

Lesbian Minister on Trial for Officiating Same-Sex Marriage



On June 16, Rev. Amy DeLong sits at her home in Osceola, Wis. (AP Photo/ Stacy Bengs)

A lesbian United Methodist pastor in Wisconsin is facing a church trial after officiating at a same-sex marriage ceremony for a lesbian couple in 2009, violating her denomination's rules. The trial started on Tuesday in Kaukauna, Wisconsin.

According to the *Associated Press*, Amy DeLong, 44, has been charged with violating a church prohibition on the ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" and marrying a lesbian couple.

"We hope this United Methodist church trial will faithfully abide by the denomination's official standard that clergy are to be monogamous in marriage and celibate in singleness, and which also affirms marriage as the union of one man and one woman," says Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion & Democracy. "The United Methodist official stance is rooted in Scripture, in historic church teaching, and in the practice of universal Christianity."

The jury for the church trial was selected from a pool of Wisconsin United Methodist clergy. A total of 13 clergy were chosen to serve during the trial and penalty phase. United Methodism has 7.7 million members in the U.S. and nearly 4.5 million overseas, primarily in Africa.

"United Methodism gains nothing by surrendering to fads advocated by liberal activists who preside over emptying churches," Tooley says. "This denomination's future belongs to growing, robust, international Christianity, not to dying, liberal, white-Anglo Mainline Protestantism in the U.S."

"I think Scripture is very clear that our expression of the

good gift of sexuality is to be reserved only within heterosexual marriage,” Thomas Lambrecht, pastor at Faith Community Church in Greenville told the United Methodist News Service in February. Lambrecht will serve as church counsel during the trial.

The United Methodist Church amended its Social Principles, which are part of the Book of Discipline, in 1972 to include verbiage that promotes tolerating same-sex unions “but not approving them.

“Homosexuals no less than heterosexuals are persons of sacred worth who need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment,” the Social Principles read at the time. “We insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured, although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this incompatible with Christian teaching.”

By 1976, the Social Principles were again amended to clearly ban same-sex marriages. Fast forward 20 years and the rules concluded, “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”