

Press Release: November 11, 1998



Broadway United Methodist Church and Local Community Respond Swiftly to Planned Picketing by Hate Group

Chicago, Ill. (Nov. 11) Broadway United Methodist Church and the Lakeview community are acting strong and fast in response to an announcement of a planned picket of the local church on November 22 by a national hate group.

The picketing group is the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas, organized by the Rev. Fred Phelps. The anti-gay group has picketed various events across the nation, including the recent funeral of hate-crime victim Matthew Shepard, and worship services of churches that are seen as friendly to gay and lesbian persons.

"It's unfortunate that individuals and groups carry the kind of hate and fear that these folks do," the Rev. Dell said. "But however offensive and even injurious the presence of such a group and their message might be, the strength of community, justice and love is stronger. Broadway's response will be a witness to that strength."

Broadway Church and the Lakeview Action Coalition, a community organization in which the church participates, are working with other congregations and organizations to respond to the planned picketing.

The response includes two primary components:

- On Saturday, November 21, congregations representing a variety of faiths will hold an Interfaith Vigil at 7:00 p.m. at Broadway United Methodist Church. The service's theme will be the power of community, justice and love to overcome the power of the kind of hate that the picketing group represents. Community members are invited to attend this service.
- On Sunday, November 22, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., a public witness will be held outside of Broadway United Methodist Church. A group of supporters will surround the entire church building-shoulder to shoulder-in a "circle of care." This circle will represent a silent and non-confrontational example of unity for justice.

Broadway urges all supporters and individuals in the neighborhood on

Sunday, November 22, to avoid interaction with the picketing group. "The Westboro Baptist group members thrive on provoking violent reactions," said the Rev. Dell. "This group wins a small victory every time they get folks to respond the way they want them to." In response to violent reactions, the group often insists on arrests and follows that action with lawsuits, he said.

Broadway invites all people who participate in the witness or come to the neighborhood that morning to "focus on celebrating the wonderful diversity of our neighborhood and our city," Pastor Dell said. "We hope to see a cooperative and mutually supportive spirit and vitality that morning."

Broadway United Methodist Church is located in the Lakeview neighborhood on the near north side of Chicago. The congregation has recently received attention because of charges brought by the United Methodist denomination against the church's pastor, the Reverend Gregory Dell, for conducting a service of Holy Union service for two men who are members of the church. A church trial for the Reverend Dell could be held as early as January. Its outcome could result in the withdrawal of the Reverend Dell's ordination and his removal from the church.

The Rev. Dell has been a pastor in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference for 28 years and was appointed to Broadway United Methodist Church in July 1995. He served as an alternate delegate to the General Conference and a delegate to the North Central Jurisdictional Conference in 1992 and 1996. He currently is a member of and serves on the Executive Committees of both the General and Jurisdictional Commissions on Religion and Race.

Broadway United Methodist Church is a Reconciling Congregation located in the Lakeview neighborhood of Chicago. Of its 185 members, nearly one-third identify themselves as gay or lesbian. The racially diverse congregation has an equal balance of men and women, and the average age is 37.

Broadway states its mission as: "God calls Broadway United Methodist Church to be a faith community embracing the diversity of our Chicago neighborhood. We welcome all persons, without regard to race, age, gender, sexual orientation, social and economic class, faith background and physical or mental capability. At Broadway, we are accepted into God's nurturing family, which invites us into spiritual growth through worship, study and mission. We are grateful for the opportunities God gives us to experience and share the love of Christ."

Members and friends of Broadway United Methodist Church, celebrating Reverend Dell's pastoral faithfulness to all people, have created The Justice Fund for costs associated with a Church complaint of this nature. Those wishing to help can make gifts payable to: Broadway United Methodist Church, with the words **Justice Fund** noted on the memo line. Gifts may be mailed to: Broadway United Methodist Church, 3344 N. Broadway, Chicago, IL 60657-3520.

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CORNET Note: Fred Phelps' hate group has a web site. You will be shocked at its contents. [Follow this link only if you are prepared to see violent imagery and words.](#) To go directly to the flier (in GIF graphic format) announcing the picket of Broadway UMC, [click here](#). Be prepared for hate language and images.

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