

**Statement by Rev. Dr. Jody Ray,
Former Senior Pastor of Mt. Bethel Church in Marietta, Georgia
Regarding the Surrender of His Credentials as an Ordained Elder of
The United Methodist Church
April 26, 2021**

Today, I must do something I never thought I would have to do – surrender my credentials as an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church. I do so with a heavy heart, but also with a clear conscience.

Earlier this month, without any previous consultation or warning, Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson informed me and the chairwoman of Mt. Bethel Church's staff-parish relations committee that she and her cabinet had decided to send me away from the people and staff of this wonderful church – a congregation and colleagues I dearly love, and with whom I take great joy in working and serving. Together, it has been and still is a privilege to celebrate together our church's ministries, the good work we do in this community, and indeed the missions programs we do all around the world.

Neither the lay leadership of Mt. Bethel Church nor I have ever contacted Bishop Hauptert-Johnson or her representatives seeking a pastoral change. And yet just weeks before the meeting of the North Georgia Annual Conference, we were informed of this unforeseen and disruptive change.

On April 5, I was told that the Bishop's projected appointment for me was to a still evolving conference position having to do with racial reconciliation. Many people know my heart for this very important issue and timely matter. So had the Bishop come to me last December or earlier this year to engage me in productive conversation about this emerging position, invited me to help shape it, and then given me some time to pray about it, then we would likely be in a very different place today. But instead, there was no conversation or consultation at all.

Unfortunately, my options were to accept the move, take a leave of absence, or surrender my credentials. That's not consultation, it is merely notification, and it violates both the spirit and letter of the covenants that bind us together.

I will not engage in trying to read the Bishop's mind for why she has taken this hasty and ill-conceived action, but I do know she has undermined her credibility with the people of Mt. Bethel Church and jeopardized the health and vitality of this great congregation that is a beacon of hope and light in this community and beyond.

So today, while I surrender my credentials, I am not ending my relationship with the wonderful people at Mt. Bethel Church. As a layman I will make myself available to work and joyfully serve in whatever capacity they have for me as we continue to trust the Lord and serve this great community and the wider world.