

Clarence McClendon Cuts Ties With Foursquare After Divorce News

After his wife ended their 16-year-marriage, the Los Angeles pastor has charged that his denomination is racist

Clarence McClendon, the dynamic pastor of the nationally-known Church of the Harvest International in Los Angeles, has terminated his affiliation with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (ICFG), left his denomination-owned church building in South Central Los Angeles and announced plans to buy the famed Hollywood Palladium where he currently holds services.

The changes came about after Tammy, his wife of 16 years and the mother of their four children, divorced the 35-year-old McClendon. His pulpit ministry would have undergone a review by the Foursquare Ethics Committee because of the divorce, said a denomination official who wished to remain unnamed. According to the official, Foursquare policy requires a newly divorced minister to step down from the pulpit for at least six months.

“My leaving had nothing to do with the [Foursquare] Ethics Committee,” said McClendon after a Wednesday evening service that drew some 3,500 worshipers to the glitzy Hollywood Palladium. “Denominationalism induces fellowship between people who are alike and can come to the point where there is intercourse between themselves, and that produces birth defects.”

McClendon, whose large radio and television ministry includes programs on the Trinity Broadcasting Network, cited “politics, real estate and systemic racism” as his reasons for leaving the denomination.

“My church is larger than Jack Hayford’s,” he said, referring to the Foursquare pastor of The Church on the Way in nearby Van Nuys, Calif. “But I had no voice. [The denomination] has a separate but equal mentality.”

In a 1999 interview with Charisma, McClendon denied having experienced racism in Foursquare, stating that he did not believe there had been any hindrances to black ministers in the denomination.

Ron Williams, communications officer for the ICFG, told Charisma that the Foursquare Church has African Americans in all levels of leadership, including the board of directors. We also have set up an intercultural desk at our headquarters office in Los Angeles to ensure the inclusiveness of all cultures in the ministry of ICFG.”

McClendon complained about Foursquare’s policy of owning church buildings and said his congregation had not been allowed to purchase the property.

“The church members knew that even after we paid the mortgage on the building, it was never going to be ours,” he said. “There could have been rioting in the streets when they learned they could never purchase or own the building.”

Williams told Charisma that the properties of West Adams

Foursquare Church, which became Church of the Harvest under McClendon, have always been held in trust by Foursquare. The church, he said, was planted as a

Foursquare church in 1939 by

Milton W. Ellithorpe, and at no time has Foursquare ever tried to deceive McClendon or the congregation about the church property.

A brief press release issued May 20 by ICFG officials noted that McClendon met with church officials on May 12 and presented a letter ending his affiliation. Church services at the Palladium started two days later.

Williams would not comment further, except to say that church officials had met with some 130 members of McClendon's congregation who expressed an interest in continuing to hold services at the facility on West Adams, near the intersection of Interstate 10 and La Brea Avenue.

McClendon, who has a practice of taking up a second offering for himself during church services, said his church has made an offer to buy the Palladium, a concert hall located a few blocks from the entertainment industry's former epicenter, at the intersection of Hollywood and Vine.

McClendon was ordained as a Baptist at age 19 and in 1998 was installed as a bishop in the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship. He also serves as its Bishop of Fellowship Relations and sits on the College of Bishops of the International Communion of Charismatic Churches.

He said his accountability is intact and that he answers in

spiritual matters to the leaders in both organizations. His press statement about the split from Foursquare stated, in part, that “it is unfortunate that some have tried to reduce such a positive and peaceable move between brothers and sisters in Christ to a situation involving baseless lies and unsubstantiated rumors leveled against Bishop McClendon.”

When asked about the wording in his statement, McClendon said there were rumors that questioned his fidelity. Some people even claimed he had a child with another woman while he was married, but he denies any wrongdoing.

“It is the work of the enemy to silence the prophetic voice,” he said. “I’m a holy man of God. I’ve lived my life by the Word of God. There have been no children born out of wedlock.

“I’m a big target and a young man,” McClendon said, noting that women in his congregation have pursued him to the point that he has had to file court-mandated restraining orders against them.

“I had to literally run from women during my ministry,” he said. “These rumors have been around for ages. The fact that [Tammy] divorced me has given rise to these rumors.

“I was married at 18 for all the wrong reasons. The only reason [the marriage] lasted as long as it did was because we both loved God. [Tammy] just made a decision about what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. I’m sad to say we are completely divorced.”

In nine years at the church’s former location, McClendon’s congregation grew from a few dozen to a weekly attendance of

some 12,000 at six standing-room-only services. He said he felt his divorce would not affect his growing ministry.

“I have a calling to preach, not to be married,” he said. “My calling is between my heavenly Father and myself. It doesn’t affect my ministry.” □