

Retired Methodist pastor conducts same-sex union

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William McElvaney, a retired Dallas pastor and former seminary president, defied United Methodist strictures against presiding over a same-sex marriage ceremony on March 1 but was uncertain whether he would lose his clergy credentials as a result.

The public ceremony was distinctive in that the three principals were octogenarians. McElvaney, 85, conducted the nuptial for George Harris, 80, and Jack Evans, 84. The couple have been partners for 53 years and are longtime members of Northaven United Methodist Church in Dallas.

A crowd of more than 200 attended the service at Midway Hills Christian Church in Dallas, applauding several times. The host church, part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), offered its facility for the event. But the reception was held at Northaven, where McElvaney is pastor emeritus.

McElvaney is a former president of the Methodist-aligned Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City and has also taught at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology.

Asked by United Methodist News Service if he expects to have charges filed against him under church law, McElvaney said, "I have no idea. We'll just have to see." Methodist bishop Michael McKee of the North Texas Conference had no immediate comment.

McElvaney sat in a chair while conducting the marriage. He has liver cancer and underwent radiation treatment three days before.

Frank Schaefer, a Pennsylvania minister, lost his credentials in November after he admitted to conducting his son's same-sex wedding. Schaefer also refused to promise that he would never again perform another same-gender union.

Dozens of other UMC pastors in the United States—some retired but others active—have declared they will disobey the church rules in such cases. More than a dozen North Texas Methodist clergy attended the service in Dallas.