



For Immediate Release
July 11, 2010

Rev. Kenneth W. Kleckner III Voluntarily Steps Away From Pastoral Responsibilities Following Arrest

LAKELAND - The Rev. Kenneth W. Kleckner III, appointed in 2006 to serve as the senior pastor of the Ocala West United Methodist Church in Ocala, Florida, volunteered on Saturday, July 10, to step away from his pastoral responsibilities to the church and the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Rev. Kleckner was arrested Friday, July 9, at the Ocala West United Methodist Church, by the Orange County Sheriff's Office after a two-month investigation. Rev. Kleckner was charged with five counts of transmitting harmful material to a minor and a separate count of soliciting a minor for sex via the Internet. Rev. Kleckner was released from the Marion County Jail after posting \$55,000 bail.

After consultation with the church Staff Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (the administrative unit in a United Methodist church that relates to all staff, both bishop-appointed staff and employed staff), Rev. Annette Pendergrass, district superintendent of the North Central District of the Florida Conference, and Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker, Resident Bishop of the Florida Conference, Rev. Kleckner relinquished his pastoral duties until such time as there is a resolution of the legal matters before him.

Rev. Pendergrass expressed the "shock and sadness" felt by all Florida United Methodists following news of the arrest and subsequent charges brought against Rev. Kleckner. His arrest, she said, "came as a great surprise and disappointment." She asks for prayer for the pastoral family, members of Ocala West United Methodist Church, and the entire community which it serves.

Rev. Pendergrass brought the message Sunday to the congregation of Ocala West at all three worship services. She invited them to "reflect on the resources of faith in dealing with storms, crises, and life's most trying times and difficulties." Following the three services, she spoke to a sanctuary filled with close to 500 members and held a brief question and answer session. Addressing the sadness, confusion and emptiness that may be felt by members of the church and community, she offered "words of comfort and encouragement that God will be walking with them as the church in the days ahead, no matter what."

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