

PCUSA minister cleared in gay 'wedding' case: Event not deemed a marriage ceremony

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A Presbyterian court in Pittsburgh ruled October 2 that a minister did not violate scripture or church law by performing a union ceremony for two lesbians, since the ceremony was not a marriage under church or state law.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) permits ministers to preside over same-sex unions as long as they are not purported to be marriages.

Janet Edwards of Pittsburgh did not conduct a marriage when she performed the ceremony in 2005 because Pennsylvania and the PCUSA define marriage as a heterosexual union, ruled the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Pittsburgh Presbytery.

"Whatever ceremony the accused presided over," the nine-member commission said in a unanimous ruling, "it was not, and could not have been, a marriage ceremony."

The court also said that there is "no evidence" that Edwards presented herself as a Presbyterian minister when she performed the ceremony.

In April, the PCUSA's highest court issued a similar ruling in a different case, finding that by the church's definition, a same-sex union can never be a marriage.

At the two-day trial, prosecutors presented eight scriptural passages to support the charge that Edwards violated scripture. But they failed to prove that Edwards's actions were violations, the court said.

Edwards and the lesbian couple have maintained that the 2005 ceremony was indeed a marriage. "I think [the court] struggled to find a way to hold those who disagree in my church together," said Edwards, "and I'm grateful to them for that."

Edwards, a direct descendant of the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards, said she will continue to celebrate such ceremonies. *-Religion News Service*