



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Pennsylvanian Methodists campaign for reinstatement of minister, United States, 2013

Time period notes: April 2013 through October 2014

4 APR
2013
to: 27 OCT
2014

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: Lebanon, Pennsylvania

Location Description: Southeastern Pennsylvania

Goals:

To reinstate Rev. Schaefer as a minister as part of larger long term goal of promoting full rights for gay people in the United Methodist Church.

Specifically, defend and restore credentials of pastor, Frank Schaefer, who was defrocked for performing a gay marriage as part of the advocacy movement for a change of the United Methodist Church prohibition against performing same sex marriages.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 034. Vigils
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 011. Records, radio, and television

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 019. Wearing of symbols

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 036. Performances of plays and music

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Defense

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- gay and lesbian rights activists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Frank Schaefer

Partners:

A group of 50 Methodist and other religious officials who publicly officiated a wedding a few weeks before the initial trial.

External allies:

Matt Berryman of Reconciling Ministries Network which is a national coalition of Methodist churches supportive of gay rights. They provided advice and technical support for building support for his case.

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- LGBT groups
- Local Lebanon PA

- Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN)

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia
- Reconciling United Methodists of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference

Groups in 4th Segment:

- California-Pacific Conference
- Curio Theatre Company

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 3 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Church bureaucracy and conservative delegates to the United Methodist Church General Conference that meets to set Church policy every 4 years.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known.

Campaigner violence:

No campaigner violence.

Repressive Violence:

No repressive violence.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Growth is based on Schaefer's transformation from progressive but non-confrontational pastor to full-time gay rights advocate with a national name recognition. He achieved his goal of preserving his credentials as a minister. Arguably he advanced the United Methodist Church closer to a gay neutral position, though it might come through a split in the Church.

His example lead 50 other clergy to do a same-sex marriage ceremony in Philadelphia in the weeks before his trial. Those people increased their commitment to the cause by taking that stand and risking consequences as well.

Gay rights advocates in the United Methodist Church had been arguing for decades, beginning at least since 1972, for changing the Church policy on gay rights, including their ban on officiating at same-sex weddings, and prohibiting openly gay clergy. The issues had been raised at each of the 2004 and 2008 General Conferences where policy for the Church could be debated and set.

At the last meeting in 2012, these issues were not allowed to come to a vote and the advocates for more gay friendly policies began to encourage open defiance of Church policies against officiating at same-sex ceremonies. In response, conservative members pursued formal complaints against offenders and church trials, which could lead to a conviction and the Church court revoking the offending pastor's credentials authorizing them to conduct services in a church. The person would lose their right to work as a Methodist minister.

In this context, a pastor at a rural Pennsylvania church, Zion of Iona United Methodist Church, officiated at his son's same-sex wedding ceremony in Massachusetts in 2007, in violation of the United Methodist Church policy against officiating in such weddings. The pastor, Frank Schaefer, did not disclose his action to his congregation, but revealed it in his yearly ministry profile that went to his supervisor in 2007. A member of the congregation, Jon Boger, discovered his action and filed a complaint that led to a trial in November of 2013. If found guilty, the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference could have revoked his credentials and threaten his job and ability to work as a minister.

He found allies and support in the local LGBT community and among socially progressive members of the United Methodist Church, and particularly from the Reconciling Ministries Network and its executive director, Matt Berryman. This group was a caucus of churches within the United Methodist Church that supported a more progressive stance on gay rights. He helped spread the word about the coming trial and need for fundraising and support. His supporters organized a benefit concert to publicize the trial and raise funds for the expenses of the defense effort. They also organized a vigil locally and encouraged others to do the same across the country in support of the effort to defend gay rights and his status as a minister who supported those rights.

In September of 2013, the Church court lifted its previous gag order and Schaefer was allowed to talk to the press and had many interviews about the situation with newspaper and TV outlets. On 9 November, 2013, a group of 36 Methodist ministers, and a dozen or so more from other religious orders, jointly officiated at a same-sex wedding in Philadelphia, in defiance of United Methodist policy and in support of Frank Schaefer.

Schaefer's trial was 18 - 19 November, 2013, and the Court suspended his ministry privileges for 30 days and presented a summons to him, requiring him to report to the Board of Ordained Ministry on 19 December, 2013, when he must announce whether he would agree to uphold the 'Discipline', the rules that govern the United Methodist membership, and which included the policies about gay marriage and banning gay ministers. During the trial his supporters wore symbols of support for gay rights such as rainbow stoles and showed protest of the prosecutor's closing statement by silent standing. In his testimony at the penalty stage of the trial, Rev. Schaefer put on a rainbow-colored stole as a sign of his choice to be an advocate for gay rights and 'from this day forth never to be silent again.'

His supporters delivered letters and a petition signed by 25,000 people to the local bishop urging her to stop holding church trials for violations of the church code regarding same-sex marriages.

At the meeting in December with the Board, Schaefer refused to agree to the terms and renounce his views on gay rights, and the Board revoked his credentials. At this point, he had an option to appeal the decision and decided to do so. He wrote a book, *Defrocked*, about his experience in the Spring of 2014.

His appeal was heard in June of 2014 and resulted in his reinstatement. The prosecution decided to appeal this decision to the final authority, the Judicial Council, and a date was set for 27 October, 2014. At that hearing, the Judicial Council upheld his reinstatement and his vindication was complete.

Over the year and a half of the controversy, Schaefer became a sought-after speaker at churches and organizations that were supportive of changing church policy about gay rights, and had numerous interviews with TV and newspaper reporters. The attention about the trial provided a platform to continue to advocate for full rights within the United Methodist Church and society at large.

During this period a number of states legalized same-sex marriage, including Pennsylvania, where he was living at the beginning

of the campaign. The controversy and conflict within the United Methodist Church continued, but Frank Schaefer took a pastoral position at a church in California with the full rights of an ordained Methodist minister. His ordeal raised visibility of the issues and moved him from a small town minister who stayed within the bounds of a conservative congregation's comfort to a full-time advocate for gay rights with a national reputation. This trial and the organizing around it led a large number of other clergy to take an open stand on the issue as shown by their officiating at a same-sex wedding.

The effort to change church policy continued and several prominent Methodist ministers openly officiated at same-sex weddings. Former Dean of the Yale Divinity School, Rev. Thomas Ogletree similarly performed his son's same-sex wedding and faced similar charges. Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert officiated a same-sex wedding in Alabama. These acts were part of a transition to active disobedience that some call 'clerical disobedience' of church law that was seen as wrong. There were also bishops who put a moratorium on trials relating to this controversy.

Research Notes

Influences:

His example may have led to others performing same-sex marriage. For example, Rev. Thomas Ogletree officiated at his son's same-sex wedding during this period. Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert presided at a wedding in Alabama of two men in October of 2013. (2)

Sources:

Mahle, Katherine A., Timothy K. Bruster, F. B. Joyner, and Beth Capen. 2014. "Judicial Council Decision 1270 Re: Frank Schaefer." The People of The United Methodist Church. Retrieved February 20, 2015 (<http://web.archive.org.proxy.swarthmore.edu/web/20150220081143/http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/judicial-council-decision-1270-re-frank-schaefer>).

Nadolny, Tricia I. 2013. "Bishop Given Rights Petition - Methodist Leader Said She Didn't Want Trial in Gay Wedding, but Had No Choice." Philadelphia Inquirer, November 22.

Nadolny, Tricia I. 2013. "Methodist Church Rules That Schaefer Can Keep His Pastor Credentials." Philadelphia Inquirer, October 28.

Nadolny, Tricia I. 2013. "Methodist Minister Will Not Relinquish His Credentials." Philadelphia Inquirer, December 17.

Naff, Clay F. 2014. "Justice on Trial: Another Minister Breaks Church Law to Perform Gay Marriage." Huffington Post, March 28.

Schaefer, Franklyn. n.d. Defrocked: How a Father's Act of Love Shook the United Methodist Church.

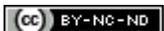
Zoll, Rachel. 2014. "Methodists in Crisis Over Gay Marriage, Church Law." Associated Press State Wide, February 10.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Jamie Irwin, 30/01/2015

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/) .

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu> .

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 02/25/2020 - 12:42): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/pennsylvanian-methodists-campaign-reinstatement-minister-united-states-2013>