

Gay caucus denied use of display booth at Methodist confab

By DAVID HENDRICKS

A group of self-proclaimed gay United Methodists plans to set up a display and petition booth Tuesday at the annual session of the church's Southwest Texas Conference despite being denied permission by Bishop J. Chess Lovern.

Whether the booth will result in some sort of confrontation Tuesday, the second day of the four-day conference, was unclear Monday.

"I don't know what is going to happen," said a conference spokesman who asked not to be identified.

The spokesman said the bishop was aware of the plans of the 12-member United Methodist Gay Caucus, but said Lovern did not wish to comment on the matter.

However, in correspondence from Lovern to the gay caucus which was

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seek delegate signatures asking that the church remove anti-homosexual language from the Book of Discipline.

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pleased by caucus member Troy Stokes of Austin, Lovern turned down a caucus request by writing:

"I do not wish to be unkind except to say to you that this conference has one through the trauma of the question several times before and it would be of no service to you or the conference to open the matter in this manner again."

Lovern also said in the letter that other groups had been denied permission to set up displays because they do not have anything to do with the work of the conference.

Gay status unclear

Stokes said of the caucus move: "The main goal is to remind delegates and guests that the role and status of gay people is not clear and sorely in need of resolution."

Stokes added that setting up the display against the bishop's wish is not meant to be disrespectful. "Rather, it is a statement of conscience."

He said petitions at the booth will

About 1,000 people are attending the conference, which opened Monday afternoon at Travis Park United Methodist Church with a communion service.

The 367-member church conference represents nearly 109,000 Methodists in South and Southwest Texas.

Quadrennial conference

In business session Monday, the first ballot in the conference's selection of five clergy and five lay delegates to the quadrennial United Methodist General Conference, April 15-25, 1980, in Indianapolis, was taken, but no decision was reached.

No one received enough votes to be selected, and a second ballot taken late Monday will have results tabulated by Tuesday.

The conference later will elect seven additional clergy and seven lay delegates who will join the general conference delegates for a South Central Jurisdiction Conference in July 1980, where new bishops — including a successor to Lovern — will be elected.