

RE: Succession – Holy Tabernacle Church of God in Christ

Dear Bishop Sheard:

I have labored in the Church of God in Christ as a faithful and loyal pastor for over fifty-five years (55). My darling wife, Dollie, who is now with the Lord, stood with me and by me as we sacrificed, labored and served together in His vineyard. With the help of the Lord and the support and sacrifices of many past and present members of Holy Tabernacle, we have been able to see great things happen in building a strong, powerful and flagship church under my leadership. I am also grateful that God has spared me and allowed me to live and reach my senior years and yet be here to serve His purpose for my life. I consider it to be a blessing to have been afforded many opportunities to contribute to and serve our denomination on every level and its leadership. I pray my latter years be my best years without any undue stress or strain. To God be the glory.

Per our phone conversation this past Tuesday evening, February 25th, the primary purpose of this letter is to reaffirm the appointment of Pastor Seth Cuningkin as my successor to assume pastorate of the Holy Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, immediately. Long before the events that transpired Monday evening, the Lord had revealed to me that he was to succeed me as Pastor, and I begin praying for and preparing him in my own way. It has been my plan to be here to guide, cover, and counsel him during the transition before requesting emeritus status as jurisdictional bishop. I had expressed this to several people in my family, local church and jurisdiction. I executed a notarized letter that was dated January 7th. This letter of Appointment was sent to you and four other General Board Members on February 13, 2025. I consider Pastor Cuningkin to be a loyal and faithful son in the ministry who served me well as a faithful member of Holy Tabernacle for more than ten years. He also served as the Director of Youth for our local church which gave tremendous impact to our church and community. With my blessing, he started the Faith Community Church of God in Christ and within two (2) years, that church grown and expanded, proving his leadership and development abilities. I am Godly proud of him and wanted him to have some pastoral experience but always knew he would come back.

Bishop Sheard, I honor and respect you as our leader and presiding Bishop. Thank you for your support and leadership during this time and season. Although I was unclear of the purpose and all the details of the meeting, I yet agreed to you and the General Board's visit this past Monday evening, February 24, but we asked a series of questions prior to your coming, and we never received a response. Your scheduled time with my family and me was at 5:30pm, which was one hour before the public meeting. You did not arrive until 6:05 and I felt that our meeting was rushed. However, during our family meeting, you promised that you would not disrespect or dishonor me in any way. I let you know that I wanted the chairman of the Trustee Board removed based on his blatant disrespect for me as well as his formation of a team of members who were rising up in attempts to take over the church. I feel that my request concerning this chairman was completely disregarded. My concern was and obviously yet is that certain actions of

a few persons under my charge as pastor and Jurisdictional Bishop have allegedly communicated to you some accusations of infractions and inactions on my part to paint a picture that I was incapable of providing effective leadership. No, I am not as strong as I was once was and I have experienced health challenges, but I am still here and able to witness God's grace. I always gave instruction and guidance in my absence. However, there are those who did not agree with my decisions and became impatient, insensitive and in many instances, disrespectful. Instead of holding my arms up during these times and following my leadership, they sought to dishonor and usurp the authority I had given.

It was my intention to request to be emeritized as Jurisdictional Bishop, and I well understand that it is your responsibility and authority with the General Board to select and appoint Bishops. When we went into the public meeting Monday evening, you announced to the church and jurisdiction that I would be emeritized as both Bishop of the jurisdiction and pastor of the local church. I was not aware that such action would be taken, especially immediately as it relates to the pastorate and the process of a new pastor. In our family meeting, you did not ask me or my family about my succession plan. We had not discussed any terms and conditions or even my desires. I did not contest publicly for the sake of peace, and I honestly assumed that we would have further discussion regarding my intentions for the local church. I desired to have the honor of installing Pastor Cuningkin as my successor as Pastor of Holy Tabernacle. He and I have been meeting and working on a succession plan for over a year and a half. However, I was surprised to know that members of the Church's board had asked you to allow them to form a pulpit committee and recommend to you the next Pastor. I did not have the opportunity to execute the decisions that I had already begun, and this group's recommendations appeared to carry more weight than the authority of the senior pastor and bishop. Again, I am requesting that you PLEASE HONOR AND IMPLEMENT MY CHOICE OF THE SUCCESSOR OF THE MINISTRY THAT I HAVE BUILT AND LED FOR 55 YEARS. **Pastor Seth Cuningkin.**

I am also genuinely concerned that the chairman of the board, who has openly disrespected me in my senior years, usurped authority, gathered a fraction of disgruntled members, and I was preparing to have removed, was allowed to lead the charge in formulating a 'pulpit committee' to identify a pastor to be recommended to you and Bishop McClelland. Consequently, my authority, interest, and regard have been divested as a founding Pastor, long time servant of the church, and a spiritual leader and relegated to just a consideration in this process. I do not believe it will be beneficial to the church, and it would be quite challenging for me to endure.

During our conversation, you mentioned that some members of the board told you that they did not want Pastor Cuningkin as my successor because he had supposedly disrespected me. I emphatically told you that was untrue. He has never disrespected me, and I am totally appalled at the boldness of these individuals to attack this young man's character in an attempt of a hostile takeover. This is only an attempt to circumvent my authority, intention, and what I believe the will of the Lord is.


It is my prayer that my God-inspired desire and wish is honored and received by allowing Pastor Cuningkin to assume his role immediately. I cannot imagine the receiving of applicants for the pulpit I have served for over 55 years and watching a rotation of potential candidates to see who the church board select and recommends Bishop Sheard, I desire my legacy to continue in the vein of what the Lord has shown and spoken to me. This process has the potential to place the church and myself under unnecessary distress. As I mentioned earlier in this letter, I want my latter years to be my best years without unnecessary stress and strain and this process challenges that.

At your direction, I have also spoken with Bishop McClelland and communicated my directive and desire, and he advised he could not honor it because he is following your leadership, and he has been appointed to oversee this process as General Board member. Thus, I am appealing to you again, please honor my appointment of Pastor Seth Cuningkin as Pastor of Holy Tabernacle Church of God in Christ immediately, so that the church may move forward, and I will be at peace.

Thank you for your leadership and regard in this sensitive matter.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert Sample", written in dark ink.

Bishop Robert Sample

PS-My spirit is broken to know that the very two men that were mentioned to you in the letters that were sent on February 13th, (also reattached to this email) the two men who have caused me the most pain in my time of ministry, are the persons who have been left to carry on in the absence of Bishop McClelland... Elder Perry Williams and Dr. Terry Wright!