

Churches Fear Lawsuits over Gay Weddings

Jul 15, 2013 [By Todd Starnes](#)



Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: We perform only Christian weddings at CCPO, and therefore will never be part of performing a same sex, so called by the world, "wedding."

Joe Carr believes a day is fast approaching when pastors will be charged with hate crimes for preaching that homosexuality is a sin and churches will face lawsuits for refusing to host same-sex weddings.

"It's just a matter of time," said Carr, the pastor of [Waynesville Missionary Baptist Church](#) in Georgia. "What's happening in Europe – we're going to see happen here and we're going to see it happen sooner rather than later I'm afraid."

And that's why the congregation will be voting next month to change their church bylaws – to officially ban the usage of their facilities for gay marriages. "We needed to have a clear statement," Carr told Fox News. "It's to protect us from being forced to allow someone to use our facilities who does not believe what we believe the Bible teaches."

"These facilities may only be used for weddings that adhere to the Biblical definition of marriage and are solely reserved for use by members and their immediate family members," the amended bylaws read. "These facilities may not be used by any individual, group, or organization that advocate, endorse, or promote homosexuality as an alternative or acceptable lifestyle. This policy also applies to birthday parties, reunions, anniversaries, wedding or baby showers, etc."

The church also included a passage to protect their pastor noting that he is not obligated to perform any wedding ceremony that would cause him to violate his conscience or conviction. "Under no circumstances is the pastor to officiate, participate, or endorse any wedding ceremony that violates the belief and teaching of this church body in accordance with the Bible," the statement read.

Even though Waynesville is a small community, Pastor Carr said he fears they could be taken advantage of by gay rights activists trying to "intimidate us."

And Waynesville Missionary Baptist Church isn't alone in their fears. Hundreds of churches around the nation are considering similar changes to their constitutions and bylaws as a result of the Supreme Court ruling on the Defense of Marriage Act. [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), a religious liberty legal organization, has already provided churches with sample bylaws that define marriage.

"I think we're in a day where every church needs to have a statement in its bylaws of its doctrinal beliefs on marriage and sexuality," attorney Erik Stanley told [Baptist Press](#). "This is a proactive approach that churches can take to head off any claims of discrimination in the future, should they occur."

Greg Erwin, an attorney who represents the Louisiana Baptist Convention, said it's hard to speculate on what impact the Supreme Court ruling could have. "It would seem that the law now is that churches do not have to perform marriages that violate its beliefs," he told [The Baptist Message newspaper](#). "However, if a church rents out its facilities for weddings to anyone but same-sex couples, then a court could find that the church is discriminating in violation of law by only refusing to rent to homosexuals."

Many Louisiana pastors said the changes are sad, but necessary. "It's a shame that we have to vote on something like this," said Paul Dabdoub, pastor of Ridge Memorial Baptist Church. "But for protection, it is a must."

But Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, told Fox News that's not necessarily true.

"The U.S. Constitution already guarantees the right of churches to decide which sacraments they wish to perform and whom they want to include in these rituals, including weddings," Lynn said. "So these additions to church constitutions are unnecessary."

Attorney Stanley said the legalization of gay marriage will have an impact on religious liberty. "Religiously liberty is on the chopping block any time same-sex marriage is legalized or normalized in the culture," he told Baptist Press.

Last week, American evangelist Tony Miano was arrested and ...

To read this article in its entirety, go to:

<http://radio.foxnews.com/toddstarnes/top-stories/churches-fear-lawsuits-over-gay-weddings.html>