

Methodist Pastor Who Led Same-Sex Wedding Reinstated

A U.S. pastor who was defrocked after officiating his son's same-sex wedding ceremony and later reinstated, can keep his ordination, a Methodist judicial council has ruled.

The church had punished Reverend Frank Schaefer last year by defrocking him when he refused to say he would never perform another gay ceremony. But an appeals panel reversed the decision, and the judicial council on Saturday upheld the appellate ruling, the church said on Monday.

The decision by the church's highest judicial body was on technical, legal grounds and did not discuss the issue of gay marriage. The nine-member council ruled that it found "no errors in the application of the church law and judicial decisions."

Schaefer, former pastor of Zion United Methodist Church of Iona in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, was charged under United Methodist Church law for having officiated at the same sex-marriage ceremony of his son in 2007.

An appeals panel in June said it upheld the church's decision to suspend Schaefer last year for 30 days. But it reversed the defrocking, saying that was punishing Schaefer for what he might do in the future instead of what he had done in the past.

Schaefer, who is now a minister in Santa Barbara, California, was not immediately available for comment.

Schaefer said after a hearing before the council last week that he had no regrets.

"I did what I did based on my heart and my conscience,"

Schaefer said.

(Reporting by Mary Wisniewski; Editing by Susan Heavey)