical Obedience, a belief based on scripture and the fullness of UMC law which calls on clergy to offer all ministries to all people, and to act as if the immoral, unjust, discriminatory laws that forbid clergy from officiating same-sex marriage do not exist. It is about respecting LGBT persons in their full personhood—offering them all of the rights, responsibilities, sacraments, and ministries of the church. The UMC also calls on bishops to be present in the lives of the community to offer a prophetic witness.

Whereas The UMC law book, known as the *Book of Discipline*, says that “The UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching,” and it forbids clergy from officiating same-sex weddings or churches from allowing weddings to happen in their sanctuaries, other parts of church law contradict these restrictions. The whole of church law leans not toward rigid restriction, but instead toward openness, acceptance, love, grace, and equality.

“Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world. Thus, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination.”

“We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.”

“All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured.”

“We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

The United Methodist Church is the second largest protestant denomination in North America. Other Protestant denominations, including Episcopal, Presbyterian (PCUSA), Lutheran (ELCA), and United Church of Christ, fully accept the LGBTQ community, including marriage equality.

Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) is a growing movement of United Methodist individuals, congregations, campus ministries, and other groups working for the full participation of all people in The United Methodist Church.