



ADAM'S GIFT



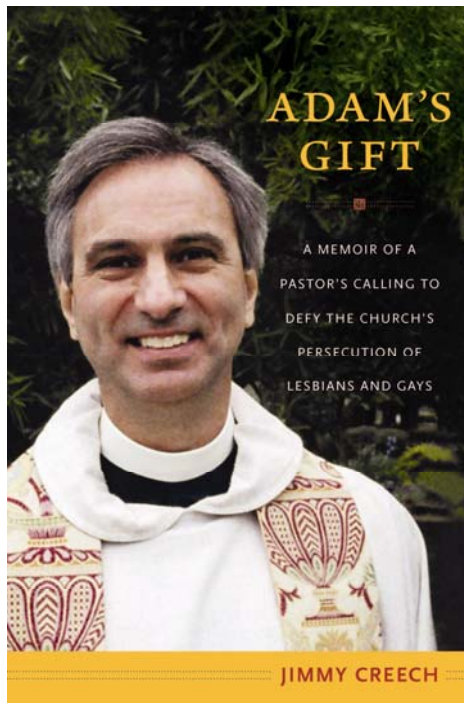
A MEMOIR OF A
PASTOR'S CALLING TO
DEFY THE CHURCH'S
PERSECUTION OF
LESBIANS AND GAYS

JIMMY CREECH

ADAM'S GIFT

A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's
Persecution of Lesbians and Gays

Jimmy Creech



Jimmy Creech, a United Methodist pastor in North Carolina, was visited one morning in 1984 by Adam, a longtime parishioner whom he liked and respected. Adam said that he was gay, and that he was leaving The United Methodist Church, which had just pronounced that “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” could not be ordained. He would not be part of a community that excluded him. Creech found himself instinctively supporting Adam, telling him that he was sure that God loved and accepted him as he was. *Adam's Gift* is Creech's inspiring first-person account of how that conversation transformed his life and ministry.

Adam's visit prompted Creech to re-evaluate his belief that homosexuality was a sin, and to research the scriptural basis for the church's position. He determined that the church was mistaken, that scriptural translations and interpretations had been botched and dangerously distorted. As a Christian, Creech came to believe that discriminating against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people was morally wrong. This understanding compelled him to perform same-gender commitment ceremonies, which conflicted with church directives. Creech was tried twice

by The United Methodist Church, and, after the second trial, his ordination credentials were revoked. *Adam's Gift* is a moving story and an important chapter in the unfinished struggle for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender civil and human rights.

Jimmy Creech is a former United Methodist minister, now retired and living in Raleigh, North Carolina. He has worked with many social-action organizations. He has received the Flagbearer Award from PFLAG National; the Human Rights Campaign Equality Award; the Saint Award presented by Metropolitan Community Church, San Francisco; the North Carolina Pride, Inc. Award; and the Lee and Mae Ball Award, presented by The Methodist Federation for Social Action. He was selected as one of *OUT* magazine's “Out 100” in 1998 and 1999.

376 pp., 17 color photographs, \$29.95 cloth trade
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Publication Date: April 10, 2011

Publicity Contact: Laura Sell
lsell@dukeupress.edu or 919-687-3639

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS



About Jimmy Creech



A native of Goldsboro, North Carolina, Jimmy Creech was an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church from 1970 to 1999. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Master of Divinity from The Divinity School of Duke University. Since the United Methodist Church removed his ordination in 1999, he has worked with many social-action organizations, including Soulforce, an interfaith movement confronting spiritual violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons; the North Carolina Religious Coalition for Marriage Equality, dedicated to defeating a anti-gay marriage amendment to the NC State constitution and to advocating for marriage equality; and Faith In America, an

organization working to end religion-based bigotry. He has received the Flagbearer Award from PFLAG National; the Human Rights Campaign Equality Award; the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina Frank Porter Graham Award; the North Carolina Pride, Inc. Award; and the Lee and Mae Ball Award, presented by The Methodist Federation for Social Action. He was selected as one of *OUT* magazine's "Out 100" in 1998 and 1999. Creech now lives in Raleigh where he recently helped to found the North Carolina Social Justice Project.

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Author Photo by Natalia Weedy

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Praise for Jimmy Creech and *Adam's Gift*

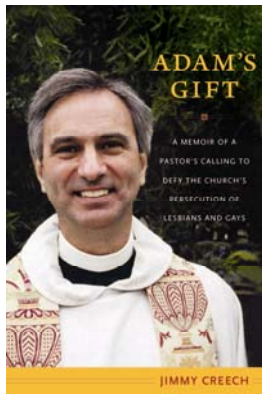
"Jimmy Creech is a man who puts his life where his Gospel is! His amazing journey, as told in his memoir, is the story of a follower of Christ who, like Christ, risked his own life and ministry for the sake of the marginalized and scorned. The LGBT community will forever owe him a debt for his sacrifice and his witness to the love of God for ALL of God's children."—**Bishop Gene Robinson**, Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire

"I would like to express a deep debt of gratitude to Jimmy Creech. He perceived what God is up to and then had the courage to act on his conviction, no matter what the price was to himself. Thank God for the prophets in our midst. May God give us the courage to emulate them!"—**Reverend John McNeil**

"*Adam's Gift* is not simply the dramatic, true story of one man's courageous and sacrificial stand against denominational practices that lead to the denial of full inclusion for lesbians and gays. It is also an intimate and powerful look at the current struggle between the forces of light and dark for the heart and soul of the Christian church."—**Reverend Dr. Mel White**

"Eleven years in the making, the author's valiant, first-person narrative examines the conundrum of religion vs. reason. . . . An inspirational example of unbiased humanitarianism."—**Kirkus Reviews**

"Essential reading for gay and lesbian Christians and other LGBT readers, Creech's memoir should serve as an important case study for pastors and denominations reexamining their stance toward sexual minorities." —**Library Journal**



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Jimmy Creech's Events Schedule

September 15, 2011

1:10 p.m.

Lecture

NCSU Peace Lunch Forum

NCSU Talley Student Center

3rd floor, Room 3118

Raleigh, NC 27695

<http://sites.google.com/site/pcmraleigh/peace-lunch-forum>

September 24, 2011

1:00-3:00 p.m.

Book signing

NC Pride

Duke University East Campus

Durham, NC

<http://www.ncpride.org/pride/pride.shtml>

September 25, 2011

9:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Sermons

12:45 p.m. Book Signing

Foundry United Methodist Church

1500 16th St NW

Washington, DC 20036

<http://www.foundryumc.org/>

September 26, 2011

7:00 p.m.

Reading and Book Signing

Busboys and Poets

1025 5th Street NW

Washington, DC 20001

http://www.busboysandpoets.com/about_5th.php

September 27, 2011

12:15 p.m.

Lecture

Dean's Forum

Wesley Seminary

4500 Massachusetts Ave. N.W.

Washington, DC 20016

<http://www.wesleyseminary.edu/>

October 2, 2011

10:00 a.m.

Lecture

United Church of Chapel Hill
1321 Martin Luther King Blvd
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

<http://www.unitedchurch.org/>

October 4 & 5, 2011

Time TBA

Lectures

University of Illinois
Springfield, IL 62703

<http://www.uis.edu/>

October 11, 2011

7:00 p.m.

Reading and Book signing
First United Methodist Church
7020 Cass St
Omaha, NE 68132

<http://www.fumcomaha.org/>

October 12, 2011

10:00 a.m.

Sermon

Hastings College
710 North Turner Avenue
Hastings, NE 68901

<http://www.hastings.edu/>

October 12, 2011

7:00 p.m.

Reading and Book signing
Hastings College Alliance
710 North Turner Avenue
Hastings, NE 68901

<http://www.hastings.edu/>

October 13, 2011

6:30 p.m.

Reading and Book signing
Sponsored by PFLAG Omaha
Countryside Community Church

8787 Pacific Street
Omaha, NE 68114
<http://countrysideucc.org/>

October 16, 2011
9:30 and 11:30 a.m.
Sermons
Omaha MCC
819 S. 22nd Street
Omaha, NE 68114
<http://www.mccomaha.org/>

October 24, 2011
11:00 a.m.
Lecture
Edenton Street United Methodist Church
228 West Edenton Street
Raleigh, NC 27603
<http://www.esumc.org/>

October 30, 2011
9:30 a.m.
Teaching Sunday School
Northhaven United Methodist Church
Dallas, TX 75230
<http://www.northaven.org/>

October 31, 2011
Time TBA
Lecture
Celebration Community Church
908 Pennsylvania Avenue
Fort Worth, TX 76104
<http://www.celebration-community-church.com/>

November 1, 2011
Time TBA
Lunch and Lecture
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, TX
<http://www.smu.edu/>

November 1, 2011

7:00 p.m.
Reading and Book signing
Northhaven United Methodist Church
Dallas, TX 75230
<http://www.northaven.org/>

November 2, 2011
7:15 p.m.
Lecture
Cathedral of Hope
5910 Cedar Springs Road
Dallas, TX 75235
<http://www2.cathedralofhope.com/new>

November 4-5, 2011
Workshop
PFLAG National Conference
Westin Alexandria Hotel
400 Courthouse Square
Alexandria, VA 22314
<https://community.pflag.org/convention>

November 8, 2011
Time TBA
Lecture
Sponsored by PFLAG
Elon University
Elon, NC 27244
<http://www.elon.edu/home/>

November 12, 2011
Workshop
Equality Conference
Greensboro, NC
<http://equalitync.org/events2/2011-equality-conference-and-gala>

November 13, 2011
10:30 a.m.
Sermon
Unitarian Universalist Peace Fellowship
4104 Watkins Rd
Raleigh, NC 27616
<http://uupf.org/>

November 20, 2011

10:00 a.m.
Sermon
304 East Trinity Avenue
Durham, NC 27701
<http://www.imanimcc.org/>

February 21, 2012
7:00 p.m.
Lecture
Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School
1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester, NY 14620
<http://www.crcds.edu/>

***Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution
of Lesbians and Gays***

Jimmy Creech

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An Interview with **Jimmy Creech**, author of *Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays* (Duke University Press, 2011)

Why did you write Adam's Gift?

Church teachings and policies have done and continue to do great harm to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, denigrating their humanity and justifying legal and social discrimination. I wrote *Adam's Gift* to challenge these teachings and policies with the hope that it will contribute to the movement toward full and equal human and civil rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Explain the title – what was Adam's gift?

Adam was the first person to self-identify to me as gay and to reveal to me the pain of growing up in an atmosphere of hatred and contempt, especially in the church. Until then, I had given little thought to the experience—if not the existence—of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. I had no awareness of the suffering the church caused them. I believed homosexuality to be a moral perversion. But Adam was someone I had known and respected for three years before he came out to me. His character and grace shattered the stereotypes I had about “queers,” challenged me to examine my negative attitudes, and seek deeper knowledge and understanding. His gift was the truth about himself which changed my life and ministry.

But doesn't the Bible say homosexuality is a sin?

No, it does not. Homosexuality, along with heterosexuality and bisexuality, is a sexual orientation, an innate personality trait that is normal, natural and healthy. There was no understanding of these sexual orientations by the writers of the Bible. Consequently, it is dishonest to claim that the Bible says anything about homosexuality. Within the entire Bible, there are a very few—I believe there are only four but others claim seven—references to same-gender sexual activity in the Bible. In each of these references, the sexual activity is condemned because it is related to idolatry and violence. It is not legitimate to use these references to condemn loving relationships between people of the same gender or to claim that homosexuality is a sin.

Why has the church persecuted lesbian, gay and bisexual people?

The early Christian church was profoundly influenced by Greek dualistic philosophies that defined physical reality as fallen and sinful, and the spiritual as good and godly. Consequently, sexuality was a major problem for the early church “fathers.” They considered sexual behavior to be a necessary evil, its only acceptable purpose being procreation. Hence, sexuality (consider only as carnal

desire) and spirituality (to which love was related) were separated. This abhorrence of sexuality ultimately led in the 13th century to the church establishing canon law that prohibited any and all sexual activity that did not have the potential for procreation. While this prohibition was not specifically designed to target gay people, same-gender sexual activity was prohibited by definition as a sin. Thereafter, people accused of or caught engaging in same-gender sexual intimacy were punished, often tortured and brutally executed. People who engaged in same-gender sexual activity were stigmatized as dangerous to the social order (criminal), as well as heretical. In the 19th century, when the new science of psychology discovered sexuality to be an innate aspect of the personality, a no less damaging perspective of gay people developed that defined homosexuality as a sickness. Whether understood as a sin, a crime or a sickness, the negative social attitudes toward same-gender sexual orientation are rooted in a flawed theology that was established in the early years of the Christian church. Homophobia was created and sustained by church teachings and policies, and has poisoned the larger culture ever since.

Why are you an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people?

As a pastor, I understood that my primary responsibility was to enable people to fulfill the Great Commandment: to love God and trust God's love for them, to love themselves and to love others. After Adam came out to me and I began to examine the teachings of the church, I discovered that the church was teaching lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people that God didn't love them and to fear God's condemnation, to hate themselves and to refrain from or feel shame for loving another intimately – teachings and policies of the church which did severe spiritual damage and were in conflict with the teachings of Jesus.

As I got to know more lesbian, gay and bisexual people, I became deeply aware of the cost they paid because of the church's teachings and policies. I was told by a gay man that he knew he was going to hell because he was queer. He said he learned that in church and he didn't want me to talk to him about God. I learned the suicide rate is much higher for gay people than for nongay people. I experienced families breaking apart when a family member announces that she or he is lesbian or gay. The church was doing nothing to help; it was only reinforcing and promoting the fear, self-hatred, shame and despair.

At the same time, I witnessed genuine love and commitment in the relationships of lesbian and gay couples, relationships that epitomized the ideals of marriage as well as any nongay couple I'd known. I was especially inspired by the love and care of gay couples when one of the spouses was dying because of AIDS—the tenderness, patience and sacrifice were extraordinary. I also got to know lesbian, gay and bisexual people I never suspected to be gay who were healthy and productive model citizens. The humanity and inherent dignity of the gay, lesbian and bisexual people I got to know after Adam came out to me transformed my mind and heart. As a pastor, I could not ignore their pain and suffering.

With this new understanding, I felt compelled to publicly challenge the teachings and policies of the church both to end the persecution and to make it possible for the church to regain integrity with the teachings of Jesus. Over time, my advocacy expanded to include full and equal human and civil rights.

What has been your experience as an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people? Do you have any regrets?

It's been difficult—and, it's been extraordinarily enriching. I've experienced painful losses and profoundly gracious gifts. The difficulties and losses came from those in the church who are adamant that gay people should not be welcomed and affirmed. It hurts to see people who represent the church and claim to speak of God's love be unjust and do harm to others.

I lost the opportunity to be a pastor in North Carolina, but gained the opportunity to work with the North Carolina Council of Churches. I was put on trial in Nebraska and lost my opportunity to continue as the pastor at First United Methodist Church in Omaha; but, because of that, I realized a calling to a national audience as an advocate for the full acceptance and affirmation of gay people. I was put on trial a second time and my credentials of ordination were taken from me; and yet, I'm no less compelled to continue until the persecution ends and full human and civil rights are granted to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Gifts of empowerment have come to me from those I've known who have braved the fear and hatred of the church to stand with integrity and dignity for justice and truth, both those who were gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, and those who were their allies. It's been an honor to be their colleague in the movement toward justice and equality.

I'll never minimize the pain and loss, but I'll also never diminish the richness of the experience.

How did your advocacy affect your family?

My family has been unconditionally supportive of my advocacy to end the persecution of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. No one has complained because of the difficulties and losses, although there were many. Patrick was in high school when I began to publicly challenge the church's teachings and policies that harm lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. He was supportive and bravely endured the publicity. Upon graduation, he began to pursue his own life goals and was no longer impacted by the controversy. My wife Chris and daughter Natalia gave up much—friends, comfort and financial security—when we went to Nebraska. But, the new friends in Omaha, along with the adventure of a new environment and the challenge of a just cause, gave them new perspectives and opportunities. In Omaha, Chris was able to teach social work on the university level for the first time; and, at Central High School, Natalia discovered her love for photography, which would eventually become her vocation. The difficulties and losses brought us closer. It wasn't just me, it was us as a family that was engaged in the advocacy. I'm most grateful for their love and support. I could not have survived without them.

Are you hopeful that the persecution of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people will end and that they will be fully accepted and included in society?

I am hopeful. Significant progress toward equality and acceptance has taken place since I closed the last chapter of my book, both in some denominations and in society. What made this possible—and what gives me hope—is the growing ranks of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who have the courage and integrity to let themselves be known by their

families, friends, neighbors, colleagues, customers and everyone else with whom they live their lives. They are the ones who are creating the extraordinary change in the ordinariness of their daily lives. Religion-based bigotry continues to do spiritual violence to them and deny them full and equal civil rights, but those who are resolute will be rewarded.

Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays

Jimmy Creech

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THE INDEPENDENT WEEKLY

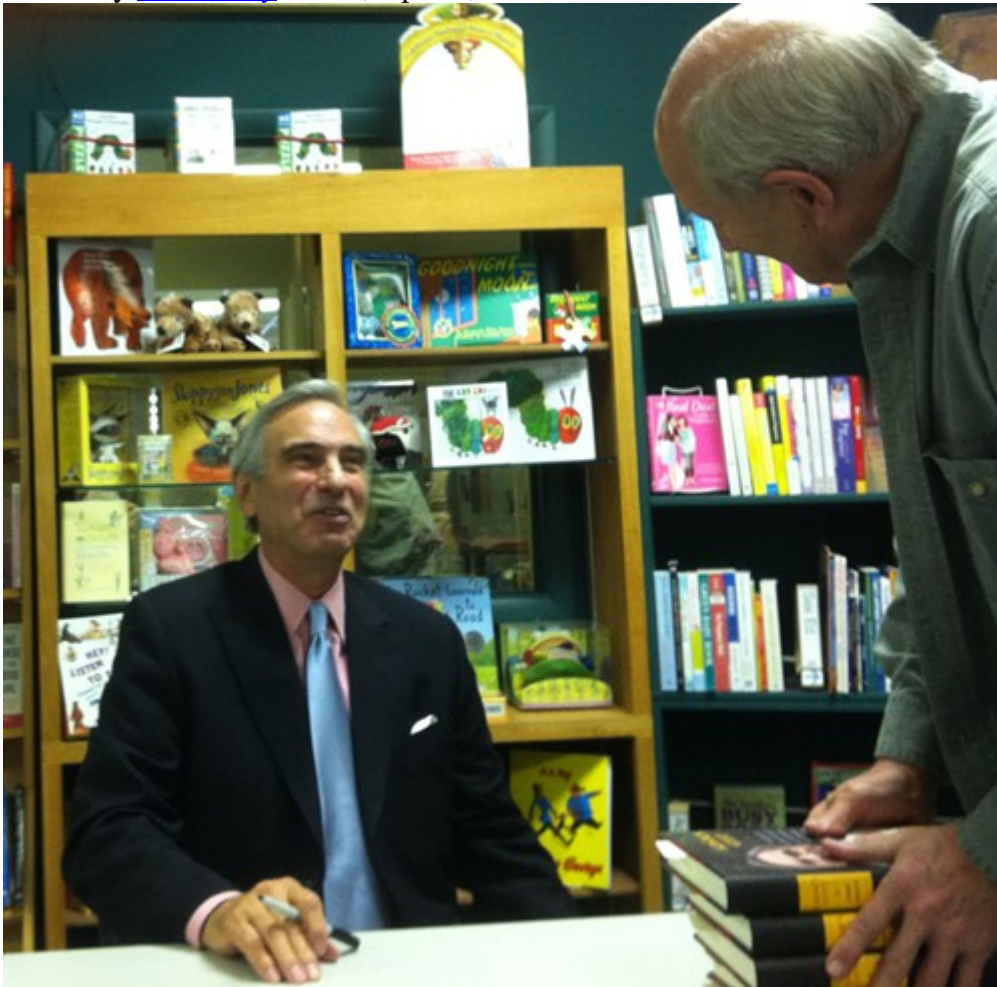
[Citizen](#)

Friday, April 15, 2011

[Around Raleigh](#)

Jimmy Creech, author of "Adam's Gift": An authentic hero

Posted by [Bob Geary](#) on Fri, Apr 15, 2011 at 9:47 AM



Jimmy Creech at Quail Ridge Books. That's Peter Rumsey at right, who's giving "Adam's Gift" to each of his four grandchildren.

"Hero" is an overused word in our vocabulary today. When I think of heroes, I think of men and women who've risked everything for a cause they believed in, not for pay, not because they were conscripted, and not because it was popular, but because — despite the public ridicule and the certainty that what they were doing would cost them dearly — they followed their conscience.

Or in the case of Jimmy Creech, followed their understanding of what Christianity was all about.

Creech has written a memoir, "Adam's Gift," about the tumultuous years in his life when, as a Methodist pastor, he was called — in the words of his subtitle — "to defy the Church's persecution of lesbians and gays."

It begins in 1984, when Creech was the pastor of a small church in Warsaw, N.C. and was blissfully unaware of the plight of gays in society. It ends in 1998, when Creech, having followed his conscience, has been forced out of leadership in Raleigh's Fairmont United Methodist Church, recruited to lead the biggest Methodist Church in Omaha, Nebraska and then actually de-frocked as a Methodist minister by the UMC governing body — all because he fought the Church over its discriminatory policies towards gays.

At the center of the book is a trial — not a civil trial, but a religious one in which Creech is charged with the "crime" of having married gay couples in Nebraska. Church "law" is against him. Creech's reading of the Bible and Methodist traditions of social justice compel him to go against that law and do what he believes God would want him to do.

The drama is every bit as real as if Creech had been put on trial for his life, for indeed, being a Methodist pastor was his life — and he risked it, and lost it, having eschewed all the readily available excuses that he might've offered for side-stepping the issue.

If you don't know Creech's story, or even if you do — and many in Raleigh will remember some of it — the book is a page-turner from the day Creech arrives in Nebraska to the guilty verdict that sends him back to North Carolina.

The power of the book, though, derives from its very first pages. Creech, in 1984, isn't a young activist looking for a place in the gay rights movement. Until "Adam," a congregant, comes out to him in the spring of that year, he didn't know, as he puts it, any "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" of the kind the General Conference of the UMC has just voted to bar from ordination.

But if Creech is no gay rights activist, he is dedicated to civil rights, and having grown up in eastern North Carolina, he's all too familiar with the way religious doctrine can be misused to keep people down — black people.

When Adam comes to him, he pours out his soul about the misery he's felt in his own church and the self-loathing that the church encouraged him to feel before, finally, he decided to leave it.

Creech is distraught. "As a pastor," he writes, "my mission was to help people overcome whatever damaged them spiritually; whatever diminished their capacity to trust God's love, to love others, and to love themselves. I'd never imagined sexuality to be an issue of justice, much less a spiritual one. In fact, I knew no clergy who did see it that way. Although I didn't realize it immediately, Adam's visit that Wednesday set the rest of my life and ministry on a new course. Adam launched me on a journey with no clear destination and with no guide or maps to follow, other than an intuitive sense of what was right, just, and compassionate."

It would easy to say that Creech was confronted with a choice that day of taking refuge in church doctrine or seeking his own spiritual path. But what the book makes clear is that Creech never thought to take refuge. He thought to do what was right. Soon, having come to Fairmont in Raleigh, he was one of a trio of pastors leading the Raleigh Religious Network for Gay and Lesbian Equality (RRNGLE — "Ringle"), stepping out at the head of the '88 Gay Pride parade and conducting a marriage ceremony with a gay couple. In 1990, he talked to the *Indy's* Melinda Ruley for a cover story that made him a national figure. It led to his ouster from Fairmont and a stint with the N.C. Council of Churches. Then Nebraska.

Today, Creech lives in Boylan Heights. He speaks all over the country on gay rights issues and bears, no scars, but a smile.

As a friend told him on Sunday, "I've been a Methodist all my life, and today I'm ashamed of that. But one day, they'll call you blessed."

On the way out, I saw Peter Rumsey carrying four copies of "Adam's Gift" to the table where Creech was signing. Four? "I'm giving one to each of my grandchildren," he said.

Good idea. Great book.



The first lines of this review say it all without any intended disrespect to any other "hero." I was a member of First UMC in Omaha from 1983-1999 before my return to Texas. I witnessed the controversy that Jimmy's inclusive gospel preaching and life brought. I also became increasingly convinced that I could, in spite of the larger church's teachings, accept my own sexuality for what it is--a blessing. Thank you, God.

Mike Herrington
Fort Worth, Texas

Posted by [MikeHerrington](#) on April 16, 2011 at 10:27 AM

When a pastor defied his church for his conscience

BY YONAT SHIMRON - Staff Writer

Published in: Life

Less than a year after he became pastor at First United Methodist Church in Omaha, Neb., two church members, identifying themselves as "Mary and Martha" asked the Rev. Jimmy Creech to perform a "covenant ceremony" celebrating their commitment to each other.

The year was 1997, and Creech faced the second most momentous decision of his career. The first - joining the 1988 N.C. Gay Pride March - cost him his pastorate at Raleigh's Fairmont United Methodist. Now he was being asked to violate his denomination's policy prohibiting pastors from performing such ceremonies.

Creech wasted little time. He agreed to do it.

"I would be treating the two women differently than I would treat anyone else if I didn't do it," said Creech, 66, in a recent interview.

And so began the drama that led to his ouster from First United Methodist and a church trial that stripped him of his ordination.

In his new book, "Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays," (Duke University Press) Creech recounts his awakening to the church's treatment of gays and lesbians and his calling to challenge - indeed, defy - his denomination's stand on

nonfiction

Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays

Jimmy Creech, Duke University Press, 368 pages

Meet the author

Jimmy Creech will read from his new book, "Adam's Gift" and sign copies:

11 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 23, NoFo @ The Pig, 2014 Fairview Road, Raleigh.

7 to 9 p.m., April 25, The Regulator, 720 Ninth St., Durham.

7 to 9 p.m., April 27, The Internationalist Bookstore, 405 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill.

2 to 4 p.m., April 30, McIntyre's Books, 2000 Fearington Village Center, Pittsboro.

Related Stories

Related Images



sexuality.

The book, 12 years in the making, was whittled down from 1,075 to 368 pages. It charts the events of those critical years without a trace of bitterness or cynicism. Creech is not on a mission to change the policies of the United Methodist Church or even to appeal to Methodist church members, he said.

"I wrote this book to speak to a larger audience about the historical background out of which the bigotry - misunderstanding, fear and malice - against lesbian, gay and bisexual arose," he said.

From his upbringing

Creech's call to challenge the church is tied inextricably to his upbringing in the Jim Crow South and specifically his hometown of Goldsboro. He remembers white church members referring to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as a rabble-rouser and Communist, and was dismayed to find his father agreeing with those who said the three civil rights workers slain in Mississippi in 1964 deserved their fate: "They shouldn't have meddled," the elder Creech said.

Later as a Duke Divinity School student, Creech studied liberation theology, which sees the Bible's central thrust as a quest for justice on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised.

During his third church assignment, in the Duplin County town of Warsaw, a man he calls "Adam" confided he was gay and opened Creech's eyes to the denomination's treatment of gays. It was 1984 and the denomination had just barred ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals." Creech saw obvious parallels with the church's treatment of African-Americans. And he resolved to do something about it.

By the time he became pastor at Raleigh's Fairmont United Methodist Church in 1987, Creech was a fully committed activist.

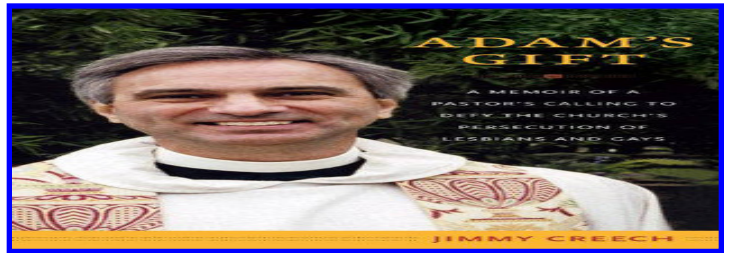
SHAWN ROCCO -
srocco@newsobserver.com

Creech



JENNIFER BRUNO - AP

Jimmy Creech, center, presided when James Raymer, left, and Larry Ellis recommitted to each other in November 1999. Creech married the couple in April 1999.



"He was among the first to say the church's stance is wrong," said the Rev. Nancy Petty, pastor of Raleigh's Pullen Memorial Baptist Church and a lesbian. "He did it in a courageous and gentle way. I think of him as a forerunner, clearing the path for many who have come after him."

Reaction to Creech's participation in the gay rights march was swift. Not only was he not reappointed at Fairmont in 1990, but no church in the N.C. Conference of the United Methodist Church would have him. He took a part-time job with the N.C. Council of Churches advocating for issues such as gay inclusion and opposition to the death penalty.

Losing his credentials

By the time he got a second chance, with the Omaha appointment, the denomination's views were firm. A new policy prohibited pastors from celebrating gay unions.

Creech told a superior he would not abide by the law; she hired him anyway.

Gay exclusion is not limited to the United Methodist Church. Over the past 20 years, just about every Christian denomination has undergone bitter upheavals over the issue. Today, other denominations, notably the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, ordain gays and lesbians. Methodists have not budged.

Creech may best be remembered as the first Methodist minister to be stripped of his ordination credentials as a result of performing a covenant ceremony. At least one other Methodist minister, a lesbian, met the same fate. A spokesman said the denomination does not track how many of its ministers have been defrocked.

The tide of history

Creech, who began work on his memoir in 1999 when he and his wife, Chris Weedy, returned to North Carolina, said he has no regrets. A longtime resident of Raleigh's Boylan Heights, he has continued his advocacy in retirement.

"You can have all kinds of theological debates, debates about what the Bible says," he said. "But when the humanity of gays and lesbians is experienced and witnessed that will give energy to the movement."

Despite the status quo, many in the denomination say change is inevitable.

"The tide of history is moving in Jimmy's direction," said the Rev. Charles Smith, a retired pastor and district superintendent in the N.C. Conference of the United Methodist Church. "Just as we repented for racism, so someday we'll have a service of repentance for gay people. I don't know when that will come, but when it does, we will lionize Jimmy."



ADAM'S GIFT

A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays

Author: Creech, Jimmy

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Category: Nonfiction

The belief system of a lifelong Methodist minister is challenged by the sudden desertion of a gay parishioner.

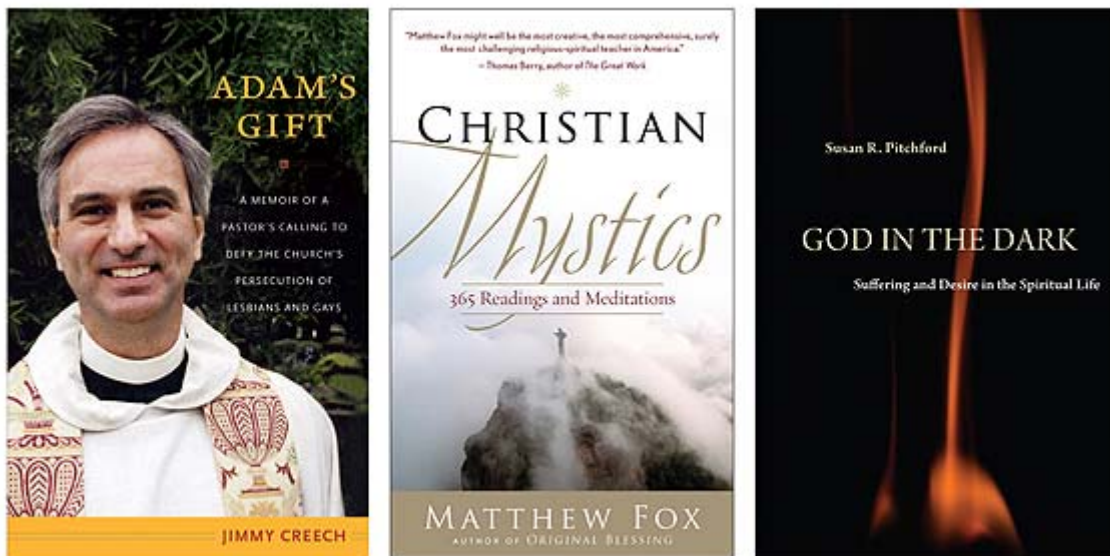
In the spring of 1984, a grief-stricken, longtime churchgoer announced that he was quitting Creech's North Carolina diocese because of the religion's newly announced policy banning the ordination of homosexuals. Creech retraces his childhood, raised in the South by staunch Methodists who addressed sex (and same-sex desire) with disdain. His appreciation of James Baldwin's groundbreaking gay novel *Giovanni's Room* (1956) defied that cultural bias and "planted a seed of doubt in my mind about the sinfulness of homosexuality that would fully mature later on." Creech writes with intense conviction about the "pastoral responsibility" he felt to research and then logically question the Bible's stance on homosexuality, to fully re-educate himself and, once convinced there was no wrongdoing, became involved in the gay and lesbian equal-rights movement. The author moved to a new diocese in 1987 where his social activism intensified with participation in gay-pride marches, gay-youth counseling and work with charitable AIDS organizations. Church politics soon exploded, and Creech relinquished his position but was ordained a pastor again after a move. While applauded and considered revolutionary by some, the author's community participation and controversial gay-marriage ceremonies drew the ire of papal sovereigns and Methodist parishioners who conspired and petitioned against him, labeling Creech a resistant turncoat and ushering in his suspension and exhaustive jury trial. Eleven years in the making, the author's valiant, first-person narrative examines the conundrum of religion vs. reason. Wounded by endless negative reactions yet buoyed by fellow activists, Creech concludes with a defection from his former Methodist alliance into an all-inclusive San Francisco-based church where he continues to fight for equal rights.

An inspirational example of unbiased humanitarianism.

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Spiritual Living Reviews, March 1, 2011



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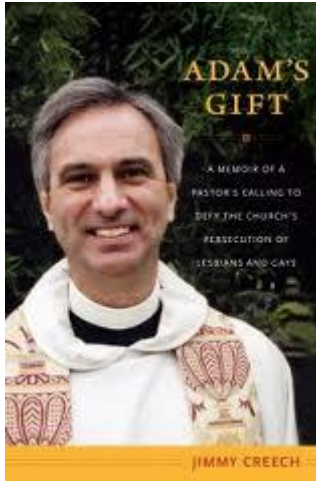
★Creech, Jimmy. *Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling To Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays*. Duke Univ. Mar. 2011. c.353p. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780822348856. \$29.95. REL

Creech, a former United Methodist minister, pioneered the rights of gays and lesbians within the United Methodist Church. His calmly written autobiography tells the heartbreaking story of his own denomination's refusal to right the wrongs done to their own membership, including him. VERDICT Essential reading for gay and lesbian Christians and other LGBT readers, Creech's memoir should serve as an important case study for pastors and denominations reexamining their stance toward sexual minorities.

http://www.gay.net/hot_topics/2011/07/adams-gift-does-god-hate-the-gays.html

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Formative Distortion: Does God Really Hate The Gays?

By: Christopher Don...
7.25.2011

Who decides what's right or wrong?

We all know the Bible appraises self-worth according to strict sets of laws and hierarchies: Go to Hell if you covet the neighbor's house, kill the neighbor, or take off with the neighbor's wife.

It runs moral meanings smooth over broken fine lines that fall somewhere between fact and fiction and good and evil. God still hates figs and shrimp, right?

It also often hides contradiction and its very own accommodating history under stories that once upon a time were not its own: Remember, Christmas and Easter grew from Pagan roots.

Unfortunately for us, the Bible and people's interpretations of it can brew misguided thoughts about homosexuality. But it does deserve our attention. Its words read just like modern humans behave: We wake hand-in-hand with dissension; we evolve, yet still keep patterns of judgment close. And we all at some point in time ask, "Where did we come from? What's the point?"

So where do the gays go from here?

Well, former United Methodist minister and Duke University seminary scholar, Jimmy Creech, suggests that maybe it's time we re-evaluate what the Bible really says about homosexuality.

In [*Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays*](#), straight-identifying Creech defends same-sex love against the Church's dangerous distortion of homosexuality as sin. He digs deep into Biblical texts, mines credible sense from scripture and history, and writes passionately about his decision to reconcile his stance on gay rights and same-sex marriage even though these things ultimately led the Church to revoke his ordination credentials.

What would Jesus do? Jimmy Creech might know.



Does the Bible condemn homosexuality?

No, it's actually not possible for the Bible to say this in any way. First of all, the writers of the Bible had no understanding of the innate human trait of sexual orientation. Consequently, there were no words for homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality. These words were coined in the late 1800s when the young science of psychology studied human sexuality and discovered that sexual orientation is an innate aspect of human personality. We've come to understand these three sexual orientations as

equally normal, natural and healthy. There are a few references in the Bible to same-gender sexual acts, though all of them are condemned because of the context in which they are found: violent rape, idolatry, and promiscuity. There is, by the way, no condemnation in the Bible of same-gender loving relationships. However, because of the fear and prejudice against same-gender loving relationships, church leaders have used these condemnations of violence, idolatry and promiscuity to condemn same-gender loving relationships. If the logic used against homosexual sex acts was used in the context of condemned heterosexual sex acts, one could claim the Bible says “heterosexuality is a sin.” But, of course, no one does.

Another issue at play is patriarchal culture. Men are considered the masters (the Hebrew for husband actually means “lord”) and women are inferior and subservient. Consequently, for a man to have sex with another man as men have sex with women violates the rigid gender roles and threatens the patriarchal culture. Such an act puts the submissive man in the woman’s role which from the biblical perspective is “abominable.” Interestingly, there’s only one biblical reference to women having sex with women (chapter one of Romans), most likely because the writers of the Bible (men) weren’t concerned about that – it didn’t threaten their patriarchal culture.

The few references to same-gender sexual acts have thus been interpreted and used in ways to justify the persecution of LGBT people. In similar ways, passages in the Bible were interpreted in ways to justify slavery, white supremacy and racial segregation. The Bible denies equal rights to women because of its patriarchy and allowed the persecution and mass murder of Jews. Modern society has rejected the misuse of the Bible to justify these injustices even though each case is a form of abuse. Using the Bible to justify the persecution of LGBT people is no less an abuse and can no longer be tolerated. It’s intellectually dishonest, pure bigotry.



Can you explain how the word “homosexual” is misused in Biblical texts?

In *First Corinthians* and *First Timothy*, the Apostle Paul used Greek words that no one else had ever used – either before him or after him. These words came to be associated with homosexuality in the late 13th Century after Thomas Aquinas condemned same-sex sexual acts in his writings. From then on, the Greek words in these two passages were

understood to mean, a “man who has sex with a man.” Because there was no Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek words (the three languages in which the Bible was written) for a “man who has sex with a man,” the term Sodomite was invented. It is often found in translations, but has no basis in the languages of the Bible – it’s purely an example of bigotry written into those translations after the fact.

Aquinas was the first church teacher to associate the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with same-sex acts. Before then, the destruction was attributed to the violent inhospitality and greed of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. A similar thing happened when the Revised Standard Version of the Bible was published in 1952. Instead of using “a man who has sex with a man,” or the King James version, “them that defile themselves with mankind,” or Sodomites, the translators chose to use the modern term homosexual – even though there was no basis for it in biblical languages. Consequently, people who do not know this history innocently claim that the Bible says “homosexuals can’t inherit the kingdom of heaven” because First Corinthians says so; and, that “homosexuals” are contrary to sound doctrine.

While careful study of these passages reveals no condemnation of same-sex loving relationships, the mass of people who read these passages without the benefit of careful study feel justified in condemning homosexuals. The harm that has been done to LGBT people by this scandalous scholarship cannot be exaggerated.



Do you think Christianity will eventually embrace LGBT people in the future, however near or far?

Yes, mainline Christian communities will fully embrace the LGBT community with equal standing and participation in the *near* future. Christian communities actually have come a long way toward this goal in a relatively short time. The Unitarian Universalist Association was the first in this country, soon after Stonewall. And now the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church, USA, the Episcopal Church, USA, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America have all embraced the ordination of clergy in same-sex committed relationships and marriage for same-sex couples.

Even though the ecclesiastical leadership of the Roman Catholic Church remains adamantly against sexually active LGBT people, more than 74% of Catholic laity support same-sex marriage or civil unions with support for their full civil rights and equal protections. There will be some who will never accept same-sex relationships, but they belong to the past of fear and hatred, not the future of acceptance and equality.

What do you say to non-believers, atheists and agnostics? Do you see religion as something essential and necessary to humanity's place in the universe?

No, I don't believe religion is essential and necessary. Religion is an organized or structured expression of the innate wonder and awe human beings have about life, nature and time. This wonder and awe and the beliefs people have about it are not dependent on religious language and concepts. I find common ground with anyone who explores those big questions about life.

Being religious doesn't guarantee a person will be good, nor does being a non-believer make a person bad. These are just two ways humans approach the mysteries of life. But, I do believe everyone who is aware and sensitive to what's happening in the world, in their lives and the lives of others, has a keen sense of wonder and awe about it all. What really matters is how we treat each other.



Your memoir, *Adam's Gift*, is about the United Methodist Church's decision to revoke your ordination credentials after you performed same-sex commitment ceremonies. But what do you think the real gift was for you?

Adam's gift was the truth about himself – a truth he'd concealed for nearly 50 years of his life. It was a gift because it opened my eyes to a reality I'd not seen before – a persecution of LGBT people in which I unknowingly was complicit. It was his humanity, his dignity and integrity, his gentleness and humility that would not allow me to rely on my conventional stereotypes and prejudice about the gay community. While there was much study and understanding I had to pursue afterward, Adam transformed me in the moment he revealed to me his true personhood and personal history. He gave me his most precious gift: His personal truth.

How do you feel about Christianity's position in US politics? It's sad, but a holier than thou attitude still marginalizes the LGBT community.

It's not possible to speak of "Christianity" as if it is one set of beliefs and values. Today, Christianity is not a term that has meaning because of the diversity within and among Christian groups. The Christians with whom I'm aligned are progressives. There are large numbers of moderate Christians too. And, there are Christian reactionaries who have

found a political home in the Republican Party. The attack on LGBT people by many Christian reactionaries is sincere – meaning, it is an expression of their real fear and prejudice. However, right-wing politicians cynically exploit this bigotry for political ends (Karl Rove and George W. Bush). I believe that the political strategy of exploiting anti-gay bigotry is coming to an end. With marriage equality in a growing number of states, with the repeal of DADT, and the current discussion of the Respect for Marriage bill, the momentum is toward inclusion and acceptance, not exclusion. Even some right-wing Republicans are saying their party should no longer talk about gay issues.



How do you think we can change the way other people less understanding think about LGBT people?

People I know who've changed their hearts and minds about gay people have done so because they got to know someone who is gay. They didn't change because of a good argument or debate about the Bible. They changed because they couldn't reconcile their fear and hatred with the dignity and character of someone they discovered to be gay. Sometimes, this is a new acquaintance whose respect is earned over time. Sometimes, it's someone loved for a lifetime. So, the gift Adam gave to me is a gift all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people can give to someone – a parent, sibling, child, neighbor, pastor, friend or colleague. LGBT people should not undervalue the power of their own dignity and integrity. There are, of course, some people whose minds and hearts will never change.

In addition, those of us who are straight must challenge anti-gay bigotry and malice whenever we encounter it and challenge elected officials who perpetuate persecution. An unjust world belongs to all of us, and all of us have an obligation to end the injustice.

Pastor's Church Trial Attests To Divisiveness of Gay Issue

By GUSTAV NIEBUHR
Published: February 15, 1998

Correction Appended

OMAHA — Joining a man and a woman before God is standard duty for members of the clergy. But for performing a union of a different sort, the Rev. Jimmy Creech, a United Methodist minister here, will soon be tried in a church court.

At issue is Mr. Creech's officiation at a covenant ceremony last September uniting two women in his congregation, First United Methodist Church. The event resembled a Methodist wedding, with Scripture readings, an exchange of vows and a celebration of communion.

But it came a month after Mr. Creech's bishop told him not to do it and a year after Methodist leaders added a statement to the denomination's rule book forbidding ceremonies uniting people of the same sex.

Mr. Creech said in a recent interview that he could not, as their pastor, refuse the women's request and that he considered the church's opposition to unions of people of the same sex to be discriminatory. He could lose his ministerial credentials if convicted.

The trial, which is scheduled to begin on March 11 in a Kearney, Neb., church, will highlight a divisive pattern emerging within Protestantism, where the consensus against homosexuality has been eroding, as it has elsewhere in society.

Issues concerning homosexuality, especially the question of whether to ordain noncelibate gay men and lesbians as ministers, have touched off rancorous debates at church conventions, where opponents often cite biblical injunctions against homosexual acts. A few cases have ended up before ecclesiastical judges.

No major Protestant denomination has voted to allow the ordination of homosexuals as ministers, nor has any developed official rituals to bless same-sex unions. But the stands that denominational leaders have taken vary considerably.

In 1996, for example, the United Methodists firmly rejected a measure to allow homosexuals to be ordained.

Last year, the regional bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) went a step further, amending the church constitution to bar anyone sexually active outside marriage from serving as a minister, elder or deacon.

By contrast, the United Church of Christ leaves the matter up to its regional associations, a few of which have ordained openly gay men and lesbians as ministers. In 1997, priests and lay leaders at the Episcopal Church's General Convention narrowly rejected a proposal to develop liturgies for blessing same-sex unions.

"This is the polarizing issue," said Michael McClellan, an Omaha lawyer and a member of the First United Methodist Church who will be Mr. Creech's co-counsel. A retired Methodist bishop will serve as judge and other ministers as a jury.

The number of same-sex unions quietly blessed by clergy members is not known. The

privacy surrounding such ceremonies has helped insure that no minister has ever been tried for performing one in the 8.5 million-member United Methodist Church, the nation's largest mainline Protestant denomination.

"This is going to be a test case," said Mr. Creech, 53, who has been suspended with pay. "This didn't start as a strategy. It began as a couple coming to me." Mr. Creech is married with a stepdaughter and has an adult son by a previous marriage.

James V. Heidinger 2d, president of Good News, an evangelical movement among Methodists, said the trial would "be a shot heard round the church." The ceremony, he said, was "a clear violation of biblical principles, as well as the tradition of the church."

Mr. Creech described his position on homosexuality and the church as a Divine calling. "I really believe this is God's history and I'm part of what God is doing," he said. "I've been invited into it and given a responsibility."

Bans on ordaining homosexuals as ministers and blessing same-sex unions, he said, reflect "a cultural prejudice that has been institutionalized in the church." In 1997, he signed a statement, titled "In All Things Charity," that called for support for ordaining gay men and lesbians and for developing ceremonies for "same-gendered couples." The statement has been signed by more than 1,300 Methodist ministers, or about 3 percent of the denomination's 37,000 ordained ministers.

The Rev. Jeanne Knepper, a spokeswoman for Affirmation: United Methodists for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Concerns, said a few signers had performed same-sex unions. "I could give you -- but I won't give you -- the names of 20 United Methodist pastors who have done these ceremonies," she said. Mr. Creech, she added, "is not anywhere near alone: he's the lightning rod."

Mr. Creech is charged with violating Methodism's "The Book of Discipline," its laws and administrative rules. In 1996, the denomination's policy-making body, the General Conference, added a sentence to the book's "social principles" section: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

That section also contains an earlier statement describing homosexuals as people of "sacred worth," but calling homosexual acts "incompatible with Christian teaching." Mr. Creech's trial will turn on whether the 1996 statement against same-sex unions is legally binding, rather than merely advisory, as Mr. Creech and his supporters contend.

The controversy has shaken members at Mr. Creech's church, a 200,000 square-foot complex atop a small hill. Financial pledges are down, as is Sunday School attendance. Some of Mr. Creech's critics have quit attending, while some supporters have picketed the offices of the Nebraska Bishop, Joel N. Martinez. Church staff members say many in the 1,900-member congregation feel caught in the middle.

Founded in 1855, the First United Methodist Church has undergone tumult before, although nothing like this. One early pastor carried a six-shooter in the pulpit. Another, considered a Southern sympathizer in the Civil War years, was run off by the congregation. In 1975, a tornado struck the church buildings.

At one time, said the Rev. Donald D. Bredthauer, the acting pastor, First United Methodist "was sort of seen as a high-steeple church," meaning socially exclusive. But he said that was

no longer true for a congregation that prepared meals for people with AIDS, backed an organization that lobbies for civic improvements in poor neighborhoods, Omaha Together One Community, and supported Habitat for Humanity, which builds housing for the needy.

"We've not stopped doing our other ministries just to take care of this," Mr. Bredthauer said.

Bishop Martinez appointed Mr. Creech to the church in 1996. He had served congregations in North Carolina. But his critics said that they found out only later that Mr. Creech left his last pulpit in Raleigh, N.C., amid a bitter dispute over his support for local gay rights initiatives.

A chapter in a book, "Congregations in Conflict: The Battle Over Homosexuality" (Rutgers, 1996), by Keith Hartman, describes that experience, saying that the congregation divided mainly along generational lines, with older members largely opposing Mr. Creech.

Mr. Creech later went to work as a lobbyist for the North Carolina Council of Churches, where he became known as an opponent of the death penalty.

The rift at the First United Methodist Church began in January 1997, after Mr. Creech preached that "to be gay was in itself healthy, normal and natural." The sermon, he said, "got a pretty strong reaction."

Bob Howard, a retired insurance company executive, said he had complained to Mr. Creech that it was "the fourth sermon we had heard on the subject."

Mr. Howard said the minister "listened very well, but the word was, 'I'm going to continue down that path.' " Mr. Howard canceled his financial pledge in protest and later stopped attending.

Melvin J. Semrad, a gas and electric company executive, said he urged Mr. Creech "to slow this train down," to give skeptics a chance to adjust. And last April, Mr. Semrad said, he warned Mr. Creech that his preaching was "going to drive a wedge" into the congregation.

"We believe we are an open church," Mr. Semrad said, "but we also believe in the 'Discipline.' " The Methodist rule book, he added, "is not for someone to pick and choose."

But Deb Keeney, an administrative assistant in a local school, said that Mr. Creech was "helping us fulfill our vision" at the church.

Before he arrived, the church had drawn up a statement of purpose, called "Vision Focus," which said, in part, that members would "welcome and celebrate the diversity of God's children," including "all economic levels, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, marital states, abilities and age levels."

Mr. Creech, Ms. Keeney said, "came to the church knowing this was the vision we had, and had no inkling there were people who did not agree with that."

But not everyone in the church had attached such weight to the statement. Frank Rathbun, a church member who is a retired natural gas company executive, said the way the statement was interpreted under Mr. Creech "turned out to be much broader than when people agreed to it."

All this might have remained within church walls had not the two women asked Mr. Creech to perform a covenant ceremony for them. He agreed last July and wrote to Bishop Martinez, who, he said, instructed him not to conduct it.

Mr. Creech said he replied to the bishop "that I felt that it was my responsibility as a pastor to do it," and that the "Book of Discipline" statement was "unjust and discriminatory." (He has not identified the women, nor have they spoken out.)

After the ceremony, more than 400 First United Methodist members wrote Bishop Martinez, saying the event challenges "the principles of our Christian faith." A Methodist minister in western Nebraska filed a formal complaint. In November, the bishop suspended Mr. Creech.

Two months later, a church investigative committee ordered a trial. Bishop Martinez issued a statement promising to expedite the process. He did not return calls seeking comment on the case. But Mr. Creech released his own statement, saying, in part, "I believe that the sin of heterosexism is no less a sin than that of racism."

His supporters have organized a group called "Support the Vision." At a recent meeting, one woman described Mr. Creech as "a beautiful man of Christ" who "was sent here for a purpose, for all of us to be tested."

But Virginia Semrad, Melvin Semrad's wife, likened Mr. Creech's relationship with the church to a marriage gone sour. "He was not known, we did not court each other long enough," she said. "I feel Jimmy Creech cannot, should not, return to his pulpit."

Although Mr. Bredthauer occupies the pastor's office, it remains largely as Mr. Creech left it. The wall behind the desk displays portraits of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mohandas K. Gandhi and Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, all victims of assassins. There is also a picture of Rosa Parks, the African-American woman who in 1955 refused to yield her seat to a white man on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Ala..

Mr. Creech, who grew up in Goldsboro, N.C., said he had been "very much affected" by the Civil Rights movement, although he had not taken part in it. "It was people willing in that moment to be faithful, to take a stand, to do the right thing, that ultimately brought about change in the South," he said.

He acknowledged that within a congregation, such boldness could be disruptive. But the sacrifice, he said, amounted simply to the loss "of artificial unity and peace."

"In order for there to be any kind of growth," he said, "there must be conflict."

Correction: February 26, 1998, Thursday An article on Feb 15 about the coming church trial of the Rev. Jimmy Creech, a United Methodist minister in Omaha, for performing a ceremony uniting two women, misstated the surname of a critic of Mr. Creech. He is Bob Howell, not Howard.