
Frequently Asked Questions – to accompany the communication to the Regional Pastors regarding the 2014 GA Resolution on Ministerial/Facility Protection Against Forced Officiating/Hosting of Same-Sex Marriages

1. Question:

Should we include in our congregational bylaws a formal statement reserving our right to restrict the use of our owned church properties to persons, events, and programs that are judged consistent with our church's nature and mission and the standards of the Church of God (Anderson), the church body with which it is affiliated?

Answer:

Yes, definitely. Such a formally stated restriction is the church's right. It must be recognized, however, that this right is put in unnecessary legal jeopardy if not formally established in congregational bylaws. Such a policy establishment should be accomplished in advance of any challenge of an "outside" party, and such challenges are becoming more frequent.

2. Question:

In light of state and federal law, can a congregation prevent its owned facilities from being used against its will for same-sex marriage ceremonies and celebrations?

Answer:

Yes, especially if an adequate facilities restriction policy is legally in place and specific reference is made to the related standard of the affiliated church body, the Church of God (Anderson), as represented by its General Assembly and the Assembly's June, 2014, resolution on this subject. In the United States, the courts historically have respected religious convictions and a church's right to function in accord with its own religious convictions, especially when they are clearly stated and consistently employed in relation to its own facilities and personnel.

3. Question:

Where does our congregation acquire critical information with which it can draft an appropriate and legally binding policy statement on the restriction of its facilities?

Answer:

Church of God Ministries in Anderson, Indiana, has drafted a model policy statement and is actively sharing it across the church for the assistance of congregations. This is a follow through to the June, 2014, action of the General Assembly of the Church of God.

It is recognized that property law may vary somewhat from state to state. Therefore, Regional Pastors of the Church of God have been asked to seek the legal opinion of a lawyer specializing in local property law and share that legal opinion with each pastor or congregation within his/her jurisdiction. The situation in Canadian provinces may differ and must be validated.

It also is recognized that not all Church of God congregations are served by a Regional Pastor. All efforts are being made to serve them with vital information from the national level. The same is true for a range of endorsed agencies and other ministry partners in the Church of God.

4. Question:
Is the issue of putting in place a congregational policy on facility restriction critical and time-sensitive?

Answer:
Yes, clearly it is. Currently, the American society is increasingly prone to initiating legal challenges against religious institutions and leaders. To delay establishing appropriate policies and procedures is to invite disruptive intrusions into church life, some of which could be avoided if proper initiatives are taken quickly.

5. Question:
Will a Church of God minister who chooses to officiate at a same-sex marriage thereby jeopardize his/her ministerial credentials?

Answer:
Credentialed ministers of the Church of God are obligated to the standards and procedures found in the Credentials Manual that is approved by the General Assembly of the Church of God and then approved by the several Assemblies through which ministers are certified, supported, and disciplined. That Manual carries a clear expectation regarding same-sex marriages based on the June, 2014, action of the General Assembly. Credentialed ministers who choose to violate this expectation are clearly subject to discipline.

In the Credentials Manual (pages 62 through 79) under Section 7 you can find information regarding the procedures for review, counseling, disciplining, restoration of credentials for CHOG ministers and congregations.

Specifically under the following sections of the Credentials Manual you will find updates made following the passing of the resolution at the 2014 General Assembly.

- *Page 54, under Section 6.11.P -- Recognition and Certification of Congregations*
- *Page 64, under Section 7.31.F – Ministerial Actions Requiring Discipline*