

Prayer Leader: Christians Facing 'New Day' of Discrimination

A federal judge's ruling in favor of a public university that removed a Christian student from its counseling program over her belief that homosexuality is morally wrong signals a "new day" of discrimination against Christians.

So says prayer leader Lou Engle, who worries the decision this week could set "the precedent for Christian students being expelled in universities across America who refuse to compromise biblical views on morality."

On Monday U.S. District Judge George Caram Steeh dismissed a lawsuit Julea Ward filed against Eastern Michigan University (EMU) alleging she was removed from the school's graduate counseling program last year after she refused to counsel homosexual clients about relationships.

"The federal judge is declaring that Christian kids do not have a voice to stand for a moral truth [and their] biblical convictions on the issue of homosexuality and immorality in the nation," said Engle, founder of TheCall, a prayer movement that has drawn thousands of college-age youth. "This is a profound moment."

Attorney Jeremy Tedesco of the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), which represented Ward, agrees that the ruling could result in Christian students being expelled from public universities for holding similar views on morality.

"It's a very dangerous precedent," he told *Fox News Radio*. "The ruling doesn't say that explicitly, but that's what is going to happen."

When assigned a homosexual client, Ward asked if he could be reassigned because she could not affirm the client's homosexual relationship without violating her religious beliefs.

The client's appointment was rescheduled with another counselor. But ADF attorneys said Ward was later told her she could stay in the counseling program only if she agreed to undergo a "remediation" program designed to help her "see the error of her ways" and change her beliefs about homosexual relationships.

"Christian students shouldn't be expelled for holding to and abiding by their beliefs," said ADF Senior Counsel David French, who argued Ward's case last month. "To reach its decision, the court had to do something that's never been done in federal court: uphold an extremely broad and vague university speech code."

EMU applauded the decision, saying Ward did not face religious discrimination but was removed from the program because she violated university nondiscrimination policies and the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics. In his opinion, Steeh agreed that Ward violated the ACA code and was not asked to change her religious beliefs.

"EMU's curriculum does require plaintiff to make an effort to counsel homosexual clients, but, contrary to plaintiff's assertion, this requirement is not a requirement to endorse or advocate homosexuality, hence infringing her free exercise rights," Steeh wrote. "Plaintiff was not required to change her views or religious beliefs; she was required to set them aside in the counselor-client relationship—a neutral, generally applicable expectation of all counselors-to-be under the ACA standard."

ADF plans to appeal the decision as it argues a similar case filed against Augusta State University (ASU) in Georgia. In

her lawsuit, counseling student Jennifer Keeton alleges ASU told her to stop sharing her Christian beliefs in order to graduate. She claims the university also told her to participate in a re-education program and attend "diversity sensitivity training" to change her beliefs.

"Simply put, the university is imposing thought reform," French said of Keeton's case. "Abandoning one's own religious beliefs should not be a precondition at a public university for obtaining a degree. This type of leftist zero-tolerance policy is in place at far too many universities, and it must stop."

Even if the cases are appealed to the Supreme Court, Engle worries that the ruling would mirror last month's 5-4 decision in *Christian Legal Society vs. Martinez*. In that case, the court ruled in favor of the University of California's Hastings College of the Law, which barred the Christian Legal Society from recognition and funding because it would not accept members who were engaged in homosexual relationships.

"I believe that the Supreme Court will probably go that way again," Engle said. "This means that the Christian voice is being completely discriminated against, and it's going to, I believe, release persecution on university students, and it's only the beginning."

Engle said Christian students will be forced to take a stand. "We're in the days of Daniel. ... You've got to trust that God will bring you divine promotion when you refuse to bow down to the image," he said. "To compromise for the sake of getting a grade, you're practicing to receive the mark of the beast."

"In other words, if you can't stand in this day, how are you going to stand when the real pressure heats up?" Engle continued. "We're going to find out who the real Christians are."