

Catholic Bookstore Could be Forced to Use Gender-Affirming Pronouns

A Catholic bookstore in Jacksonville, Florida, is suing over a local ordinance that would force them to use gender-identity affirming pronouns regardless of the customer's biological reality.

Queen of Angels Catholic Bookstore is known by the community as a place to go to find answers on religion and Christianity. Now, the bookstore is being challenged by the Jacksonville law that would put LGBTQ rights above their own religious liberty.

Bookstore owner Christie DeTrude "seeks to provide a welcoming environment for anyone who enters her store. And she seeks to use her bookstore to share the Gospel," the Alliance Defending Freedom website states. DeTrude's bookstore also prides itself on Catholic principles and a Christian heart which means: "The bookstore serves everyone regardless of who they are and sells anything in the store to anyone."

However, this willingness to serve customers of all backgrounds is not enough with the implementation of the Human Rights Ordinance that was first approved in 2017 by Jacksonville. Officials updated the law with a new bill in 2020 as it was determined to be "unenforceable as written," according to the Jacksonville Daily Record.

The ordinance describes it unlawful to use sexual orientation and gender identity to refuse service or communicate in a way that would lead a person to believe "the patronage of such person is unwelcome, objectionable, or unacceptable." Gender identity and sexual orientation in the ordinance include both something that is physically visible and that which the person believes to be true of themselves.

The ordinance also includes a limitations and exemptions section which concludes with the statement: "With regard to discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, this Part 3 shall not apply with regard to any action of, or decision made by, a religious organization as defined in this Chapter."

How are religious organizations defined in this ordinance? They are listed as "churches, synagogues, mosques and schools of religious instruction and non-profit institution or organizations affiliated therewith, as well as 'any religious corporation association or society.'"

The bookstore's filed complaint against the city of Jacksonville states: "Following a disturbing nationwide trend, the City has expanded its public-accommodation law to cover gender-identity discrimination and thereby require businesses to address customers using their preferred pronouns and titles regardless of a customer's biological sex."

The complaint continues with the issue that the ordinance creates when placed in the context of First Amendment rights, which the Queen of Angels Catholic Bookstore believes are being undermined.

"The bookstore *just cannot speak* contrary to its beliefs—to affirm, for example, the view that sex can be changed. So, the store cannot use customers' pronouns or titles contrary to their biological sex."

With ordinances like this one in Jacksonville, the people who are most affected are not those who already had rights and are gaining additional ones, as the LGBTQ community in this case. It is the people concerned about the negative effects it could have on their First Amendment rights to the freedom of speech and religion.

With issues from Colorado baker Jack Phillips who has had to repeatedly defend his religious right *not* to bake cakes in

support of the LGBTQ agenda, to a young girl who was told at school that she couldn't wear a face mask which said "Jesus loves me," those in the faith community have unfortunately grown accustomed to seeing their values knocked down.

While there is a real human desire for life to be easy, this is not possible. For the Christian believer, there are real spiritual and natural battles that come as a result of being a disciple of Christ. In John 15:18 (MEV) Jesus reminds His followers that: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." Jesus does not promise that our life on this earth will be without struggles, but rather He promises that we can count on having opponents. However, His Spirit gives comfort through these struggles, and the perseverance to keep going with the knowledge that one day He will wipe away every single tear and the pain and suffering of a sinful world will fade away.

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