



North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church

RALEIGH AREA

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An Open Letter

To the

Clergy and Laity of the Fayetteville District

June 23, 2008

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I write this letter to you with a heavy heart over the death of Rosemary Todd Wynn. Rose died prematurely and at the hands of another person, according to state and county officials. How tragic! And, how very sad. Our hearts go out to all her family and friends, especially to Sam, Christopher, Anthony, Mrs. Todd and her sister and brothers.

Like you, I long for answers – all of the answers to this tragedy. So, it is very tempting for us to believe that all we hear and read is truth and nothing but the truth. Couple with that tendency another temptation, to believe that our imaginations are accurate when we fill-in between the lines of these supposedly factual statements. And all of a sudden, we think we have the answers and the inference is that we don't need the law enforcement to discover the facts and appointed judges or jurors to determine guilt. I don't think we intend to do such, but when we follow the human urges we become the judge and jury.

Perhaps that is why Jesus clearly tells us not to judge. In Matthew 7:1 he says, “Do not judge lest you be judged. *For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.*” (Italics mine). This, my sisters and brothers, is the word of the Lord for you and me! It's a good word; and, it's a warning word. Let's encourage one another to **wait** on the answers and refrain from judging. In the meantime, may we be in constant prayer for one another, for Rose's family and for all those assigned to find the answers.

We are also privileged to live in a nation that has as one of its constitutional rights that every person is **innocent** until proven guilty. This is a foundational piece of our freedom and it should grieve us significantly when it is broken. I would not want you to be treated otherwise and so I do not want Sam Wynn or any other person of interest to be treated that way. I trust our Lord to help us, when it is time, to love the guilty as He loved us; but, until someone is proven guilty, let us love the innocent.

These two weighty admonitions, one Christian and the other national, are sufficient reasons why I have proceeded to appoint Sam Wynn to the office of District Superintendent of the Fayetteville District. In addition, however, I would call your attention to paragraph 334.1 of our Discipline that states, “Every effective elder in full connection who is in good standing shall be continued under appointment ...”(Shall in our United Methodist language means “mandatory”). I am bound by oath to uphold the Discipline. If I chose not to be Christian or an honorable citizen regarding this matter, I am still bound by the Discipline. I am confident that you see, as I do, the wisdom of the Church on this right of an elder to be appointed if no charges are pending against that elder.

Open Letter to Clergy and Laity

As your bishop, I write from my heart regarding these spiritual and temporal matters that we must consider as we think of the issues that surround Rose Wynn's death. But I also write from my heart a word of appreciation for you as well as a word of concern for you.

First, a word of concern for you. I know that many in your communities are neither grounded in the faith nor thoughtful about guarding our rights as citizens and, as a result, they are "tying you to the stake" in the questions and comments that come to you. I am truly sorry! I trust that God is giving you the strength to be patient and kind even in the midst of unfairness and unkindness. We know that most are really reacting to their hurt and anger over someone losing their life to violence. Please look up to the One from whom our strength comes and pray for those who are judging prematurely. May God give you the right words to say at the right time.

Now a word of appreciation for you. I am so encouraged by the way you have manifested the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) in these troubled days. Your words of encouragement and commitment to pray mean more to me than my words could ever convey. Your spiritual maturity and leadership skills, as clergy and lay leaders in our local congregations, give me great confidence as we guide our people through this time. God bless you for your Christ-like spirit and behavior!

Finally, I want to announce to you that the Reverend Milton Gilbert will be your Acting District Superintendent during these next sixty days. Milton desires to be available when you need him so please do not hesitate to call upon him.

May the God of peace and power guard our minds and hearts as we hope and pray for an early conclusion to this search for answers and the full truth.

Grace and Peace from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Al Gwinn