

DOCUMENTS FROM REV. MARION VISEL SAME SEX WEDDINGS
NEW PALTZ, NY, MARCH 2004 (Chronological Order)

1. Article from Human Rights Campaign, "Lambda Legal Files Historic Lawsuit Seeking Full Marriage for Gay Couples in New York." March 5, 2004. (Good outline of events that lead up to UU Ministers officiating weddings for same sex couples in New Paltz, NY later in March 2004.)
2. Sample script, Wedding Ceremony, March 6, 2004, Rev. Katherine Greenleaf and Rev. Dawn Sangrey. *not used*
3. Article "Minister takes debate to heart" from The Poughkeepsie Journal, New Paltz, NY. March 7, 2004 (date?).
4. Warning letter from Ulster County, NY, District Attorney, March 11, 2004.
5. Contact information for the organizing body for same-sex marriage in New Paltz, NY, New Paltz Equality Initiative, Charles Clement NPEqualityInitiative@yahoo.com 845-255-4747. Business card for Rev. Marion Visel's pro-bono attorney (each celebrant had their own pro-bono attorney). Russell M. Gioiella, Attorney at Law, Litman, Asche & Gioiella, LLP, 45 Broadway Atrium, New York, NY 10006 Tel. 212/809-4500, cell 917/885-0191, RMG@lagnyc.com
6. Sample script, Wedding Ceremony, March 13, 2004, Rev. Katherine Greenleaf, Rev. Dawn Sangrey and Rev. Marion Visel.
7. Letter from New Paltz Chief of Police requesting copies of contracts of marriage for wedding ceremonies performed by Rev. Marion Visel in New Paltz, NY. Hand delivered on March 13, 2004. (Rev. Marion Visel did not respond to the request.)
8. Article "Police Cite Westport Minister in New Paltz Same-Sex Marriage Ceremonies" from Westport NOW.com, Westport, CT. March 14, 2004. (I believe the article inaccurately states that I was cited following officiating at March 13 wedding ceremonies. I was warned but I don't believe I was charged.)
9. March 15, 2004 Letter to the Editor, New York Times, in response to article "Uniforms Mix with Wedding Finery at Same-Sex Nuptials" March 14, 2004.
10. Article "Ministers Charged for Marrying NY Gays" New York Times. March 15, 2004.
11. Request for comment and interview, News 12, Comcast, March 15, 2004. *- maybe don't use this?*
12. Sample of emails of thanks to Rev. Marion Visel, March 16, 2004 from couples married by me in New Paltz.

13. UUA statement from President Bill Sinkford, "UU Ministers charged after performing civil marriages." March 17, 2004.
14. Email response from News 12 interview from same sex couple who wish to be married at future New Paltz wedding. March 19, 2004.
15. Article "Minister vows to continue same-sex ceremonies" Norwalk Advocate (Norwalk, CT) March 22, 2004.
16. Email of thanks to Rev. Marion Visel, March 24, 2004 from a couple married in New Paltz on March 13.
17. To be added when found, letter from NY Attorney General, Eliot Spitzer.



HUMAN
RIGHTS
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Marriage in New York

March 5, 2004 -- Lambda Legal Files Historic Lawsuit Seeking Full Marriage for Gay Couples in New York

On March 3, 2004, New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer issued an informal opinion saying that same-sex couples who have legally married in San Francisco; Portland, Ore.; Canada or elsewhere are also married under New York law and must be given all the rights and protection of marriage.

Spitzer recommended, however, that state officials only honor those licenses given to same-sex couples who have married out of state. New York courts, he said, would not support any cases because state law does not specifically authorize the issuance of licenses to same-sex couples in the state. (In contrast, the Bar Association of the City of New York has argued that New York law does not prohibit the state's issuance of same-sex marriage licenses. Like the attorney general, however, it says state law allows for recognition of same-sex marriages carried out in other states.)

On Feb. 27, the mayor of New Paltz, a town outside Manhattan, began marrying couples without licenses. Mayor Jason West pleaded not guilty March 3 after the local county district attorney charged him with 19 criminal counts. A day later, John Shields, mayor of Nyack, N.Y., said he would lead a group of same-sex couples to the clerk's office to apply for marriage licenses. In Ithaca, Mayor Carolyn K.

Peterson said March 2 that while the city will not issue same-sex marriage licenses, it will accept applications and forward them to the state's health department for individual determinations.

New York is one of 12 states without laws explicitly defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

For more information:

- [Freedom to Marry](#)

Minister takes debate to heart

Reverend marries and is married in village

By Kathianne Boniello
Poughkeepsie Journal

A minister who helped oversee more than a dozen same-sex marriages in New Paltz Saturday said it's important to stand up for what you believe.

"I always worked for social justice," said the Rev. Kay Greenleaf, 64, who has been the minister at Poughkeepsie's Unitarian Universalist Fellowship since 1998. "I've spent most of my career working with poor people, or those who need help. It's just a natural place for me to be."

But the Florida native, who has lived in several states and considers Ohio home, doesn't consider herself an activist.

"I do think in this culture, in spite of the fact that we are really proud of our freedoms, we instill a great deal of fear in people about speaking out and calling attention to themselves," she said. "I just believe in what I'm doing."

Greenleaf has been with her partner, Pat Sullivan, 61, for 17 years. The two met at a mutual friend's Thanksgiving dinner and eventually became a couple.

It's not the first time

The two women had a Unitarian service in Ohio in 1989 and went to Vermont for a civil union in 2000. They were also married Saturday by the Rev. Dawn Sangrey, a pastor of the Fourth Unitarian Society of Westchester in Mohegan Lake, in hopes these New York ceremonies would eventually be upheld as legal.

Sullivan, a registered nurse, said neither of them wanted to seek out the spotlight.

"I respect her for standing up for what she believes in and what I believe in," she said.

Caring translates

A graduate of Ball State University in Indiana, Greenleaf worked as a teacher and social worker before becoming a minister in 1996.

"It just made sense in terms of what I had been doing all my life," she said of her decision to become a minister. "Being a social worker is not terribly different than being a minister."

And her congregation in Poughkeepsie thinks highly of her, said Paula Greenspan, president of the board of trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie.

"She's a good minister, she's caring, she's warm," Greenspan said. "I'm really proud that she stood up for something she believed in and did something that I hope will advance respect and equal rights for all people."

Greenleaf praised New Paltz Mayor Jason West, who brought the village onto the national stage by performing 25 same-sex marriages Feb. 27.

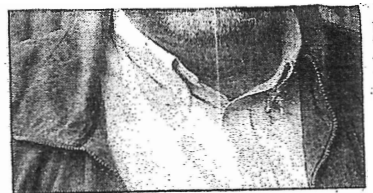
The minister offered to help perform the same-sex ceremonies during the mayor's efforts last week. West called her Friday after he was restricted from performing such ceremonies by a court order.

"I believe he's absolutely right in what he's saying and what he's doing," she said. "I just really think Jason West is a courageous young man."

QUOTES

The Journal conducted interviews in the Village of New Paltz Saturday morning to get opinions of those who work or live there.

People were asked: "What has been the effect of the gay marriage issue on New Paltz?"



'I believe how (Mayor Jason West) approached it was completely wrong and illegal. I don't know why he felt this was the way to approach it.'

Gary Gagliano
does business in the Village of New Paltz,
Town of Lloyd resident



'There's more people in town and the mayor's got more publicity. The way I look at it, there's too many break-ups and single parents, so good for them (same-sex couples) trying to get married.'

Tony Vuocolo
works in the Village of New Paltz,
Gardiner resident

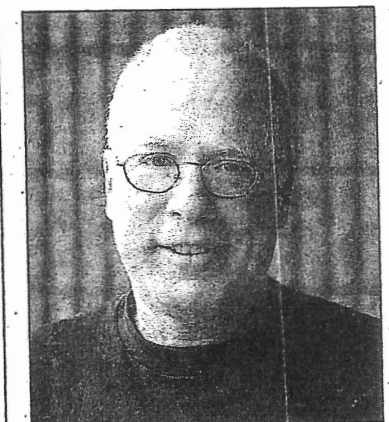
'It hasn't changed going grocery shopping, it hasn't changed stopping to get a bite to eat. It's certainly fun to have people ask where Main Street is when we really have only one street.'

Janine Ermilio
Village of New Paltz



'We're on the map. Everybody knows New Paltz.'

A.J. Williams-Myers
SUNY New Paltz professor



'I think we got hundreds of millions of dollars of free publicity for the town — that means more business. From a social perspective, I have no problem.'

Steve Auerbach
Village of New Paltz



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ROBERT J. FISHER
REBECCA MILLOURAS-LETTRE
EPHIE TRATAROS-KEHAYIAS

March 11, 2004

Dear Officiant: *Rev. Maria Visel*

JUNIOUS HARRIS
Investigator

It is our understanding that you intend to perform marriage ceremonies under the authority of New York State law between persons who have not obtained marriage licenses from the appropriate State authority, in this case the Town Clerk of the Town of New Paltz.

I am fully aware and respect the separation of Church and State and the intentions of individual ministers to perform religious ceremonies. Please be assured that this office does not seek to interfere or in any way hinder your rights to conduct or preside over religious ceremonies where couples are married in the eyes of the church and not under the law of New York State.

However, as you are aware, §17 of the Domestic Relations Law states, "[i]f any clergyman or other person authorized by the laws of this State to perform marriage ceremonies shall solemnize or presume to solemnize any marriage between any parties without a license being presented to him or them as herein provided...he [or she] shall be guilty of a misdemeanor..." This law applies to public officials and clergymen alike who are authorized by the laws of this State to perform marriage ceremonies, regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the participants.

Indeed, as I am certain you are equally aware, on March 5th, the New York State Attorney General issued a public statement recognizing the illegality of such conduct and recommending that officiants should not solemnize the marriages of same-sex couples until these issues are adjudicated by the courts. Moreover, that same date, the Honorable Vincent G. Bradley, Supreme Court Justice, issued a temporary order restraining Jason West, the Mayor of the Village of New Paltz, from solemnizing marriages without first being presented with a marriage license issued by a town or city clerk. The Court stated in this order, "It is beyond dispute that the provisions of the Domestic Relations Law referred to above provide that a marriage license must be obtained and presented to the officiant before the marriage ceremony can be performed."

Page Two

Individuals who do not agree with the clear requirements of the Domestic Relations Law or any other law have every right to seek appropriate and lawful redress via numerous options. These include petitioning the New York Legislature to draft new laws addressing the concerns; applying for legal process to the Courts of New York State seeking declaratory relief concerning the particular law; or seeking a court order compelling the town clerk to issue the appropriate license. Finally, parties who have standing and believe they are aggrieved by a particular law may request an advisory opinion of the State Attorney General.

It is not the intention of this office to interfere with every individual's right to express their religious beliefs or to perform religious ceremonies as I understand has been the tradition of the Unitarian Church and other faiths. I trust, however, that as members of the clergy who have been authorized to perform marriage ceremonies under New York law you are familiar with its restrictions and the consequences. If not, I believe that this letter fully explains the law and the position of this office.

Yours truly,



DONALD A. WILLIAMS
District Attorney

DAW/las

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ATTORNEY AT LAW

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Charles Clement
New Paltz Equality Initiative
* 845-255-4747
NPEqualityInitiative@yahoo.com

**The Wedding Ceremony
of**

**March 13, 2004
New Paltz, New York**

Welcome to this wonderful day.

Will you take hands as you say your vows?

_____do you take_____ as your marriage partner? (I do.)

_____do you take_____as you marriage partner? [I do]

Will you each love the other, honor (her/him), comfort and respect (her/him) in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, and will you be true to (her/him) as long as you both shall live? (I will.)

[If there are rings] With this ring, I thee wed.

Out of this tangled world your two souls have come together, drawn by mutual love and respect. By your free choice you have made a marriage. As all here wish for you a full life, a life rich in meanings and sharing, in caring and in joy, it is my joy to witness this marriage.

For as much as you have committed yourselves to one another by the vows you have made (and by the rings you have exchanged), therefore, in the name of Love and Justice, I declare that you two are one, life partners, married to each other.

May no one tear asunder those whom love has joined together.

Will you greet each other with a kiss?

Celebrants:
the Rev. Katherine Greenleaf
the Rev. Dawn Sangrey
the Rev. Marion B. Visel
Unitarian Universalist Ministers



NEW PALTZ POLICE DEPARTMENT

23 PLATTEKILL AVENUE, NEW PALTZ, NEW YORK 12561

Raymond K. Zappone, Chief

(845) 255-1323
ADMIN. 255-7112
FAX 255-2648

March 13, 2004

Dear Reverend Marion B. Visel;

On Saturday March 13th, 2004 you performed several wedding ceremonies in the Village of New Paltz, NY.

It is our belief that each couple filed paperwork and that an affidavit of Marriage was issued for each ceremony performed on March 13th, 2004. As you requested, we are writing to you to officially request copies of any and all contracts of marriage and or affidavits of marriage for those wedding ceremonies performed by you on March 13th, 2004.

I thank you and appreciate your assistance in this matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Raymond K. Zappone".

Raymond K. Zappone
Chief of Police
New Paltz Police Department

cc: Ulster County District Attorney Donald Williams



NEW PALTZ POLICE DEPARTMENT

23 PLATTEKILL AVENUE
NEW PALTZ, NEW YORK 12561

Reverend Marion B. Visel



SECTIONS

Article Archives

« "Warrior Dance" | Main | Sunday, March 14, 2004 »

MARCH 13, 2004

Police Cite Westport Minister in New Paltz Same-Sex Marriage Ceremonies

A minister from Westport's Unitarian Church was among clergy cited by police today for performing same-sex marriage ceremonies in New Paltz, N.Y., according to Sunday's New York Times

It said the Rev. Marion B. Visel was one of a number of Unitarian ministers performing the ceremonies under the watchful eyes of 18 police officers.

She and the others received warning letters from the local district attorney.

"I must have officiated at 50 weddings, but never have the police been involved," the newspaper quoted Visel as saying.

"The fines and jail I may face are not as important as the justice brought about by marrying these loving couples."

The Times said as about 25 couples prepared to be married, the New Paltz police chief, Raymond K. Zappone, delivered warning letters to the clergywomen from the Ulster County district attorney, Donald A. Williams.

The letters were similar to one delivered to New Paltz Mayor Jason West several days before he received a criminal summons for performing same-sex marriages.

They warned that a member of the clergy who solemnized an unlicensed marriage might be charged with a misdemeanor.

West, 26, was charged with 19 counts of a criminal misdemeanor for solemnizing unlicensed marriages and was served with an injunction, which he has obeyed, to stop conducting the ceremonies.

In his place, an ad hoc group of residents and clergy who call themselves the New Paltz Equality Initiative have set to the task of organizing weekly marriage ceremonies along the banks of the Wallkill River.

Today, 25 lesbian and gay couples waited in a muddy patch behind a wire arbor until called forward by a master of ceremonies to exchange vows on wooden stages at opposite ends of a small field.

The ceremony attracted about 250 people from several states for an event that combined the righteousness of a civil rights campaign with the tears of a wedding, the newspaper said.

The legality of the marriages in New Paltz will likely be determined by the courts, and those officiating - all of them Unitarian clergywomen - may face the same misdemeanor charges as the mayor, according to the Times.

The Westport Unitarian Church Web site said Visel graduated from Starr King School for the Ministry, Berkeley, Calif., in 1998 with a Master in Divinity.

She was ordained by the Westport congregation and serves it as an endorsed community minister. She is also a chaplain with Connecticut Hospice, working out of their home care office in Norwalk, it said.



Rev. Marion
Visel File photo

Subj: **New Paltz Again**
Date: 3/15/04 7:39:35 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: tcomer25@hotmail.com
To: letters@nytimes.com
CC: mbvisel@aol.com

To the Editor:

In "Uniforms Mix With Wedding Finery at Same-Sex Nuptials" (Metro, March 14), the latest entrants into the gay marriage melee are Unitarian ministers "solemnizing unlicensed marriages" in open disregard of state law.

This should be viewed not as an act of civil disobedience but as a wake up call that it's time for the state to get back on its own side of the church/state line.

To those who argue that the traditional form – and sanctity – of marriage must be preserved, I say that such is not the role of government in a free society. The state does indeed have a legitimate interest in marriage, but it is limited to the mandates of governance such as census, property regulation and taxation.

The sacrament of marriage, however, clearly falls within the purview of religion, and religious communities under the first amendment may live their creeds free of governmental interference. Hence, the clergy in New Paltz cannot possibly be guilty of a crime.

Although it flies in the face of 200 years of tradition, states should revoke the entire concept of a "license", for they do not have legal authority to decide who is entitled to marry, and replace it with a system for the voluntary registration of "domestic unions". Registrants, regardless of race, religion or sexual orientation, would be recognized as a unit for civil purposes and be bound to all pertinent laws. Equally important, this approach would get the state out of the marriage business without jeopardizing the running of government.

Thomas R. Comer, Esq.
Stamford, CT
Day - 203 852 6800 x137
Eve - 203 324 9275

Subj: **Emailing: AP-Gay-Marriage-NY**
Date: 3/15/04 3:24:10 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: jbridges@hvc.rr.com
To: mbvisel@aol.com

The New York Times

NYTimes.com > [National](#)

Ministers Charged for Marrying N.Y. Gays

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: March 15, 2004

Filed at 2:17 p.m. ET

KINGSTON, N.Y. (AP) -- Two ministers were charged Monday for marrying 13 gay couples, thrusting the clergy into the legal battle over gay marriage in what is believed to be the first such prosecution for performing same-sex ceremonies.

Unitarian Universalist ministers Kay Greenleaf and Dawn Sangrey were charged with multiple counts of solemnizing a marriage without a license, the same charges leveled against New Paltz Mayor Jason West, who last month drew the state into the widening national debate over same-sex

unions.

The charges may be the first brought against clergy for performing same-sex unions, according to the Human Rights Campaign, a Washington, D.C.-based gay rights group.

“As far as I know that's unprecedented,” said Mark Shields a spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign. “It's ridiculous that prosecutors would spend their time charging anyone with a crime who is simply trying to unite two people with basic rights and protections.”

realistic,

Greenleaf, who acknowledged performing the ceremonies in New Paltz knowing the couples did not have licenses, said she signed an affidavit for the couples and considers the ceremonies civil.

Ulster County District Attorney Donald Williams said gay marriage laws make no distinction between public officials and members of the clergy who preside over wedding ceremonies.

Williams said he decided to press charges because the marriages were “drastically different” from religious ceremonies because Greenleaf and Sangrey publicly said they considered them civil. Some Unitarian ministers, Greenleaf included, have been performing ceremonies for gay couples since before the issue entered the national debate.

“It is not our intention to interfere with anyone's right to express their religious beliefs, including the right of

members of the clergy to perform ceremonies where couples are united solely in the eyes of the church or any other faith," Williams said.

Williams had said before Monday's charges were announced that it would be more difficult considering charges against clergy because the clergy had not sworn to uphold the law.

He said his decision to press charges was influenced by New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer's opinion that gay marriage is illegal in New York and by the injunction issued by a state supreme court justice against West.

The ministers performed the weddings March 6.

On Saturday, Greenleaf and Sangrey were joined by a third minister, the Rev. Marion Visel, in performing 25 more ceremonies, which went off without protests or arrests. It could not immediately be learned if more charges would be brought.

The ministers' lawyer, Robert Gottlieb, was unaware of the charges when contacted by The Associated Press and declined immediate comment.

Since West joined San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom as the only elected officials to marry gay couples, the issue has spread rapidly across the country. Courts, legislatures and elected officials are wrestling with what supporters say is a matter of civil rights and opponents call an attack on the time-honored institution of marriage.

West married 25 gay and lesbian couples Feb. 27 in a highly publicized marathon ceremony. West is now under a court order temporarily halting the weddings.

The charges carry a fine of \$25 to \$500 or jail time.

Subj: Re: News 12 Interview request
Date: 3/15/04 6:22:36 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: msmanoff@optonline.net
To: Mbvisel@aol.com

Reverend Visel,

I'm sorry to send you yet a 3rd e mail, but we are hoping to get a comment or two from you for a story this evening. Would it be possible for you to e mail the answers to these questions and we will print your answers on a full screen for our story?

(1) Whats your reaction to your two fellow ministers (Kay Greenleaf and Dawn Sangrey) having criminal charges filed against them today in connection with the marriages of 13 couples performed March 6th in New Paltz?

(2) Were you there that day taking part in those ceremonies?

(3) Would you perform same sex marriages in Connecticut ?

(4) What about IF it was declared against the law?

(5) What concerns to you have you could face criminal charges because of your involvement with the same sex marriage ceremonies you conducted in New Paltz?

Again, if you are in the area, we can come to you with the camera for a very short interview. Thanks

Marge Stevens----- Original Message -----

From: Mbvisel@aol.com

Date: Monday, March 15, 2004 4:57 pm

Subject: Re: News 12 Interview request

> Hi, I would be happy to speak with you. I will be in Norwalk
 > tomorrow (tues)
 > morning. I'll try to reach you this evening.

Subj: **Thank you - thank you SO much!**
Date: 3/16/04 1:11:27 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: pmartinez@monroecc.edu
To: marion@uuwe.tport.org

Reverend Visel:

We are one of the elated couples that you married on Saturday, March 13. We desperately wanted to tell you how much we appreciate what you did, not just for us, but for all of our brothers and sisters in the Gay and Lesbian community.

We saw the police that morning, and only later learned it was to give you and the other two ministers the warnings. Throughout the course of the day, this weighed heavily on our minds, how much you were willing to risk and how much was sacrificed by so many others. We knew about the charges against Mayor West and knew that you could well be facing a similar legal challenge. We are truly touched and in awe of the personal commitment that so many people have made to perfect strangers. And, while we knew that the risk to you was great and to us almost nonexistent, we knew that this was truly what we had to do, all of us, if we're ever to live truly equal to the rest of the nation's citizens. We had to let you take that risk, we know. It doesn't make it easier for us to know that you likely will be charged along with the Revs. Greenleaf and Sangrey but we also understand that without the sacrifices that people like you make, our love for each other will always be considered "dirty," and an "abomination."

While I may be more optimistic than others, I believe that New York state may "fall" sooner than others and that our marriages will be legalized and you will be able to perform these types of ceremonies without the specter of criminal charges lurking around every corner.

And when that day comes, we want to have a **real** wedding – the kind that comes with stress, family meddling, wedding cakes, flowers... the works. And we would be honored to have you perform the ceremony, paying your travel expenses and giving you lodging for the night. We cannot think of anyone we would want to do this more than you.

And until that day comes, we give our solemn promise that we will never take one minute together for granted, and that the vows we made in front of you this past Saturday will be honored and cherished. We vow to make the sacrifice you made for all of us, meaningful.

Thank you so much again!

Pat Martinez and Lisa Golden

Subj: **[Uuma-news] UU ministers charged after performing civil marriages; Pres. Sinkford issues statement**
Date: 3/17/04 7:20:23 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: DWeiner@uua.org
To: uuma-news@uua.org

(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

Subj: RE: Channel 12 interview
Date: 3/19/04 3:39:15 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: pmartinez@monroecc.edu
To: Mbvisel@aol.com

Will you be doing more marriages this weekend – thus figuring it'll take them until Tuesday to decide whether to haul your butt to court for violating the sanctity of marriage and undermining the very core of civilization? You sure are a radical! ☺

Marion, I have to tell you that I was raised Catholic. Had some issues with Catholicism completely unrelated to my orientation. Got married, got divorced a dozen years later, and then turned to Mormonism.

These days I joke that I'm a recovering Catholic and Mormon. I've always considered myself sort of a rubber-band type of "Christian." That being, someone who takes an interest for a while, then falls away, then becomes interested again, then falls away. I think a large part of it was some internalized "shame" thinking that somehow I was an abomination in God's eyes (okay, THAT is my Catholic upbringing) and that I wasn't worthy to even speak His name (there's the Mormon in me) and so I sort of stopped talking to God. Sort of like the disobedient child that refuses to look their parents in the eyes because they know they've been bad and don't want to see the disapproval and disappointment in their parents' eyes.

We attended a Marriage Equality rally here in Rochester almost a month ago. A Unitarian pastor spoke, and stirred something within both of us. Lisa even commented "Almost makes you want to start going to that church." Then we got the phone call from the New Paltz Equality Initiative and found ourselves right smack in the middle of realizing just how much support we have from the church and the clergy, and we found comfort also in beginning to realize that maybe we need to stop listening to the hard-line Christians who stopped speaking God's words a long time ago and began to mix their own in and credit Him with it.

What you women have done is beyond anything we could have ever expected from clergy. And now, we don't joke about "maybe" starting to go to the church. We looked up where our closest one is, and think we've found a home. We found a home, NOT because they teach what we want to hear, but because they teach what we have believed deep in our hearts our whole lives.

We want to be involved in this movement, and we want to perform service to others that have the same hopes and dreams we have. You helped us to realize one of ours and we want that for all of our GLBT brothers and sisters.

We hope you don't mind if we continue to correspond with you. Also, if there's anything we can do up this way to help out, please ask us. We'll do anything within our means to help advance this movement.

Love and hugs!

Pat and Lisa

-----Original Message-----

From: Mbvisel@aol.com [<mailto:Mbvisel@aol.com>]

Sent: Friday, March 19, 2004 2:44 PM

To: Martinez, Patricia (ETS: Word Processing)

Subject: Re: Channel 12 interview

Hi, I've had a busy but good week too. As far as the legal defense \$\$ is concerned, we 3 ministers have pro bono legal counsel. I'm not sure what will happen with the charges and if their will be fines levied, and if the ministers charged will pay the fines (or go to jail).

But contributions should go to the New Paltz Equality Initiative (NPEqualityInitiative@yahoo.com). Or have folks send checks to the NPEI in care of

Wednesday, March 24, 2004 America Online: Mbvisel

Minister vows to continue same-sex ceremonies

By J. Clyde Wills
Special Correspondent

When the Rev. Marion Visel of Westport visited the quiet hamlet of New Paltz, N.Y., last Saturday, it wasn't for the little town's natural setting, its cultural offerings or university.

It was for another thing for which New Paltz — nestled between the Shawangunk Mountains and the Hudson River about 90 miles north of New York City — has become known: A willingness to perform same-sex marriages.

Visel, a Unitarian Universal-

ist minister, performed 11 marriages during her visit to New Paltz.

They were not the mass weddings seen in San Francisco, she said — some weddings took as long as 90 minutes, with an exchanging of vows and often an exchange of rings.

"It was just wedding," she said. "The feeling was very up and celebratory."

A community minister from the Unitarian Church in Westport, Visel traveled to New Paltz to support fellow ministers Kay

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Greenleaf and Dawn Sangrey, and those wishing to marry.

"I would not hesitate to go back and perform same-sex marriages again," said Visel, 54, a Hamden resident.

Greenleaf and Sangrey have since been charged with solemnizing a marriage without a license, and could face fines and jail time. Visel so far has not been charged.

"But I anticipate being charged," she said.

Last month, in response to the thousands of same-sex marriages performed by San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, New Paltz Mayor Jason West followed suit. West also has been charged.

Visel knew there was a legal danger before she left for New Paltz. When she got there, each minister was presented with a letter from the district attorney's office informing them of their rights and the law.

"It was a suggestion that we not proceed because we would be in violation of the law," she said.

Performing same-sex marriages is nothing new for Unitarian Universalist ministers, who have conducted such marriage ceremonies for 35 years. The re-

ligious ceremonies are not legally binding.

"This has been a deep and committed part of our faith tradition for several decades," said Janet Hayes, information officer for the Unitarian Universalist Association.

What makes the marriages in New Paltz different, Visel said, is the minister signed an affidavit of marriage that was notarized in lieu of a marriage license.

"We were very explicit with the authorities that it was our intention that these marriages were civil," she said.

The authorities in New Paltz were respectful, Visel said, and made it clear the violation was because the marriages were civil, not religious.

"It's an issue of justice," she said. "I believe that all of the couples that I married last Saturday have been couples for 10 years."

The charges were the result of a clarifying opinion on New York law issued earlier this month by state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer. New York law does not

permit same-sex unions, Spitzer said, but it does protect same-sex couples who are married in other states.

In Connecticut, Westport First Selectwoman Diane Farrell has asked state Attorney General Richard Blumenthal to clarify state law regarding same-sex marriage. Blumenthal has said he will issue an opinion by early April.

"I think it is important to wait to hear from the attorney general," Farrell said.

As a justice of the peace, Farrell said she is prepared to perform same-sex weddings if they become legal. It is a matter of what the law provides, she said.

"I think that equal rights are entitled to every American," she said.

The Unitarian Universalist Association still is deciding what to do about the charges against Greenleaf and Sangrey, Hayes said.

Laws governing same-sex unions vary from state to state and the association is dealing with a few of them, she said.

"... I was healing an injustice."

The Rev. Marion Visel
On performing same-sex marriages

"It's all unfolding so quickly that we are not sure what to do and when," Hayes said.

For Anne Stanback, president of the Connecticut chapter of Love Makes A Family, a statewide coalition advocating for the legalization of same-sex marriage, pressing charges against ministers is "appalling."

"It shows there is a lot of confusion about this issue," Stanback said.

Despite the threat of prosecution, marriages have not stopped in New Paltz, Visel said, and other ministers are ready to go. Right now, the only denomination conducting the marriages is Unitarian Universalist, but she thinks other religious leaders will come forward.

Visel said she'll return.

"We plan on being there this Saturday and the Saturday after that and the Saturday after that," she said.

Such social action is driven, in part, by President Bush's Defense of Marriage Amendment, a proposed constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage. That added flame to the fire, Visel said, and it is just a matter of time until marriage laws are changed.

"I didn't feel that I was breaking the law, but I was healing an injustice," she said.

Subj: **March 13 ceremonies**
Date: 3/24/04 11:30:27 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: sbirden@adelphia.net
To: mbvisel@aol.com

Rev. Visel,

We tracked your e mail address down through one of the couples that was married in New Paltz on March 13th. We told you then, but we wanted to say again, what a gift you gave us by officiating our ceremony. It was such an act of courage for you to go there and be part of this ceremony, knowing that you would probably end up in court--or possibly jail-- as a result. We were truly moved and honored by your conviction and action.

That day at New Paltz affected us in ways that we never expected. We've been together for 16 years and while we hoped that one day we could exchange vows in marriage, we never believed that it would actually occur. So we expected this much-anticipated day to be a moving one for us, but it impacted us in ways that we never expected. We were prepared for protesters, policemen, and reporters. We were not prepared for the outpouring of caring that occurred from the moment that we arrived in New Paltz on Friday night at the bed and breakfast through the day on Saturday. We were not prepared for 200 volunteers to give their time to make our day special. We were not prepared to come face to face with the strength of conviction from the ministers. What a gift you gave us. Thanks so much.

Susan Birden and Colleen Kavanaugh