



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 7, 2013

Pastor Sentenced for Protecting Woman and Her Daughter from Ex-partner

A Mennonite pastor convicted last year of helping a woman flee the country with her daughter in order to keep the little girl from being handed over by court order to the woman's former lesbian partner was [sentenced March 4](#) by a federal judge to 27 months in prison.

In 2009, Virginia Amish-Mennonite Pastor Kenneth Miller (shown, at center) helped former lesbian Lisa Miller (no relation) leave the country with her daughter, Isabella, after a court granted custody of the child to Miller's former partner, Janet Jenkins. Jenkins is not biologically related to the girl, and never went through legal proceedings to adopt her.



According to [LifeSiteNews.com](#), the now 10-year-old girl "was conceived by artificial insemination while Jenkins and Miller were in a Vermont civil union, which was dissolved in 2003. Following the end of her relationship, Miller returned to the Baptist religion of her youth and consequently disavowed homosexual behavior. She has raised Isabella with the same values."

Although two experts testified in sworn affidavits that Isabella suffered serious emotional trauma connected to the court-ordered visits she had with Jenkins, in 2009 a Vermont family court judge gave custody of the child to the Jenkins after Miller refused to share custody with her. However, by that time the Rev. Miller had helped the mother and child to escape to Nicaragua, where the minister's [Beachy Amish](#) sect reportedly has a mission.

While the Rev. Miller said he thought Isabella's mother retained sole custody of the child, and was not aware that he had broken the law by helping her evade Jenkins, a jury nonetheless convicted him in August 2012 of "aiding and abetting a parental kidnapping. He had remained free for over a year until federal judge William K. Sessions sentenced him to two years and three months in prison.

Isabella's mother, Lisa Miller, also faces charges of kidnapping her own daughter, but thus far federal agents have been unable to locate either her or Isabella, and Nicaragua, the country to which the two originally fled, does not have an extradition treaty with the United States.

Prior to the March 4 sentencing, prosecuting attorney Christina Nolan took aim at the Rev. Miller's faith, accusing him of using it as justification to ignore the requirements of the law to the emotional detriment of Jenkins, whom she claimed felt like a mother who lost her child. "He sees Ms. Jenkins as a homosexual associated with the powers of darkness," Nolan charged. "He answers to a court higher than this one [and] blames the victim for his crime." She added that "there is no sentence you can give that can begin to take [Jenkins'] pain away" over losing Isabella.

Nolan charged that because of the Rev. Miller's "brazen intervention, a child — an American citizen — is growing up outside this country, and a mother must bear the unimaginable daily torment of being separated from her child, without any word on her child's health or well-being. Kenneth Miller's offense



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could not be more serious.”

In a letter to Judge Sessions before sentencing, Miller explained his actions and challenged that any punishment he receives is aimed against his faith and values. “If it is true that my actions flow out of my faith in Jesus, and from my deeply held moral beliefs — and I sincerely think they do — then it must follow that whatever judgment is being brought against me by the United States of America is judgment on my faith and conscience and deeply held moral beliefs. I was faced with a woman in distress who needed help to protect her daughter from what seemed to be an inhumane court decree.”

In handing down the sentence, Sessions claimed that he thought highly of the Rev. Miller and his decision to act upon his moral convictions. But, he added, the law required him to sentence Miller to prison for his actions. “My responsibility as United States District Judge is to enforce the laws and respect the system of justice,” he said. While Miller’s attorney, Brooks McArthur, requested that the minister be sentenced to house arrest rather than prison, noting that he has no criminal record and is not violent, Sessions refused, insisting that a “strong message” must be sent against Miller’s crime, adding that the “horror of this cannot be overstated.” He then sentenced the pastor to 27 months behind bars, plus a year of supervised probation.

Miller is unlikely to serve any of the sentence for the time being, after McArthur announced that he would appeal the verdict in the case based on the trial venue. “Our hope is that he does not ever have to serve any time,” McArthur told reporters. He explained that Miller’s defense team plans to challenge the decision to try the case in Vermont, where Lisa Miller and Isabella lived until fleeing the country, rather than in Virginia.

The Rev. Miller had been in jail for several weeks prior to sentencing because of his refusal to provide testimony regarding others who may have aided in the escape of Miller and her daughter. The pastor is now free pending the appeal of the sentence.

Following his unexpected release from jail pending the appeal, Miller told the Christian News Network: “I just thank God for his mercy. This was wholly unexpected today. I fully expected to go back to my cell mates ... at the Northwest State Correctional Center.” He said that the experience has brought him and his family closer together, even though he has been separated from them during his incarceration. “And it has definitely brought us all closer to God,” he added. “My time in the cell was like a spiritual retreat in a lot of ways, and just an amazing work that was done in my heart and the hearts of my family through all this.”

Photo of Rev. Kenneth Miller leaving court after his sentencing Mar. 4: AP Images



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