

Megachurch pastor resigns, suit alleges sexual coercion

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When megachurch pastor Tyrone Gordon announced January 22 that he was resigning in mid-February from St. Luke Community United Methodist Church—a 6,000-member Dallas congregation that is one of the largest predominantly African-American churches in the U.S.—he gave no reasons except to say that "distractions and factions have arisen."

Dallas area Bishop Earl Bledsoe then said that complaints about Gordon, 53, had come from people inside and outside of the church.

A lawsuit filed February 3, by a pastor, Cameron Jerrod Greer, 26, of Cockrell Hill United Methodist Church in Dallas, alleged that Gordon used his position to coerce Greer and other young men at the church into unwanted sexual encounters. Greer said in an interview with the *United Methodist Reporter* that he reluctantly filed the suit but felt he had to protect himself and others. "The church sometimes, with its silence, ends up hurting people," Greer said.

The suit against the Methodists' North Texas Conference has "no basis," said Bledsoe, adding that the regional conference "intends to vigorously defend itself in court."

The United Methodist News Service quoted a church official who said the filing of a lawsuit does not necessarily mean that accusations went unheard in the denomination. The UMC Book of Discipline lists varieties of sexual misconduct as chargeable offenses, and it outlines a complaint process.

The Methodists have no central office for reporting or tracking complaints of clergy sexual misconduct. However, the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, which took up the issue, offers, among other resources, a website: [UMSexualEthics](#).

Saying she believes that the UMC as a whole is vigilant and better equipped to bring justice in cases of malfeasance, Garlinda Burton, the commission's top executive,

told the news service that the problem is still very serious.

One year ago, at a commission conference, Burton estimated that "at least one-third to one-half of the dozens of victim-survivors I've counseled during the past eight years have left the church—either in shame or frustration—because they found no justice or healing."