

the rest of



our world

Gay Pastors

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Another body of the United Methodist Church has reaffirmed its policy forbidding openly gay pastors.

The nine-member Judicial Council, the denomination's highest court, on Monday released the interpretation of the Methodist Book of Discipline.

However, in a small victory for gay pastors, the council ruled a bishop cannot strip away pastors' appointments without giving them a full church hearing.

The decision unifies the judicial and legislative branches of the nation's third-largest denomination against accepting gay pastors.

The United Methodist General Conference, which sets policy for the denomination, voted last year to maintain its doctrine that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching."

The Judicial Council ruled that a Seattle minister's statement that she is "living in a partnered, covenanted homosexual relationship with another woman" is sufficient to merit a review of her status as a minister.

The council's rulings were in response to questions submitted by the denomination's Pacific Northwest Conference, which includes Washington and northern Idaho, after its local bishop denied ministerial appointments to two Seattle pastors who revealed their homosexuality.

Estates

SEATTLE — The highest court in the state of Washington has ruled that gay relationships deserve the same kind of recognition when passing an estate from partner to another as married couples do.

The state Supreme Court ruled that gays may be entitled to the estates of partners who die without wills.

The justices reversed a lower court ruling, ordering a new trial for Frank Vasquez, who is claiming the \$230,000 estate of his longtime partner. A lower court had found the claim invalid because same-sex marriage is illegal in Washington.

"Equitable claims are not dependent on the 'legality' of the relationship between the parties, nor are they limited by the gender or sexual orientation of the parties," Justice Charles Johnson wrote in the unanimous decision.

"It's a tremendous affirmation of one of the most basic principles," said Jenny Pizer of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, a gay rights organization.

Vasquez, 64, shared a house, business and financial assets with Robert Schwerzler, who died without a will in 1995.

Vasquez claimed the estate, which consisted mainly of the house. His claim was challenged by Schwerzler's siblings, who described Vasquez as a housekeeper and said they never saw the men display affection.

Surgeon General

WASHINGTON — The U.S. surgeon general cheered by gay advocates for his pronouncements is retiring.

Surgeon General David Satcher, a Clinton appointee, said he will leave government service in February at the end of his four-year term.

Satcher said he would not ask President Bush to appoint him to another term.

Satcher rankled the White House last summer when his office released a report that found there was no evidence showing that teaching sexual abstinence in schools was successful. It called for schools to encourage abstinence among students but to also teach birth control techniques.

Additionally, the report found that there was no evidence that a gay person could become heterosexual.

The report drew a sharp retort from Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer and demands from political conservatives for Satcher's resignation.

"The president understands the report was issued by a surgeon general that he did not appoint, a surgeon general who was appointed by the previous administration," said Fleischer at the time. "The president continues to believe that abstinence and abstinence education is the most effective

way to prevent AIDS, to prevent unwanted pregnancy."

Elections

NEW YORK — The 2001 elections held good results for gays and lesbians.

In four of five cities where they were presented with the question, voters affirmed gay rights ordinances.

Only in Houston did voters approve amending the city charter to prohibit the nation's fourth-largest city from offering benefits to gay domestic partners.

In Michigan, voters in Traverse City and Kalamazoo rejected amendments that would have prevented their cities from enacting policies protecting gays from discrimination. In Huntington Woods, voters upheld a city ordinance banning anti-gay discrimination.

In Miami Beach, Fla., voters said the city should provide employee benefits to domestic partners.

TV sex change

NEW YORK — For the first time on network television, a prominent character is undergoing a sex change.

Producers of "The Education of Max Bickford" anticipated a fuss after casting the role of Erica, a college professor who used a sabbatical for a sex change operation. Never before had such a character been a regular in prime-time television.

The conservative American Family Association alerted its members, and CBS got a handful of protest letters. But no advertisers expressed concern, and moral watchdogs have been quiet.

"I think the lack of comment is an indication that there is an acceptance," said Nicole Yorkin, a creator of the drama. "It's not something they see as so shocking or horrifying that it requires a great deal of discussion."

A woman, Helen Shaver, was cast as Erica. "Bickford" creators said they didn't seek an actor who had been through a sex change because there weren't many to choose from.

Shaver took the role, she

said, because it was well-written and offered the chance to work regularly with star Richard Dreyfuss. She researched the part by reading books and talking to people who had undergone a sex change.

Any indications that her character had once been a man are very subtle: Shaver will make certain movements with her hands, or slightly alter her walk or voice.

Suicide

PHILADELPHIA — A federal jury has cleared three small-town police officers of responsibility in the suicide of a youth who killed himself after they threatened to reveal his sexuality.

Eighteen-year-old Marcus Wayman's mother charged that the officers caused her son's death in 1997 by threatening to tell his grandfather he was gay.

Officers approached Wayman and a 17-year-old male friend in a car. Police frisked the teen-agers, and found the younger one with two condoms.

Officers Scott Willinsky and Thomas Hoban took them to the station on underage drinking charges.

Scott Willinsky later testified that both boys conceded that they had stopped to have sex, although the 17-year-old disputes making the statement. Willinsky allegedly asked if they were "queer" and threatened to tell their families they were gay.

Wayman told his friend he was going to kill himself. A few hours later, he found the keys to the gun cabinet at his home and shot himself in the head, according to court testimony.

Wayman's mother, Madonna Sterling, filed a civil suit over her son's death, charging that the town and three of its police officers, Joseph Willinsky, Scott Willinsky and Thomas Hoban, violated Wayman's right to privacy. Joseph Willinsky is the police chief and father of Scott Willinsky.

Boy Scouts

BERKELEY, Calif. — A Boy Scouts troop is going to have to pay to dock its boats

at the city marina.

An Alameda County judge ruled that Berkeley has the right to charge the Sea Scout organization for docking boats at the marina because the group does not allow openly gay members.

The city stopped offering free berths in 1998 after the Sea Scouts and its parent organization, Boy Scouts of America, refused to alter their anti-gay policies.

The Sea Scouts sued, but Alameda County Superior Court Judge James Richman ruled against them.

Survey

MENLO PARK, Calif. — Gays, lesbians and bisexuals feel more comfortable and accepted by society.

That's the word from a survey, which finds that three-quarters feel greater social acceptance, but about the same percentage say they have experienced discrimination. The findings by the nonprofit Kaiser Family Foundation were based on telephone interviews with 405 randomly selected self-identified lesbians, gays and bisexuals in 15 major U.S. cities last November.

Seventy-six percent of lesbians, gays and bisexuals surveyed reported they feel more accepted. However, 74 percent reported encountering verbal abuse, while 32 percent said they experienced physical abuse or damage to their property because of their sexual orientation.

Eighty-five percent of lesbians, 76 percent of gay men and 60 percent of bisexuals said they had experienced discrimination, according to the survey.

The foundation conducted a second telephone survey with 2,283 adults to gather the general public's feelings about gay and lesbian issues.

In that survey, 62 percent reported they have a friend or acquaintance who is gay, compared to 55 percent three years ago and 24 percent in 1983.

Integration

SAN DIEGO — A new study finds that integrating gay and lesbians into the San Diego police force has improved morale — both within the department and