

PCUSA unit refuses to rebuke Jane Spahr over same-sex marriages

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [June 13, 2012](#) issue

In an unprecedented act of defiance, a California region of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has rejected a ruling from a church court to rebuke a pastor who wed same-sex couples. The Napa-based Presbytery of the Redwoods voted 74-18 on May 15 instead to praise Jane Spahr, who wed 16 same-sex couples when gay marriage was legal in California during a five-month period in 2008.

“The 38-year ministry of the Rev. Dr. Jane Adams Spahr has been faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to her calling,” the presbytery said. “I was stunned by the kindness and the love,” Spahr said. “I’m so grateful to the presbytery.”

In 2010, the Redwood presbytery’s own court found Spahr guilty of breaking church rules by representing the ceremonies she conducted as marriages and ordered the presbytery to publicly rebuke her. That decision was upheld by the PCUSA’s top court in February.

The Redwoods Presbytery has now rejected those rulings, saying that a public rebuke would “continue the harm” done to gays, lesbians, transgender people and bisexuals “in the name of Jesus Christ.”

The presbytery’s action does not undo the rebuke but emphasizes the presbytery’s rejection of the judicial rulings, said Robert Conover, its stated clerk, or chief church officer.

Laurie Griffith, manager of judicial process and social witness in the PCUSA, said she had never before seen a presbytery reject a ruling from its own court. The rebuke still stands, she said.

Last year, the PCUSA voted to allow openly gay clergy. Gay and lesbian advocates say they will lobby to lift the ban on gay marriages at the denomination’s General Assembly in Pittsburgh, June 30-July 7. —RNS