

Christian Florist Refuses to ‘Sell’ Her God-Given Freedom in Gay Flap

A Christian florist who refused to provide flowers for a gay wedding has declined a settlement offer that would have saved her home and business.

The day after a judge ruled that Barronelle Stutzman had broken state laws, Washington State’s Attorney General Bob Ferguson offered to drop his lawsuit if she paid a fine and agreed to make flower arrangements for same-sex ceremonies.

But Stutzman rejected the offer, explaining in a letter to Ferguson that it’s about “freedom not money.”

Freedom to Honor God

“I certainly don’t relish the idea of losing my business, my home and everything else that your lawsuit threatens to take from my family, but my freedom to honor God in doing what I do best is more important.

“Washington’s constitution guarantees us ‘freedom of conscience in all matters of religious sentiment.’ I cannot sell that precious freedom,” she said.

Religious liberty organization Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) is representing Stutzman, and plans to appeal the court’s decision.

Freedom of Expression

In March 2013—three months after marriage was redefined in Washington—Stutzman told long-standing customer Robert

Ingersoll that she could not arrange flowers for his wedding because of her relationship with Jesus Christ.

The court heard that Stutzman would have provided the raw materials, but felt that arranging the flowers for a same-sex wedding involved freedom of expression, and went against her Christian beliefs about marriage.

Ingersoll wrote about the incident on Facebook, which led to Stutzman receiving hate mail and a threat to burn down her business, Arlene's Flowers.

Free Flowers

Ingersoll and his partner Curt Freed were offered free flowers for their wedding from other florists.

The state's Attorney General, Bob Ferguson, filed a lawsuit under consumer protection laws, before the gay couple launched their own legal action.

A previous court ruling in January means Stutzman could lose her home and savings, as a judge said the state and the couple may collect damages and lawyers' fees from Stutzman's business and her personally.

Conscience Clause

In Northern Ireland, DUP MLA Paul Givan is hoping to introduce a "conscience clause," in the wake of legal action against a Christian-run bakery that refused to decorate a pro-gay marriage campaign cake.

He has launched a consultation on his Private Member's Bill, which would give reasonable accommodation to people who have strongly-held religious beliefs.