



DEFROCKED

How a
Father's
Act of Love
Shook
the United
Methodist
Church

Franklyn Schaefer
with Sherri Wood Emmons

DISCUSSION GUIDE

by UMC LEAD bloggers Pastor Melissa Meyers and Jon Copeland

Prologue; Deep Roots; Becoming a Minister; Finding the Methodist Church

How does Rev. Schaefer's family history and upbringing influence his spiritual formation?

After his son Tim has open-heart surgery at six weeks old, what does Rev. Schaefer mean when he says, "As a parent, I've often wondered if there were signs our son would one day turn out gay, but there weren't. Still, I believe God was already preparing us."?

What does Rev. Schaefer mean when he says "call to ministry"? What happened in his life to confirm this? Do you or someone you know feel called to ministry?

What in your life do you feel "called" to do?

Rev. Schaefer's first charge was as a student pastor at Morrisville UMC. Describe what you think it might be like to be a student pastor.

My Son Is Gay; Zion of Iona; Tim's Wedding

How did Claudette and Frank's theology influence their acceptance of their son's coming out?

There was concern among some congregants before the Schaefer arrived because they have homosexual children. Describe the conflict between those congregants and the Schaefer.

Despite the possibility of punishment, Rev. Schaefer grants his son's wish to officiate his wedding. Why is taking this risk so important?

Worship Wars; The First Accusation; The “Concerned Group”

Describe the tension between proponents of traditional and contemporary worship styles. Have you seen this tension in your own church? How did you deal with it?

What was the motivation for the first accusation?

Why does “the concerned group” form? Have you seen similar consensus-building in your own lives?

The Second Accusation; Registered Junk Mail; Initial Support; Lawyering Up

When the Registered Mail started arriving, Rev. Schaefer was able to joke about the mail coming. How would you have felt about the mail? Could you joke about it?

Rev. Schaefer had a great deal of initial support from the congregation he was serving. If your pastor was on trial, what would your reaction be?

There was a proposal for a just resolution by Jon Boger, the complainant. How would you have responded to his proposal? Would you have agreed or had an alternative response?

A Leave of Absence and a Mass Departure; Raising Defense Funds

Rev. Schaefer was initially given a gag order and couldn't speak about the trial to anyone. How would you have responded to the concerns or calls from a congregation if you couldn't talk about the trial?

During the process, a group of 60-70 people left the church and formed a new congregation. Have you ever wanted to leave a church? What went into your decision process? What would make you want to leave a church?

Rev. Schaefer was thrown into the spotlight pretty quickly in order to raise funds. How would you feel about the attention if it were you? Or if it were your pastor?

On the Home Front; Meanwhile, Back at the Church

Prior to this, Rev. Schaefer had rarely preached on homosexuality. When was the last time you heard a sermon preached on sexuality? How was it received by your church?

The congregation was feeling the strains of the trial, as was the whole Schaefer family. How could they have been supported in their struggles both of faith and of church discipline?

The “concerned group” continued to bring their concerns and provide challenges to ministry of the church. How would you have dealt with their actions?

Preparing for the Trial; The Trial, Day One; Guilty

The only witnesses allowed during the trial were Jon Boger and Rev. Schaefer. What would your reaction be to this happening?

Rev. Schaefer's final sermon at his church quoted Martin Luther King Jr. What are your thoughts about this passage?

There were many people involved in the trial, both as counsel and communicating what was happening. Did you follow any of the trial as it was happening? What do you remember hearing? How would you have shared what was happening?

The guilty verdict was not completely surprising. How would you have felt having heard it about yourself?

The Trial, Day Two; Go Defrock Yourself

During the second day of the trial, friends of Rev. Schaefer are asked to speak in his defense. There is testimony from his church members, his superintendent, and even his son. Where have you seen examples of friends and family standing up for each other, in the Bible and in your life?

What does Rev. Schaefer mean when he says “an act of compassion takes precedence over a religious law” and why does he choose to reference the parable of the good Samaritan?

On the second day of the trial, Rev. Schaefer testifies that he received a calling from God to denounce discrimination against LGBT people in the church. What does it mean, in this moment, that he is “called” or when he says “that was not just me talking. I was empowered by the Holy Spirit”? Read the passage he quotes (Mark 13:11) and discuss the significance of this part of the Gospel.

At the end of the trial, Rev. Schaefer must make a choice: promise to uphold parts of the *Discipline* that he believes are discriminatory or be defrocked. He chooses not to make that promise. Later he writes: “I was upholding the *Discipline* by refusing to discriminate against my LGBT brothers and sisters.” How does he uphold the *Discipline* in his actions?

The trial sparked off a nationwide campaign for a moratorium on all LGBT-related church trials. How have church trials affected you and how do they affect others not directly involved?

Study guide for *Defrocked: How a Father's Act of Love Shook the United Methodist Church* by Franklyn Schaefer with Sherri Wood Emmons (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2014).

The Aftermath; My Family's Continued Journey

Following the defrocking, Rev. Schaefer immediately joins Foundry UMC in Washington D.C., making a statement of his intention to stay in the United Methodist Church. Why is it important to him to remain in the church? What is his message to the church?

Rev. Schaefer receives a call from Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the California-Pacific Conference, who offered him a job as a pastor. She expresses the support of the pastors and district superintendents in her conference. What does she mean when she says “we think what you did was right. You acted in the spirit of Jesus”?

Five Points for the Church's Struggle with Homosexuality

In this essay, Rev. Schaefer describes a framework for interpreting scripture and biblical discussion of sexuality. What is the difference between the *literalist* and *contextualist* approaches?

Rev. Schaefer quotes Matthew 22:36-40, describing a “lens” for interpreting scripture: love of God and neighbor. How does this passage affect your own interpretation of scripture?

Rev. Schaefer says that because sexual orientation is not a choice, discrimination based on sexual orientation is like condemning God's creation. If you were with someone who believes that sexual orientation is a choice, how would you express to them why you embrace God's-created LGBT people?

My Future

In light of Rev. Schaefer's trial, defrocking, and new ministry, what is the future for the LGBT community in the United Methodist Church?

What can you and others do to encourage positive developments in the church? Examples include, supporting ordination for LGBT clergy and changing the *Book of Discipline*, or expanding the ministry of your own church to LGBT people in your neighborhood.

Epilogue

Have you ever reconciled with somebody who you feel wronged you?

When you feel attacked, how do you cope? Has the way you cope changed over time? If you wanted to change how you cope, what would that process look like for you?

Has the way you've viewed a contentious issue changed over in time? What triggered that change? What was that experience like?

Response

What is your response to the official statement from Bishop Johnson? How does this debate help the church? How does it hurt the church?

Study guide for *Defrocked: How a Father's Act of Love Shook the United Methodist Church* by Franklyn Schaefer with Sherri Wood Emmons (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2014).