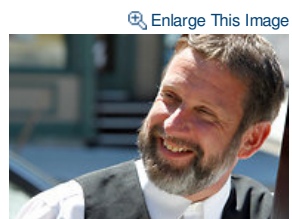


Sect Pastor Is Convicted of Assisting in Abduction

By ERIK ECKHOLM
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After only four hours of deliberation, a federal jury in Burlington, Vt., found an Amish-Mennonite pastor guilty of abetting international parental kidnapping in a widely publicized case involving a same-sex union and religious opponents of homosexuality.



Toby Talbot/Associated Press

Kenneth L. Miller outside Federal court in Burlington, Vt., on Aug. 7. Mr. Miller was convicted of abetting international kidnapping and is facing three years in prison.

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The pastor, Kenneth L. Miller of Stuarts Draft, Va., could face up to three years in prison. He was convicted of helping Lisa A. Miller flee to Nicaragua with her daughter, Isabella Miller-Jenkins, in 2009 to evade court-ordered visits with Ms. Miller's former partner in a civil union in Vermont.

After the verdict, more than 100 of Mr. Miller's supporters from the Beachy Amish-Mennonite sect, the women in traditional long dresses and head scarves, men with trimmed beards, gathered outside the courthouse to sing "Amazing Grace" and other hymns.

Mr. Miller, 46, joined the group and said, "We are of course disappointed, but with the grace of God and by his help, we will bear the consequences."

After splitting up with her former partner, Janet Jenkins, in 2003, Ms. Miller, who is not related to Mr. Miller, moved to Virginia, declared herself a born-again Christian, tried in court to strip Ms. Jenkins of her parental rights and interfered with mandated visits. In 2009, as a frustrated Family Court judge in Vermont threatened to transfer custody of the girl, Ms. Miller disappeared with her daughter.

The Beachy Amish-Mennonites regard homosexual behavior as a sin.

In the trial, Mr. Miller's lawyer, Joshua M. Autry, did not dispute the evidence that Mr. Miller had helped arrange for Ms. Miller and her daughter to fly from Canada to Nicaragua and obtain shelter from missionaries. But Mr. Miller, his lawyer argued, did not realize that Ms. Miller was defying any court orders at the time.

The prosecutors cited evidence that Mr. Miller tried to hide what Ms. Miller was doing, including by specifying that the flights should not touch down on American soil and giving the pair Mennonite garb to wear as a disguise. His case was also undermined by the reluctant testimony of a fellow pastor in Canada, who said he had refused to transport Ms. Miller and Isabella across the United States-Canada border because he feared they were breaking the law.

"The evidence shows the defendant helped Lisa Miller because he believed in her

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cause,” Paul Van de Graaf, an assistant United States attorney, told the jury.

Mr. Miller had to give up his passport but remains free for now. Mr. Autry said the defense might appeal, arguing that the trial should have been held in Virginia, where Mr. Miller’s actions took place.

The prosecutors presented evidence that others had worked with Mr. Miller to help Ms. Miller flee. Chief among those alleged to have taken part was a businessman in Virginia, Philip Zodhiates. Telephone records suggest that Mr. Zodhiates was in touch with Ms. Miller for months and drove her and her daughter to the Canadian border for their escape.

Mr. Zodhiates has not been indicted, and declined to comment.

Telephone records also indicated that as he drove home from the border, Mr. Zodhiates tried to call a cellphone number registered to Liberty Counsel, an evangelical legal group.

That cellphone number has sometimes been used by Mathew D. Staver, the founder of Liberty Counsel, dean of the Liberty University Law School in Lynchburg, Va., and a leader of Ms. Miller’s defense team.

In an e-mail Tuesday, Mr. Staver said that the phone number in question had been widely circulated as a contact number for Liberty Counsel’s public relations office and that he had no knowledge of Ms. Miller’s flight and had never discussed her case with Mr. Zodhiates.

Federal agents believe that Ms. Miller and Isabella, now 10, are still hiding in Nicaragua.

Jason McLure contributed reporting from Burlington, Vt.

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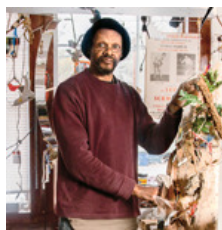
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