

Pastors Rally to Support Marriage Amendments in Three States

Led by pastor Jim Garlow, the Protect Marriage campaign was launched in response to California's legalizing gay marriage in May



[] Roughly 3,000 pastors in California, Florida and Arizona joined in a conference call Wednesday to develop a strategy to rally Christians in support of marriage amendments on the November ballots in those states.

Hosted by pastor Jim Garlow of Skyline Church in San Diego, the meeting included such speakers as Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, Bishop Harry R. Jackson Jr. of the High Impact Leadership Coalition and Prison Fellowship founder Charles Colson, who quoted a Princeton professor as saying the battle for marriage is “the Armageddon of the culture war.”

“This is where if we lose, it would be very hard to turn the ship right again,” Colson said. “If we win, we might start rolling back the other side. This is a major, major struggle, and we should spare nothing in defining marriage the way every civilization has as the union of one man and one woman joined together as one flesh, as we believe in the Scripture in order to procreate.”

Responding to a May 15 California Supreme Court ruling that legalized gay marriage in his state, Garlow launched the Protect Marriage campaign () to unite pastors in support of Proposition 8, which would amend the California state constitution to define marriage as between one man and one woman. The lobbying effort has since spread to Florida and Arizona, where voters also will decide on marriage amendments

on Nov. 4. Similar marriage amendments have passed in 27 states.

To drum up support for the marriage amendments, Garlow is encouraging pastors to host voter registration drives, raise money for marriage campaigns and commit to prayer and fasting. California pastors also are urging their members to pray for eight minutes each day at 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. for the passage of Proposition 8.

A 40-day fast is scheduled to begin Sept. 24 in the run-up to Election Day, and on Oct. 1 an iProtect Marriage youth rally () advocating for Proposition 8 will be simulcast to churches nationwide free of charge.

“Let’s get all that [youthful] passion going in the right direction,” said Teen Mania founder Ron Luce, who is one of the leaders of the iProtect youth rally. “If we don’t give them something to do, the world will.”

In all three states, major prayer events are being planned for Nov. 1. In Arizona, a prayer meeting will be held at the state Capitol, and in California Lou Engle will host TheCall San Diego, which he hopes will draw a capacity crowd of 75,000 to Qualcomm Stadium.

“This is a spiritual battle; it must be won in prayer,” Engle said, calling on church leaders to participate in the 40-day fast. “We believe the pastors across California and the nation need to lead the nation in these 40 days of fasting and prayer. We need to take away the rights of the powers of darkness to bring this kind of resolution forward because it’s a spiritual battle.”

California’s gay marriage ruling states that ministers who object to gay marriage will not be required to officiate at ceremonies for same-sex couples. But Christian leaders say redefining marriage could severely limit religious freedom.

"This is ground zero in a culture war that the California Supreme Court just declared on Christianity and every single faith," said Maggie Gallagher, president of the National Organization for Marriage and co-author of *The Case for Marriage*. "Yes, you won't be thrown in jail if you refuse to marry same-sex couples. But I'm here to tell you the consequences to the liberty of the church and other faith traditions are very real and serious. What this decisions says is that people like you and me who think marriage is the union of husband and wife are exactly like racists who oppose interracial marriage."

Gallagher said that thinking could affect churches' tax-exempt status, the ability of Christian universities to teach that gay marriage is unbiblical and even the licensing of those who oppose gay marriage to teach, counsel or practice law or medicine. "Tell me how people who are racist and oppose interracial marriage, how does the government treat them? By the way, I think that's great on the racial issue, and I think it's absurd that they make this connection. But this is what they are saying. ... You can't be a teacher, attorney, a social worker, a medical doctor, a marriage counselor—you cannot have these licenses if you are an open racist. Can you run a university that teaches that interracial marriage is wrong? No you cannot."

Religious liberty attorneys say cases in New Jersey, where a Methodist ministry is being sued for not allowing a same-sex couple to use its pavilion, and New Mexico, where a Christian photographer was fined more than \$6,000 for refusing to photograph a lesbian couple's commitment ceremony, are signs that gay rights is already beginning to trump religious liberty.

"We have an opportunity to turn this around, not only by talking to people and praying and preaching about it but by actually going out and voting [and] donating money to these constitutional amendment campaigns in Florida and Arizona and

California," Alliance Defense Fund attorney Jordan Lorence told *Charisma* shortly after the May 15 ruling.

A recent Field Poll showed that only 42 percent of California voters support Proposition 8, but traditional marriage advocates say that data is skewed. "The Field Poll is notoriously wrong on marriage," said Proposition 8 campaign manager Frank Schubert of Schubert Flint Public Affairs.

He noted that in 2000, Field Polls showed no more than 50 percent of Californians in support of Proposition 22, a proposal to enact a statute defining marriage as between one man and one woman. That measure ultimately passed with 61 percent of the vote, but the state Supreme Court decision nullified the law. Proposition 8 supporters say judges could not overturn a constitutional amendment.

Schubert said a recent *Los Angeles Times* poll showing 54 percent of voters in favor of Proposition 8 offers a more accurate picture of the initiative's support. "We feel very confident we can win this campaign if we get the resources, if we get that volunteer army, if we keep the prayer chain going, if we implement the plan that's been laid out," Schubert said. "It's all up to us. We can't turn to anybody else. God has given us this opportunity on this day, and if we seize it we will be victorious. If we are lazy, if we think someone else is going to do it, then we're going to wake up on Nov. 5 wondering what the heck happened to our state."

Last week California Attorney General Jerry Brown revised the wording of Proposition 8 to say the amendment "eliminates right of same-sex couples to marry." Amendment supporters said they planned to file a ballot challenge.

Garlow admitted that the vote in California could be as close as 50 percent plus one vote. "Every single vote counts," he said, noting that churches large and small must make protecting marriage a priority.

Church leaders in Florida and Arizona echo that sentiment. In the Sunshine State, Amendment 2 will have to pass by more than 60 percent of the vote in order to become law. Current polls show that more than 60 percent of voters in all but South Florida are in support of the measure.

"We are believing God and praying and working hard so that we can get that bump that we believe is going to come from the church," said John Stemberger, president of the Florida Family Policy Council and an Amendment 2 advocate (). "In Florida, we're no strangers to close elections, and we believe this will be a close one."

Leo Godzich, pastor of special projects at Phoenix First Assembly of God and a leader in his state's traditional marriage campaign (), said the journey to get Proposition 102 on the November ballot was a battle in itself, with the measure passing in the Senate by just one vote. He noted that a previous marriage amendment failed to pass in a 52-48 vote.

"We learned the primary reason we lost was because we did not mobilize our base," said Godzich, who is also president of the National Association of Marriage Enhancement. "We need prayer that some of the apathy among the pastors in Arizona will be washed away this time. ... We need men of God to stand up and declare that this is not just an attack on marriage. God chose to define the relationship with the church as a bridegroom and bride. This is really a battle for the identity of the church." **—Adrienne S. Gaines**

Conference calls will continue through November, with the next scheduled for Aug. 27.