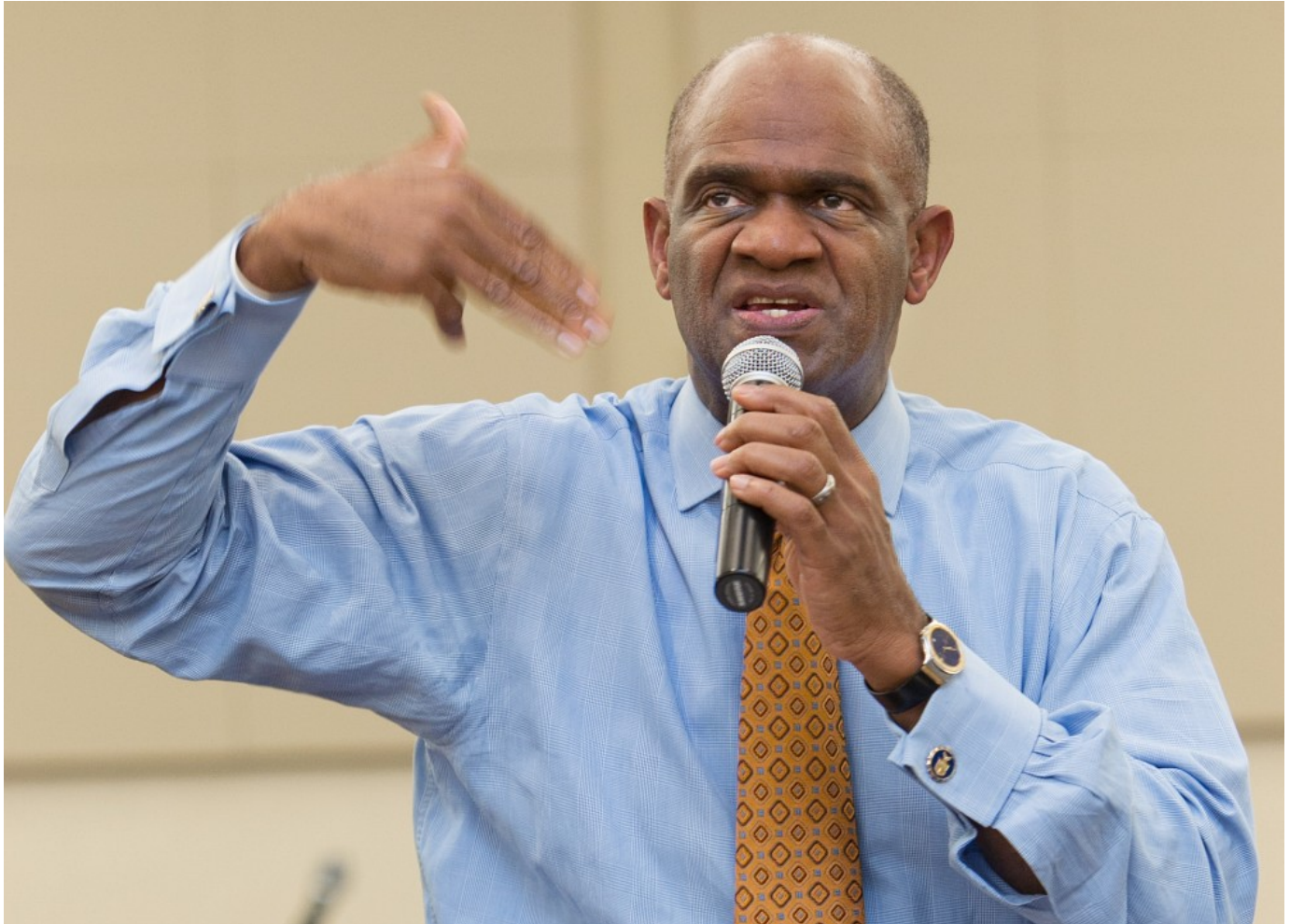


UMC pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell resumes preaching following guilty wire fraud plea
by [Sam Hodges](#) in the [May 6, 2020](#) issue



(United Methodist News Service/Mike DuBose)

Kirbyjon Caldwell, the former senior pastor of Houston's Windsor Village United Methodist Church—the denomination's largest in membership—surrendered his clergy credentials weeks before pleading guilty on March 11 to conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

Yet, as he awaits sentencing this summer in federal court, Caldwell remains on staff at Windsor Village and is taking the pulpit there occasionally as a lay preacher. Caldwell is scheduled to be sentenced on July 22 and faces five to seven years in prison.

Asked about Caldwell's continuing role at Windsor Village after pleading guilty to a felony, Bishop Scott Jones, of the Texas Annual Conference, said: "The decision to continue employing him is made by Windsor Village. The Texas Conference is clear that his status has changed from being senior pastor to lay preacher."

Jones added: "The question of Kirbyjon Caldwell's long-term future won't be decided until the sentencing takes place."

Caldwell began at Windsor Village in 1982 and over the years led it to remarkable growth. Along with its status as largest in membership, it's one of the denomination's largest in attendance. It's easily the largest predominantly African American United Methodist church.

Under Caldwell, the church and affiliate nonprofits have been a force in housing, education, and economic development in Houston. Caldwell has served on corporate boards and been a friend to US presidents. He officiated at the wedding of Jenna Bush, daughter of President George W. Bush.

But in 2018, federal authorities charged Caldwell and a Shreveport, Louisiana, investment advisor, Gregory A. Smith, with a multi-million-dollar investment scheme. They were accused of selling historical Chinese bonds to people who believed false promises of huge returns on investment.

Caldwell insisted he was innocent and that the bond sales were legitimate. But Smith pleaded guilty last summer, and Caldwell's plea followed last month.

The plea statement Caldwell signed says he did not realize at the outset that the bond transactions were illegitimate. But it also says he repeatedly ignored information to the contrary and eventually used \$900,000 in ill-gotten funds to pay off personal loans and mortgages and to maintain his lifestyle.

Caldwell has paid back some of his victims in full and others partly, the plea statement says. —United Methodist News Service