



## CHURCH TRIAL Q&As

### **What is a church trial?**

In a United Methodist church trial, an individual responds to a charge or charges of having violated denominational law, as set forth in the Church's *Book of Discipline*.

A trial is described as a "last resort" in the *Book of Discipline*. When a complaint is filed against someone, the matter is first addressed in a supervisory process and usually resolved. If resolution doesn't occur, the complaint may be forwarded to the Conference Committee on Investigation, which conducts hearings and decides whether grounds exist for converting the complaint to a charge for trial. The Committee's decision to move forward with a trial involving Amy DeLong was communicated on December 10, 2010.

The Conference bishop designates another bishop to preside over the trial, and a jury or "trial court" of 13 clergy members (and two alternates) from the respondent's Annual Conference — in this case, the Wisconsin Conference UMC — hears the case. (Nine votes are necessary to convict.)

### **Why is Rev. Amy DeLong on trial?**

She is charged with conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions, and being a self-avowed practicing homosexual -- both in violation of ¶2702.1b of *The 2008 Book of Discipline*, which outlines the United Methodist Church law.

### **What is the denomination's official policy on homosexuality?**

The United Methodist Church, in *The 2008 Book of Discipline*, states that homosexuals are people of sacred worth. However, it regards the practice of homosexuality as incompatible with Christian teachings. The Church forbids the ordination and appointment of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals." It also forbids the celebration of same-sex unions by its clergy and in its sanctuaries.

### **Who will preside over the trial?**

The original presiding officer, Bishop Bruce Blake, has recused himself from the trial for personal reasons. Bishop Linda Lee has selected Bishop Clay Lee as the new presiding officer.

### **Who is representing the Church and Respondent?**

Rev. Thomas Lambrecht is the Counsel for the Church. Rev. Scott Campbell is the Counsel for the Respondent.

**When will the trial be held?**

The church trial originally scheduled to begin on April 11, 2011 is now scheduled for Tuesday, June 21, 2011 at Peace United Methodist Church in Kaukauna, WI.

**How are the members of the trial court selected?**

The 13 members and two alternates are chosen by the presiding officer—with input from the Counsels for the Respondent and the Church—from a pool of Wisconsin Conference clergy. *The Book of Discipline* specifies that at least 35 pastors must be named to the jury pool. The bishop's cabinet — the district superintendents — recommends the names for the pool. Special consideration is given to ensuring that the pool is diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and gender. The counsel for each side has up to four peremptory challenges, as well as unlimited challenges for cause. The alternates will sit as observers and will be prepared to serve if one or two of the original jurors are unable to sit.

**What are the possible outcomes of the trial?**

The possible outcomes are listed in *The Book of Discipline*. But we cannot predict the outcome. This is in the hands of the jury.

**Will the trial be open to the public?**

Yes. The United Methodist Church *Book of Discipline* provides for open court proceedings at the request of the respondent. However, seating will be limited. No cameras or audio or video recording equipment will be allowed in the courtroom.

**What happens during the trial?**

The trial is convened by the Bishop and then, by Discipline, she leaves the proceedings. The presiding officer acts as the judge during the trial, but has no authority to determine guilt or innocence. The Counsel for the Church represents the Church. The Counsel for the Respondent represents the person on trial. The trial begins with the selection of the jury as described above. Once selected, both sides of the trial present their case and can question witnesses. This is followed by the deliberation of the jury and a determination of guilt or innocence, and other possible outcomes. If found guilty, the Respondent can appeal to the Committee on Appeals of the Jurisdictional Conference.

**Where can I find out more information about *The Book of Discipline* and the United Methodist judicial process?**

Refer to these links:

***The 2008 Book of Discipline—Judicial Administration***

[http://www.wisconsinumc.org/content/documents/2008BookofDiscipline-Judicial Administration.pdf](http://www.wisconsinumc.org/content/documents/2008BookofDiscipline-Judicial%20Administration.pdf)

***GCFA Administration and Judicial Procedures Handbook***

<http://www.wisconsinumc.org/content/documents/GCFAJudicialProcedures.pdf>

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