

Lesbian minister to face Methodist church trial

by [Daniel Burke](#)

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(RNS) United Methodists will begin a trial Tuesday (June 21) against a Wisconsin minister who's accused of breaking church rules by celebrating a same-sex marriage and being in a lesbian relationship.

The Rev. Amy DeLong, 44, of Osceola, Wis., could be defrocked if the 13-member jury composed of local clergy finds her guilty of either charge.

A minister for 14 years, DeLong agreed to officiate at a same-sex ceremony in 2009, the same year she and her partner registered as a couple under Wisconsin's domestic partnership law, according to United Methodist News Service.

The United Methodist Church, which has about 11 million members -- about 7.7 million in the U.S. -- calls homosexual activity "incompatible with Christian teaching."

The denomination bars "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" from ministry, and prohibits all clergy from celebrating same-sex marriages, even in states where it is legal.

While hundreds of clergy in recent months have petitioned the UMC to lift the bans, polls and church conferences indicate that a majority of ministers favor retaining them. Moreover, the church is growing most rapidly in Africa, where Christians tend to hold conservative views on sexuality.

The church's highest court upheld the bans last April, overturning a move by Methodists in New York to allow clergy to marry same-sex partners. "The church's definition of marriage ... is clear and

unequivocal and is limited to the union of one man and one woman," the court ruled.

In 2005, a Philadelphia minister was defrocked after she told her congregation that she was in a lesbian relationship.