

United Methodist bishop may face trial for presiding at gay wedding

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(RNS) Complaints have been filed against a United Methodist bishop who presided over a same-sex wedding of two men in defiance of his denomination's rules prohibiting such ceremonies.

Retired Bishop Melvin G. Talbert is the highest clergyman to have broken the church's official laws and the only known bishop to do so.

He officiated at the Oct. 25 union of two men in Birmingham, Ala., even after the local bishop and the executive committee of the Council of Bishops urged Talbert not to go ahead with the ceremony.

Days later, the denomination's Council of Bishops requested complaints be filed against Talbert.

According to the complaints lodged with bishops in the denomination's Western region, Talbert is alleged to have "violated the sacred trust of his office."

Reached at his Nashville home, Talbert, 79, said church policy requires him to remain silent about the disciplinary process. But he said he was "delighted" that the New York Annual Conference announced Monday (March 10) that it had averted a trial for the Rev. Thomas Ogletree, who presided at the marriage of his son to another man.

"I hope this is a way forward," Talbert said. "This matter will not be resolved until those discriminatory passages are removed from the Book of Discipline."

Church law calls homosexuality “incompatible with Christian teaching.” The denomination bans clergy from performing and churches from hosting “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions.”

The church’s disciplinary process could lead to a trial and the loss of Talbert’s clergy credentials, though, increasingly, bishops in more liberal regions of the country find ways to resolve such complaints without trials.

Several other United Methodist clergy face possible trials, as the denomination grows increasingly polarized over church law over ministry to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

RNS added or changed several phrases to clarify the fifth and second-to-last paragraphs on March 14, 2014.