

# Methodist jury acquits lesbian minister: Book of Discipline uses "soft words" about homosexuality

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The filing of charges against two Unitarian Universalist ministers who performed same-sex marriages in New York state has drawn mixed reaction from religious leaders. Ministers Kay Greenleaf of Poughkeepsie and Dawn Sangrey of Bedford Hills were charged with misdemeanor counts of "solemnizing marriages without licenses" for performing same-sex weddings for 13 couples March 6 in New Paltz.

"This office fully understands, appreciates and supports the significance of separation of church and state," said Ulster County District Attorney Donald A. Williams after filing charges on March 15. Williams said he filed charges because the clergywomen "proclaimed their intent to perform civil marriages under the authority vested in them by New York state law, rather than performing purely religious ceremonies."

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said: "Though these arrests, depending on the facts, may raise issues of violating civil authority, even in that case we respect the ministers' actions as a form of civil disobedience. These laws need to change. That day is coming—we hope, we pray, soon."

A contrary view came from Richard Land, president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission: "We have an obligation to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's," he told the *Washington Post*. "If these ministers feel this is an unjust law, then I'll look forward to reading their letter from the Ulster County Jail."

The Boston-based Unitarian Universalist Association, whose ministers have officiated at religious ceremonies for same-sex couples for more than 35 years, defended its stance.

“Unitarian Universalism honors ministerial independence in matters of conscience, and the Unitarian Universalist Association supports the right of our ministers in New York state to act on their best judgment on these issues,” the faith group said. - *Religion News Service*