



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **SHAKEN NORTH CAROLINA CHURCH OFFICIALLY ACCEPTS PASTOR'S RESIGNATION**

WINSTON-SALEM, NC — The leaders of historic, rural Bethany United Church of Christ said they were stunned to receive the emailed resignation of their pastor, Robert W. Lee IV, a few days after he denounced white supremacy at the Aug. 27 MTV Video Music Awards. On Sunday, September 10, the congregation voted to accept Lee's unexpected resignation.

With no members of the governing council tuned into the VMAs, the leaders of Bethany only became aware of any conflict when Pastor Lee emailed his resignation to governing council chair Jerry Clodfelter a few days after the program aired.

"I was headed out of town when I received Pastor Lee's email," said Clodfelter, "so I respectfully declined his resignation and asked him if we could discuss his desire to resign when I returned. No one at Bethany was aware any problem existed, and we were unprepared for the media attention. To the knowledge of the governing council, no one at Bethany had an issue with Pastor Lee's statements on television."

Founded in 1789 as one of the earliest Reformed congregations in North Carolina, Bethany's ministry focuses on Sunday worship. The church supports the social justice advocacy for which the United Church of Christ is known in the region and beyond.

"Bethany was so pleased to have found Pastor Lee," said The Rev. Jerry Rhyne, Minister for Church Affairs in the Western NC Association of the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ. "Small churches like Bethany — churches that want to grow into a fresh future — can offer young ministers a wonderful opportunity to explore their vocation and spread their wings. We remain hopeful that Bethany will find the right woman or man to continue their legacy."

Lee, 24, a recent graduate of Duke Divinity School and descendant of the Confederate General, had been invited by MTV to introduce the mother of Heather Heyer, the woman who died on August 12 from injuries sustained while counter-protesting the white nationalist Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA. Since accepting in May the part-time call to lead this small congregation, Lee's leadership and preaching had been well-received by the congregation. Lee was working on becoming credentialed in the progressive United Church of Christ, with his congregation's full spiritual and financial support.

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**About the United Church of Christ** — The Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ is one of the most diverse in the mainline Protestant denomination, which comprises nearly 900,000 members and 5,000 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly-gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

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