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Articles are in reverse chronological order.

Now going directly to 23 states: CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, ID, KY, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NV, NC, NY, OK, TX, WI

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: April 27, 1999

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

DOES ANYONE SEE A PROBLEM WITH THIS?

The Dell trial is over and the verdict is in. He was convicted and his punishment was announced. He will be removed from his church pastorate until he can either sign a statement saying he will abide by the Book Of Discipline or until the Book Of Discipline is changed to accommodate his views. Since the verdict, there has been great fanfare that the news of the guilty verdict sends a warning to all other clergy out there who might be considering similar actions. But what is the real message that is being sent out to the clergy of the denomination?

I am very disturbed at what looks suspiciously like a continued plan to undermine the system and promote an agenda. When I first began writing News From The Front articles, I took heat from individuals because I suggested that such an organized agenda was being played out. A member of Rev. Dell's church even wrote a letter to our Bishop complaining about my unfounded criticism of Rev. Dell and the suggestion that Dell was acting as part of a larger plan of action. Would you like to know what had I suggested? I made the comment that if Dell were found guilty and removed from his pastorate, he would be provided with a way to work full time to change the Book Of Discipline. However, what has resulted is even more astonishing than anything I could have predicted.

While it is true that Rev. Dell will no longer be the "official pastor" of the Broadway Church as of July, his leadership will still be strongly felt. If you haven't already heard the news, Rev. Dell will work 3/4 time for "In All Things Charity" and be hired by the Broadway church 1/4 time as a "consultant".

The United Methodist News Service reported that: "The Broadway church, which has been the base for In All Things Charity, **CREATED A NEW JOB** (my emphasis) for Dell.... Dell will spend three-quarters of his time as director of In All Things Charity. The remainder of his new position will involve acting as a consultant on an as-needed basis for whomever is appointed interim pastor at Broadway."
([UMNS #208](#))

So what do we have now? We have a church pastor who will continue to be a strong presence in a church he has been removed from. Officially, he will not be the pastor of the church, but what about unofficially? Since the "In All Things Charity" program is based at the Broadway Church, I can assume that he will be working out of the church. In other words, between his role with that organization and his role as "consultant", he will be working full time at the Broadway United Methodist Church. What has in fact resulted is that Rev. Dell is given a new pastor to "consult" as to how things should be handled at the church and at the same time is given the free time needed to work full time at trying to change the Book of Discipline.

Perhaps this is a way to compromise and keep everyone happy. Those who wanted Dell convicted and punished can point to the trial and its verdict. Those who wanted Dell acquitted can point to an agenda for change that is in fact blessed and given new power by the reality of what has resulted from that conviction. However, I will end this piece with the same question with which I began: Does anyone see a problem with this?

Reporting From
The Northern Illinois Conference
Rev. Kent L. Svendsen
Northern Illinois Conference Coordinator
Confessing Movement Within The UMC

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: April 1, 1999

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

"NOBODY WINS"

The impact of the Greg Dell trial can not be overstated. As I sat in the sanctuary of the 1st United Methodist Church of Downers Grove, I began to sense the important

influence it will have on the lives of all United Methodists. It is apparent that the real issue was not Greg's church and his ministry, but the fundamental way that we all look at ministry to those with same-sex attractions.

In all honesty, I would not what the power to tell another minister how to "be in ministry" in their particular setting. After all, as pastors, we often have to meet people where they are before we can ever hope to be in ministry to them. Perhaps that is why John Wesley was rather vague when he talked about certain aspects of ministry and very dogmatic in talking about others. However, John Wesley also recognized that we needed "a (doctrinal) fence around the garden" to protect Methodists from having their garden (ministries) torn up and destroyed. Unfortunately, that is exactly what has been happening and the problem will continue to grow worse as we become more and more public in our denominational disagreements.

The Dell trial held no victories for anyone. When the verdict was announced, everyone sat in stunned silence. During the trial, I had tried to sit as close to the Church Counsel as I could. I wanted to gain as much understanding of the situation as was possible by a mere observer. After both sides had rested and the "trial court" (jury) had left to deliberate, I then moved my observation spot to the back of the church. We waited for over four hours for their decision.

Rev. Greg Dell was found guilty. As the announcement of the verdict was given, what seemed like a funeral pall covered the room. Everyone was in stunned silence, I did not hear any "cheers" or "jeers". Directly in front of me was what appeared to be a same-sex couple who were embracing and crying. I watched as one gently wiped the tears from the other's eyes. The fact that Dell would continue in ministry until July and that there was also the possibility that the whole thing could be dismissed at executive session for lack of ratification, held little solace for them.

While I did agree with the verdict, I was also deeply saddened by the whole matter. For you see, we also suffered a great loss. In order to get the desired conviction, the Church Counsel (prosecution) had to carefully avoid putting homosexuality on trial instead of Greg Dell. That allowed for defense witnesses to make many statements attacking and condemning transforming ministries, without the validity of those statements being challenged. So the record now speaks for itself. Exodus type ministries have now been openly accused without challenge as being filled with people who are "lying to themselves" and doing great harm. After the trial, I was left with the impression that Dell was convicted simply because he broke the rules and not because those rules were right or just. The message that sends out is disastrous. It tells us that the best thing that could happen would be for the rules to

be changed so that good and faithful ministers like Dell won't be hurt by them. Dell became the innocent victim of an unjust system of laws. In that regard, we may have won a legal battle, but we have an even greater possibility of losing the war.

The great divide between differing viewpoints has now been pushed even wider and more pronounced, making it harder for real dialogue to take place. After the penalty phase had been completed and the decision had been announced, I simply got up and walked out the door. I felt as though I was leaving a wake, and unfortunately we all know that the next step after the wake is the funeral.

What will come next? Well, we know that Greg Dell has promised not to give up the fight and will continue to attack our Book of Discipline until it is changed to his liking. As a reserve military chaplain, the tactics of conflict are well known to me. One begins with small side skirmishes and uses the casualties from those fights to promote the cause and encourage people to join. Those efforts then continue until enough peaceful individuals resign themselves to the fact that they will have to either fight the war or surrender if they are to prevent further destruction. Finally, after raising great armies, the two opposing forces face off on the field of battle again and again. There will be much anguish at the great loss of denominational life and vitality that results from those battles.

Right now there seems to be little hope for peace. Some say that removing the restrictive language would also remove the problem. However, the restrictive language was put there in the first place to address this very issue. Some say that they will leave if the language doesn't change, some say they will if it does, and others say that a denominational split is the only answer. Personally, I plan to be in continual prayer to try to determine what God says about this whole matter. I would also like to invite everyone reading this to join me in a day of fasting on Friday, May 28th, 1999. I would also like to urge you to hold a prayer meeting that Friday night to plead for God's direction for our denomination as we prepare for our various annual conferences this year in which we will elect delegates to General Conference in the year 2000.

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen, Reporting

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: March 26, 1999

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

DELL TRIAL DAY TWO

Friday, March 26, 1999

8:00 A.M. The doors opened There was a prayer team presence on the sidewalk out front of the entrance and the Dell supporters were in the park behind the church. Security had been increased and they would not allow me in the door with my organizer. I had to leave it with a friend outside and hand carry my notebook inside.

8:48 A.M. The trial resumed late because one of the trial court (jury) members had been caught in traffic. (It was scheduled to start at 8:30) Bishop Tuell instructed us that he had been made aware that an alternate (from the trial court [jury]) had asked a question on Thursday. He indicated that alternates did not have the privilege and to ignore the question and it's answer.

8:51 A.M.- 8:56 A.M. James Walter Reed Jr. was called by the defense. Jim is a member of the Broadway UMC and is on both the Pastor Parish Relations Committee and the Committee on Religion and Race. He is also a West Point graduate and works as a Political Consultant. Jim was a character witness for Dell

8:56 A.M. - 8:57 A.M. Church Counsel asked him one question about his knowledge of our church discipline No questions from trail court (jury).

8:58 A.M. - 9:18 A.M. Terry VandenHoek was called by the defense as a character witness He is a emergency medical physician at the University of Chicago hospital and a member of Broadway UMC. Terry denied the validity of ex-gay ministries and said basically that they were all lying to themselves. Evidently he had tried it and it had not worked for him. He had also tried suicide once because of his struggle with sexual identity. Terry also questioned the scriptures and had reinterpretations of them which he said denied the condemnation of homosexuality.

Church Counsel did not cross examine this witness

9:18 A.M. - 9:23 A.M. The Trial Court (jury) asked a question concerning a quote from the Book of Discipline para 117. They were wondering if he saw any contradictions between pastoring to all people and the restriction on same-sex covenant ceremonies.

9:23 A.M. - 9:38 A.M. The defense called Carl Reinhardt as a witness. Carl is a member of the Broadway United Methodist Church and a High School teacher. He is also one of the two individuals for which Rev. Dell had performed the same-sex

covenant ceremony. He told his story

9:38 A.M. - 9:46 A.M. Church Counsel questioned him about the circumstances surrounding the planning of the service.

9:46 A.M. - 9:50 A.M. Re-direct by Defense

9:50 A.M. - 9:53 A.M. Re-cross examination

The Trial Court (jury) had one question

9:53 A.M. -9:58 A.M. Church Counsel called Keith Eccarius as a witness. Keith is the other individual for which Rev. Dell performed a same-sex covenant ceremony. Keith works as a Systems Analysis. His father died when he was 12. When he came out as gay, he was asked to leave the Assembly of God church he was attending.

10:00 A.M. - 10:43 A.M. Church Counsel questions Keith

The Trial Court had three questions for him

10:03 A.M. - 10:20 A.M. a recess was called

10:20 A.M. The Defense calls Greg Dell He is allowed to talk about the positive affect his ministry has had on people. He talked about, among other things, how every appointment is like a cross cultural appointment because of the great diversity among churches.

10:43 A.M. - 11:00 A.M. Church Counsel questions Dell and discusses specifically Judicial Council Decisions no. 833.

There were two questions from the Trial Court (jury).

The Defense rested.

The Church Counsel tried to call a rebuttal witness against Dr. Thomas Frank (who testified on Thursday), but since he had not arrived from the airport, the bishop refused to wait.

11:08 A.M. - 11:10 A.M. Defense gave their closing remarks

11:21 A.M. - 11:29 A.M. Church Counsel gave their closing remarks

The Trial Court (jury) deliberated from 11:30 A.M. - 4:00 P.M. or 4&1/2 hours

The verdict was 10 guilty and 3 not guilty for violation of the "Rule And Order of The

Church" 13 guilty and 0 not guilty for the specific charge of performing a same-sex ceremony

HE WAS FOUND GUILTY

4:12 P.M. - 4:21 P.M. The Trial Court (jury) received instructions from Bishop Toole on the reporting process. The Trial Court (jury) asked that some future effort be made to identify exactly constitutes the "Rule And Order of The Church" so that further juries won't have to determine it for themselves.

PENALTY PHASE BEGINS

4:21 P.M. - 4:47 P.M. Church Counsel calls Paul Lewis to testify. Paul is an attorney and is also a member of the Wesley United Methodist Church in Aurora. He testified that: 1. There is confusion among the young people because of the mixed signals they are receiving over issues of sexuality from the church; 2. People in his church have begun holding back on their giving, because of the Homosexual controversy; 3. He is concerned because he believes that at least one of their church leader had stepped down from their position because of these occurrences; 4. He believes that it will adversely affect the ability of the church to bring new people into the church because it sends them an unclear message concerning our beliefs and practices; and 5. He testified that Dell's actions had stopped dialogue within parts of the church, because it had turned honest dialogue into harsh rhetoric which was aimed to attack rather than to inform.

There was no cross examination and no Trial Court (jury) questions

The Defense's second witness was to be Rev. Awilda Nolla, who is part of the Hispanic caucus, but she had not arrived. Bishop Toole announced a dinner recess until 6:00 P.M..

At 6:00 P.M. it was announced that Rev. Nolla's car was stuck in traffic because of a sever accident and she would be late. We waited until 7:00 P.M., but she had not arrived. It was decided that when she arrived, she would be sandwiched in between Defense witnesses and if she didn't arrive after their second witness, that she would not be allowed to speak.

7:06 P.M. - 7:14 P.M. The Defense gave their Opening Statement

7:14 P.M. - 7:27 P.M. They called Rev. Darius Thomas as their first witness. Rev. Thomas is the associate pastor at the 1st Wesley Academy.

He spoke of being married to his wife Penny in 1967 in Texas. They are a ethnically

mixed couple with Darius being a person of color and Penny being Caucasian. The minister who married them had to break the civil law because it was illegal to marry them in Texas because they were a mixed couple.

7:27 P.M. - 7:30 P.M. Church Counsel cross examined him. It was pointed out that it was the unjust civil law which was against their marriage and not the church law. The minister did not break church law to perform the ceremony.

7:30 P.M. - 7:40 P.M. Redirect questioning They discussed the questionable language found in the 1960 and 1964 Books of Discipline as concerns "mixed marriages".

7:40 P.M. - 7:43 P.M. A very short re-cross examination, there were on questions from the Trial Court (jury).

7:45 P.M. -7:50 P.M. The Defense called Rev. Phil Blackwell who is the Council Director for the conference. The Defense also presented for evidence 600 letters of support for Rev. Dell over the objection of the Church Counsel.

8:02 P.M. - 8:10 P.M. The Defense cross examines; No questions from the Trial Court (jury).

Awilda Nolla had not arrived by then, so she would not be allowed to speak. (In fact, to the best of my knowledge she never arrived and rumor has it she had returned home because the accident had caused her such a sever delay.)

8:12 P.M. - 8:22 P.M. The Defense calls Rev. Greg Dell He was allowed to give a prepared statement and in doing so respond to the question: "What penalty should be applied?" His reply. "What penalty will best serve the church." He asked for censure and reprimand. He also promised not to do another same-sex ceremony for political ends.

8:22 P.M. - 8:23 P.M. Church Counsel cross examines Dell stated that he would not promise to stop doing same-sex commitment services.

8:23 P.M. - 8:24 P.M. Redirect "Do you have any planned?" Answer: "No. Not right now."

8:24 P.M. - 8:26 P.M. Defense gave it's final statement and asked for reprimand or censure

8:26 P.M. - 8:29 P.M. Church Counsel reminded the Trial Court (jury) that this decision would go way beyond Greg's local church and our conference in its effect.

Bishop Toole then gave instructions to the Trial Court (jury). He indicated that at least 9 votes would be required to come to a consensus on any penalty. Here are the possible penalties which Rev. Dell faced: 1. expulsion from the church; 2. The withdrawal of his credentials of ordination; 3. The suspension of his rights to exercise the functions of his office; 4. or fix a lessor penalty. para 2627 H(1)

8:30 P.M. - 11:18 P.M. 2 hours and 45 minutes The Trial Court (jury) deliberates and makes a decision

During this time there were groups singing and praying in the sanctuary. I decided to join the reconciling group who were singing up front as a sign of peace and friendship. They opened the circle and allowed me in and eventually a significant number of evangelicals joined also. It all went well and was a powerful spiritual experience until they started singing "She's my savior", at which time the remaining evangelicals separated from the group. A small group of evangelicals then went upstairs into a small alcove to pray that the outcome would be God's will and to sing and worship Jesus Christ.

THE PENALTY IS ANNOUNCED

It was decided by the Trial Court (jury) that Rev. Gregory Dell would have his Elder's orders suspended, beginning 1 July, 1999 until either he submitted a signed document that he would comply to the Book of Discipline's requirements to not perform same-sex covenant ceremonies or the prohibition is lifted by General Conference or Judicial Council action.

The Defense asked for a ruling on the pledge aspect of the penalty

Bishop Toole said he had no authority to rule it out of order and that the Trial Court (jury) had the leeway to make such a decision

The Defense then asked for a stay of penalty because of ministry commitments by Rev. Dell

Bishop Toole granted a stay of penalty until July 5th, 1999 so that Rev. Dell could perform a heterosexual wedding on July 3rd. A request for one specific October date for another heterosexual wedding was denied.

If what Rev. Dell has proclaimed in the past and at the trial is true, this is not the end of the story. So, To Be Continued!

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen Reporting From The Northern Illinois Conference

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: March 25, 1999

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

Now going directly to 23 states: CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, ID, KY, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NV, NC, NY, OK, TX, WI

GREG DELL TRIAL DAY ONE

(Many of the names may not be spelled correctly because of no access to transcripts)

Notes From The Trial

7:30 AM There was a prayer team presence in support of the church counsel outside the front of the church on the sidewalk. The remaining prayer team members were holding a vigil at a church a short commute away. On the other hand, those supporting Dell were located behind the church in a park. They were matching in a "circle of care" with signs and the scene had a somewhat carnival atmosphere.

During the morning the "trial court" (jury) was selected in a closed session. The doors were open and the trial began at about 1:00 P.M.

Note: No name tags, arm bands, etc. were allowed in the sanctuary of 1st United Methodist of Downers Grove, Illinois.

1:00 P.M. - 1:20 P.M. Bishop Toole explained the process and gave instructions as to how the trial would be held.

Dell pleads not guilty

1:20P.M. - 1:43 P.M. Rev Steve Williams, Church Counsel, gives his opening remarks which included quotes from 306.4f, 324, 2624 (1e), 65 (c) along with others from the Book Of Discipline.

Defense waves opening remarks until they present their case.

1:45 P.M.- 2:40 P.M. Rev. Williams begins the prosecution by calling Bishop George Bashore to the stand Paragraphs 304.1 (i), 324, 65C, 2601, in the Book of Discipline

were talked about along with Judicial Council decision 694 "Ordination is a gift with responsibilities and it is a privilege." The Historic examination was discussed.

2:40 P.M. - 2:50 P.M. a recess was called.

2:40 P.M. - 3:24 P.M. Rev. Larry Pickins, Defense For Greg Dell, cross examines Bishop Bashore References included Paragraph 49 & 304(i) in the Book of Discipline Rev. Pickins attempted to undermine the relevance concerning church law and its application.

No redirect

3:28 P.M.- 3:55 P.M. Rev Greg Dell called by church counsel His ministry history was examined: Deacon 1969 & Elder in the NIC in 1972 He admitted to having performed the ceremony and of knowing of the prohibition at the time.

Defense asks no questions of Dell.

3:58 P.M. - 4:08 P.M. Bishop C. Joseph Sprague is called as a witness Questions consisted of the charges that were brought against Rev. Dell and that process.

Defense had no questions.

There were a number of questions from the jury 4:08 P.M. - 4:15 P.M.

Prosecution rests their case.

Since the first defense witness had not arrived from the airport, the session was recessed until 5:45 P.M.

5:45 P.M. Session reconvened.

6:00 P.M. - 6:28 P.M. The Defense begins with their opening statement.

By this time, attendance in the sanctuary was probably somewhere between 225 - 275 There were plenty of extra tickets for Thursday, but there may not be for Friday (Tickets were needed along with strict security to assure order was maintained).

6:28 P.M. - 7:01 P.M. Dr. Thomas Frank (sp?) was called as a defense witness (Chandler School of Theology which is part of Emory University) He had written several books on church polity and organization Paragraphs 324, 2624.1, 15.6, 629.4, were among the passages discussed from the Book of Discipline. His testimony as an expert witness put into question the validity of charging someone with a violation of rule and order since it was a general term and not a specific item

such as sexual misconduct, etc. He indirectly indicated that it would be a subjective judgment by the church counsel (jury) concerning whether what Dell did was a "violation of rule and order" or not. He talked about the changing system and the vagueness of polity concerning this and other issues.

7:01 P.M. - 7:19 P.M. Church Counsel questions the witness, but the vagueness issue, at least from my perspective, did not get resolved.

There was redirect by the defense and recross. There were also questions raised by the trial court.

The jury then asked questions until 7:33 P.M.

The Defense called Rev. Phil Blackwell who is on the conference staff. The Church Counsel made a motion to deny. There was a lengthy discussion of the validity of the witness. Bishop Toole upheld the motion to deny.

The Defense then scrambles since they had told the rest of their witnesses that they could leave. Fortunately two had stayed behind.

8:00 P.M. - 8:13 P.M. John McDermit (sp?) was called as a defense witness. He is Executive Director of the Lakeview Coalition, a community action group in Dell's community. He was asked about Dells activities to promote the community.

8:13 P.M. - 8:15 P.M. Defense cross examined simply asking what he knew about our church law (which was nothing).

There was redirect. Trial court had no questions.

8:18 P.M. - 8:24 P.M. Elizabeth Michelle Cutter age 16 was called for the defense. She was in Dell's last church. She read a poem she had written about Dell and talked about how he had encouraged her to be involved in church and to think for herself.

No Church counsel questions.

Trial Court had 1 question.

The session was closed until 8:30 A.M. tomorrow, Friday 26th.

It is expected that the Defense will finish tomorrow and the trial court will be sent to decide Dell's fate.

Rev. Kent Svendsen reporting from Northern Illinois 11:40 P.M.

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: March 3, 1999

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

A Day of Prayer and Fasting for our Denomination

(Found in Minutes of Several Conversations, *from the year 1744 to the year 1789*, Wesley's Works Vol. VIII pg. 328, printed in 1991 [I believe there is a later edition out now])

Q. 56. What can be done in order to revive the work of God where it is decayed?

"Whenever you can, appoint prayer meetings, and particularly on Friday."

"Let a fast be observed in all our societies, the last Friday in August, November, February, and May."

Is the work of God in decay? Surly it is! Are we John Wesley Methodists? I will not speak for you, but as for myself, it is the Lord God I serve and in doing that I am following the example of John Wesley whom few served better or more passionately.

Therefore, I officially declare Friday, May 28th, 1999 as a day of fasting and urge all Methodists everywhere to organize a Friday night prayer meeting to plead for the spiritual life of our denomination and for our nation.

If possible try to organize this within you church and even encourage several churches to cooperate together. Invite other denominations together to pray with you for our nation. This is the key for revival to break out within our denomination! God's people either want to observe or lead that which is observed. But, God said, if we "humble" ourselves and "pray" and "seek my (i.e. God's) face" (II Chronicles 7:14). Are we doing that AS A DENOMINATION? I think not.

Let us pray as a people called Methodists, let us also pray with our Christian brothers and sisters everywhere! Has the nation and our denomination "decayed" enough for us to put off going out to eat, attending sports events, organizing new study committees, electing officers in renewal and concerned evangelical organizations, and finally, talking about prayer, but spending little time doing it. (I

know there are many prayer warriors out there, I am not speaking to you except for you to be organizers of this work.) Let us gather in our sanctuaries across the nation and put on our foreheads again the ashes of repentance and in grief, be sorrowful and cry out for our world, praying in groanings so deep that the Spirit has to speak for us before the throne of God! Let us stop walking in the flesh and begin walking in the Spirit.

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: March 3, 1999

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

Dell trial: March 25, 26, & 27

[Reliable sources](#) tell me that Dell supporters are being brought in from all over the country to protest his trial.

Therefore, there will be a *rally for righteousness* across from the church each morning from 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM and those supporting the Disciplinary Stand are encouraged to attend.

First United Methodist Church
1032 Maple Ave.
Downers Grove, Illinois 60515
630 968 7120

Please pass the word that this will be a major spiritual battle for the life and ministry of our beloved denomination.

Please pray for Church Counsel Steve Williams as he represents the church in prosecuting this individual who has chosen to bring great damage and destruction to our denomination.

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: March 3, 1999

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

Now going directly to 23 states: CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, ID, KY, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NV, NC, NY, OK, TX, WI

Bishop Sprague called me this evening in response to my FAX. He said that a news article had been published which stated that Dell was going to perform another ceremony soon. The Bishop assures me that the article was in error and that there are no plans for any such ceremony by (Mr.) Dell. I told him that I would pass that word on to my evangelical friends.

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: March 1, 1999

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

I was informed today that Greg Dell is planning to perform another same-sex commitment service at his church in the near future. While this might be an unsubstantiated rumor, I felt that you should be aware of the fact that the information was being passed around. If it is true, it only adds to the damage that he has already done. Mr. Dell has shown a total disregard for the welfare and people of our denomination. He has also betrayed his fellow ministers with whom he is in covenant. But this latest rumor does not adequately represent all that Mr. Dell has been up to recently.

Mr. Dell was recently interviewed by the Chicago Tribune and an article concerning him appeared in their Sunday Magazine Section (February 21, 1999). In that article, Greg Dell all but openly dares the denomination to take action against him. It appears that he wants to be a martyr for the cause and is very self-righteous and arrogant about it. In the past, he has taken public stands against our military, our government, and secular social systems, all of which were well within the scope and precepts set down by our church discipline. Unfortunately, this time his enemy is not some organization or activity on the outside, but the very denomination which offered him a forum for social action and pastoral ministry. We are now the enemy that he is attacking.

Tonight, March 1st, Mr. Dell will be on a panel discussion that is being taped for airing on the "Different Drummers" program (Channel 2 television in Chicago). He will be sitting on the panel as a "United Methodist Minister" and answering questions for UMYF youth concerning issues of sexuality! I know that he is billed as such, because I am the other "United Methodist Minister" who will be on the panel. Another individual, Doug Dyer from "Transformed By Grace Ministries" out of Chicago, had originally accepted the invitation. However, Lynn Bosscher, Assistant Producer of the show, told me the invitation was taken back, so they could have "another United Methodist Minister" on the show.

It is pretty obvious that Mr. Dell is going to cause just about as much damage to the United Methodist Church as he can and that he really doesn't care about the negative results. I have written my bishop, begging him to defend our church from these kinds of open and blatant attacks on church discipline. What actions he will take are yet to be determined.

At a recent continuing education event (The John Wesley Institute) there was much discussion concerning the upcoming church trial of Mr. Dell. To my surprise, one individual who claimed to have no firm stand on the issue, stated that he would not vote to convict, if he were on the jury. He simply didn't think that the disciplinary rules should apply in this case. Considering this insight and the upcoming trial, there is an important question that we should be asking ourselves. Mainly this: If he is doing this kind of thing now, what will happen after the trial if there are not enough jurors willing to keep their covenant and be loyal to our discipline? I don't know about the climate among clergy in Nebraska (Creech) or California (recent covenant service), but in Northern Illinois Conference there are enough sympathizers, and probably enough willing to do jury nullification, in order to prevent Dell from being convicted. I guess only time will tell. .

You notice that I never used the title reverend to describe Mr. Dell. I just wanted to let you know, that was not an oversight, but for a very good reason. Mr. Dell has forfeited that sacred title by his total disregard for his ordination vows which state: "In covenant with other elders, will you be loyal to The United Methodist Church, accepting its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline..." (The United Methodist Book Of Worship pg. 676.) If he is really the man of integrity that he claims to be. Rather than going on a campaign which will bring great harm and destruction to our denomination, shouldn't he surrender his credentials in protest and walk away, rather than violate the covenant he made before God? If he were to do so, I would support him in that decision and even suggest that he be rightly compensated for his long years of service and dedication. Along those same lines, if there are churches which cannot abide by the discipline, I would also support a way for them

to separate from us without having to walk away from the property they worked so hard to build up and maintain. Isn't that what the Book of Discipline is all about? A system established in which everyone agrees to follow its rules and affirm its doctrine. Isn't that the mortar and substance of our connection?

On another note: I was recently invited to attend a four session "neutral" study on homosexuality at a United Methodist Church in our conference. The invitation came from a member of that church who had shown interest in the Confessing Movement in the past and had contacted me before. I was interested in attending to see exactly just how "neutral" it really was going to be. I was also somewhat surprised that such a study had been put together so quickly by staff within our conference office. I have been asking and begging for such a thing on a district and conference level for quite some time now, only with no results.

I told the church member that out of professional courtesy, we should contact his pastor and ask him if it was all right for me to attend and observe. (The church member wanted me to give my perspective on the event and be able to respond to the material presented.) I called the pastor of the church and was I ever surprised. He was furious! He forbid me to come to the event at his church and even suggested that it would be "interfering with his ministry" (a chargeable offense under the discipline) for me to even meet and talk to any of his church members, even if it were outside of the church setting. He further told me that simply by sitting in the group, that I would destroy the "neutral setting". Evidently there is a lot more fear out there than just homophobia.

For "News From The Front", this is Rev. Kent L. Svendsen reporting.

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen, Pastor
Reynolds United Methodist Church

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

Dateline: February 25, 1998

Rev. Kent L. Svendsen

Northern Illinois Conference

United Methodist Church

Rev. Dell will be on trial Thursday, March 25th

United Methodist Church - Saturday March 27th 1ST UMC of Downers Grove, Illinois It is open to the public and I will try to be there and report back daily on my News From The Front e-mail news