

pressdemo.com

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.pressdemo.com

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[<<Back](#)

Article published - Apr 25, 2008

Minister awaits church verdict on same-sex marriages Guerneville couple's union part of Presbyterian case

By GUY KOVNER
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Rev. Jane Spahr now awaits the verdict following a two-hour trial Friday before the Presbyterian Church's highest court on charges that she violated church law by marrying same-sex couples.

"It's been wonderfully inspiring," Spahr, 65, a lesbian activist, said in a telephone interview. "So we wait, but we're with wonderful family and friends."

Spahr has acknowledged marrying gay and lesbian couples, saying it is a matter of principle and conscience.

Critics and church prosecutors say she is flouting Presbyterian law which defines marriage as "a civil contract between a woman and a man."

A 16-member Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly is expected to issue a verdict Monday. The body heard the case at the denomination's national headquarters in Louisville, Ky.

Spahr said she couldn't predict how the ruling might go, but one of the women she married expressed optimism.

"This body seemed open-minded," said Sherrill Figuera of Guerneville. "I hope, pray and believe that the spirit will move their hearts and they will realize that now is the time for change."

Spahr presided at Figuera's marriage to her longtime partner, Annie Senechal, on the Sonoma coast in 2005, one of the two ceremonies cited in the charges against Spahr.

The case against Spahr was prompted by an e-mail from a Seattle-area Presbyterian minister, the Rev. James Berkley, in 2004.

The 2.3-million member Presbyterian Church has been sharply divided over homosexuality, including the question of gay marriage, for more than 30 years.

Spahr was acquitted by a church tribunal in Santa Rosa in 2006, but the verdict was appealed by the Presbytery of the Redwoods. A regional judicial body found last August that Spahr had violated church law, and she appealed to the Louisville tribunal, which is the equivalent of the church's supreme court.

Sara Taylor, one of Spahr's three attorneys, said she argued today that since there is no "strict prohibition" against performing same-gender marriages that no offense can be established.

"We're definitely hopeful," Taylor said. "It is a very thoughtful commission."

Commission members were not available for comment.

© www.pressdemo.com
