

Mennonite Pastor Jailed for Helping Lesbian Kidnap Girl

A Mennonite minister was sentenced in Vermont on Monday to more than two years in prison for helping a woman flee to Nicaragua with her daughter to evade court orders granting visitation rights to the woman's former lesbian partner.

Kenneth Miller, 45, was convicted in August of aiding and abetting international kidnapping. Prosecutors said he helped orchestrate Lisa Miller's flight to Canada and then on to Nicaragua in 2009 with her daughter after she decided to reject her homosexuality and her former partner.

Kenneth Miller and Lisa Miller are not related.

The case drew widespread attention as **gay rights** and evangelical Christian groups took opposing sides in the custody battle between Lisa Miller and her former partner, Janet Jenkins, over their daughter, Isabella Miller-Jenkins, now 10.

After Monday's hearing at U.S. District Court for the District of Vermont in Burlington, Kenneth Miller's lawyer said his client would not start serving his sentence until a higher court hears his appeal.

"Our hope is that he does not ever have to serve any time," said the lawyer, Brooks McArthur. He said the defense team would likely challenge the decision to try the case in Vermont rather than in Virginia, where Lisa and the couple's daughter lived.

Jenkins and Miller were joined in a civil union in Vermont in 2000 and, using in vitro fertilization, Miller gave birth to a daughter two years later.

Miller filed to dissolve the union in 2003. She won custody but a Vermont court granted Jenkins visitation rights.

Miller increasingly embraced conservative Christian ideals and renounced homosexuality.

Kenneth Miller, an Amish-Mennonite pastor in Virginia who worked in his family's garden-supply business, contacted Mennonites to drive Lisa Miller and her daughter to an airport in Canada in 2009 and pick her up in Nicaragua where the group runs a mission, according to court documents.

Lisa Miller was indicted on international kidnapping charges in 2010 but federal agents have been unable to locate her or Isabella. Nicaragua does not have an extradition treaty with the United States.

Prosecutors had sought a sentence of up to three years.

"From the beginning we thought this was a serious crime," U.S. Attorney Tristram Coffin said after the sentencing. "Mr. Miller was involved in removing a child from the visitation custody of a parent, and that's an extremely significant act."