

**B. John Masters, Jr.**

---

August 27, 2013

Ken Carter, Resident Bishop  
Florida Annual Conference, United Methodist Church  
450 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue  
Lakeland, FL 33815

Dear Bishop Carter:

I submit the attached complaint against Rev. Bruce Toms, Senior Pastor at Palma Ceia United Methodist Church in Tampa (PCUMC), with a heavy heart. In 2011, PCUMC, at the urging of a large group of members, put actions to the Gospel Message, and adopted a statement of welcome and non-discrimination. It was nothing more nor less, and did not affiliate PCUMC with any other organization.

Unfortunately, in the Summer of 2013, that statement of welcome was rescinded in unilateral action by Bruce Toms. While Toms claims his actions to be in defense of the order and Discipline, I believe they are, in the best case, based on a mis-reading of the Discipline, and in the worst case, based on animus towards our lesbian and gay neighbors.

I have made every effort to work with Toms to find some common ground, but to no avail. I have attempted to work with the Church Council, but he has managed to confuse and intimidate the Church Council, so they are unsure of their authority in this matter. Several efforts to bring this matter to the attention of the District Superintendent have been unsuccessful.

This puts me in the difficult situation of having to advance this to your office as a formal complaint pursuant to ¶ 363.1 of The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012, and seeking a *Supervisory Response* pursuant to ¶ 363.1(b).

This situation leaves me thinking about the story of the pilgrim in Acts 8. The servant of the Queen of Ethiopia, becoming captivated by the tomes which spoke of the God of the Israelites, traveling the long hard journey to the great temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice, and to learn about this amazing God. Yet the priest, because of the eunuch's characteristics of being different, barred his way...made it clear that he and his offerings were not welcome.

However, God intervened, by sending one skilled at restoring those rejected by others. Philip begins to jog alongside the Ethiopian's carriage, and starting with Isaiah 53, teaches the Ethiopian about the crucifixion of Christ, the new covenant, and the Gospels. By the end of the 55th chapter, the carriage stops, and Philip baptizes the eunuch.

*Res severa est verum gaudium*

---

I suspect that after Philip had gone, and the Ethiopian returned to his carriage; it would be logical for him to continue his reading from where he left off. If that's what he does, he would have resumed in chapter 56, and in verses 3-7 would have found this:

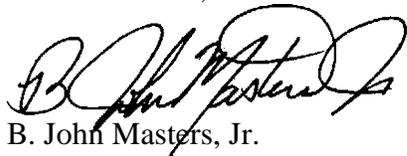
Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

"And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

During one of our discussions, Toms stated to me that while he believed the statement of welcome might have been passed in a spirit of love, it was more important to maintain the polity of the Church. When I read these stories, I really find very little about church polity, and much more about welcome and love and ministry to one another. Before this situation, I found a church dedicated to ensuring that the foreigner was never turned away, and could be assured, before ever approaching the doors, that they were welcome.

But even given that, it is my decidedly un-expert opinion that he has failed to provide any justification, based on the Discipline or Judicial Council rulings, for his actions in removing the statement of welcome, and has clearly overstepped his authority. Therefore, I come to your office in a spirit of reconciliation seeking affirmation for the loving actions of my church, and resolution to this difficult situation.

Yours in Peace,



B. John Masters, Jr.

cc: Rev. Bruce Toms  
Rev. Walter E. Monroe, Jr., District Superintendent  
Marty Peate, PCUMC Church Council Chairperson  
Bill Josey, PCUMC SPRC Chairperson



IN THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

FLORIDA ANNUAL CONFERENCE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

BENNETT JOHN MASTERS, JR, MEMBER, PALMA  
CEIA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Complainant,

vs.

REVEREND BRUCE TOMS, SENIOR PASTOR,  
PALMA CEIA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Respondent

COMPLAINT OF CONDUCT IN VIOLATION OF  
THE DISCIPLINE OF THE UNITED METHODIST  
CHURCH BY AN ORDAINED ELDER AND  
REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY RELIEF

**I. INTRODUCTION**

This is a complaint filed pursuant to ¶ 363.1 of The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012 (hereinafter, the Discipline), and is seeking a *Supervisory Response* pursuant to ¶ 363.1(b).

Complainant alleges that Respondent has committed violations of the Discipline under ¶ 2702.1(b), and (d) based on ¶ 303.3 related to the Purpose of Ordination<sup>i</sup>; ¶ 304.1.h Qualification for Ordination<sup>ii</sup>; ¶ 335.(8).c.(4) related to The Practice of Ministry<sup>iii</sup>; ¶ 335.(8).c.(4); ¶ 161.II. The Nurturing Community. (F)<sup>iv</sup> and other sections of the Discipline related to the organization and authority of the Local Church.

Further, Complainant alleges that Respondent's actions violate both the letter and intent of Judicial Council Decision 847<sup>v</sup> and Judicial Council Decision 871.<sup>vi</sup>

In 2011, the Administrative Council (now known as the Church Council) of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church (hereinafter PCUMC) adopted a statement of welcome and non-discrimination which reads, "We affirm that worship and membership at Palma Ceia United Methodist Church is open to all who seek to know Christ and share His love, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or economic status, and we welcome and respect all members of our community without regard to these characteristics."

1 This statement was to be placed on the home page of the PCUMC website, and all other  
2 publications where such a statement would be appropriate to the purpose of the publication. The precipitating event  
3 for this complaint was Respondent, without consultation with the Church Council, acted unilaterally to remove the  
4 statement from the PCUMC website.

5 A cascade of actions has followed from that event resulting in inaccurate statements by the  
6 Respondent defending said action to the Complainant and to The Church Council. Such inaccurate and incomplete  
7 statements constitute "disobedience to the order and discipline of The Church," and represent practices incompatible  
8 with Christian teaching.

9 Respondent's statements and actions do not meet the requirements for integrity, honesty,  
10 cooperation, and leadership qualities expected of an Ordained Elder of the United Methodist Church (hereinafter  
11 The Church). These actions stand in contrast to ¶ 105. SECTION 4— OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK, which says in  
12 pertinent part, "As United Methodists, we are called to identify the needs both of individuals and of society and to  
13 address those needs out of the resources of Christian faith in a way that is clear, convincing, and effective. Theology  
14 serves the Church by interpreting the world's needs and challenges to the Church and by interpreting the gospel to  
15 the world."

## 16 17 **II. PARTIES**

### 18 **A. Named Complainant/s**

19 Bennett John Masters, Jr. was christened at Sulfur Springs United Methodist Church in Cleveland  
20 County North Carolina, in 1959, and Baptized at Central United Methodist Church in Kings Mountain, North  
21 Carolina. Masters has been an active member of PCUMC, for over eleven years. For the past several years, Masters  
22 has served as a substitute teacher, and most recently the primary teacher of the J.O.Y. Adult Sunday School Class at  
23 PCUMC.

24 Masters is a gay man who has been in a monogamous relationship with his significant other for  
25 over thirteen years. He graduated from Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, in 1981 with a B.S. in Business  
26 Administration, and in 1984 with an A.S. in Funeral Service from Gupton-Jones College, Atlanta, GA. Masters has  
27 worked in the records and content management industry for over twenty-five years.

1 **B. Named Respondent/s**

2 Bruce Toms is an Ordained Elder in full connection with the Florida Annual Conference of The  
3 United Methodist Church. Toms was appointed as the Senior Pastor of PCUMC in July, 2012.

4 He is a native Floridian who graduated from Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Florida with a  
5 BS in Political Science and Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky with a M.Div. Bruce has  
6 previously served as pastor at Lake Magdalene United Methodist Church in north Tampa and East Lake United  
7 Methodist Church in Palm Harbor.

8  
9 **III. JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

10 The complaint is raised to the Episcopal Office Of the Florida Annual Conference (hereinafter the  
11 Conference) because all local efforts to resolve the issue have been exhausted.

12 The Discipline lays out the procedure for just resolution of complaints in Section XVI.  
13 Administrative Fair Process; ¶ 363 Complaint Procedures--1. This document stands as a written and signed  
14 statement alleging misconduct as defined in ¶ 2702.1, specifically ¶ 2702.1(b) and ¶ 2702.1(d), along with violations  
15 of the requirements of ordination.

16 The first meeting at which the Complainant discussed the matter with the Respondent was on or  
17 about September 27, 2012. At this meeting, Respondent indicated that he found the statement problematic, and  
18 wanted it removed. Complainant advised Respondent it had been duly voted on by the Church Council.

19 A new website design was published on or about June 4, 2013, which did not include the  
20 Statement of Welcome and Non-Discrimination. A meeting was held to discuss this situation between Complainant  
21 and Respondent on or about June 7, 2013. Respondent was intractable and not open to any discussion of a  
22 compromise or reconciliation. The matter was subsequently discussed by Complainant with the Chair of the Church  
23 Council<sup>vii</sup> who advised Complainant to bring the matter to the attention of the Church Council. Complainant's  
24 invitation was subsequently withdrawn, and an email from the Chair of the Church Council advised Complainant,  
25 "*You may use the e-mail as evidence that you have exhausted all remedies with the Administrative Council with  
26 regard to this matter*" (See Exhibit 01).

1 An email was sent by Complainant to Rev. Dr. Walter E. Monroe, Jr., District Superintendent  
2 (hereinafter the District Superintendent), South-Central District, Florida Conference of the United Methodist  
3 Church (hereinafter The District) on July 14, 2012, to request a meeting to discuss the issue (see Exhibit 02).  
4 Complainant received no response by July 19, 2013, contacted the office of the District Superintendent, and left a  
5 request with Laura J. Hofts, the District Business Administrator.

6 An email from Hofts was received by Complainant July 23, 2013 advising complainant that the  
7 District Superintendent was asking the issue be directed to SPRC Chair, Bill Josey (see Exhibit 03). A follow-up  
8 email to the District Office explained the email from the Chairperson of the Church Council, and provided the  
9 pertinent quote that Complainant had exhausted all remedies with the local church (see Exhibit 04).

10 A final attempt was made by Complainant to discuss the matter with the District Superintendent  
11 on August 16, 2013. Complainant left a voicemail. An email was received by Complainant on August 19, 2013 from  
12 Hofts, asking for further clarification of the reason for the call. Complainant responded on August 19, 2013, and no  
13 further response has been received from the District office (See Exhibit 05).

14 Having made appropriate and reasonable attempts to resolve the issue first with Respondent, next  
15 with the governing body of PCUMC, and finally with the office of the District Superintendent, Complainant must  
16 forward this complaint to the Office of the Bishop as the next prescribed procedural step.

#### 17 18 **IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS**

19 In 2008, Complainant submitted to the Church Council of PCUMC, a "Resolution for Justice," as  
20 an inclusive statement of welcome and non-discrimination (see Exhibit 06). Members of the Council rejected the  
21 resolution on the grounds that certain administrative requirements included in the resolution, to wit, the requirement  
22 for the Church to, where reasonable, acquire services and goods only from those organizations which have a similar  
23 statement, would impose an undue administrative burden.

24 On August 22, 2011, Complainant and a contingent of PCUMC members supportive of such a  
25 resolution submitted a revised resolution (See Exhibit 07) to a meeting of the Church Council. There was a  
26 passionate discussion, and the Council heard personal stories of the harm that the messages often conveyed under  
27 the guise of religion can cause to young lesbian and gay people, and how they are often driven away from the

1 Church because of a lack of genuine welcome. There was a debate, both sides compromised, and a consensus was  
2 reached.

3 The vote was to accept the resolution with the language of the final statement of non-  
4 discrimination to comport with the terms used in the 2008 Discipline (the version in effect at the time). Shortly after  
5 that, a statement of welcome and non-discrimination, fully compliant with the language of the Discipline was  
6 accepted.<sup>viii</sup> As planned, it was published to the Church website.

7 The resolution makes a public statement that PCUMC will not discriminate against anyone, but  
8 especially notes those classes identified by the United Methodist Church in the Discipline as having been  
9 historically discriminated against. This resolution reiterates the Church's official position identified in both the  
10 Discipline and Social Principles, with the aim of raising awareness about that position both among fellow United  
11 Methodists and non-Methodist so they may better understand our Discipline and the welcome "buried" within. This  
12 was intended to be a clear and direct statement that the members of PCUMC are a community of people, who, as  
13 lived out by Jesus, are open and welcoming to all, while using language taken directly from the Discipline.

14 At a Wednesday evening church dinner shortly after Respondent's appointment to PCUMC,  
15 Respondent talked of the need for the congregation to get involved with developing programs. A teacher of the JOY  
16 Adult Sunday School Class took that to heart, and saved some time one Sunday morning to lead a brain-storming  
17 session to develop a list of ideas for programming at PCUMC.

18 Within a few days, Complainant and Respondent met to discuss the ideas from the brain-storming  
19 session, and at one point the topic of the welcoming statement came up. Respondent indicated he didn't want it on  
20 the website. Complainant explained it had been discussed, debated, and voted on by the Administrative Council.

21 During this meeting, Respondent expressed concern the statement might cause a prospective  
22 member to not consider PCUMC. Complainant explained that the geographic area was generally progressive on  
23 social issues, that PCUMC is not aware of anyone leaving the church as a result, nor was PCUMC aware of any  
24 adverse effects from it being there. Complainant pointed out that over the previous few years, a number of PCUMC  
25 members had moved to Hyde Park United Methodist, which was thought to be in the process of going even further  
26 than PCUMC by becoming a reconciling church, so a statement of welcome didn't seem to be an issue.

1 After this discussion, a redesign of the PCUMC website was announced via a Facebook post on or  
2 about June 3, 2013. Complainant became aware of the omission of the statement from the redesigned site.  
3 Complainant contacted the PCUMC Office on or about June 5, 2013 to inquire as to the omission, and subsequently  
4 received an email from Respondent advising, "Julie gave me the message you called about the website, I will be  
5 happy to meet with you about this at your earliest convenience." (See Exhibit 08)

6 During the subsequent meeting held on or about June 7, 2013, Respondent indicated the language  
7 of the statement was left off the site at his direction. Respondent admitted to having not consulted the Church  
8 Council in advance of this unilateral action.

9 Respondent inquired several times of Complainant as to how many people had come to PCUMC  
10 because we had the statement, and specifically how many gay people had started coming. Complainant explained  
11 that Complainant does not interview new or prospective members. Complainant asked Respondent how many  
12 people had not come, or had left. Respondent would not answer, and responded that no one was coming because of  
13 the statement.

14 Complainant suggests that the inclusion of such a statement may not be on the top of prospective  
15 members' list, but more and more people view inclusive language as a check-box item, and will expect to see it.  
16 Further, since neither Respondent nor Complainant can cite anyone who's left, or declined joining because of it, it  
17 seems to be a neutral, "do no harm" situation.

18 Respondent read the charge of the Senior Pastor from the Discipline. Complainant is not sure the  
19 exact passage Respondent read, as the charge is repeated at several places in the Discipline (as the Discipline often  
20 does). The charge is found in Section IX. The Ordained Elder in Full Connection ¶ 332. Ministry of an Elder.<sup>ix</sup> The  
21 pertinent part, as cited by Respondent is, "...and to order the life of the Church for service in mission and ministry."  
22 The charge occurs again in ¶ 340. Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors— 1.<sup>x</sup>

23 Respondent indicated that the Statement of Welcome is not consistent with the Discipline, and  
24 therefore, does not support the proper "order" of the church, as Respondent is required to maintain as part of his  
25 vows of ordination. Respondent indicated that, under the section related to "order the life of the church," he had the  
26 authority to remove the statement because it was in violation of the Discipline.

1 At several points during the meeting Respondent asked Complainant the purpose of the statement.  
2 Complainant explained it was to condense the lengthy and scattered language of the Discipline, and make the  
3 language of the Discipline accessible. Respondent explained that the General Conference is the only body  
4 authorized to make such statements, and that the local church cannot interpret the Discipline nor make other  
5 statements related to the contents of the Discipline, or otherwise speak on behalf of the church.

6 Complainant pointed out a lengthy and more ambiguous statement on a sub-page of the website  
7 that "...all are welcome..." and asked Respondent from where within the Discipline that statement originated.  
8 Respondent stated that was just a common statement often used. Complainant suggested that under Respondent's  
9 interpretation of the Discipline, this statement would also violate the authority of the Discipline since that statement  
10 is not specifically found in the Discipline.

11 At this point in the conversation, Respondent stated that, "I believe the resolution might have been  
12 passed out of a sense of love, but Church polity must be maintained."

13 Complainant notes the primary elements of our statement of welcome are indeed in the Discipline,  
14 a key component of the compromise and consensus reached by PCUMC. They, in fact, occur in multiple places  
15 throughout the discipline:

- 16 • ¶ 161. II. THE NURTURING COMMUNITY "Language of a derogatory nature (with  
17 regard to race, nationality, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, and physical  
18 differences) does not reflect value for one another and contradicts the gospel of Jesus  
19 Christ."
- 20 • ¶ 161.II.F ) All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation,  
21 are entitled to have their human and civil rights insured and to be protected against  
22 violence.
- 23 • ¶ 335(c)(4) which notes that people up for ordination are required to "Provide evidence of  
24 your willingness to relate yourself in ministry to all persons without regard to race, color,  
25 ethnicity, national origin, social status, gender, sexual orientation, age, economic  
26 condition, or disability."

1 At a later date, in discussing the situation with the Chairperson of the Church Council, Marty  
2 Peate, Church Council Chairperson, offered that Respondent had explained to him that our statement violated two  
3 United Methodist Judicial Council Rulings. Complainant asked the specific rulings to which he was referring. Peate  
4 was unable to recall, but agreed to get the information from Respondent, and provide it to Complainant.

5 Complainant made several requests to Peate, and finally directly contacted Respondent so as to  
6 discover which two rulings Respondent was citing.

7 During this telephone conversation, Respondent indicated the two rulings he was citing are  
8 Rulings 847 and 871. Complainant pointed out to Respondent that the Statement of Welcome had no affect to  
9 affiliate PCUMC with any third party organizations, nor had PCUMC gone through the reconciling process, nor had  
10 there been any discussion of our church becoming a Reconciling Church. In fact, the PCUMC statement would not  
11 qualify PCUMC as a Reconciling Ministries church.<sup>xi</sup>

12 Complainant pointed this out to Respondent, and asked how Respondent thought they applied.  
13 Respondent did not respond. There was a period of silence over the phone.

14 Complainant had a conversation with the Chairperson of the Church Council, and the Chairperson  
15 suggested Complainant bring it to the attention of the Church Council at the regularly scheduled meeting on July 22,  
16 2013. Complainant indicated he considered PCUMC having a statement of welcome to be a "settled issue," and  
17 believed the matter was specifically for consideration by the Church Council as to whether they intended to abdicate  
18 their role in governing the church to any Senior Pastor.

19 Complainant advised the Chairperson during this conversation that it was arrogant of Respondent  
20 to disregard the vote by the Church Council, and unilaterally remove the statement without any consultation or  
21 explanation, and further explained it was intellectually dishonest for Respondent to offer multiple and changing  
22 explanations to justify Respondent's action. Subsequent to that discussion, Complainant received an email from the  
23 Chairperson. The language and tone of the email were significantly out of character for the Chairperson, and  
24 Complainant believes said email might have been primarily dictated by Respondent. In the email, Complainant is  
25 accused of referring to Respondent as an arrogant liar. Complainant was also advised, "I will not place this item on  
26 the agenda nor will I yield the floor to you during the July 22 meeting, and respectfully ask you that you not attempt  
27 to speak" (See Exhibit 01.).

1 Complainant attended the July 22, 2013 Church Council meeting. Despite being advised the issue  
2 would not be on the agenda; Respondent rose and made a lengthy presentation, including PowerPoint slides giving  
3 explanations for Respondent's actions. The PowerPoint was used during an open meeting of the Church Council, and  
4 Complainant believes it is and ought to be a part of the official record of proceedings. To ensure accuracy,  
5 Complainant requested that Respondent provide a copy of the presentation, and Respondent has, on multiple  
6 occasions, refused to provide the presentation. (See Exhibits 09, 10, 11 and 12.)

7 Respondent began the presentation by explaining that questions had been raised about our  
8 welcome statement. Respondent stated he was not seeking any resolution or vote, that it was a settled issue.  
9 Respondent stated the discussion could not be had without a discussion about homosexuality.

10 Respondent proceeded to display a slide showing the single statement from the Discipline which is  
11 the infamous line from ¶ 161, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and  
12 considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." Respondent failed to show the next sentences  
13 following this one, which say, "We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in  
14 Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We  
15 implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves  
16 to be in ministry for and with all persons." Respondent failed to show the language from the immediately preceding  
17 paragraph which says, in part, "All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are  
18 entitled to have their human and civil rights insured and to be protected against violence."

19 Respondent stated he had, as part of his ordination, vowed to uphold the Discipline and the order  
20 of the United Methodist Church, yet Respondent failed to show ¶ 162.III. THE SOCIAL COMMUNITY "We  
21 deplore acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender,  
22 disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation." Complainant  
23 notes, this language matches PCUMC's Statement of Welcome.

24 Respondent sought to further support his case by citing Judicial Council Rulings 847 and 871, and  
25 explained them, by saying they prohibited identifying with third-party organizations. Respondent proceeded to  
26 display several statements of welcome from a number of Reconciling Ministries Churches, and then displayed  
27 PCUMC's statement again, and asked the group to note their similarity.

1 Complainant notes that the statement of welcome, and the 2011 actions of the Church Council in  
2 no way set PCUMC in violation of Judicial Council Ruling 847 or 871. However, Respondent's actions are, in fact,  
3 in violation of 847 which states, in pertinent part, " Additionally, reconciliation and healing is a mandate of the  
4 gospel required of the whole church. 'As servants of Christ we are sent into the world to engage in the struggle for  
5 justice and reconciliation. We seek to reveal the love of God... and to demonstrate the healing power of the gospel  
6 with those who suffer.' (§ 103)," and 871, which says in pertinent part, " We do, however, reiterate the proposition  
7 that local churches like Annual Conferences can freely pursue principles and causes affirmed in the Discipline and  
8 by the General Conference with the mandate of reconciliation and healing being required of the whole church."

9 Respondent noted the requirement of his Vows of Ordination to maintain the order of the church,  
10 but he didn't note, 335. Requirements for Admission to Full Connection and Ordination as Elder— Provisional  
11 (C)(4) "Provide evidence of your willingness to relate yourself in ministry to all persons without regard to race,  
12 color, ethnicity, national origin, social status, gender, sexual orientation, age, economic condition, or disability."

13 Complainant also believes in upholding the Book of Discipline, yet recognizes that the entirety of  
14 the *Discipline* isn't contained in a single sentence in § 161.F.

- 15 • Article IV, "Inclusiveness of the Church," in Division I of the Constitution (§ 4), is also  
16 in the *Discipline*.
- 17 • Articles XXI, "Of the Marriage of Ministers," and XXII, "Of the Rites and Ceremonies  
18 of Churches," of the Articles of Religion of the United Methodist Church (within § 104)  
19 are also in the *Discipline*. Article XXI says in part, "The ministers of Christ are not  
20 commanded to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage"...and they are  
21 permitted to "marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve best to  
22 godliness." Article XXII states that the rites and ceremonies of the church do not have to  
23 be "the same or exactly alike" in all places, and they "may be changed according to the  
24 diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against  
25 God's Word."
- 26 • The Wesleyan Quadrilateral (in § 105) is also in the *Discipline*.

- 1 • ¶ 122--which talks about such things as welcoming and gathering persons into the body  
2 of Christ; nurturing persons through the means of grace; sending persons into the world  
3 to live lovingly and justly, free the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate,  
4 caring presence--is also in the Discipline.
- 5 • ¶ 140—reflecting the Church’s call to inclusivity and the recognition that God made all  
6 creation and saw that it was good; that inclusiveness means openness, acceptance and  
7 support that enable all persons to participate in the life of the Church; that inclusiveness  
8 denies every semblance of discrimination; the mark of an inclusive society is one in  
9 which all persons are welcomed, fully accepted and supported enabling them to  
10 participate fully in the life of the church--is also in the Discipline.
- 11 • ¶ 161.F—includes F—includes that all persons are of sacred worth—is also in the  
12 Discipline.
- 13 • ¶ 162.J—about equal rights regardless of sexual orientation--is also in the Discipline.
- 14 • ¶ 164.F—about recognizing the right to civil disobedience and resisting or disobeying  
15 unjust laws--is also in the Discipline.
- 16 • ¶ 202—about local churches ministering to persons in their communities and providing  
17 appropriate nurture to all--is also in the Discipline.
- 18 • ¶ 204—about each local church ministering to all its members and having nurture  
19 responsibilities among its members--is also in the Discipline.
- 20 • ¶ 214—about all persons being able to participate in the full life of the church--is also in  
21 the Discipline.
- 22 • ¶ 228.1—about enlisting all members in participation in the church’s ministries, and it  
23 being the duty of the pastor and members of the church to provide care and spiritual  
24 oversight and individual and family worship--is also in the Discipline.
- 25 • ¶ 303.2—about ordination being fulfilled through ministries of justice and compassion--is  
26 also in the Discipline.

- ¶ 305—which speaks of baptism as God’s gift of unmerited grace; of the incorporation of each person into the church and its ministry; of the primary form of ministry in God’s name is that of service to the world; that all members of the church are commissioned to ministries of love and justice--is also in the Discipline.
- ¶ 332—about Elders being ordained to service and being authorized to provide pastoral care--is also in the Discipline.
- ¶¶ 340.1 and 340.2—about clergy serving in Christ’s ministries of love and justice - is also in the Discipline.<sup>xii</sup>

"Much like the *Bible*, *The Book of Discipline*, is a complex and multi-faceted book; like the Bible, it has been authored by many writers and in many cases, committees, over time; and like the Bible, it contains depth and nuance and even conflicting statements and provisions. Upholding *the Discipline* is less a matter of living in a world of black and white and applying the *Discipline* accordingly, and more a matter of embracing the ambiguities of a world of gray and seeking to identify the core principles/messages that can guide us in whatever we encounter."<sup>xiii</sup>

"Grace, nurture, pastoral care, inclusion, theological inquiry and reasoning, social justice and love are all important principles or themes espoused across the *Book of Discipline*."<sup>xiv</sup>

Complainant believes the most egregious action, and the one indicative of Respondents animus towards homosexual persons are his actions related to a website listing service, gaychurch.org, for which Respondent displayed a screen capture during the Church Council presentation. The site appears to be a cataloging/search service providing geographical listings of churches which have a welcoming statement that includes sexual orientation. Said site is nothing more nor less, and made no claim that any church listed therein was "an affiliate." Respondent showed the page for churches listed in Tampa. There were two United Methodist Churches listed, one being Hyde Park United Methodist Church, and the other PCUMC.

Respondent indicated he was attempting to contact the site, and would request our removal. PCUMC has been removed. Complainant believes this might be the single strongest indicator that Respondent's actions are based not on some perceived infraction of the Discipline, but predicated on a feeling of animus towards lesbian and gay persons. If, as Respondent has previously claimed, "all are welcome," it would be counterintuitive to

1 seek to remove the listing from a website that did little more than tout PCUMC's welcome to our lesbian and gay  
2 neighbors.

3  
4 **V. PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

5 WHEREFORE, As Bishop Ken Carter of the Florida Annual Conference, United Methodist  
6 Church has noted, "I am convinced that God is calling us, in the 21st century, to share the gospel, in less harmful  
7 words and through more gracious actions, with all people, and surely among them are our gay and lesbian neighbors.  
8 I am also convinced that welcoming gays and lesbians will open us more fully to their gifts, among them testimonies  
9 of courage and patience, faith and grace."<sup>xv</sup> PCUMC, through this unremarkable Statement of Welcome, was  
10 attempting to do just that. Respondent's actions clearly violate the ordination requirements to minister to all, but  
11 more important, Respondent's actions fail to uphold the spirit of our faith.

12 THEREFORE, Complainant respectfully requests that the Episcopal Authority find Respondent to  
13 be in violation of his vows of ordination and requirements for the vocation of ministry, specifically, ¶ 2702.1(b), and  
14 (d) based on: ¶ 303.3 related to the Purpose of Ordination<sup>xvi</sup>; ¶ 304.1.h Qualification for Ordination<sup>xvii</sup>; ¶  
15 335.(8).c).(4) related to The Practice of Ministry<sup>xviii</sup>; ¶ 335.(8).c).(4), and that a remediation program of guidance,  
16 mentoring, and monitoring of Respondent be established.

17 FURTHER, requests that the Episcopal Authority find that Respondent has overstepped his  
18 authority by overruling the Church Council of PCUMC in regard to the Statement of Welcome, and will order  
19 Respondent to follow the 2011 resolution as amended, and ensure the adopted Statement of Welcome is displayed  
20 on the first page of the PCUMC website, and all other publications where such a statement would be considered  
21 normal and appropriate.

22 FURTHER, that Respondent be required to follow a course of sensitivity training (or similar as  
23 determined appropriate by Episcopal Authority) as regards interactions with and ministry to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual  
24 and transgendered (LGBT) persons, and successful completion of such training shall be a requirement for continued  
25 connection as an Elder in the United Methodist Church.

1 FURTHER, that the Episcopal Authority implement an on-going program to monitor compliance  
2 with the Resolution, and with Respondent's interactions with all members of the community, and especially  
3 homosexual persons.

4 Dated this 27th of August, 2013.

5  
6   
7 \_\_\_\_\_  
Bennett John Masters, Jr.

1  
2  
3  
4 **ENDNOTES**

5 <sup>i</sup> Ordained persons exercise their ministry in covenant with all Christians, especially with those  
6 whom they lead and serve in ministry. They also live in covenant of mutual care and accountability with all those  
7 who share their ordination, especially in The United Methodist Church, with the ordained who are members of the  
8 same annual conference and part of the same Order. The covenant of ordained ministry is a lifetime commitment,  
9 and those who enter into it dedicate their whole lives to the personal and spiritual disciplines it requires.

10 <sup>ii</sup> Be persons in whom the community can place trust and confidence.

11 <sup>iii</sup> Provide evidence of your willingness to relate yourself in ministry to all persons without regard  
12 to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, social status, gender, sexual orientation, age, economic condition, or  
13 disability.

14 <sup>iv</sup> Human Sexuality— We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone  
15 to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married,  
16 sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. We deplore all forms  
17 of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting  
18 the sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused children. All  
19 persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil  
20 rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-  
21 appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults. We affirm that all persons are individuals of  
22 sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human  
23 fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with  
24 God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and  
25 considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will  
26 seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and  
27 accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We  
28 commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

29 <sup>v</sup> In declaring that an Annual Conference may not become an unauthorized organization, the  
30 Judicial Council is in no way limiting efforts by the conferences to pursue principles and causes, affirmed in the  
31 Discipline and by the General Conference. Additionally, reconciliation and healing is a mandate of the gospel  
32 required of the whole church. "As servants of Christ we are sent into the world to engage in the struggle for justice  
33 and reconciliation. We seek to reveal the love of God... and to demonstrate the healing power of the gospel with  
34 those who suffer." (§ 103)

35 <sup>vi</sup> We hold that the same logic in Decision 847 is applicable to local churches. In matter of fact,  
36 Decision 847 stated "...This principle applies to any Annual Conference or other United Methodist Church entity  
37 which attempts to identify itself as an unofficial body." We do, however, reiterate the proposition that local churches  
38 like Annual Conferences can freely pursue principles and causes affirmed in the Discipline and by the General  
39 Conference with the mandate of reconciliation and healing being required of the whole church.

40 <sup>vii</sup> Current Chairperson of the Church Council is Marty Peate.

41 <sup>viii</sup> The statement of welcome and non-discrimination reads, " We affirm that worship and  
42 membership at Palma Ceia United Methodist Church is open to all who seek to know Christ and share His love,

1  
2  
3 regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or economic status, and we welcome and  
4 respect all members of our community without regard to these characteristics."

5 <sup>ix</sup> Elders are ordained ministers who, by God's grace, have completed their formal preparation and  
6 have been commissioned and served as a provisional member, have been found by the Church to be of sound  
7 learning, of Christian character, possessing the necessary gifts and evidence of God's grace, and whose call by God  
8 to ordination has been confirmed by the Church. Elders are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Word, Sacrament,  
9 Order, and Service. By the authority given in their ordination, they are authorized to preach and teach the Word of  
10 God, to provide pastoral care and counsel, to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and to  
11 order the life of the Church for service in mission and ministry. The servant leadership of the elder, in both parish  
12 and extension ministries, is expressed by leading the people of God in worship and prayer, by leading persons to  
13 faith in Jesus Christ, by exercising pastoral supervision, and by ordering the Church in mission in the world.

14 <sup>x</sup> The responsibilities of elders are derived from the authority given in ordination. Elders have a  
15 fourfold ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service and thus serve in the local church and in extension  
16 ministries in witness and service of Christ's love and justice. Elders are authorized to preach and teach the Word, to  
17 provide pastoral care and counsel, to administer the sacraments, and to order the life of the church for service in  
18 mission and ministry as pastors, superintendents, and bishops.

19 <sup>xi</sup> Reconciling Ministries requires organizations to have a statement of non-discrimination which  
20 does include all of the categories listed in the PCUMC statement, but additionally requires the including of language  
21 related to gender identity, which is not part of the PCUMC statement.

22 <sup>xii</sup> Upholding the Book of Discipline," RMNBlog, Kevin M. Nelson, August 20, 2013  
23 (Paraphrased).

24 <sup>xiii</sup> Upholding the Book of Discipline," RMNBlog, Kevin M. Nelson, August 20, 2013.

25 <sup>xiv</sup> Ibid

26 <sup>xv</sup> "'God Hath Bid All Humankind': Generous Orthodoxy and our Mission with Gays and Lesbians  
27 in the United Methodist Church," A Pastoral and Missional Reflection given to St. Luke's United Methodist Church,  
28 Orlando, Florida, Kenneth H. Carter, Jr., Resident Bishop, Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church, July  
29 25, 2013, P.9.

30 <sup>xvi</sup> Ordained persons exercise their ministry in covenant with all Christians, especially with those  
31 whom they lead and serve in ministry. They also live in covenant of mutual care and accountability with all those  
32 who share their ordination, especially in The United Methodist Church, with the ordained who are members of the  
33 same annual conference and part of the same Order. The covenant of ordained ministry is a lifetime commitment,  
34 and those who enter into it dedicate their whole lives to the personal and spiritual disciplines it requires.

35 <sup>xvii</sup> Be persons in whom the community can place trust and confidence.

36 <sup>xviii</sup> Provide evidence of your willingness to relate yourself in ministry to all persons without  
37 regard to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, social status, gender, sexual orientation, age, economic condition, or  
38 disability.

**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, July 14, 2013 3:50 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: RE: Admin Council

*John,*

*Our conversation this morning further reinforced my conclusion that your issues lie solely between yourself and the Senior Pastor, and not the Administrative Council. In your own words, you have gone as far as stating you do not like him and asserted that he is an arrogant liar. You have also been highly disrespectful to the Senior Pastor in your communications with me and with your behavior within the sanctuary, including standing and turning your back during at least 2 sermons. Therefore, I must reemphasize my position that I will not place this item on the agenda nor will I yield the floor to you during the July 22 meeting, and respectfully ask you that you not attempt to speak.*

*Regarding your question about moving on, all I can tell you is that the leadership of the church is solidly behind our Senior Pastor and 100% focused on the Mission of making disciples of Christ . . . of all. You have the right to chose your place of worship as you desire and feel fit, but you do not have the right to be disruptive and disrespectful.*

*In closing I should remind you that Bill Josey and I authored and promoted the previous welcome statement, and we both agree with the Senior Pastor's decision to utilize the more universally inclusive welcome statement on the new church web page. I would also like to point out that Palma Ceia has a longstanding history of tolerance and acceptance that cannot be denied.*

*You may use the e-mail as evidence that you have exhausted all remedies with the Administrative Council with regard to this matter.*

*Respectfully,*

*Martin A. Peate, Chair  
Administrative Council  
Palma Ceia United Methodist Church*

On 07/12/13, B. John Masters<[bjohnmasters@gmail.com](mailto:bjohnmasters@gmail.com)> wrote:

See Marty, all I want is for the church to resume use of the welcome statement that was previously thoughtfully approved. I'm not interested in creating problems for Bruce Toms, but if he is going to singlehandedly overrule the appropriate church authority on the subject, particularly for not supportable reason, it will eventually come to that, but let's try to handle this in holy conferencing first.

Unless of course, you'd just prefer I fold up the tent and move on. If so, please just say so.

=====

B. John Masters

E: [REDACTED]

P: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

---

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, July 12, 2013 2:35 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Admin Council

John,

After reviewing your e-mail last night, I now have a better understanding of your issues/concerns and have concluded that the Administrative Council is not the appropriate venue to initiate a formal complaint against the senior pastor.

The appropriate process to lodge a complaint against the senior pastor is to contact Bill Josey, Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee. With this, I must rescind my offer for you to address the Administrative Council at the meeting on July 22.

Thank you for your understanding and I hope that a resolution can be achieved soon.

marty

[REDACTED]

**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** B. John Masters [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, July 14, 2013 9:57 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Requesting a meeting concerning an issue at PCUMC

Dr. Monroe:

I regret that I must seek a meeting with you to discuss a situation at Palma Ceia United Methodist Church.

In 2011, Members of the congregation took to the Administrative Council a resolution to adopt a statement of welcome and non-discrimination. This was not an effort to become a Reconciling Ministries church, but to simply make clear that our welcome was extended to all, regardless of a person's status. After discussion, compromise and Holy Conferencing, a consensus was reached, and the following statement was adopted:

"We affirm that worship and membership at Palma Ceia United Methodist Church is open to all who seek to know Christ and share His love, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or economic status, and we welcome and respect all members of our community without regard to these characteristics."

We believed, at the time, and believe today, that this statement comports with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and is consistent with the letter and intent of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. It was to be posted on our website, and on new supplies of printed materials as supplies were reprinted.

As you are aware, Bruce Toms was appointed to PCUMC in the last round of appointments. Due to previous conversations, Rev. Toms was aware the statement had been considered and voted on, however, during a redesign of the website, and without prior consultation with the Administrative Council or any interested parties, he ordered the statement removed.

He has variously cited: marketing and perception concerns; his obligation to maintain the order combined with statements that the statement is conflict with the Discipline; that the local church and Administrative Council have no authority to pass such a statement; and then to the Chair of the Admin Council, after the fact, that his action is based on Judicial Council Rulings 847 and 871. (I would remind you that the statement does not make us a Reconciling Church, nor was that the intent, this issue addressed in those rulings.)

I was first invited to address the Administrative Council on the topic at their July 22 meeting by the Chair of the Council. Recently, that invitation has been withdrawn, and I'm told, via email from the Chairperson, "*I must reemphasize my position that I will not place this item on the agenda nor will I yield the floor to you during the July 22 meeting, and respectfully ask you that you not attempt to speak... You may use the e-mail as evidence that you have exhausted all remedies with the Administrative Council with regard to this matter.*" I believe this comes after discussion with Rev. Toms. As I had told the Chairperson in a conversation this morning, it was not my intent to complain about the Pastor, but to ensure that the authority of the Administrative Council was respected, and that this decision, and all decisions, would be respected. I'd hoped and believed the matter could be settled amicably. PCUMC, as I'm sure you are aware, has a long history of being welcoming to all, and Rev. Toms actions were an unexpected and unwelcome surprise.

Given that I appear to be unwelcome at the Administrative Council meeting, I would like to schedule a meeting with you at a mutually convenient time this week to discuss next steps. I believe that Rev. Toms is misinterpreting the polity of the United Methodist Church, and has exceeded his authority.

I look forward to hearing from you, and can most easily be reached at (813) 300-6897.

Yours in peace,  
 John Masters

**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 23, 2013 4:47 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** FW: Requesting a meeting concerning an issue at PCUMC

Mr. Masters,

Please accept my apology, I meant to address the email below to you and not Mr. Monroe.

With apologies,

*Laurie J. Hofts*

**Phil 4:13 - I can do all things through God who strengthens me.**  
SC District Business Administrator

[REDACTED]

---

From: FLUMC-SC  
Sent: Tuesday, July 23, 2013 4:35 PM  
To: [REDACTED]  
Cc: Bruce Toms; 'Josey, William'; DS-South Central  
Subject: FW: Requesting a meeting concerning an issue at PCUMC

Good Afternoon Mr. Monroe,

Dr. Monroe has reviewed your email and has asked that you redirect your issue to your SPRC Chair, Bill Josey, on this matter. I have copied him in on this email.

*Laurie J. Hofts*

**Phil 4:13 - I can do all things through God who strengthens me.**  
SC District Business Administrator

[REDACTED]

---

From: B. John Masters [REDACTED]  
Sent: Sunday, July 14, 2013 9:57 PM  
To: DS-South Central  
Cc: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Requesting a meeting concerning an issue at PCUMC

Dr. Monroe:

I regret that I must seek a meeting with you to discuss a situation at Palma Ciega United Methodist Church.

In 2011, Members of the congregation took to the Administrative Council a resolution to adopt a statement of welcome and non-discrimination. This was not an effort to become a Reconciling Ministries church, but to simply make clear that

our welcome was extended to all, regardless of a person's status. After discussion, compromise and Holy Conferencing, a consensus was reached, and the following statement was adopted:

"We affirm that worship and membership at Palma Ceia United Methodist Church is open to all who seek to know Christ and share His love, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or economic status, and we welcome and respect all members of our community without regard to these characteristics."

We believed, at the time, and believe today, that this statement comports with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and is consistent with the letter and intent of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. It was to be posted on our website, and on new supplies of printed materials as supplies were reprinted.

As you are aware, Bruce Toms was appointed to PCUMC in the last round of appointments. Due to previous conversations, Rev. Toms was aware the statement had been considered and voted on, however, during a redesign of the website, and without prior consultation with the Administrative Council or any interested parties, he ordered the statement removed.

He has variously cited: marketing and perception concerns; his obligation to maintain the order combined with statements that the statement is conflict with the Discipline; that the local church and Administrative Council have no authority to pass such a statement; and then to the Chair of the Admin Council, after the fact, that his action is based on Judicial Council Rulings 847 and 871. (I would remind you that the statement does not make us a Reconciling Church, nor was that the intent, this issue addressed in those rulings.)

I was first invited to address the Administrative Council on the topic at their July 22 meeting by the Chair of the Council. Recently, that invitation has been withdrawn, and I'm told, via email from the Chairperson, "*I must reemphasize my position that I will not place this item on the agenda nor will I yield the floor to you during the July 22 meeting, and respectfully ask you that you not attempt to speak... You may use the e-mail as evidence that you have exhausted all remedies with the Administrative Council with regard to this matter.*" I believe this comes after discussion with Rev. Toms. As I had told the Chairperson in a conversation this morning, it was not my intent to complain about the Pastor, but to ensure that the authority of the Administrative Council was respected, and that this decision, and all decisions, would be respected. I'd hoped and believed the matter could be settled amicably. PCUMC, as I'm sure you are aware, has a long history of being welcoming to all, and Rev. Toms actions were an unexpected and unwelcome surprise.

Given that I appear to be unwelcome at the Administrative Council meeting, I would like to schedule a meeting with you at a mutually convenient time this week to discuss next steps. I believe that Rev. Toms is misinterpreting the polity of the United Methodist Church, and has exceeded his authority.

I look forward to hearing from you, and can most easily be reached at (813) 300-6897.

Yours in peace,  
John Masters

=====



-----

**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** B. John Masters [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 23, 2013 5:11 PM  
**To:** 'FLUMC-SC'  
**Subject:** RE: Requesting a meeting concerning an issue at PCUMC

The issue involves serious violations of the Discipline...something not under the purview of the SPRC. Again, I respectfully request a meeting.

If Dr. Monroe does not want to get involved, I'll create a formal complaint and forward along to the Bishop.

The issue was taken up at the Administrative Council meeting last night, the issue was not resolved, and I have an email from the Chair of the Administrative Council saying, "You may use the e-mail as evidence that you have exhausted all remedies with the Administrative Council with regard to this matter."

Therefore, this now, procedurally goes to the DS. If he's not interested, I'll take that as meaning it should be directed to the Bishop's office.

Thank you,  
John Masters

=====  
B. John Masters

[REDACTED]

---

From: FLUMC-SC [mailto:REDACTED]  
Sent: Tuesday, July 23, 2013 4:35 PM  
To: [REDACTED]  
Cc: Bruce Toms; 'Josey, William'; DS-South Central  
Subject: FW: Requesting a meeting concerning an issue at PCUMC

Good Afternoon Mr. Monroe,

Dr. Monroe has reviewed your email and has asked that you redirect your issue to your SPRC Chair, Bill Josey, on this matter. I have copied him in on this email.

*Laurie J. Hofts*

**Phil 4:13 - I can do all things through God who strengthens me.**  
SC District Business Administrator

[REDACTED]

---

From: B. John Masters [mailto:REDACTED]  
Sent: Sunday, July 14, 2013 9:57 PM  
To: DS-South Central  
Cc: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Requesting a meeting concerning an issue at PCUMC

Dr. Monroe:

I regret that I must seek a meeting with you to discuss a situation at Palma Ceia United Methodist Church.

In 2011, Members of the congregation took to the Administrative Council a resolution to adopt a statement of welcome and non-discrimination. This was not an effort to become a Reconciling Ministries church, but to simply make clear that our welcome was extended to all, regardless of a person's status. After discussion, compromise and Holy Conferencing, a consensus was reached, and the following statement was adopted:

"We affirm that worship and membership at Palma Ceia United Methodist Church is open to all who seek to know Christ and share His love, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or economic status, and we welcome and respect all members of our community without regard to these characteristics."

We believed, at the time, and believe today, that this statement comports with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and is consistent with the letter and intent of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. It was to be posted on our website, and on new supplies of printed materials as supplies were reprinted.

As you are aware, Bruce Toms was appointed to PCUMC in the last round of appointments. Due to previous conversations, Rev. Toms was aware the statement had been considered and voted on, however, during a redesign of the website, and without prior consultation with the Administrative Council or any interested parties, he ordered the statement removed.

He has variously cited: marketing and perception concerns; his obligation to maintain the order combined with statements that the statement is conflict with the Discipline; that the local church and Administrative Council have no authority to pass such a statement; and then to the Chair of the Admin Council, after the fact, that his action is based on Judicial Council Rulings 847 and 871. (I would remind you that the statement does not make us a Reconciling Church, nor was that the intent, this issue addressed in those rulings.)

I was first invited to address the Administrative Council on the topic at their July 22 meeting by the Chair of the Council. Recently, that invitation has been withdrawn, and I'm told, via email from the Chairperson, "*I must reemphasize my position that I will not place this item on the agenda nor will I yield the floor to you during the July 22 meeting, and respectfully ask you that you not attempt to speak... You may use the e-mail as evidence that you have exhausted all remedies with the Administrative Council with regard to this matter.*" I believe this comes after discussion with Rev. Toms. As I had told the Chairperson in a conversation this morning, it was not my intent to complain about the Pastor, but to ensure that the authority of the Administrative Council was respected, and that this decision, and all decisions, would be respected. I'd hoped and believed the matter could be settled amicably. PCUMC, as I'm sure you are aware, has a long history of being welcoming to all, and Rev. Toms actions were an unexpected and unwelcome surprise.

Given that I appear to be unwelcome at the Administrative Council meeting, I would like to schedule a meeting with you at a mutually convenient time this week to discuss next steps. I believe that Rev. Toms is misinterpreting the polity of the United Methodist Church, and has exceeded his authority.

I look forward to hearing from you, and can most easily be reached at (813) 300-6897.

Yours in peace,  
John Masters

=====



**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** B. John Masters [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, August 19, 2013 10:12 AM  
**To:** 'FLUMC-SC'  
**Subject:** RE: Question regarding your message

Ms. Hofts:

I replied to your email of July 23 on the same day. In that email from you, you indicated that Rev. Monroe was advising me to take this to the local authority at PCUMC. I replied with a quote from an email from the Chair of the Admin Council stating the email was evidence that I'd exhausted all avenues at PCUMC.

This is, I believe a very serious matter, and I'm giving Rev. Monroe one final chance to work with us to resolve this situation on a less formal basis.

I am, however, in the process of preparing a formal complaint, which, given Rev. Monroe's current lack of interest, will result in it going directly to the Office of the Bishop.

So, as I have preferred all along, I'm making one last good faith effort to seek a resolution to this situation at a lower more informal level. However, if Rev. Monroe is not interested in resolving this, I'm fine with proceeding with the formal complaint to Lakeland. It's his choice.

Good day.

=====  
B. John Masters

[REDACTED]

---

From: FLUMC-SC [REDACTED]  
Sent: Monday, August 19, 2013 9:39 AM  
To: [REDACTED]  
Cc: DS-South Central  
Subject: Question regarding your message

Good Morning Mr. Masters,

You left a message late Friday asking D.S. Monroe to return your call. Could you please provide me with additional information regarding the nature of your call.

Thank You

*Laurie J. Hofts*

***Phil 4:13 - I can do all things through God who strengthens me.***

SC District Business Administrator  
Florida Conference of the UMC

[REDACTED]



**A RESOLUTION  
PALMA CEIA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

---

**TITLE:** **A Statement of Commitment to Justice for All People and a Call to Action for Palma Ceia United Methodist Church**

**SUBJECT:** Equal Opportunity for all persons

**SUMMITTED BY:** B. John Masters, Jr.

**REFERENCES:** United Methodist Church Book of Discipline ¶161 and ¶162

**DATE:** TBD

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:** There are no direct financial implications arising to Palma Ceia United Methodist Church associated with this resolution.

1 **Inasmuch** as Palma Ceia United Methodist Church has always been a church providing  
 2 open hearts, open minds and open doors, it is appropriate that Palma Ceia United  
 3 Methodist Church adopt a public statement of that commitment consistent with Biblical  
 4 teaching and the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. This includes a call to action  
 5 to put into practice our belief that people are free and secure only when all of society  
 6 creates a social climate which believes in equal protection of and equal opportunity for all  
 7 people. Especially as Methodists, “We believe we have a responsibility to innovate,  
 8 sponsor, and evaluate new forms of community that will encourage development of the  
 9 fullest potential in individuals...”<sup>1</sup> As Plato said, “Justice will only exist where those not  
 10 affected by injustice are filled with the same amount of indignation as those affected.”

11 **Whereas**, Christians have been called from the earliest days of Old Testament teaching  
 12 to be Just to all, as in Micah 6:8 when the Prophet tells the people, “He hath showed thee,

---

<sup>1</sup> United Methodist Church Book of Discipline ¶161

13 O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to  
14 love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?," and;

15 **Whereas**, the Father of Methodism, John Wesley, wrote in his, "Explanatory Notes on  
16 The Bible," for this verse, "He - God hath already told you in his word, with what you  
17 ought to come before him. To do justly - To render to every one their due, superiors,  
18 equals, inferiors, to be equal to all, and oppress none, in body, goods or name; in all your  
19 dealings with men carry a chancery in your own breasts, and do according to equity. To  
20 love mercy - To be kind, merciful and compassionate to all, not using severity towards  
21 any. Walk humbly with thy God - Keep up a constant fellowship with God, by humble,  
22 holy faith," and;

23 **Whereas**, as described in John Gill's Exposition of The Entire Bible, "to do justice" or  
24 "judgment"; means to exercise public judgment and justice, as a king, among his  
25 subjects; to do private and personal justice between man and man; to hurt no man's  
26 person, property, and character, and;

27 **Whereas**, Justice is doing what is right. It is living by the Golden Rule and making  
28 decisions that are good for everyone. It is building relationships in the marketplace, the  
29 neighborhood or the family upon goodness, truth, mercy and compassion. It is living  
30 above the culture's values. Justice is the recognition, according to Tom Ehrlich, that life  
31 matters, how we treat others matters and the choices we make here and now matter. Our  
32 decisions reveal our character and make the world better or worse. Pursuing justice  
33 makes it better, and;

34 **Whereas**, Justice is also making sure that everyone has a seat at the table, a tenant of  
35 Methodism from its earliest roots as the first item of the 1908 Social Creed of the  
36 Methodist Episcopal Church says, “For equal rights and complete justice for all men in  
37 all stations of life,” and;

38 **Whereas**, in the 22nd Chapter of the Book of Matthew. Jesus was challenged by the  
39 Pharisee’s to define the Greatest Commandment. In verse 34 he responded, “Love the  
40 Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” 38  
41 “This is the first and greatest commandment.” But Jesus didn’t stop there. Without  
42 hesitation, he went on to say in verse 39, “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor  
43 as yourself.,’” and;

44 **Whereas**, in the New Testament, Paul says, “in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek,  
45 slave or free, male or female, God has enough love for all!,” and;

46 **Whereas**, John Wesley wrote in his comment on Acts 2:45: "It was a natural fruit of that  
47 love wherewith each member of the community loved every other as his own soul. And if  
48 the whole Christian Church had continued in this spirit, this usage must have continued  
49 through all ages," and;

50 **Whereas**, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us, “When evil men shout ugly words of  
51 hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love. Where evil men would  
52 seek to perpetuate an unjust status quo, good men must seek to bring into being a real  
53 order of justice;” and;

54 **Whereas**, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church ¶161 states, “The  
55 community provides the potential for nurturing human beings into the fullness of their  
56 humanity. We believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new  
57 forms of community that will encourage development of the fullest potential in  
58 individuals. Primary for us is the gospel understanding that all persons are important-  
59 because they are human beings created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ  
60 and not because they have merited significance. We therefore support social climates in  
61 which human communities are maintained and strengthened for the sake of all persons  
62 and their growth. We also encourage all individuals to be sensitive to others by using  
63 appropriate language when referring to all persons. Language of a derogatory nature  
64 (with regard to race, nationality, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, and physical  
65 differences) does not reflect value for one another and contradicts the gospel of Jesus  
66 Christ;”

67 **Whereas**, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church ¶162 states, “The  
68 rights and privileges a society bestows upon or withholds from those who comprise it  
69 indicate the relative esteem in which that society holds particular persons and groups of  
70 persons. We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work  
71 toward societies in which each person's value is recognized, maintained, and  
72 strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing,  
73 education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and  
74 physical protection. We deplore acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based  
75 on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or economic status;”

76 **Whereas**, the United Methodist Church has adopted the saying, Open Hearts, Open  
77 Minds, Open Doors, and;

78 **Whereas**, the website of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church states, “We have Open  
79 Minds, Open Hearts, and Open Doors. I think you will find us a warm, welcoming and  
80 accepting church.” and;

81 **Whereas**, Palma Ceia United Methodist Church and its members view our place in the  
82 Tampa Bay area and the larger world as witnessing to Jesus Christ’s message of love for  
83 and acceptance of all people, and;

84 **Whereas**, The people of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church have a history of  
85 acceptance of and outreach to all people, and a desire to encourage others to love one  
86 another in the spirit of the Gospel Message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ;

87 **Now therefore be it resolved:** The People of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church  
88 adopt the following statement of non-discrimination:

89       The people of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church are called to share  
90       God’s love as we minister with and to all persons in the community where  
91       the church is located and beyond, providing worship, nurture, fellowship,  
92       and service. Our welcome knows no boundaries of age, race, ethnicity,  
93       culture, gender, sexual orientation, economic condition, physical or mental  
94       ability. We embrace and seek to preserve the beautiful, amazing diversity  
95       of God’s creation. We cooperate in ministry with other local churches and

96 groups of God's people as we participate in the worldwide mission of  
97 Christ.

98 And will publish said statement as a public statement of Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open  
99 Doors to our community and beyond in all places and publications as appropriate, and;  
100 The statement will be added in a reasonable time to the website on the page which  
101 includes the current statement of openness, and may be placed at other places as  
102 appropriate.

103 **Be it further resolved**, we require that organizations seeking and/or receiving material  
104 support from Palma Ceia United Methodist Church through our time, talents, resources  
105 and use of facilities will be required to have a statement of non-discrimination that will  
106 include at least all categories stated in the Statement of Non-Discrimination, to include  
107 age, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, economic condition, physical or  
108 mental ability, and;

109 An exception is granted for organizations that are a sub-division of a national  
110 organization, and as such do not have the authority at the local level to proscribe a  
111 different non-discrimination statement than that published by the national organization,  
112 and must demonstrate said restriction. However, the Chairperson of the Administrative  
113 Board or The Pastor or his/her designee shall be required to address a letter to the  
114 appropriate governing authority of said organization providing the non-discrimination  
115 statement of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church and expressing our desire that all  
116 organizations utilizing the support and resources of Palma Ceia United Church maintain a  
117 published non-discrimination statement that includes, in pertinent part, all classes

118 recognized in the non-discrimination statement of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church,  
119 and;

120 It will be assumed that other United Methodist Churches adhere to the non-discrimination  
121 statements set forth in the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, and;

122 **Be it further resolved**, Palma Ceia United Methodist Church will, whenever reasonably  
123 possible, seek to acquire products, services, sponsorships, etc. only from organizations  
124 which have a published non-discrimination statement which equivalently protects all  
125 classes listed in the non-discrimination statement of Palma Ceia United Methodist  
126 Church, and;

127 This requirement shall not be seen as requiring Palma Ceia United Methodist Church to  
128 end or otherwise interrupt any existing contracts and/or agreements for the provision of  
129 services or products that existed prior to passage of this resolution.

130 **Effective Date:** The requirements of this resolution shall be effective immediately on  
131 passage by the Administrative Board of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church, and any  
132 required notices under the exception clause shall be sent within a reasonable time after  
133 passage, but not more than sixty (60) days from passage. Inclusion of the Non-  
134 Discrimination Statement in printed materials where appropriate will be included only in  
135 new supplies of the printed materials after existing supplies are exhausted.

**A RESOLUTION  
PALMA CEIA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

---

**TITLE:** **A Statement of Commitment to Justice for All People for Palma Ceia United Methodist Church**

**SUBJECT:** Equal Opportunity for all persons

**SUMMITTED BY:** B. John Masters, Jr., et. al.

**REFERENCES:** United Methodist Church Book of Discipline ¶161 and ¶162

**DATE:** August 22, 2011

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:** There are no direct financial implications arising to Palma Ceia United Methodist Church associated with this resolution.

1 **Inasmuch** as Palma Ceia United Methodist Church has always been a church providing  
2 open hearts, open minds and open doors, it is appropriate that Palma Ceia United  
3 Methodist Church adopt a public statement of that commitment consistent with Biblical  
4 teaching and the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. Especially as Methodists,  
5 “We believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new forms of  
6 community that will encourage development of the fullest potential in individuals...”<sup>1</sup>

7 **Whereas**, Christians have been called from the earliest days of Old Testament teaching  
8 to be Just to all, as in Micah 6:8 when the Prophet tells the people, “He hath showed thee,  
9 O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to  
10 love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?,” and;

11 **Whereas**, the Father of Methodism, John Wesley, wrote in his, “Explanatory Notes on  
12 The Bible,” for this verse, “He - God hath already told you in his word, with what you  
13 ought to come before him. To do justly - To render to every one their due, superiors,

---

<sup>1</sup> United Methodist Church Book of Discipline ¶161

14 equals, inferiors, to be equal to all, and oppress none, in body, goods or name; in all your  
15 dealings with men carry a chancery in your own breasts, and do according to equity. To  
16 love mercy - To be kind, merciful and compassionate to all, not using severity towards  
17 any. Walk humbly with thy God - Keep up a constant fellowship with God, by humble,  
18 holy faith,” and;

19 **Whereas**, Equal Rights and Justice are tenants of Methodism from its earliest roots as the  
20 first item of the 1908 Social Creed of the Methodist Episcopal Church says, “For equal  
21 rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life,” and;

22 **Whereas**, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church ¶161 states, “The  
23 community provides the potential for nurturing human beings into the fullness of their  
24 humanity. We believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new  
25 forms of community that will encourage development of the fullest potential in  
26 individuals. Primary for us is the gospel understanding that all persons are important-  
27 because they are human beings created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ  
28 and not because they have merited significance. We therefore support social climates in  
29 which human communities are maintained and strengthened for the sake of all persons  
30 and their growth. We also encourage all individuals to be sensitive to others by using  
31 appropriate language when referring to all persons. Language of a derogatory nature  
32 (with regard to race, nationality, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, and physical  
33 differences) does not reflect value for one another and contradicts the gospel of Jesus  
34 Christ;” and;

35 **Whereas**, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church ¶162 states, “The  
36 rights and privileges a society bestows upon or withholds from those who comprise it  
37 indicate the relative esteem in which that society holds particular persons and groups of  
38 persons. We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work  
39 toward societies in which each person's value is recognized, maintained, and  
40 strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing,  
41 education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and  
42 physical protection. We deplore acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based  
43 on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or economic status;”

44 **Whereas**, the United Methodist Church has adopted the saying, Open Hearts, Open  
45 Minds, Open Doors, and;

46 **Whereas**, The people of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church have a history of  
47 acceptance of and outreach to all people, and a desire to encourage others to love one  
48 another in the spirit of the Gospel Message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ;

49 **Now therefore be it resolved:** The People of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church  
50 adopt the following statement of non-discrimination:

51 “We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We support  
52 the basic rights of all persons without regard to race, ethnicity, gender,  
53 sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or economic status.”

54 And will publish said statement as a public statement of Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open  
55 Doors to our community and beyond in all places and publications as appropriate, and;

56 The statement will be added in a reasonable time to the website on the page which  
57 includes the current statement of openness, and may be placed at other places as  
58 appropriate on all official Church printed and electronic materials where such a statement  
59 would be expected and advance the purpose of inclusion of all in the message of Jesus  
60 Christ.

61 **Effective Date:** The requirements of this resolution shall be effective immediately on  
62 passage by the Administrative Board of Palma Ceia United Methodist Church. Inclusion  
63 of the Non-Discrimination Statement in printed materials, where appropriate, is required  
64 only in new supplies of the printed materials after existing supplies are exhausted.

**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** Bruce Toms [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday,  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:**

John,  
Julie gave me the message you called about the website, I will be happy to meet with you about this at your earliest convenience.  
Please let me know of your availability over the next couple of days or Monday.

Thank you,

Bruce

**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** Bruce Toms [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday,  
**To:** B. John Masters  
**Subject:** Re: PowerPoint from Monday evening

No John, I will not give you a copy of my presentation.

Bruce

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 24, 2013, at 10:44 AM, "B. John Masters" [REDACTED] wrote:

Would you please provide me a copy of the PowerPoint from Monday evening's meeting. It was presented in an open meeting, and would therefore be a part of the record of the meeting, so this should not present any issues.

Thank you,  
John Masters

=====

B. John Masters

[REDACTED]

-----

**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** Bruce Toms [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday,  
**To:** B. John Masters  
**Cc:** Martin A Peate; William Josey  
**Subject:** Re: PowerPoint from Monday evening

John,  
I will be happy to meet with you about this. I will be back in the office on Wednesday of next week.

Bruce

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 24, 2013, at 2:37 PM, "B. John Masters" [REDACTED] wrote:

Please explain why not...it was presented to the Church Council in an open meeting, and would be a part of the official record.

Thank you,  
John

=====  
B. John Masters

[REDACTED]

---

From: Bruce Toms [REDACTED]  
Sent: Wednesday, July 24, 2013 1:31 PM  
To: B. John Masters  
Subject: Re: PowerPoint from Monday evening

No John, I will not give you a copy of my presentation.

Bruce

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 24, 2013, at 10:44 AM, "B. John Masters" [REDACTED] wrote:

Would you please provide me a copy of the PowerPoint from Monday evening's meeting. It was presented in an open meeting, and would therefore be a part of the record of the meeting, so this should not present any issues.

Thank you,  
John Masters

=====  
B. John Masters

[REDACTED]



**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** Bruce Toms [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 01, 2013 1:41 PM  
**To:** B. John Masters  
**Cc:** Josey, William; [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: Availability?

John,  
I will be glad to schedule a time to meet with you. However, because of your recent propensity to misquote me and your apparent mission to diminish my integrity among church members and my superiors, the SPR Chair and Church Council Chair must also be present at the meeting. If you should desire pastoral counseling or consult, we will provide that for you with Keith Harcombe.

Please provide some times of availability you can meet and I will arrange the meeting with Bill Josey and Marty Peate.

Bruce

---

**From:** B. John Masters [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 1, 2013 12:51 PM  
**To:** Bruce Toms  
**Subject:** Availability?

Would you be available today around 1pm or 1:15, or some time tomorrow?

=====  
B. John Masters  
[REDACTED]  
-----

**Masters, B. John**

---

**From:** Bruce Toms [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 07, 2013 12:04 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Meeting

John,  
My apologies, our office email went down early Saturday morning and we just got back up yesterday.

I will meet with you as stated in a previous email but the extent of my discussion on the issue of my power point presentation is this:

I will not make copies of my presentation available.

It appears you have a grievance with this action.

I have little hope that meeting on this issue will be productive, change my mind, or alleviate your dissatisfaction so the subsequent appropriate step is to submit your grievance to the SPR Committee for review.

If you still desire a meeting, it looks like the best times to meet are between 5 and 6pm next week Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday.

Bruce