

Pentecostal Church Sues Radical Gay Activist Group

✖ **May 21, 2009** – A Michigan church has filed a federal lawsuit against a radical gay activist group that interrupted a Sunday worship service last fall with shouting, same-sex couples kissing and a banner proclaiming “It’s OK to be gay.”

Mount Hope Church, an Assemblies of God congregation in Lansing, filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan in Grand Rapids on May 15.

The church, which is being represented by the nonprofit Christian legal firm Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), names Bash Back!, a self-described militant gay activist group based in Chicago, its Lansing affiliate and several individuals who planned or participated in the protest.

“This is a group that has threatened violence on its Web site against churches,” said Dale Schowengerdt, legal counsel for ADF. “Bash Back! is a national anarchist group with a strong local component in Lansing, and they’re threatened for themselves and they certainly see the threat to other churches. It’s happened in Boston, it’s happened in California, and it’s happened in Seattle. This is a group that has strong ambitions to intimidate churches, so this church is saying enough is enough.”

On Nov. 9, Bash Back! members dressed in militant garb and staged a protest outside the church to distract security staff, blocking access to the building and parking lot at various times. Meanwhile, 10 protestors who had entered the church masked as congregants stood up in the middle of the service, “declared themselves fags and began screaming loudly,” Bash Back! leaders said in a statement posted online

after the November incident.

According to the lawsuit, the protestors threw fliers into the congregation, while two women rushed to the front and began kissing near the podium. Other protesters held a banner that read: "It's OK to be gay! Bash Back!" Group members pulled fire alarms as they ran out of the building. Roughly 700 churchgoers were in attendance.

In a statement posted online after the November incident, Bash Back! leaders said Mount Hope was targeted because it is "complicit in the repression of queers" by working to "institutionalize transphobia and homophobia" through "repulsive" ex-gay conferences and hell house plays, "which depict queers, trannies and womyn [sic] who seek abortions as the horrors."

No criminal charges have been filed against the gay activists. Bash Back! also has claimed responsibility for church protests in the Boston and Seattle areas.

In a statement on its Web site, Bash Back! said it is raising funds to fight the lawsuit. "Bash Back! and radical transfolk/queers cannot and will not be intimidated," the group said. "Some of us face life and death on a daily basis. This lawsuit aint [expletive]."

In a statement, ADF said federal law imposes penalties upon anyone who disrupts, by force or threat of force, a church service. The lawsuit asks for an injunction to prevent future protests, as well as statutory and compensatory damages, as well as legal costs.

ADF attorneys expect it to take a year for the suit to go to court.