



STATEMENT ON PACIFIC MOUNT OLIVE CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST

In light of the various rumors and misinformation that has been spread throughout our Church and social media about an ongoing legal battle involving Pacific Mount Olive Church Of God In Christ ("Mount Olive") in Los Angeles, California, the Office of General Counsel releases this statement to clarify the facts and issues disputed in this matter. Contrary to what has been said, **the Presiding Bishop and General Board never voted to remove a pastor from his church:**

- Elder Milton Joyner was never appointed by a jurisdictional bishop as pastor of Mount Olive COGIC, he assumed the pastorate by an alleged vote of the membership;
- Pastors can only be appointed by jurisdictional bishops; not voted by local congregations;
- Elder Joyner's alleged appointment is invalid and thus not recognized by the Church of God in Christ;
- The members of Mount Olive petitioned Bishop J. Bernard Hackworth COGIC to join and was accepted by the Metropolitan Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of Southern California;
- As the jurisdictional bishop, Bishop Hackworth is the interim pastor of Mount Olive and responsible for overseeing the affairs of the church until he appoints a new pastor to the church.

Elders within the Church Of God In Christ **are never permitted** to "takeover" a church against the will of a jurisdictional bishop. Pastors can only be appointed to churches by jurisdictional bishops according the Constitution of the Church Of God In Christ.

BACKGROUND

The following is a background of the facts of this case. The following facts are supported by countless court documents filed and evidence presented in the various civil court actions related to this dispute.

Mount Olive, which was founded by Bishop Charles Harrison Mason in 1923, is one of our oldest churches in Los Angeles. Mount Olive owns a significant amount of real property, including its church building, an apartment complex, some vacant land, and a single family residence. Mount Olive has a history of turbulence in its leadership and several pastors have served and later resigned from the pastorate of that church over the past couple of years. In addition to its pastorate woes, in July 2012, Bishop Joe Ealy released Mount Olive from the Southern California First Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction due to its members' opposition to his leadership and efforts to assist the church and he, thus, encouraged them to find another jurisdiction more suitable to their desires. The church, however, maintained its membership and fellowship with the Church Of God In Christ ("COGIC").

In or about September 2012, Elder Milton Joyner, pastor of Greater Holiness Church Of God In Christ ("Greater Holiness"), another COGIC church in Southern California, attended a fund-raising event at Mount Olive. During his visit, Elder Joyner toured the church, was impressed by its property and assets, and learned from the church organist, Mr. Anthony Spence, that Mount Olive was in a legal dispute with its then-current, and now former pastor. In or about August 2013, Mount Olive's legal dispute with its former pastor ended and Mount Olive publicly sought pastoral candidates in order to nominate one for recommendation to a jurisdictional bishop for appointment and installation as pastor. Elder Joyner applied as a candidate. He was interviewed and screened, however, Elder Joyner was not nominated and later notified by the church that he was not recommended as a pastoral candidate.

In August 2013, following the resignation of one of Mount Olive's trustee board members, Mr. Spence was asked to serve as an interim trustee board member. Sometime in September 2013, a dispute arose between Mr. Spence and certain members of the Mount Olive board of trustees (the "Board") and later that month the Board voted to remove Mr. Spence as interim trustee. Mr. Spence protested his dismissal and due to his unruly behavior, Mr. Spence was also removed as church organist.

Per Article III, Part II, Section D, Paragraph 17 of the Constitution of the Church Of God In Christ (the "*Constitution*") (as amended on April 14, 1982), all vacancies in the pastorate of a local church must be filled by the jurisdictional bishop. Nevertheless, sometime in late October 2013, Mr. Spence, who at this time was no longer a member of the Board, purported to convene a "special meeting" of the Mount Olive Board of trustees without the presence of the Chairman and other members of the Board to elect a new pastor. Mr. Spence alleges that during that "special meeting", the Board voted to remove certain members of the Board who were not present, including the Board Chairman, and elect Mr. Spence as the new Chairman of the Board. Mr. Spence further alleges that during this "special meeting" the Board voted Elder Joyner as interim pastor of the church, which is not possible under the *Constitution*.

On the Sunday following this unauthorized "special meeting," Mr. Spence interrupted the worship service to introduced Elder Joyner as the new pastor of Mount Olive. Subsequent to this announcement, Elder Joyner joined Mount Olive, along with the members of Greater Holiness, in his attempt to "merge" the two congregations. Since his Greater Holiness congregation outnumbered the existing congregation at Mount Olive, Elder Joyner purloined the majority support of the Mount Olive membership. During this hostile takeover, Elder Joyner and Mr. Spence attempted to take control of the church's bank accounts, open new bank accounts, and Elder Joyner held himself out to be interim pastor of Mount Olive. Elder Joyner and Mr. Spence also collected rent and money in the name of the church and exerted control over the church's real and personal property without proper authority to do so.

Amid this takeover, in or about November 2013, the original members of the Board petitioned Bishop J. Bernard Hackworth to join the Metropolitan Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of Southern California ("Metropolitan Jurisdiction"). Since Bishop Ealy did not oppose Mount Olive's transfer to the Metropolitan Jurisdiction, Bishop Hackworth asked the Presiding Bishop to approve—under his executive authority provided in Article III, Part II, Section A, Paragraph 1(a) of the *Constitution*—Mount Olive's request to join the Metropolitan Jurisdiction. Bishop Ealy did not object to the requested transfer and, in January 2014, the Presiding Bishop issued Bishop Hackworth a letter approving Mount Olive's request to join the Metropolitan Jurisdiction.

During that time, several lawsuits were launched between the original members of the Board and Elder Joyner and Mr. Spence concerning the control of Mount Olive. When Bishop Hackworth visited Mount Olive to set the church in order, Elder Joyner and Mr. Spence refused to recognize his authority as jurisdictional bishop and pastor, resulting in the locks to the church

being changed several times and several physical altercations requiring local law enforcement to be dispatched to the church to resolve the matter.

Bishop Hackworth was and continues to serve as the interim pastor of Mount Olive until he appoints a new pastor to the church. Bishop Hackworth never appointed Elder Joyner to pastor Mount Olive. Yet, as the civil disputes continued, Elder Joyner reached out to Bishop Hillrie Murphy, prelate of the California Southwest Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, seeking to transfer Mount Olive to his jurisdiction. Bishop Murphy purportedly accepted Mount Olive into his jurisdiction, despite the fact that Mount Olive was already a member of the Metropolitan Jurisdiction.

Elder Joyner argues that because he was appointed pastor of Greater Holiness, the members of Mount Olive could simply vote him in a pastor. However, Elder Joyner's understanding of the *Constitution* is wrong. Article III, Part II, Section D, Paragraph 1 of the *Constitution* unequivocally states that the pastor of a local church shall only be appointed by the jurisdictional bishop of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction where the local church is a member. In other words, you cannot simply transfer your pastor credentials to another church. You have to be appointed by the jurisdictional bishop as pastor of a new church.

To that end, even if the members of Mount Olive voted to transfer jurisdictions, which there is no evidence to support that they did, the purported transfer violated Article III, Part II, Section D, Paragraphs 18 and 19 of the *Constitution* (as amended on April 14, 1982), which requires that notice of such vote be given to the existing jurisdictional bishop and the bishop must be given the opportunity to oversee the voting process; in addition to the fact that a local church can only transfer jurisdictions once in a twelve month period. Bishop Hackworth was never notified of the alleged vote and Elder Joyner was never appointed as pastor of Mount Olive to conduct a vote. Elder Joyner intended to usurp authority and control over a church that he had no authority to do so.

In spite of the civil actions, Elder Joyner was tried before the Pastors and Elders Council of the Metropolitan Jurisdiction in September 2014 and found guilty of, among other things, violating the laws and constitution of the Church of God In Christ, misappropriating and misusing church funds, and engaging in conduct unbecoming of a minister of the gospel. In light of this verdict, the Metropolitan Jurisdiction ordered that Elder Joyner be removed from Mount Olive's premises and his license be suspended. Elder Joyner appealed his conviction to the General Council of Pastors and Elders (the "GCPE") and the GCPE reversed the conviction, ruling that since Elder Joyner was not affiliated with the Metropolitan Jurisdiction, the Metropolitan Jurisdiction did not have standing to try Elder Joyner and he is permitted to join any jurisdiction within the Church Of God In Christ brotherhood that he wished. Despite what Elder Joyner argues, the GCPE did not rule that he should be restored as pastor of Mount Olive. Elder Joyner deceptively relies upon a first order issued by the GCPE, which the GCPE later corrected to clarify that while Elder Joyner's pastoral credentials are restored, the council was not ruling that Elder Joyner be recognized as pastor of Mount Olive.

In the end, the civil courts have found that this dispute is a matter of internal church government and is an ecclesiastical issue that cannot be decided by the civil courts on neutral principles of law. Therefore, the civil court dismissed the civil cases, with prejudice, and directed that the matter be resolved by the leadership of the Church of God in Christ.

This past January, the General Board, under its executive function, voted that Mount Olive is a member of the Metropolitan Jurisdiction. Under Article III, Part II, Section D, Paragraph 17 of the *Constitution*, Bishop Hackworth is the interim pastor for Mount Olive and has the authority to set the church in order until he appoints a successor. Bishop Hackworth never appointed Elder

Joyner as pastor of Mount Olive. Under the General Board's directive and authority, Bishop Hackworth instructed Elder Joyner to return the church to his control so he can set the church in order, as the Constitution of the Church Of God In Christ gives him the authority to do. In response, Elder Joyner and Mr. Spence have relentlessly rebuffed Bishop Hackworth's authority and have gone as far as to launch a frivolous lawsuit against the Church Of God In Christ, the Presiding Bishop, the General Counsel of the Church of God in Christ, and Bishop Hackworth alleging a conspiracy to sell Mount Olive for personal gain. Nothing could be further from the truth. The civil courts have spoken on the matter and concluded that this matter is not for the courts, but should be decided by the Church Of God In Christ.

The Presiding Bishop and General Board never voted to remove a pastor from his church. Elder Joyner was never appointed as pastor of Mount Olive COGIC. Elder Joyner's erroneous claims are nothing but smoke and mirrors. It is the responsibility of the leadership of our Church to uphold the *Constitution* and, in this instance, our leadership has properly done so.