

## Defrocked UMC pastor reinstated after LGBTQ bans lifted

by [John W. Coleman](#)

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Beth Stroud (right) hugs Bishop John Schol after she was reinstated as UMC clergy on May 21 during a closed clergy session of the Eastern Pennsylvania annual conference in Wildwood, New Jersey. (Photo by Shari DeAngelo, courtesy of the UMC Eastern Pennsylvania Conference)

On May 3, its final day, the United Methodist Church's general conference voted to allow for the reinstatement of clergy who previously were defrocked under the denomination's LGBTQ bans.

About three weeks later, on the first evening of the Eastern Pennsylvania annual conference, a closed session of about 200 ordained clergy voted overwhelmingly to

readmit former clergywoman Irene Elizabeth “Beth” Stroud as a full member of its body.

Stroud’s ministerial orders as an elder were removed in 2004 after a church trial in which she admitted to being in a committed relationship with another woman.

Stroud was reinstated with loud applause, hymn singing, and tearful hugs by her fellow clergy. Afterward, Stroud was given a red clergy stole and joined her colleagues in the procession onto the annual conference floor for their opening ordination and commissioning worship service.

“I’m deeply grateful for the discernment of the clergy of Eastern Pennsylvania,” said Bishop John Schol, who leads both the Eastern Pennsylvania and Greater New Jersey annual conferences. “And I’m grateful that the church has opened up to LGBTQ persons.”

After [more than a half century of debate and defiance](#) over the place of LGBTQ people in the denomination, general conference delegates voted earlier this month to end decades-old bans on [the ordination of “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy](#) and [the officiation of same-sex weddings](#).

Schol, who retires in August, expressed his deep admiration for Stroud who served as his associate pastor at West Chester United Methodist Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania, more than two decades ago. Stroud then served as pastor of First United Methodist Church of Germantown in Philadelphia before she was defrocked.

“I couldn’t be prouder as your bishop, and you couldn’t have given me a better gift as I retire,” Schol told the clergy gathering.

During the evening worship service, after Schol invited anyone interested in pursuing ministry to come forward, he suddenly knelt before Stroud at the stage front. As the congregation sang the hymn *Child of God*, she laid her hands on his shoulders and quietly prayed for him.

The worshippers, numbering nearly 500, then began to sing *Draw the Circle Wide*, the hymn that has become an unofficial anthem of the United Methodist movement to extend full ministerial, membership, and marital rights to LGBTQ members.

After being defrocked, Stroud briefly served her church as a lay ministerial aide. She then moved to New Jersey where, after earning a doctorate in religion from

Princeton University in 2018, she taught and lectured at several schools, including her alma mater.

Stroud was recently hired to teach history of religion at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, one of the denomination's 13 affiliated seminaries. She will join the faculty there this summer. —United Methodist News Service