

Methodist scholar may face trial over officiating at same-sex wedding

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Thomas W. Ogletree, a United Methodist theologian and retired dean at Yale Divinity School, is facing a potential church trial for officiating last year at the same-sex wedding of his son.

Ogletree, 79, a Yale Divinity professor emeritus, told United Methodist News Service that as a professor, he rarely has been asked to perform weddings. When his son asked him to officiate, he said he felt “deeply moved.”

The wedding of his son, Thomas Rimbey Ogletree, to Nicholas Haddad on October 20 took place at the Yale Club in New York City. The father in a statement described the ceremony as “one of the most significant ritual acts of my life as a pastor.”

Some clergy in the New York regional conference filed a complaint against Ogletree after his son’s wedding announcement appeared in the *New York Times* on October 21. Randall C. Paige, pastor of Christ Church in Port Jefferson Station, New York, led the clergy filing the complaint.

The State of New York legalized same-gender marriage in 2011.

Ogletree said he and Paige met in January in an attempt to find a just resolution to the dispute and avoid a trial. Ogletree refused to apologize or promise never again to officiate at a same-sex union. Paige has declined comment to the *Times*, which published the story May 6.

“I told him that I am retired, I am almost 80 years old; it is highly unlikely I’ll be asked to perform another wedding,” Ogletree said to United Methodist News Service. “But if I were asked to perform such a wedding, then I could not in good conscience refuse.”

The case is among the first to go public since 2011, when more than 1,000 active and retired United Methodist clergy across the United States started to sign pledges

declaring their willingness to defy the denomination's long-standing ban on affirming such unions.

Ogletree was among the 208 clergy signers, supported by 869 lay signers, in the New York Conference. He said he joined the act of ecclesial disobedience to be in "solidarity with those pushing for change in the United Methodist Church."

Those pledges sparked objections from other clergy and laypeople who urged the Council of Bishops to make it clear that they will enforce the Book of Discipline on this issue. More than 2,800 clergy and nearly 13,500 laity signed those petitions.

The bishops council responded in November 2011 that they would uphold the church's law.

Thomas Lambrecht, the vice president and general manager of the unofficial evangelical caucus Good News, said he thinks the church's position on homosexuality "is soundly based on scripture."

Resolutions calling for change at the United Methodist Annual Conferences, held every four years, have failed each time. The growing numbers of delegates at the quadrennial meetings from traditionalist churches in Africa and Asia appear to doom the chances for change, observers say.

Whether Ogletree actually will face a church trial remains uncertain. Ogletree told United Methodist News Service that the church counsel could dismiss the case.

Matthew M. Berryman, the executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network, said his group alongside the New York group MIND (Methodists in New Directions), plans to support Ogletree and his family—regardless of what happens—with prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.