

Trial set for lesbian Methodist pastor: Irene (Beth) Stroud could lose ministerial credentials

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A lesbian United Methodist pastor whose case was suspended on a technicality will face trial in Pennsylvania December 1—the first case to be tried under the church’s tightened rules against noncelibate gay clergy.

Irene (Beth) Stroud, associate pastor of First United Methodist Church in Germantown, will face a jury of 13 pastors on charges that she violated a ban against “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy. Stroud triggered the trial when she announced her homosexuality to her congregation last year. Stroud has requested an open trial, which will be overseen by retired Bishop Joseph Yeakel at a church camp in Spring City.

If found guilty, Stroud could lose her ministerial credentials. Her church has established a legal defense fund to help her pay for church attorneys. “I’m not afraid,” Stroud said in a statement posted on a Web site run by supporters. “I can’t know what the outcome of the trial will be, but I trust God to work in and through whatever happens.”

In September Yeakel rejected an indictment against Stroud as “null and void” because of procedural errors. But on October 11 the investigative committee again drafted an indictment based on “reasonable grounds” to pursue charges.

Delegates at the Methodists’ General Conference in May tightened rules against gay clergy, and the church’s top court ruled that “the practice of homosexuality is a chargeable offense” for clergy. The court also said bishops may not appoint pastors who had been found to be “self-avowed practicing” homosexuals by a church trial.

In a separate but related development, charges were dismissed against a San Francisco pastor who was accused of breaking church law by marrying a gay couple in her church last February. The complaint against Karen Oliveto was “resolved”

after she left Bethany United Methodist Church to take a teaching position at Pacific School of Religion, said Bishop Beverly Shamana. *-Religion News Service*