

## **Closing Argument** **The Rev. Scott Campbell, DeLong Counsel**

Sisters and brothers of the trial court, you have a rare and precious opportunity today. You have come to one of those watershed moments in life when by doing what is right and just and true, you can help to shape the future of the Church, and indeed the course of history. This is no small thing. I'm not engaging in hyperbole when I speak of shaping history. The eyes of the Church are upon you today. And not only the eyes of the Church, but the world is watching as well. There are thousands beyond these walls who will form their impression of the United Methodist Church by what they read of your decision.

This is no private matter, no in-house business. You will be declaring to the world in your decision what kind of people make up the United Methodist Church. They will see that we are truly a people with open minds, open hearts, and open doors, or they will see that we are a people who have closed our minds and hearts and doors, and turned our backs on a member of our own family. They will see that we are a people who have taken to heart the call of Amos to let justice flow down like waters in righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, or they will see that we are a people more concerned with tiny trickles of tradition than with great torrents of righteousness. They will see that we are a people who are guided by the highest and noblest principles embodied in our Discipline. Or they will see that we are a people who would rather tithe dill and cumin than concern ourselves with the weightier matters of the law -- justice, mercy and faithfulness.

As you well know, there are two charges in this case. The first is that Amy performed a holy union for a lesbian couple. In the documents you have received, the names of these two women were blacked out in order to protect their privacy. But there is one place in the wedding service that Amy missed with her black marker and their names leaked out and were used by the Church in trying to secure Amy's conviction. No matter. Carrie Johnson and Carolyn Larsen are more than blacked-out names on a prosecution handout. They are real flesh and blood people. Beloved children of God.

They also happen to be two women who finally found each other later in their lives. The gifts that God had held in store for them through many years of looking in the wrong places. In their happiness together, they came to Amy ask her to help them say thank you to God for the rich, deep blessing that God had so mysteriously and unexpectedly bestowed upon them. Their hearts overflowing with gratitude and joy.

Amy knew that Paragraph 341.6 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline 2008 edition called upon her to turn Carolyn and Carrie away. Two other pastors had already said that they could not do what was being asked of Amy. But she also knew that the Discipline said many other things that had powerfully shaped her understanding of ministry. At the time Amy had been preparing for ordination, she was asked by the United Methodist Church, will you be in ministry to all persons regardless of gender or sexual orientation. And she said yes.

It is a question which our Discipline asks every candidate. She knew that the Discipline declares, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. Not just some. She knew that the social principles of our Church implore us -- not suggest to us, but beg us, implore us -- not to reject our gay and lesbian members and friends.

And so she said yes. She would help two people who had been rejected by the Church to find their way back into its embrace. And that is exactly what has happened. She agreed to pray for them and invoke God's blessing upon them and their families in the same way that she had done for so many others over the years.

On the very first page of our Discipline we find these words from our Counsel of Bishops. They say, we do not see the Discipline as sacrosanct or infallible. But we do consider it a document suitable to our heritage. It is the most current statement of how United Methodists agree to live their lives together, unquote.

In seeking guidance in the complex business of living our lives together as people from many different nations, many different regions, many different backgrounds and opinions, we United Methodists take a snapshot every four years of what the majority of delegates to our General Conference thinks about particular issues at particular times.

Yet the great underlying principles upon which our faith is founded are not invalidated or set aside by these votes, at least not in the minds and hearts of those had been shaped and nurtured by these great principles, nor are they irradiated from our Discipline. They are still there. And they are still applicable. They continue to guide us as we struggle to be faithful to the Gospel in the swirl of a world changing faster than any of us can comprehend. If Amy is guilty of anything, she is guilty of choosing to be guided by what is great and noble and grace-filled in our heritage.

There's a second matter before us as well. Charge 2 claims that Amy has engaged in practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teaching by being a self-avowed practicing homosexual. We have heard that phrase ad nauseam over these last two days. We are going to have a look at this charge, and we're going to have to look at this charge in a different way than we have looked at the first one.

The second charge isn't about something that Amy did. It is about something that she is. It is about who she is as a person. The law of the Church is very, very careful about such charges. It requires that a person self-avow who they are. A person has the right to set limits upon what they will avow, and what they will not. And as such, the debate that was before us in terms of Amy's refusal to offer the answer to the Church that the Church was demanding falls into a special category.

The issue before us is one of self-avowal. Not coerced avowal. Amy has the right to place the limits upon where she will draw the line about what she will avow, and she cannot be compelled or coerced to go beyond what she has decided.

The evidence has shown that Amy has indeed avowed that she is a lesbian. She has indeed proclaimed love for her life partner, Val. She has done that openly and proudly in many settings, including to bishops and superintendents. But the law of the Church says more than that. In the case recorded -- in a case recorded in Judicial Council Decision No. 20, a woman wrote a letter to her bishop, stating that she was living in a partnered covenanted homosexual relationship with a woman.

The Judicial Council said that this admission was enough to subject her ministry to review. But in the process of that review, the Church had to ask whether she was engaging in genital sexual activity with a person of the same gender. That is the test of the word practicing that has been set up by the highest court in United Methodism.

Amy DeLong has never openly acknowledged to any official in the United Methodist Church that she is engaging in genital sexual activity with anyone. Nor has the Church produced a single shred of evidence that she has so acknowledged.

Now, there is more to consider here as well. And I'm going to try to lead you through just a very short chain of connections, and will do so as clearly as I can. Amy is being charged under Paragraph 2702, which is listed under chargeable offenses in the judicial section of the Discipline. Specifically, she is being charged for engaging in practices that have been declared -- that's an important word -- declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teaching. There is only one such declaration in the legal section of the Discipline. And that is found in Paragraph 304.3, where the Discipline states, the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. That is the declaration that is at stake in 2702.

Now comes the interesting piece. In Judicial Council 1027, we find these words. No provision of the Discipline bars a person with a same-sex orientation from the ordained ministry of the United Methodist Church. Rather, 304.3, that paragraph we were just talking about, is directed toward those persons who practice that same-sex orientation by engaging in prohibited sexual activity. The connection is clear. 304.3 only applies to those who have self-avowed that they are engaging in prohibited sexual activity. And thus the charge listed in 2702 that references that declaration in 304.3 is only applicable if it can be shown that the person has self-avowed that she is engaging in prohibited sexual activity.

Amy has made no such acknowledgement, and the Church has presented no evidence to show that she has. You must find her not guilty of Charge No. 2.

Thank you for your careful consideration of all that is before you in this significant moment.