

Subj: [Uma-news] UU ministers charged after performing civil marriages; Pres. Sinkford issues statement
Date: 3/17/04 7:20:23 AM Eastern Standard Time
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(March 16, 2004) The Ulster County (NY) District Attorney has charged two Unitarian Universalist ministers with solemnizing unlicensed marriage after the ministers performed civil marriages for more than twenty same-sex couples in New Paltz, NY. The ministers, the Rev. Kay Greenleaf and the Rev. Dawn Sangrey, along with the Rev. Marion Visel, a UU minister from Westport, CT, began performing the marriage ceremonies after the Mayor of New Paltz, Jason West, ceased officiating at same-sex marriages on March 6. West has had the same charges levied against him by the Ulster County DA.

Sangrey and Greenleaf signed affidavits for the couples they married and said they considered the ceremonies civil and legally binding. Ulster County District Attorney Don Williams said he was compelled to prosecute Greenleaf and Sangrey because they "publicly proclaimed their intent to perform civil marriages under the authority invested in them by New York State law, rather than performing purely religious ceremonies."

If convicted of the charges, the ministers could spend a year in prison and be fined up to \$500 each. The ministers will be arraigned on March 22.

In commenting on the charges levied against Sangrey and Greenleaf, the Rev. William G. Sinkford, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association today issued the following statement:

"Unitarian Universalists strongly support marriage equality for same-sex couples. Our ministers have been officiating at religious marriages for same-sex couples for more than thirty-five years, and our ministers have happily signed marriage licenses recently for civil marriages for same sex couples in San Francisco and Oregon. 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. Unitarian Universalists believe that equal marriage rights for all is a matter of justice. And in the long run, we have faith that justice will prevail. Unitarian Universalists are proud to stand on the side of love."

Wednesday, March 17, 2004 America Online: Mbvisel