



Contact Rev. Andy Oliver
RMN Director of Communications
Cell 312-448-5305
Email andy@rmnetwork.org
Website www.rmnetwork.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 6, 2015

VIRGINIA CLERGY NOT TO FACE TRIAL; LOST SALARY SUBSIDIZED BY SUPPORTERS

United Methodists are sending a message to conferences like Virginia that would seek to deter LGBTQ people from receiving the full ministry of the church: We will support clergy that The UMC attempts to penalize.

Two clergy in Virginia will not face trial for officiating same-sex weddings, according to a statement today by conference officials. Rev. Amanda Garber was given a one-month suspension without pay for presiding over [the wedding of Brittany and Lindsay](#), two of her congregants. Prof. Emeritus at Shenandoah University, Rev. Dr. John D. Copenhaver, was suspended for three months for officiating at [the wedding of Sarah and Rev. Delyn Celec](#) who married in part to care for their niece and two nephews in need of family following the murder of the children's mother.

In response to the financial deterrent the Virginia Conference is choosing to place upon Rev. Garber, Reconciling United Methodists across the country have contributed to a [clergy defense and resiliency fund](#), and a check is being sent today in the full amount Rev. Garber would have otherwise lost. [Donations to this fund](#) are currently needed to aid clergy facing unjust penalties like this one.

In a statement, Rev. Garber said:

I am grateful for the support of so many, but also saddened that my new-church-start will have to face this set-back so early in their formation. It is difficult to build denominational loyalty when the people of my church are witnessing this punitive action being taken for my being their pastor. While I am grateful that a resolution has been reached, I am overwhelmed by a deep sense of grief and sadness. I weep regularly as I continually journey with persons who harm themselves, who consider suicide, and who long to have their relationships and commitments accepted and blessed by the church. I weep with those who long to use their God-given gifts as laity and ordained clergy, but are regularly and resoundingly told 'no.' I weep as we hurl insults, venom, and labels at each other. I weep as so many of my friends and colleagues leave The United Methodist Church. I cling to the glimpses of grace and powerful support I have experienced and continue to experience on a daily basis. Most of all, I cling to the promise that God's love is stronger than fear.

Rev. Dr. Copenhaver, who has authored [a proposal for change in The UMC](#), is similarly saddened by the resolution reached:

Although I am relieved, and grateful to all parties, that a resolution has been reached, I am saddened the resolution did not include a clear statement by all parties that would recognize and regret the harm experienced by LGBTQ persons by the language and policies of the Book of Discipline. Further, I do not believe my actions deserve any punitive consequence. Rather I believe that pastors who respond to the pastoral needs of marginalized LGBTQ persons should be commended by The UMC. Nevertheless I have acknowledged that I have knowingly and publicly officiated at a same sex marriage, a violation of ¶2702.1b, causing felt harm to my bishop, district superintendent, and some

pastors and church members. I, therefore, accept the consequence of suspension. At the same time, I hold that the harm felt by these persons is in no way commensurate with the harm experienced by LGBTQ persons who have felt rejected by the Church's language, have been excluded from representative ministry, and denied the blessing and support of the Church for their marriages.

The Revs. Garber and Copenhaver would like to express their deepest gratitude to their colleague and advocate, Rev. Rob Vaughn, who provided wise counsel and support through the resolution process, and are calling on all clergy, laity, and congregations to sign [Altar for All](#) to join the movement for marriage equality in The UMC.

Matt Berryman, Reconciling Ministries Network's executive director and Bridget Cabrera, deputy director, said in a joint statement:

When the history books of a fully inclusive United Methodist Church are one day written, it will include the names of Rev. Amanda Garber and Rev. Dr. John D. Copenhaver as faithful prophets who through their Biblical Obedience helped the church find its way to end the discrimination of people who long to celebrate their love and follow their call to ministry. We will do all in our power to continue to stand by and enable clergy to do the right thing like these two have done in their witness.

The discriminatory policies of The UMC are meant to dissuade LGBTQ persons from pursuing their calls to ordained ministry, clergy from offering the ministry of marriage to prepared same-sex couples, and church leaders from supporting ministries with and for LGBTQ persons. The [Clergy Defense and Resiliency Fund](#) of Reconciling Ministries Network was established to support LGBTQ candidates through the ordination process, and United Methodists facing complaint investigations or church trials due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or service in ministry with LGBTQ persons.

...

[Reconciling Ministries Network](#) mobilizes United Methodists of all sexual orientations and gender identities to transform our Church and world into the full expression of Christ's inclusive love.