

Cornerstone United Methodist Church

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April 2004 Newsletter

Statement from Marion M. Edwards
resident bishop, North Carolina Annual Conference

Dear North Carolina Conference United Methodists:

I join with many United Methodists around our church who are saddened and confused by the recent not guilty verdict rendered at the church trial of Reverend Karen T. Dammann of the Pacific Northwest Conference of The United Methodist Church. I find it incomprehensible that a clergy jury can place itself above the law of the church.

The Book of Discipline 2000, paragraph 304.3, is very clear: "...Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." This paragraph is located in the legislative section of *The Book of Discipline* dealing with the ministry of the ordained. Therefore, it is the principle by which we are to be guided and is thereby the position of our United Methodist Church!

As you engage in conversation in your local church and communities around this issue, please make the following note and clear distinction; the action taken on March 20, 2004 in The Pacific Northwest Conference is the action of one group in one place at one specific time. It does not reflect the position of the Church as a whole.

The position of our denomination regarding homosexuality has not changed as the result of the misguided action taken at the Dammann church trial. This church trial jury has stepped outside *The Book of Discipline* and injected its perspective in place of the corporate wisdom of the General Conference. Their decision places them in opposition to the letter and spirit of the General Conference and its legislative law. According to our church polity, an appropriate response to the findings of the church court trial in the Pacific Northwest Conference will be left to the elected delegates this coming April at General Conference in Pittsburgh, Pa.

As the Bishop of The North Carolina Annual Conference, I recognize that there are those within our church who do not agree with our church's position. I reach out in love to you across our differences and desire to remain in dialogue with you! However, I reaffirm my position and the position of our church as found in the Social Principles of *The Book of Discipline 2000*, ¶161.G, "...Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationship with God, with others, and with self. Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, we affirm that God's grace is available to all. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons."

Bishop Marion Edwards
North Carolina Annual Conference

STATEMENT FROM GOOD NEWS REGARDING DAMMANN COURT DECISION

In what has become one of the most surreal and bizarre verdicts in a United Methodist church trial, the Rev. Karen T. Dammann is now able to say, "I'm in good standing."

She made that declaration at a news conference in Bothell, Washington, after a 13-member jury of her Pacific Northwest Conference clergy colleagues voted to acquit the outspoken lesbian clergywoman of the charge of "practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings."

In a decision on Saturday, March 20, that has elated some United Methodists and hurt, confused, and angered many, many others, eleven members of the church court voted to find Rev. Dammann not guilty. Two said they were undecided. None supported a guilty verdict. And with that decision, the United Methodist Church finds itself in the midst of one of its most serious crises in more than a decade.

According to the standards found in the denomination's *Book of Discipline*, Dammann cannot possibly be "in good standing" while being in a publicly acknowledged, lesbian relationship. (In fact, Dammann and her long-time partner, Meredith, participated in a same-sex "wedding" ceremony the week prior to the trial.) Furthermore, the United Methodist Church cannot continue with any sense of unity with these kinds of destructive irregularities tearing at the heart, soul, and conscience of our church.

A Summary of the Case

In 2001, the Rev. Karen Dammann indicated to Bishop Elias Galvan (Seattle Area) by letter that she was in a partnered relationship with another woman, but that nonetheless, she desired an appointment in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. Months later, Bishop Galvan filed a formal complaint against Dammann, which was sent to the conference Committee on Investigation, and was summarily dropped. It was then sent to the Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals, and again dismissed. Both panels had persons who admitted publicly their disagreement with United Methodism's standards on homosexuality and stated their unwillingness to vote to send the case to trial. The latter appeal was sent automatically to the United Methodist Judicial Council for review and the Council remanded the charge back to the conference, instructing them to deal with the matter seriously. In Decision 980, the Judicial Council stated it would retain jurisdiction of the matter to ensure the decision was implemented. The charge against Dammann was reintroduced and the church trial began Wednesday, March 17, with retired Bishop William Grove serving as trial judge.

A Flawed Trial—An Indefensible Verdict

What has angered, confused, and embarrassed United Methodists is the conflicted and contradictory statement of the jury. In its verdict, the jury chairperson, the Rev. Judy Schultz, said, "While sustaining the specification that Rev. Karen Dammann is a self-avowed practicing homosexual, we, the trial court, do not find the evidence presented...to be clear and convincing that Karen Dammann has engaged in any practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings. We cannot sustain the charge."

This verdict is astonishing in light of these two acknowledged facts: first, Dammann had admitted to Bishop Galvan that she was in a covenanted relationship with another woman; and second, the trial jury admitted the same, verifying that Dammann was "a self-avowed practicing homosexual." These facts should have led to a verdict of guilty for Dammann. The case should have been open and shut in light of the evidence. The jurors, however, were not willing to see or accept the obvious. Such a refusal to act upon a clear matter of law is known in civil trials as "jury nullification." It would appear that "nullification" is precisely what transpired with the Pacific Northwest Conference trial court.

In the statement read after the verdict, the jury said, "We searched the *Discipline* and did not find a declaration that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings." Such a claim would be laughable if it weren't so irresponsible and intellectually dishonest. It reminds one of the words of Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass*, "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." The well-known, oft-debated phrase found in the *Book of Discipline* about homosexuality since 1972 is the one stating that we "consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching" (Par. 161 G). The pro-homosexual constituency has been trying to remove that phrase ever since.

Even a newcomer to the United Methodist Church could find the relevant passage in the *Book of Discipline* dealing with standards for ordained ministry. The *Discipline* says, "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church" (Par. 304.3). The *Discipline* could not be clearer about this matter.

The focus of the trial was to have been upon Karen Dammann and whether she had violated church law because of her partnered relationship. The defense, however, brought in numerous witnesses to speak to questions of biblical interpretation, theology, and the history of the church's standards on homosexuality. The result was that the church's standards ended up on trial, not Dammann. The task of the court was not to critique and evaluate the rightness or wrongness of the church's standards, but to determine if Dammann had violated those standards. These witnesses should have been declared irrelevant and out of order by the trial judge.

The Trial and its Implications for the Church

Aspects about the process of the trial and its verdict are at once, seriously flawed, an embarrassment to clear-thinking United Methodists everywhere, and a threat to the unity of the United Methodist Church.

First, it is apparent that the Pacific Northwest Conference (if not the entire Western Jurisdiction) has broken covenant with the rest of the denomination. Their actions in this verdict are consistent with the statement passed by the Western Jurisdiction in the summer of 2000, when its delegates defiantly declared, "We Will Not Be Silent." It was that jurisdiction's way of saying it did not intend to abide by the rulings of General Conference. The actions of the PNW Annual Conference in its earlier casual dismissal of the Dammann complaint, and now in this recent trial, are schismatic acts. That is, they are indications this conference is separating itself from United Methodist doctrine and polity.

Second, the panel of 13 jurors reporting 11 votes for acquittal is a disturbing example of "jury nullification," a situation in which jurors refuse to acknowledge clear and established law in the disposition of a case. The Church cannot continue with an autonomous constituency that chooses to smugly ignore church standards, substituting their own desires for the agreed upon policies of the General Conference.

Third, the trial made a mockery of our church and its polity. We saw this when the clergyman who prosecuted the case against Dammann said to reporters after the trial, "I'm glad I lost." He also said he believes the jury disregarded church teachings, but added, "I don't feel bad about that." Can anyone, regardless of his or her views on this divisive issue, believe there is any integrity in this kind of process?

Fourth, we are deeply distressed that three retired United Methodist bishops testified on behalf of Dammann. This raises a major question about whether bishops should *ever* appear before a church court to speak in support of a position that is in direct opposition to church law and the *Book of Discipline*, let alone the church's long tradition. This appears to us to be an egregious misuse of the Episcopal office.

What Can United Methodists Do?

The first thing we would say to United Methodists all across the country is that you can make a difference in the future of the denomination. Now is the time for unified and prayerful United Methodists to speak out. Departure from the denomination out of frustration only weakens our church's Apostolic witness. An older generation of liberal leadership is passing off the scene and the church will soon welcome a new generation of leaders. Evangelicals are, and will increasingly be, a major part of the emerging new leadership.

Here are things concerned United Methodists can and will be doing:

1. First, let us call the denomination to prayer and fasting. During this Lenten season, we should make prayer and fasting a part of our church's involvement, including Sunday school classes and small group gatherings. Remember, effectual, fervent prayer avails much! Those pastors and laity in the Western Jurisdiction who are upholding the church standards feel hopeless and isolated. Let's lift them in prayer daily. (Be a part of Good News' General Conference Prayer and Information e-mail list. Send to: Letters@goodnewsmag.org.)

2. Use *every possible means* to communicate your concern about the trial and issues it has raised. Write your bishop, district superintendent, as well as district and conference leaders, urging them to take immediate remedial action (including speaking out personally). Anguished United Methodists need to hear from other leaders of the church and soon. Here are specific suggestions as to how to communicate:

a. Write thoughtful, substantive letters, typed or printed preferably. Avoid angry remarks, threats, or name-calling. Appeal for accountability and faithfulness to the church and its standards. Urge others to call the Western Jurisdiction to accountability.

b. Send e-mails. Think and write carefully and prayerfully before pushing the "send" key. Make sure your communication is grace-filled while being firm.

- c. Call some of your church leaders to express personally your deep concern. Let them know you are praying for them during these troubled days and as we approach General Conference.
3. Communicate with your General Conference delegation. Again, be grace-filled and measured. They have much reading to do. Your brevity will guarantee your letter being read.
4. As you write, e-mail and call, here are possible ways the crisis might be addressed:
- a. Urge the Judicial Council, as it has retained jurisdiction of the trial, to review the trial to determine if it was, in fact, a serious juridical procedure or only a pretense of a trial.
- b. Urge bishops to find a way to address this crisis as a way of leading the church in matters temporal and spiritual. We are pleased that a number of our active bishops have already issued statements expressing their distress about the trial's outcome. Express appreciation to them for speaking out publicly on the matter, but urge them to not stop with just speaking out, they need to take action. Urge your bishop (or the Council of Bishops) to call upon the Judicial Council to review the integrity of the entire Dammann trial and verdict. The Council needs to lead the church in helping the Western Jurisdiction either become a part of the connection once again, or recommend some action that would allow non-compliant pastors and churches to withdraw amicably. To get the name and address of your bishop, go to the Good News web site, front page: www.goodnewsmag.org.
- c. Delegates at the 2004 General Conference might consider a call for repentance to the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference (or the entire Western Jurisdiction) and consider ways to try to bring the Western Jurisdiction back into fellowship with the rest of the denomination. (We are aware that the actions of the PNW Conference and Western Jurisdiction do not represent all of their pastors and laity. Many of them are embarrassed by the actions of their conference and jurisdiction.)
- d. Delegates at the 2004 General Conference might entertain a resolution of censure of at least the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference and perhaps the entire Western Jurisdiction. Some have questioned whether the General Conference delegation from the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference should be seated, in light of the conference's breaking covenant with the rest of the church.
5. Urge your General Conference delegates to support legislation that strengthens the accountability of United Methodist leaders and that closes loopholes in the church's judicial proceedings. (See Good News' proposed legislation on our web site: www.goodnewsmag.org)
6. Some churches and individuals are already feeling compelled to consider redirecting contributions which have in the past gone into the UM denominational channels. Some already are doing so. Many United Methodists feel this is the only way left to voice their protest of an errant, unfaithful church. It is tragic when United Methodists feel that they are compromising their commitments by giving to the denominational system. As delegates gather in Pittsburgh next month to wrestle with the denomination's financial shortages, they should be ready to admit there is a connection between our church's financial shortfall and the massive, adverse publicity that comes from those who flaunt their disregard for the *Book of Discipline* and continue to push for the approval of homosexual practice and same-sex marriages. (Speaking of adverse publicity, most of the major U.S. newspapers have carried articles about the trial, including two days of consecutive front-page stories in the *New York Times*.)

United Methodism is not experiencing a shortage of financial resources. We are facing a shortage of confidence and trust about whether the church and its leadership are being faithful to our doctrine and polity.

The enormous negative fallout from the Dammann trial can only be reversed or remedied by major action by our United Methodist Council of Bishops, the Judicial Council, or the delegates as they gather next month in Pittsburgh. The voices of faithful United Methodists all across the church *can play a vital role* in ensuring that some action will be taken.

Again, we invite concerned United Methodists to be a part of Good News' General Conference Prayer and Information e-mail list. For periodic e-mailings, send your name and e-mail address to: Letters@goodnewsmag.org. We also welcome information about what action your church may be taking.

In closing, we urge you to remember the words that Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi, which are so timely for us today: "*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*" (Phil. 1:27). Amen.

-- Authorized by the Executive Committee of the Good News Board, meeting by teleconference Tuesday evening, March 23, 2004. Approved by e-mail consensus of the full board of directors of Good News.

P.U.S.H.

A man was sleeping one night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light, and God appeared. The Lord told the man he had work for him to do, and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might.

So, this the man did, day after day. For many years he toiled from sun up to sundown, his shoulders set squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock, pushing with all of his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain. Since the man was showing discouragement, the Adversary (Satan) decided to enter the picture by placing thoughts into the weary mind:

"You have been pushing against that rock for a long time and it hasn't moved." Thus, he gave the man the impression that the task was impossible and that he was a failure. These thoughts discouraged and disheartened the man. Satan said, "Why kill yourself over this? Just put in your time, giving just the minimum effort; and that will be good enough."

That's what the weary man planned to do, but decided to make it a matter of prayer and to take his troubled thoughts to the Lord. "Lord," he said, "I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength to do that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock by half a millimeter. What is wrong? Why am I failing?"

The Lord responded compassionately, "My friend, when I asked you to serve Me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all of your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to Me with your strength spent, thinking that you have failed. But, is that really so? Look at yourself. Your arms! are strong and muscled, your back sinewy and brown; your hands are callused from constant pressure, your legs have become massive and hard. Through opposition you have grown much, and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. True, you haven't moved the rock. But your calling was to be obedient and to push and to exercise your faith and trust in My wisdom. That you have done. Now, I, my friend, will move the rock."

At times, when we hear a word from God, we tend to use our own intellect to decipher what He wants, when actually what God wants is just simple obedience and faith in Him. By all means, exercise the faith that moves mountains, but know that it is still God who moves the mountains.

When everything seems to go wrong ...
Just P.U.S.H.!

When the job gets you down ...
Just P.U.S.H.!

When people don't do as you think they should ...
Just P.U.S.H.!

When you can't find the right work ...
Just P.U.S.H.!

When your money is "gone" and the bills are due .
Just P.U.S.H.!

When people just don't understand you ...
Just P.U.S.H.!

P– Pray
U– Until
S– Something
H– Happens

Children's Church Volunteer Training Offered

What? This will be a short orientation to children's church materials and a chance to get your questions

answered.

When? Sunday, April 18th at 10:45a.m. (Come a little early for second service or stay a few minutes later if you

attend first service.)

Where? In the 3rd-5th grade Sunday School room (across from the nursery)

Who? Anyone ages 16 and up interested in a ministry to preschoolers during the second service

Contact person? Call me, Laurie Harro, at 860-9735 or e-mail me at 3pines-harro@msn.com

Church Council

Have you ever thought of idea that would improve our church family? Come and share it at the church

council meeting. They meet the second Sunday of the month in the evening. The council is made up of people responsible for different ministries and programs throughout the church. From the Cornerstone webmaster to the Director of Children's programs, all aspects of the church's life is discussed. Current topics include VBS, how we can better connect with visitors to our church and the expansion of our church facilities. Anyone is welcome to attend.

Nursery Volunteers Needed

Cornerstone UMC provides outstanding Nursery care during our services for children 0-2. We are in need of volunteers to help in the room. There is a sign-up sheet on the door to the nursery. Anyone is welcome to help, you do not have to have a child in the room to volunteer. Please sign up for a date today!

VBS Registration

It is almost that time again! Vacation Bible School is just around the corner... We will begin registering for VBS on Sunday May 2-Sunday June 6. We would like to have the majority of children registered by May 23, to allow for shirt ordering. The cost is \$7 (this covers the shirt and decal). Embroidery Designs will be handling our order, and has offered to heat iron the decals on the shirts at no charge. The crew leader shirts will be \$12. All registration fees need to be made in cash at the time of registration. There will be a table in the Fellowship Hall during these dates from 10:30—11:00 am. If you have any questions regarding registration, please contact Julie Layton at 875-7415. If someone is unable to pay the registration fee, please just let me know and I will be sure the cost is covered.

Easter Schedule

Friday April 9 7:00 pm
Good Friday Service

Sunday April 11 6:30 am
Easter Sunrise Service

Sunday April 11 9:30 am
Easter Sunday Service

Sunday April 11 9:30 am
Easter Sunday Service

Upcoming Events

April 3	8:00 am	Mission First Saturday @ Salvation Army
April 4		Youth Sponsored Picnic and Easter Egg Hunt
April 14	7:00 pm	Mexican Youth Service
May 9		Youth-conducted Services
June 12		End of Year Pool Party