

A History of Prophets

As we welcome Frank Schaefer this night, celebrating the prophetic role that has moved him into the national spotlight, we also recall our own history in the Northern Illinois Conference, and an earlier prophet among us....



Rev. Greg Dell

In 2008, a year following his medical leave from active ministry and three years before his official retirement, Greg Dell was inducted into the Chicago Gay & Lesbian Hall of Fame. Greg's history of involvement in social justice and, in particular, his support of gay and lesbian holy unions – which included a trial and suspension from his United Methodist pulpit in 1999 – made him a candidate for “friend of the community.”

Born in 1945 in Chicago, Greg tells the story of his early participation in social justice movements when he and a friend participated in a civil rights march in the Berwyn neighborhood: “I was a teenager when Dr. Martin Luther King came to Chicago,” Greg writes. “He came to raise public awareness of the metropolitan area’s segregated housing – the worst in the US at that time and the worst today. My best friend and I decided to participate in one of the early marches. We were youth members of the local Methodist church and we took to heart the message that was being preached each Sunday – a message challenging the racism all around us...Before we took our first steps we were greeted with shouted epithets – some from young children, hurled rocks and threatening action – including being spit upon and rushed at by people lining the streets carrying axe handles. The police took action only when the violence was the most vehement.”

Greg says it was then that “intolerance of intolerance” was planted in his soul.

As a student at Illinois Wesleyan University, Greg led the challenge to racially restrictive policies at the school and in the community. It was at Illinois Wesleyan where Greg met his wife & partner in justice work, Jade. When Greg was at Duke Divinity School, he participated in efforts to unionize workers at Duke University. His commitment to social justice, planted at an early age, always kept Greg looking for ways in which injustice crossed borders of race and class. Ordained in 1968, Greg served the Northern Illinois Conference in many locations, (Community UMC in Naperville, Minooka UMC, Wheadon UMC in Evanston, Euclid Avenue UMC in Oak Park, and Broadway UMC in Chicago), continuing his justice work and stretching his progressive understanding of the Christian call.

CHRONOLOGY

March 26, 1999: By a vote of 10 to 3, the trial court finds the Rev. Greg Dell guilty of disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church. By a vote of 13 to 0 the court finds him guilty of conducting the service between Keith Eccarius and Karl Reinhardt on Sept. 19, 1998. He will be suspended from his pastoral duties on July 3, unless he signs and submits to the bishop a document saying that he will abide by Paragraph 65c or until the paragraph is lifted or its binding nature is changed by General Conference or Judicial Council action. Greg refuses to sign such a document.

April-May, 1999: Greg Dell announces he is to become the director of In All Things Charity. Greg Dell appeals the trial court ruling.

June-July, 1999: Northern Illinois elects Greg Dell as a delegate to General Conference. In July, he leaves his pastoral position at Broadway UMC as his suspension begins.

Monday, August 9, 1999 Greg Dell's hearing. Friday, August 17, the jurisdictional court upholds the verdict but alters his penalty, giving it a specific length of time, rather than undetermined. Bishop Sprague announces that he will re-appoint Dell to Broadway UMC on July 1, 2000.

www.umaffirm.org/cornet/gregdell.html

Honoring One of Our Own...Rev. Greg Dell

"If there's one word to describe Dell's life, a word that surfaces in conversations with those who know him, it's inclusion," writes Illinois Wesleyan University in "Faith Beyond Words," a feature on Greg in their 2008 magazine. "He has a passion for embracing and advocating for all of humanity, which has led to multiple arrests for civil disobedience." Included among Greg's arrests: disrupting the UMC General Conference in Cleveland in 2000, as a coalition of RMN and MFSA advocates stood for an end to institutional bigotry against persons who identify as LGBTQ.

The national spotlight hit Greg when, in 1998, a complaint was filed against him after he performed a service of holy union for two gay men in his congregation at Broadway United Methodist Church. Although Greg had been doing wedding celebrations for gay and lesbian couples for nearly 20 years, the complaint led to Greg's trial.

After a year's suspension from his pastoral duties, Greg returned to Broadway and continued his progressive activism in the struggle for racial, gender, and sexual-orientation-based justice. He has been given awards for his work by the Chicago Commission on Human Relations and the Church Within A Church Movement, and has received honorary doctorates from Illinois Wesleyan University and Chicago Theological Seminary.

Now retired and living with Parkinson's disease, Greg continues to be an advocate for justice and a mentor to pastors and laity. "He's somebody who takes his faith

seriously, even when it means a great cost to him personally," said Rev. Lynn Pries of Naperville, retired North Central College Chaplain.

Naming Greg her mentor, Rev. Vernice Thorn, who serves as Co-Pastor at Broadway, remembers Greg telling a gay couple in premarital counseling: "this is who I am. This is what I've been called to do and that's to minister all of God's people."

Thanks, Greg, for your faithful witness, and for setting the course that others follow today as we greet Frank, as we celebrate marriage equality in Illinois, and as we practice an "Altar for All."

~ compiled by Broadway pastor Rev. Lois McCullen Parr for the NIC Reconciling Task Force & MFSA from several sources including

<http://www.mindny.org/2011/06/celebrating-intolerance/>

http://www.gllhalloffame.org/index.pl?item=309&todo=view_item

<http://www.iwu.edu/magazine/2008/fall/DELL.html>

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"Intolerance of intolerance was planted in his soul."

PASTORS PUT ON TRIAL
by The United Methodist Church for performing gay marriages or for being Lesbian or Gay.

1998 JIMMY Creech	2004 KAREN Dammann	2012 AMY DeLong
1999 GREG Dell	2005 BETH Stroud	2013 FRANK Schaefer

AND THERE ARE MORE TRIALS SCHEDULED THIS YEAR.
Countless more pastors have been required to turn in their credentials because they are lesbian or gay.
Tell the United Methodist Church to
STOP THE PERSECUTION!
If you are disgusted with UMC for putting their clergy on trial for being gay or lesbian or for conducting same-gender weddings, please contact The United Methodist Church at 202-547-6270 or cob@umc.org

SAVE THE DATE!
Winter Warming 2015
Saturday, January 17, 2015
featuring
Bishop Sally Dyck as preacher.

For more information about NIC's Reconciling Task Force, follow our Facebook page (NIC Reconciling Methodists) or watch for announcements of events at www.radicallyinclusive.org; to be added to our email list, please send your request to pastorcarol@epworthchicago.com.