

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

The Rev. Gregory Dell, (773) 935-9354

Courtney Cosgrove, (773) 868-4022

Penalty Upheld for Ousted Pastor Gay-Supportive United Methodist Pastor's Suspension Continues

Chicago, Ill. (September 17) The suspension of a United Methodist pastor for conducting a service of Holy Union for two gay men in his congregation was upheld today. The denomination's "Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals" affirmed a decision rendered on March 25 by the Church Trial Court that found the Rev. Gregory Dell guilty of "Disobedience to the Order and Discipline of the United Methodist Church."

The Committee on Appeals altered the original unspecified length of the suspension period, instead suspending Pastor Dell from July 5, 1999, to June 30, 2000. The Committee also upheld the Trial Court's ruling that the suspension can be ended when Rev. Dell "signs and submits a document to the Bishop of the Northern Illinois Conference which states that he will comply with 65C of the Discipline," according to the Committee's decision.

"This struggle is far from over," Rev. Dell said. "I can't say I'm not disappointed. But the deepest injury is not to me. It is first to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons and their supporters involved in this struggle. They are the ones who so consistently have been threatened with or have already been the victims of exclusion or violence from church and society.

"In a very fundamental way, the decision by the Committee on Appeals is a loss for The United Methodist Church and the overwhelming majority of its members who are not supporters of mean-spirited legalism, bigotry and exclusion," Dell continued. "At the same time, I am clear that this struggle is nowhere close to being resolved."

The Jurisdictional Appeals Committee met on Monday, August 9, 1999, to hear the appeal of the guilty verdict and suspension penalty assigned to Pastor Dell. The Committee heard one hour of arguments for Pastor Dell's defense by the Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens and one hour of arguments by the Church's counsel, the Rev. Steve Williams.

Because of the Committee's decision, the suspension of Rev. Dell will continue. He will not be able to [return to the pulpit](#) of Broadway United

Methodist Church, where he had served as pastor since 1995. He, however, will continue in his role as Director of In All Things Charity, a national movement sponsored by Broadway Church that seeks to change the Church's discriminatory policies against homosexual individuals.

The Rev. Phylemon Titus, a clergy member from the Detroit Annual Conference, chairs the Jurisdictional Appeals Committee that upheld Dell's verdict. He and the Committee's other eight members were elected by the eight state regional bodies of the denomination in July 1996 to hear appeals of Church Trials. The Committee's deliberation on Rev. Dell's case marked its first work since that election. Representing Rev. Dell at the Appeal were his counsel the Rev. Dr. Pickens and assistant counsels, Ted Swain of Gould and Radner, and Antonious Porch of Morrison & Foerster LLP.

Rev. Dell was pastor of Broadway United Methodist Church when he conducted a Holy Union service on September 19, 1998, for two men in that congregation. Rev. Dell's bishop filed a complaint following the service, saying that while the bishop himself disagreed with the church law prohibiting conducting of such services, the act did leave Dell liable to the charge of "disobedience."

The Church trial that convicted him also imposed a penalty of a "suspension from ministerial office" until Rev. Dell signed a statement agreeing to uphold the prohibition or until the rule was changed by the denomination. In refusing to sign such a statement Dell said, "Approximately 30% of the congregation I serve is gay or lesbian. My ordination requires me to be in ministry to all persons without discrimination based on their identities. I will not withhold a ministry from some which is available to others solely because of an unjust church law grounded in bigotry and exclusion."

In spite of his conviction, Dell was elected in June 1999 to serve as a delegate at the United Methodist General Conference. If his suspension is in effect at the convening of that conference, he will be ineligible to be seated as a voting delegate.

"My hope remains that at the May 2000 meeting, our denomination will have the grace and humility to say we have a long way to go before reaching a faith consensus on issues surrounding sexual orientation," Dell said. "As we make that statement of the obvious, we must change the legislative and judicial atmosphere from its present hostility to one of generosity and charity.

"These are matters very close to the root of what it means to be a faithful Christian for many people with many different perspectives," Dell continued. "This is no time for the church to be self-righteous and narrow about that which is so painful for so many."

| [Affirmation](#) | [CORNET](#) | [CORNET News](#) | [Greg Dell](#) |