

Indiana Church Relieves Drag Queen Minister of Duties

Rev. Craig Duke, who appeared on a cable television show and in the pulpit as a drag queen recently, has been relieved of his duties as the lead pastor of Newburgh United Methodist Church in Newburg, Indiana, several media outlets have reported.

Mitch Gieselman, superintendent of Indiana United Methodist Conference, said in an email that Duke was not fired nor did he resign from the church. He will receive a "significantly reduced salary" through Feb. 28, at which time he and his wife, Linda, must move out of their home that is provided by the church.

In a statement to the *Evansville Courier and Press*, Gieselman didn't condemn Duke, but did not condone his actions, either.

"While there is a diversity of opinion regarding the moral implications of Rev. Duke's actions, he has not been found to have committed any chargeable offense or other violation of the United Methodist Book of Discipline," Gieselman said.

Duke appeared in the Nov. 8 episode of HBO's *We're Here*, a program that follows drag queens throughout the country. During the program, Duke donned a pink wig, acrylic nails, platform boots and a sparkling fringed dress. While he received numerous messages of support, he also received a great deal of pushback from church members and the community for his actions.

Church officials, in a statement, felt it was the best course of action for everyone involved.

"Our desire is to provide an opportunity for Craig to be able to utilize his numerous gifts as a pastor in a local

congregation,” the statement read.

Duke told Religion News Service that he knew he would receive negative feedback from his appearance on the HBO show, but he didn't think it would cost him his job.

Emails from congregants began not longer after the Nov. 8 episode aired. Enough were so negative that “at the ‘insistence’ of Newburgh’s Staff-Parish Relations Committee, Duke said he requested a new assignment from Bishop Julius Trimble of the Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church.

“Clearly, there were folks that were more displeased with my participation than I was aware of, or, at least, the group that was unhappy continued to work together,” Duke told RNS. “It just got to the point where the conflict, the anger grew too much, and so for my mental health, too, I started to back away and I told my district superintendent that the conflict was so much, it was at such a level from some, that I was unable to be an effective leader.

“To do a show like this, it makes be vulnerable to those that are saying that I have crossed the line, that I’m participating in something that is unbecoming to the ministry,” he said. “You can’t do a drag show like this in southern Indiana and not offend someone.” {eo}

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