

# Retired UMC clergy offer to perform gay marriages: In California

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Adding fuel to the growing controversy over gay marriage in California, a group of retired United Methodist clergy has volunteered to perform same-sex marriages, a move that conservatives call a “surrender to popular fashion.”

At the church’s California-Nevada Conference’s annual meeting in June, 82 retired clergy volunteered to perform same-sex marriages, which became legal in California on June 16. Methodist rules restrict clergy from presiding over such marriages.

“We choose to follow the tradition of our church for full inclusion of the people to whom we minister,” said Don Fado, a retired minister from Sacramento, who led the clergy group’s efforts.

The retired clergy offered their services as stand-ins for active ministers who could be punished or even defrocked for taking part, Fado said, although he viewed such a scenario as unlikely.

Prior to the meeting, Bishop Beverly J. Shamana had encouraged ministers to be “prayerful and discerning” about participating in such ceremonies and cautioned ministers that they could face discipline for participating.

United Methodist Action, which opposes same-sex marriage, criticized the clergy’s offer as a betrayal of Methodist values and said the move reflected a larger problem within the denomination.

“As failed clergy of dying churches, they are attempting to jump on the latest fad,” said Mark Tooley, director of UMAction. “Trying to seem relevant, they instead look silly.”

“I do not call ministering to the marginalized and the people rejected by society as a fad,” Fado said in response. *—Religion News Service*