

BISHOP JACK TUELL 1923-2014

Had change of heart on gay issues

BY STEVE CHAWKINS
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When retired Methodist Bishop Jack Tuell was asked how he changed his mind on issues of gay ordination and gay marriage, he explained it simply: "I changed my mind when I changed my heart."

But the answer was more complicated.

Mr. Tuell, 90, a prominent clergyman who emerged late in life as an voice for change in his church's views of homosexuality, died Jan. 10 at the Wesley Homes Health Center in Des Moines, Wash. He had been in failing health for several years, his daughter Cynthia Tuell said.

For decades, Mr. Tuell, an attorney who became an ordained minister at 35, worked his way up the hierarchy of the United Methodist Church. He was a pastor, wrote a text on church governance and served as bishop in Portland, Ore. From 1980 until his retirement in 1992, he was the Los Angeles region's bishop — the top official for 195,000 mem-



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In the 1980s and early '90s, Bishop Jack Tuell led the Los Angeles region of the United Methodist Church.

bers in more than 400 churches. Along the way, he hewed to the church's line on gay issues when questions cropped up. In 1999, he oversaw a hearing that resulted in a Chicago minister being suspended for a year for blessing a homosexual union.

As bishop in Los Angeles, Mr. Tuell advocated immigrant rights, signed a protest letter calling U.S. arms policy "idolatrous" and marshaled clergymen against a national lottery game show. But he shuffled

a gay clergyman to a non-pastoral job, and his stance on gay issues continued to reflect official policy as stated in the church's Book of Discipline: "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching," although gay people, like all others, have "sacred worth."

After he retired, Mr. Tuell acted as a judge in church hearings. In 1999, he presided over the trial of Gregory Dell, a Chicago minister accused of disobeying church law by per-

forming a commitment service for two gay parishioners. Dell was suspended from the ministry for a year. For months, Mr. Tuell reflected on the conviction. Dell, a minister he described as "dedicated, energetic, compassionate, caring and able," had been ousted. Anguished friends had told him their gay and lesbian children didn't feel at home in the churches where they were raised.

"Ecclesiastically speaking, the decision was correct," he later wrote. "As I understand the Spirit of God, it was wrong."

Mr. Tuell expressed his change of heart in a guest sermon at his Seattle-area church in 2000. "I stated flatly that I was wrong and called on the church to prayerfully seek a new inclusiveness," he later wrote. "I was 76 years old."

His change of heart was widely publicized.

Mr. Tuell also brought his advocacy to the church at large, showing up in frail health at the 2012 General Conference to protest church policy.

schawkins2@tribune.com