

Seminary president ousted over gay daughter's wedding: Kansfield officiated at ceremony

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The New Brunswick Theological Seminary, one of the nation's oldest schools for training mainline Protestant clergy, has retired its president and reprimanded him for officiating at his gay daughter's wedding.

The board of trustees of the New Brunswick, New Jersey-based school implied in an earlier statement that the wedding wasn't a factor in its decision not to renew the contract of Norman Kansfield, 64.

But on February 10, a board spokesman and Kansfield confirmed that the ceremony, which was conducted in Massachusetts, precipitated the decision.

"We decided that the president had put the seminary in an awkward position by performing that ceremony without giving us the benefit of offering sufficient counsel," said Larry Williams Sr., a member speaking on the board's behalf. "It could have hurt the school if it divided people in our student body, if it divided our faculty, if it divided other people who support us."

In a letter sent shortly before the June 19 wedding of his daughter, Anne, Kansfield informed the board of his decision and said he wasn't seeking its permission. The board voted January 28 not to renew Kansfield's contract.

The ceremony took place shortly after Massachusetts began allowing same-sex marriages, touching off a national furor.

In an interview at the seminary, Kansfield said he had not done anything to hurt his denomination, the Reformed Church in America. A former pastor and seminary librarian, Kansfield is considered among the denomination's most learned theologians.

“People presume I have been on a crusade,” said Kansfield, a strapping man with a shock of white hair. “In point of fact, I’m a conservative theologian. I would not do anything that goes against the church.”

The Reformed Church—which traces its roots to Dutch settlers who arrived in America 400 years ago—is one of the more conservative denominations in the National Council of Churches.

Unlike its fellow mainline Protestant churches—such as the Episcopal and the Methodist—the church has not had high-profile controversies over the rights of homosexuals. That is about to change.

The denomination’s national office in Grand Rapids, Michigan, recently said formal complaints have been filed against Kansfield, and he said he expected to be brought up on charges in June at the church’s General Synod in Schenectady, New York. –

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