

Attention surrounds trial

By DANE STICKNEY
Staff writer

While the Rev. Jimmy Creech once again stands trial for performing same-sex marriages, eyes and ears of Lincoln citizens will be tuned in.

The trial of Creech, a Methodist pastor, begins in Grand Island today. Creech, a member of Nebraska's Methodist conference, is accused of breaking church law by performing a same-sex marriage in North Carolina.

Although the debate surrounding the trial is based on same-sex marriages and church doctrine, the outcome of the case could send reverberations through the state.

Barbara DiBernard, a UNL English professor, said the outcome of the trial could have a profound impact on the gay community in Nebraska.

"It's a big deal," she said. "If the marriage of gay people is more culturally accepted, we'll be one step closer to equality."

DiBernard said Lincoln is fairly accepting of gay people, but more steps need to be taken to create a more tolerant atmosphere for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people.

"As a lesbian, I have not experienced open discrimination, but there are many people and agencies that might not make gay people feel wel-

come," she said. "I have to think, 'Am I going to come out to my doctor or a certain agency, and if I do, what does that mean?'"

DiBernard said almost half of the hate crimes in Lincoln last year were motivated by sexual orientation, and the fear of violence against gay people is not going away.

"The violence is very detrimental to young people coming out," she said. "I wouldn't walk on Lincoln's streets holding my partner's hand."

Barbara Kimberly, a board member of Lincoln's Parents and Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays, said the attention from the Creech trial will make the climate toward the gay community better because it will make people think about the situation.

"There's a great deal of violence and hateful rhetoric circulating," she said. "The more things like the Creech trial that happen, the more the public is aware of the injustices, and things can't help but get better."

Lincoln's climate toward gay people is reasonably positive and is constantly getting better but has plenty of room to grow, Kimberly said.

"The police department is supportive, and the religious support is improving," she said. "But things could always get better. Maybe a positive outcome from this trial would help."

Dan Parsons, executive director of

Lincoln's Family First organization, said he hoped the Methodist Church didn't approve of Creech's actions.

Family First is a public policy think tank concerned with children and family issues, Parsons said.

Parsons said the Methodist Church should condemn Creech because same-sex partner relationships would be detrimental to children who could be adopted into the family.

"Research has clearly shown that children raised in a family with a male and a female role model do better with academics, and they do better sociologically," he said. "Many of us feel that the church is the last true means of support for the family, and if the church decides to approve this kind of lifestyle for a family unit, it could be dangerous to society."

Parsons' organization and many like it are keeping a close eye on the happenings in Grand Island, he said.

"We're very interested," he said. "If the church doesn't support traditional values, then they're not supporting Christian values, which shape the vast majority of opinions in Nebraska and in the country."

His organization is not attempting to offend gay people, Parsons said.

"We don't mean any disrespect to homosexuals," he said. "Statistically, a traditional marriage is better for the children, and that's what we're worried about."

Creech to commence second church trial

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between the pastor and the congregation," he said. "I could conceive a situation where I would perform a same-sex marriage, but I would do it to help people deepen and strengthen their commitment to each other, not for political reasons."

Vetter said he is afraid the church's position on same-sex marriages will portray the wrong image to the public.

"The Methodist Church supports the thought that gay people are God's children and have the same human worth as heterosexuals," he said. "But then we turn around and deprive them certain rights inside the church. In that respect, we're very schizophrenic about it."

"I have big fears that we'll be seen as gay-bashers. We should be open and loving. I'm hopeful that the rest of the church give homosexuals more rights in church, but I am saddened by their reaction to Jimmy Creech's actions."

Steve Todd, a pastor at Horizons Community Church, and officials at St. Paul United Methodist church declined to comment on the situation because they participate on a board that could possibly be asked to make an appellate decision on the outcome of the trial.

Lauren Ekdahl, pastor of

Lincoln's Trinity United Methodist Church, was the equivalent of the prosecuting attorney in Creech's first trial.

Even though he disagreed with the severity of the church's opposition to same-sex marriages, Ekdahl said it is important for Methodist religious leaders to follow the church rules.

"I am not unsympathetic to the cause of homosexuals, but I do support strong discipline within the church," he said.

Ekdahl said the Methodist Church is split between two schools of thought: those who are conservative and strictly follow the literal interpretation of the Bible and those who are progressive and follow the teachings of Christ.

"I see myself as a progressive," he said. "But there is a need for democratic process and a strong authority base in the church."

The United Methodist Church will hold another national conference in May 2000 where the policy about same-sex marriages will be discussed and possibly changed, Ekdahl said.

"Until the principles are changed, all Methodist pastors must follow the rules," he said. "Hopefully, people will become more educated on the topic by the next conference. Right now, we do not know enough to be as dogmatic as we are trying to be."

Storyteller gets Sandoz award

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such as elementary school students, church and civic groups and the elderly.

He has performed in places such as Canada, Mexico, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Philadelphia and Chicago.

Jones was given the Mari Sandoz award for his unique contribution to the Nebraska book world, said Mary Nash, president of the Nebraska Library Association.

A committee of six members chose the recipient of the award. Candidates must be nominated, and the committee reviewed letters supporting each nominee, Nash said. Sandoz was also a storyteller, so Jones was a natural choice for

the award.

"He's just an amazing person," Nash said.

The most influential person to Jones' stories was his grandfather. Through his grandfather, Jones is able to trace his family genealogy back 28 generations, almost 300 years.

Jones' grandfather was given the responsibility of naming Jones.

While searching for inspiration in the Rocky Mountains, Jones' grandfather came across a chipmunk playing, completely uncovered by trees. The chipmunk, vulnerable to birds and other prey, continued on, oblivious to imminent danger.

Jones' grandfather decided that

"Foolish Chipmunk Who Plays" didn't quite have the ring he was looking for, so he continued on.

He then encountered a bear on his path, resulting in Jones being named "Sitting Bear."

Using stories passed down from his relatives, Jones can recount the creation of his tribe, which occurred 10,000 years ago.

One of Jones' goals as a storyteller is to erase stereotypes people have of American Indians.

"People have the image of Indians never laughing, and through my stories I hope to fight that stereotype," he said. "We are all similar; we have commonality. Humor is universal."

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