

Presbytery backs gay wedding rites: Minister cleared by church court

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A lesbian minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who conducted weddings for two same-sex couples has been cleared by a church court in northern California of misconduct charges.

The Permanent Judicial Commission of Redwoods Presbytery ruled March 3 that Jane Adams Spahr committed “no offense” and acted “within her right of conscience” when she pronounced lesbian couples “bride and bride and partners in life.” The ruling, which came in a trial in Santa Rosa, was made despite a 2000 ruling by the highest Presbyterian court which said that ministers may bless same-sex “unions” but not conduct “marriages.”

Spahr, 63, faced penalties ranging from a reprimand to defrocking. But in a 6-1 decision, the Redwoods panel asserted that marriage of same-sex couples is not “outside of, or contrary to, the essentials of the Reformed faith as understood” by the presbytery.

Robert Conover, the temporary stated clerk of the 52-congregation presbytery, told Presbyterian News Service that it was too early to know if clergy and members of Redwoods will vote to appeal the ruling.