

FORCING RELIGIOUS GROUPS TO HOST SAME-SEX “MARRIAGE” CEREMONIES

USCCB Fact Sheet

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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY UNDER ATTACK

A Concrete Example

The Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association of the United Methodist Church is a ministry organization that owns a facility known as the Boardwalk Pavilion in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. This building and others on the same site have hosted church and worship services for over a century. The pavilion is currently used for Sunday and weekday worship services, Bible programs, youth programs, and charitable fundraisers.

However, in 2007, the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights **threatened to prosecute the Camp Meeting Association for adhering to its deeply held religious beliefs.** State officials began an investigation because the Christian organization had refused to allow a same-sex civil union ceremony at the pavilion. The state based its investigation on the complaint of the two women who sought the ceremony.

In January 2012, a New Jersey administrative law judge recommended that the state’s Division on Civil Rights find that the Camp Meeting Association violated a state nondiscrimination law. The Association believes that it is merely exercising its constitutionally protected right to use its property in accordance with its religious beliefs, without government interference.

A similar situation arose in Hawaii in 2010 when **an individual demanded to be able to hold a same-sex “marriage” ceremony in a Catholic chapel,** a consecrated religious sanctuary on the grounds of a diocesan retreat center. After Church employees declined this demand, the

individual filed a civil rights complaint against the Catholic Church in Hawaii. The individual alleges that he was discriminated against on the basis of his religion (because he is not Catholic) and sexual orientation.

The Church has responded that forcing the Church to allow same-sex marriages in its chapel would violate the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as well as the Hawaii Constitution. The Church has argued that the government does not have a right to force a church to allow use of its facilities by individuals or groups who do not share the religious beliefs of the Church, or who may be actively antagonistic to the teachings and beliefs of the Church.

Although supporters of laws redefining marriage often claim that they contain ample religious freedom protections, these examples from New Jersey and Hawaii show that the possibility of forcing a church to violate its deeply held religious beliefs is very real. Such a possibility would run afoul of the religious freedom protections in the U.S. Constitution, as well as federal and state statutes.

Is our most cherished freedom truly under threat?

Among many current challenges, forcing religious groups or churches to host same-sex “marriage” or civil union ceremonies denies these institutions the right to exercise freely and fully their religious beliefs. The state should not be able to dictate the use of sacred spaces in ways that violate deeply held religious beliefs. Without religious liberty properly understood, all Americans suffer.

What can you do to ensure the protection of religious freedom?

Text the word “Freedom” to 377377 for updates from the bishops on current threats to religious liberty. Also, please visit www.usccb.org/freedom for more information on how you can take action to protect religious liberty!