

How Should Your Church Respond to the Supreme Court's Marriage Decision?

The recent Supreme Court decision has raised questions for churches who hold to the traditional view of marriage about how their beliefs will be protected now that same-sex marriage is legal in all 50 states.

The Guiding Principle—Courts Do Not Rule on Matters of Faith

The First Amendment provides strong protections regarding sincerely held religious beliefs, so make sure your policies are clearly connected to your Statement of Faith. Pastors still are not legally compelled to perform marriage for any couple on theological grounds, but it is important for your church to clarify its position on gender, human sexuality, and marriage.

Focus on Two Documents: Your Statement of Faith and Your Building Use Agreement

The Court's majority opinion reaffirmed that "religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths..."

What are "the principles that are so fulfilling and so central" to your church? Make sure your **Statement of Faith** is clarified with regards to your church's beliefs about same-sex marriage, including the fact that marriages are considered to be worship services, and include this updated Statement in your church's Bylaws.

Church leaders are also concerned about being forced to allow their facilities to be rented for celebrations such as marriage receptions for same-sex couples. Here, your **Building Use Agreement** needs to be clear: *your building may only be used for purposes consistent with your church's sincerely held religious beliefs*. You may even want to include your Statement of Faith in your Building Use Agreement.

Even if you do provide this clarification, there is still an area where you can get into trouble: failing to be *consistent* with your policies. If you make an exception and fail to treat all groups equally, you open yourself to claims of discrimination and possibly legal action.

Moving Forward—A Mission to Fulfill

For centuries, the challenge of the church has been to relate Biblical truth to an ever-changing culture. By following these principles and reviewing your policies with your attorney, your ministry can continue to boldly move forward in reaching your community and the world. We thank you for your faithful ministry and your partnership in fulfilling your mission!