



Greg Dell's Letter to Broadway United Methodist Church

Dear Sisters and Brothers of Broadway Church,

On Saturday, Oct. 10 I received a phone call from Bishop Sprague informing me that he was [filing charges](#) against me for "disobedience to the Order and The Discipline of the United Methodist Church" for conducting a service of Holy Union for a same gender couple on September 19. Bishop Sprague is very positively sensitive on this issue and I felt his sincere personal and pastoral support in our conversation. He also assured me that I would not be suspended from the pastorate while this matter was in process.

It appears that the appropriate path for this complaint is judicial rather than administrative which means a church trial is all but assured. Let me give you some background and my present perspective.

Many of you receiving this knew I was going to do this service or that I had done it. I have made no secret-even announced in a speech at the last General Conference-that I have done such services for over 17 years. While I have refused ever to treat them as clandestine or in any way shameful events I have also never gone out of my way to publicize them any more than I would a service for a different gender couple. I treat weddings and services of Holy Union in virtually identical ways.

However in this case several events transpired to make the situation different. During the trial of the Reverend Jimmy Creech for conducting a service of Holy Union in Nebraska I was contacted by the New York Times for an interview. In the course of our conversation the reporter asked if I knew of other clergy who did or supported such services. I said there were many including myself and others who signed the ["In All Things Charity"](#) and [CORNET statements](#). He asked if I had a service planned. When he found that I did he asked to speak with the couple. After checking for their agreement I phoned him back. He asked when the service was scheduled. I gave him the date and he said that would be too late for the story he was planning. However, he later put the date along with some information from other persons in a wire story. That story made it to the [Windy City Times](#) a metropolitan wide gay and lesbian paper in Chicago. As a result of their follow-up a rather prominent (front page picture and all) story was run.

When that story appeared on the Internet many of us assumed it would only be a "matter of time" before someone made the "official" contact with the Bishop forcing the issue. It was.

People have asked me if I regret the interviews that led to the article or if I regret the article itself. My response has been that for over 35 years I've been involved in justice work where we have been desperate for media coverage. However, this is one time when its welcome was not without ambivalence. I'm glad for the witness it has made in the gay/lesbian/bi and transsexual community and in the church. I've gotten some amazing responses back since the article was published. The service and the article apparently were words of real hope and good news to a lot of folks who had not only given up on the church and in some cases the faith, but in some cases on themselves. Nothing can erase the importance of that.

However, some of us had recently agreed that the cause would not be appreciably helped by another martyr (even in the best and most precise definition of the word). We said we needed workers to move us toward General Conference to stop the destructive direction of the church. While I will never stop doing such services as long as I have my ordination and there are people who want them, I also wanted (and want) to be part of the work and strategy for General Conference.

I do have a defense strategy. But if that fails and I'm found guilty I don't feel that the die is cast. Penalties range from removing my orders as a United Methodist pastor to censure. The trial jury will decide. I also have the right of appeal.

I said in a sermon after I did the service that some people asked if I wasn't afraid of what would happen to me if I did the service. I said that I was more afraid of what I would be if I didn't. I feel good about what I've done and am doing but these feel like kind of stormy and unpredictable seas.

Keep Jade and me in your thoughts and prayers.

*Grace and peace,
Greg*