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## **Presbyterian Church Rules that Minister's Decision to Officiate at Wedding of Two Women Did Not Violate Church Constitution or Scripture**

### **Ruling indicates growing trend toward reconciliation within the church regarding the inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people**

PITTSBURGH — In a significant victory for reconciliation and the inclusion of all people of God, the nine-member Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) of the Pittsburgh Presbytery ruled unanimously that the Rev. Dr. Janet Edwards is not guilty of violating Scripture or the constitution of the Presbyterian Church for presiding at the wedding of two women.

The decision reinforces a fundamental principle of the Presbyterian tradition of reform — that ministers should follow their own conscience and calling as the whole church seeks to better understand God's intention for us in the modern era. Ministers who do not wish to preside at such ceremonies are not required to do so.

"I am blessed to serve Christ in the Presbyterian Church of the Reformed tradition, which welcomes the fact that change is part of God's good plan," said Rev. Edwards upon hearing the decision. "I pray that the dialogue sparked by this trial will provide another step along the path as we seek to reconcile our church with the fine future for marriage God has in store for us."

The trial that concluded today was the second trial Rev. Edwards has faced for officiating at the wedding of Brenda Cole and Nancy McConn in June 2005. At the first trial, in November 2006, charges were dismissed because the Investigating Committee had missed a filing deadline set by the Presbyterian Book of Order, the church's constitution. Rev. Edwards' accusers then filed new accusations in January 2007, which resulted in this second trial.

Throughout both sets of proceedings, Rev. Edwards has maintained that her decision to preside at McConn and Cole's wedding was a faithful expression of her personal call to ministry.

"I spent several months in prayer and met with Nancy and Brenda many times before I concluded that marriage between these two women falls within the Presbyterian tradition of reform," Rev. Edwards said.

"For those colleagues who disagreed with my decision to preside at Nancy and Brenda wedding, I would not ask nor expect them to bless such a union. It is not my place to judge what is in their hearts. I am grateful that Scripture and the church give us the space to follow our own pastoral calls," she added.

In addition to ruling based on the church's constitution, the Book of Order, the PJC also found no violation of Scripture. All previous Presbyterian court rulings have been based on the constitution alone.

Stephen Paschall, counsel for Rev. Edwards, explained, “This is a historic decision because it is the first time a Presbyterian court has ruled on the question of Scripture, not just the church’s constitution, and they found no violation of Scripture.”

Four witnesses testified yesterday that there is no prohibition in Scripture or in the constitution of the Presbyterian Church against marrying two women or two men, and that Rev. Edwards’ actions were in full compliance with the requirements for pastoral care expected of ordained clergy.

Standing beside Rev. Edwards as the PJC announced its decision were more than half a dozen Presbyterian ministers from around the country who agree that pastors should be allowed to preside at wedding ceremonies for same-sex couples if they feel called to do so.

“I have come here to stand in solidarity with Rev. Edwards because I, too, believe that the church is meant to be a place of inclusion not exclusion,” said the Rev. Dr. Randall K. Bush, pastor of Pittsburgh’s East Liberty Presbyterian Church. “Challenging those who seek to marginalize and diminish the lives of faithful gay and lesbian brothers and sisters is at the heart of prophetic Christian witness. My hope is that all Presbyterians and denominations will join in open dialogue about this important question facing us today.”

The Rev. Dr. Jim Rigby, pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas, agreed. “As Presbyterians, our greatest gift to the Church Universal is our understanding that change is both possible and necessary in Christian life. It’s true, change is never easy. But I believe it is our duty to extend all of the church’s blessings to all who wish to come and worship — and today, I believe that includes offering the blessings of marriage to all people of God.”

“Rev. Edwards’ witness is not about defiance of church belief, but about affirming loving, committed relationships,” said the Rev. Charles Booker-Hirsch of the Northside Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. “I am inspired by the dialogue I see taking place in our church today,” he added.

At the conclusion of the trial, Rev. Edwards said, “I hope that this trial will contribute to our community’s dialogue about how we embrace all people of God, including gay and lesbian couples, within our church. If the conversations it has inspired become part of the dialogue on how our church can fully embrace its gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members, I believe this trial can be a blessing to us all. I know these are difficult questions, but I trust that together we can find reconciliation.”

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