

Methodists avoid trial of pastors in complaint over same-sex wedding

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) in the [November 12, 2014](#) issue

United Methodists in Pennsylvania have agreed to resolve a complaint against three dozen clergy who blessed a same-sex wedding without taking the case to trial.

A complaint was filed against 36 United Methodist pastors who officiated at a November 9, 2013, wedding for two men at Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia. Philadelphia area bishop Peggy Johnson announced October 3 that the complaint had been resolved.

The resolution calls for the officiating clergy to acknowledge that they violated rules of the United Methodist Book of Discipline. In return, the complaint will be withdrawn.

“Though I may sympathize with the pastoral concerns of the respondents, it is unacceptable to disregard and disobey the Book of Discipline,” Johnson said. “I pledge that, in future cases where clergy within my jurisdiction officiate or host a same-gender ceremony, any complaints that I receive will be handled swiftly and with significant and appropriate consequences, which may include a trial, involuntary leave of absence without pay, or other significant consequences, in accordance with the Discipline and in consultation with the Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference.”

The pastors officiating at the Philadelphia ceremony acted in solidarity with Frank Schaefer, who also faced a church trial in Johnson’s area. A church court reinstated Schaefer this summer after he was defrocked in November 2013 for officiating at his son’s gay wedding.

The Philadelphia ceremony was held before same-sex marriage was legalized in Pennsylvania earlier this year. United Methodist rules prohibit clergy from participating in and churches from hosting same-sex union ceremonies.

Against the backdrop of a campaign to “Stop the Church Trials,” some Methodist bishops have tried to sidestep court proceedings. Saying “church trials produce no winners,” a bishop in New York agreed to drop charges against Thomas Ogletree, a

former dean of Yale Divinity School, who presided at his son's gay wedding.  
—Religion News Service

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