



Methodist Church Tries Lesbian Pastor

Friday, March 19, 2004

Associated Press

BOTHELL, Wash. — A Methodist minister on trial for declaring herself a lesbian said Thursday that God called her into the ministry, "and I just can't believe that God makes a mistake."

The Rev. **Karen Dammann** ([search](#)), 47, is charged with "practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible to Christian teachings." Church law prohibits ordination of practicing homosexuals. She has pleaded not guilty and is being tried before a jury of 13 pastors.

Nine votes are needed for conviction, which could mean a loss of ministry.

"God called me into ordained ministry and I just can't believe that God makes a mistake," Dammann said during a break in the second day of her trial at Bothell United Methodist Church.

Dammann, on leave as pastor of First United Methodist Church in **Ellensburg** ([search](#)), 95 miles east of Seattle, also said she was hopeful about the trial's outcome. "It's possible that this will be a prophetic moment for the church," she said.

During Thursday's testimony, Dammann's defense team tried to show that church officials knew Dammann was a lesbian five years ago — and took no action against her.

The Rev. **Elaine Stanovsky** ([search](#)), who supervised Dammann when she was a pastor at a Seattle church, said she visited Dammann and her partner, Meredith Savage, shortly after Savage had a baby boy, who is now 5.

Stanovsky said Dammann told her she was considering asking for family leave to care for Savage, who also was having problems with her hip.

Stanovsky said she did not believe Dammann was admitting her homosexuality, but was aware they were a family. "They were making decisions as a family. They were caring for one another as a family," she said.

Two years later, Dammann sent a letter to church officials acknowledging her sexual orientation.

Bishop Elias Galvan of the church's **Pacific Northwest Conference** ([search](#)) received the letter and forwarded a complaint against her. He said he was simply following church rules.

Later Thursday, retired Bishop Jack Tuell testified that church law and the social principles on which it is based are ambiguous and difficult to interpret.

"It is my opinion that the United Methodist Church has never declared the practice of homosexuality to be incompatible with Christian teaching," said Tuell, who has a law degree and wrote a book on Methodist Church law.

The jury also heard testimony on the church's earlier struggle with admitting minorities to the ministry and how that paralleled the turmoil over homosexuals.

"I, being an African-American, was incompatible, both in the nation and within the church," said retired Rev. Gilbert

Caldwell. He said the church must move on from its focus on homosexuality when there are more important issues such as hunger and war.

The trial continues Friday.

United Methodist officials have said the trial is the first against a homosexual pastor in the denomination since 1987, when the credentials of the Rev. Rose Mary Denman of New Hampshire were revoked.

Last week, Dammann married Savage in Portland, Ore., where officials began allowing gay marriages earlier this month.

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