

UMC to Decide if LGBT Members Can Stay Pastors

The United Methodist Church Judicial Council will rule next week if gay and lesbian members of the clergy can maintain their pastoral roles.

The ruling comes after married lesbian Karen Oliveto was consecrated as a bishop last year.

Council of Bishops President Bishop Bruce Ough asked for prayer as the judicial council considers their ruling.

"[Easter is] the season of waiting for the Holy Spirit to come among us and make it possible for us to hear one another, to understand one another, to know the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," Ough said. "We are Easter People and we are not afraid! Come Holy Spirit! Come and grant us ears to hear and hearts to discern your wisdom and will for 'such a time as this.'"

The Council will meet April 25 to discuss several cases, including Oliveto's.

The UMC's Book of Discipline maintains homosexuality is a sin, and people who identify as LGBT cannot serve in clergy roles.

LGBT members even sent a letter to the Council, claiming the debate over homosexuality is "hurtful."

"We, your LGBTQI clergy, write to you before their session begins to respond in love to this harm," the letter says. "We, as the community of queer clergy ... stand together: we are all one body and one church. Together we affirm and are proud of our denomination's core beliefs and mission. ... (But) questions, briefs and complaints ... are hurtful to us, and they are hurtful to the whole church."

The Council is working with the Commission on a Way Forward. The Commission on a Way Forward was proposed by the Council of Bishops and approved by the 2016 General Conference to do a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph of the Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and explore options that help to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church, according to its website.

“We believe the Holy Spirit is operating through the Commission’s and Council’s leadership and conferencing,” Ough said. “The conciliar work of the Commission happens concurrently with other legal, legislative and supervisory processes. However, we urge the entire church to stay focused on the Commission’s work as our best opportunity to determine God’s leading for the church. We believe the God who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (Phil. 1:6) and we need to hold this course.” {eo}