

# The FRONT PAGE

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Serving the Carolinas' Gay &amp; Lesbian Communities for Twenty Years

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## Creech Loses Pastoral Credentials

Last month, a jury of Nebraska United Methodist Church ministers has taken the pastoral credentials of the Rev. Jimmy Creech away.

The 13-member ministerial jury unanimously declared Creech, a former Omaha pastor, guilty of violating church rules against conducting same-sex unions when he married two gay men in Chapel Hill, earlier this year.

Now at home in Raleigh, Creech intends to complete work on a book about the struggle of the Christian churches to be inclusive and affirming of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. He's been working on it since returning to NC. He will also continue to accept speaking engagements.

"I intend to remain a United Methodist and find new ways to work for change within the UMC toward full inclusion of all people without exception. I don't consider the trial an end for me, only a painful change in my relationship with the UMC."

After the jury's verdict, Creech, a minister for 29 years, told reporters, "This is a loss of something I love dearly. This is the pettiness of the church and not the spirit of God that has acted here today. It is a scandalous day for the United Methodist Church."

"The real victims of the trial are bisexual, gay, transgender and lesbian people who once again witnessed a mainline Christian denomination reject the dignity and integri-

ty of their humanity and relationships," Creech told *The Front Page*. "They are being persecuted for who they are; I was punished only for what I did."

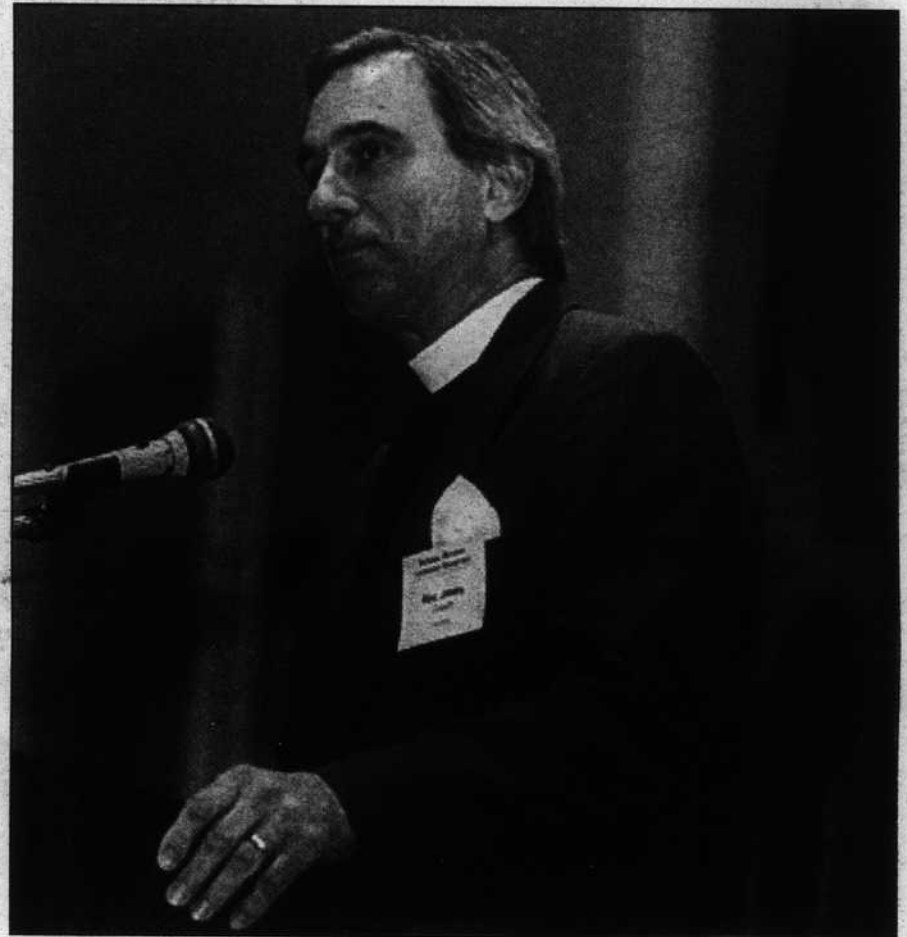
Creech had himself refused to participate in selecting the jurors who would hear the case and offered no formal defense, insisting that it would give credibility to what he views as an wicked and unjust church rule. Instead, Creech said he would answer questions from the prosecutor and make a final statement.

The day before the trial got started Creech and his supporters presided over a ceremony for Larry Ellis and James Raymer, the two gay men whose union in North Carolina prompted the current trial.

Earlier in the day, some 74 Creech supporters were arrested outside, in a symbolic blockade of the church where the trial was taking place, singing hymns and arms locked together.

Methodist Church officials said that Creech has the right to appeal the jury's verdict, but Creech had earlier said he would not appeal any decision by the jury because he said it would only validate the process, which he feels is illegal and unjust.

"I am very grateful for the love and support given to me and my family from the people of North Carolina," Creech told *The Front Page*, "especially from the gay community. You gave me strength!"



## MK Cullen Announces Resignation

Equality NC's longest-serving Executive Director, MK Cullen, has announced her resignation to the Equality NC PAC Board of Directors and membership.

Cullen provided four and a half years of stable leadership and service to North Carolina's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) movement.

Cullen worked with Equality NC's board and volunteers and donors to develop an organization committed to equality and justice for all North Carolinians. Equality NC PAC is the state's only organization devoted solely to giving the LGBT Community a voice in General Assembly elections and during the legislative session.

The Board of Directors of Equality NC PAC will begin an immediate national search for a new Executive Director.

Following her departure in February 2000, Cullen will be moving with her partner to Washington, DC in summer 2000.

"MK's vision of a LGBT community that

is 'plugged into' state politics has been the driving force of this organization during her tenure," one board member said.

"She has successfully articulated our needs to General Assembly candidates and legislators and organized coalition partners around our issues. She has raised our community's awareness through educational drives that included issues ranging from complex legal issues to understanding who represents us in the NC General Assembly."

During MK's tenure as Executive Director of Equality NC PAC, the organization has seen growth and development of its organizational infrastructure and its presence and ability to impact statewide politics. Among the organizational highlights are:

- Distributing 10,000 voters guides in 1998;
- Hosting the first statewide Lobby Day for Equality at the NC General Assembly in March, 1999;

- Lobbying the NC General Assembly on issues such as increasing hate crimes penalties, banning same sex marriages and reforming the Crime Against Nature law;

- Participating in "Equality Begins at Home," a national week of actions designed to promote LGBT issues at the local and statewide level;

- Endorsing candidates the 1995-1999 election cycles with an ever increasing number of endorsed candidates;

- Increasing the LGBT community's voter participation and voter registration;

- Serving as one of the initial states in the Human Rights Campaign's Field Cabinet;

- Increasing the working relationship with NC Lambda Youth Network and increasing integration of young people into grassroots organizing;

- Being a founding organization of the Federation of Statewide LGBT Political Organizations;

- Increasing the visibility and awareness

of LGBT issues in the mainstream North Carolina media;

- Taking the dormant N.C. Human Rights Fund, an early local gay rights group, and folding it into the organization as its non-profit educational arm;

- Networking LGBT grassroots activists and organizations throughout North Carolina.

In announcing her resignation, Cullen said, "It was an honor to represent North Carolina's vibrant and diverse LGBT movement. I feel that promoting issues of fairness and equality benefits all North Carolinians. This state has an amazing network of grassroots activists who fight the good fight everyday of their lives."

Regarding her departure, Cullen said "This is a good time to turn the organization over to someone who can build on our strong foundation and move the organization to the next level in North Carolina history".