

Pastor's Jail Term in Limbo

Thursday's sentencing of a pro-life pastor facing prison time for offering sidewalk counseling at a California abortion clinic has been pushed back to March 20.

✖ **Feb. 20, 2009** – The case of a pro-life pastor facing prison time for offering sidewalk counseling at an Oakland, Calif., abortion clinic will be “in limbo” until March 20, according to his legal firm.

At his sentencing yesterday, Pastor Walter B. Hoyer of Berkeley, Calif., was given 30 days in jail, a \$1,130 fine and 3 years probation that included a “stay away order” from the clinic at which the pastor was convicted last month of “unlawful approach,” under an Oakland city ordinance that bars picketers from coming within eight feet of women entering an abortion clinic.

Because Hoyer refused to agree to the stay away order, a legality forced his sentencing to be re-scheduled for March 20.

Attorney Dana Cody, executive director of the Life Legal Defense Foundation, which is representing Hoyer, told *Charisma* on Thursday the case is “in a holding pattern.”

“Basically, had Walter agreed to the stay away order, it would’ve been over and would have gone to appeal,” she said. “But there was no sentencing entered, [so now] we have to wait for March 20.”

Hoyer is known for standing outside the Oakland abortion clinic offering leaflets and counseling to women. According to his legal firm, he held a sign on the day of his arrest last May that read: “Jesus loves you and your baby. Please let us help.”

Prior to that arrest, Hoyer, an African-American, was the plaintiff in a federal civil suit challenging the constitutionality of the Access to Reproductive Health Care Facilities Ordinance, the controversial law used to convict him last month in the criminal case.

Calling Hoyer's conviction a violation of free speech rights, black pro-life leaders traveled from across the country to attend Hoyer's sentencing yesterday. "Walter, being a pastor, the prophetic voice of God, is bringing attention to this issue," said Stephen Broden, an African-American pastor from Dallas who arrived in Oakland earlier this week. "We who are in the black pro-life movement recognize that if they silence Walter then the potentiality for us being silenced [also exists]."

Pre-trial hearings in Hoyer's federal civil suit begin this spring.

Hoyer told *Charisma* on Wednesday that regardless of his fate, ending abortion should be black America's top priority.

"Every seventy-two seconds a black baby is murdered in the womb of his or her mother," Hoyer said. "I am hoping this case will create a dialogue that will strengthen the resolve of leadership in black America to fight for the lives of her children by taking a stand against abortion." — **Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**