

Methodist Pastor Refuses to Stop Performing Gay Marriages

The Rev. Frank Schaefer said Monday he would refuse to surrender his clergy credentials voluntarily and continue to perform **gay marriages** in opposition to his denomination's orders.

A United Methodist pastor in Lebanon, Pa., Schaefer will meet Thursday with denomination leaders in the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference to learn if he will be defrocked, or stripped of his clergy credentials. He was found guilty last month of violating United Methodist law for officiating at his son's same-sex wedding in 2007.

Thursday marks the end of a 30-day suspension from ministry imposed as punishment, following a church trial in which Schaefer was found guilty of disobedience to the order and discipline of the United Methodist Church.

The jury ruled that Schaefer had to pledge to follow the United Methodist Book of Discipline "in its entirety" or surrender his credentials at the end of his suspension.

"My conscience does not allow me to uphold the entire discipline because it contains discriminatory provisions and language that is hurtful and harmful to our homosexual brothers and sisters," Schaefer said in a statement.

The United Methodist Church's General Conference in 2012 upheld the church's 40-year-old rule that calls homosexuality "incompatible" with **Christian** teaching." The church's Book of Discipline also forbids the ordination of "avowed" homosexuals and bans clergy from officiating at **same-sex marriages** or holding such ceremonies in its churches.

Rob Renfroee, president of Good News—an orthodox renewal

movement within the United Methodist Church—criticized Schaefer's unwillingness to decide on his own to leave the ministry.

"What gives civil disobedience the possibility of being a noble moral choice is the willingness to accept the consequences for one's actions," he said. "Unfortunately, Rev. Schaefer has rejected that path."

Clergy have increasingly defied church rules recently, performing **same-sex marriages** publicly and signing petitions calling for change. At least four other clergy face church trials, possibly next year.

Earlier this month, two female Methodist pastors married at Tibbetts United Methodist Church in Seattle. The district superintendent for the two pastors officiated at the Dec. 7 service, which drew more than 300 people, United Methodist News Service reported.

Schaefer held out hope Methodist leaders would allow him to continue in ministry. He also pledged to work toward changing the language and provisions in the Book of Discipline that discriminate against gays.

"I am hopeful that we can and will accomplish these changes," he said. "It's only a matter of time."