

Pastor Found Guilty in Church Trial for Performing Gay Marriage

A Pennsylvania **pastor** on trial by Methodist church officials for officiating at his son's 2007 **same-sex marriage** ceremony was found guilty on Monday of violating church law and being disobedient.

Reverend Frank Schaefer, pastor of the Zion United Methodist church in Lebanon, Pa., testified he had been conflicted about performing the ceremony but chose to violate his denomination's teachings out of love for his child.

The verdict came after an all-day hearing at a church camp near Spring City, Pa., and was delivered by the jury of nine men and four women.

Alfred Gwinn, a retired bishop who presided at the hearing, said there were at least nine votes for a guilty verdict, as dictated by church law.

"I did not want to make this a protest about the doctrine of the church," Schaefer said at the opening of the trial. "I was ready to choose between my son and my career."

Schaefer's statement followed opening statements by a prosecutor and the defense before a presiding officer.

His trial is the first of its kind since 2012, when the church's governing body affirmed its stance that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings, according to an article on an official Methodist blog.

But it is at least the eighth trial in the past 20 years of a member of the clergy accused of violating church law by performing a same-sex marriage or by acknowledging being gay,

the blog report said.

The United Methodist Church has some 12 million members worldwide.

Testifying against the pastor was Jon Boger, a member of his congregation who had complained about the wedding to the church hierarchy.

"He kept it silent from the congregation. Nobody knew," Boger said. "It was a lie and a broken covenant."

Thirteen pastors are acting as the jury. Schaefer faces the possibility of reprimand, suspension or revocation of his ordination credentials if he is found guilty.

Outside the trial held in rural Pennsylvania, about 100 supporters were on hand to give Schaefer encouragement.

They unfurled a banner, several feet long, that read "We Are Open and Affirming" and had signs reading "Law or Love—Jesus Chose Love" and "Church trials are incompatible with **Christian** teaching."

"We oppose the homophobic position of the United Methodist denomination," said Reverend Hal Taussig of Philadelphia's Chestnut Hill United Church, which is affiliated with both the United Methodist and the United Church of Christ denominations.

Schaefer said he had informed a district church official that he officiated at the wedding that was held in Massachusetts, which in 2003 became the first U.S. state to permit gay marriage.

The jury will consider on Tuesday what penalty to levy against Schaefer for his role in the wedding of his son Tim and another man.