

City Council Demands Churches Conduct Same-Sex Weddings

A local council in the U.K. has been forced to apologize after issuing a letter that incorrectly demanded churches be licensed to perform same-sex marriages.

Essex County Council wrote to all churches in the county registered as wedding venues telling them that with “immediate effect” they “must” be licensed to “conduct same sex marriages.”

The words *immediate* and *same* were bold and underlined, with the latter also capitalized.

Simon Calvert of the Christian Institute says the council’s letter shows the need for churches to know their legal rights.

He says, “There is no legal reason whatsoever for churches to stop holding marriages in the ways they always have. They are free to do so.”

The Christian Institute has produced a new free legal guide, which gives reassurance that churches are well within their rights to say no to same-sex marriages.

“The behavior of Essex County Council goes to show why churches need to know their legal rights, because bureaucrats who want to push for gay marriage will try and go beyond the law,” warns Calvert.

He adds, “We want to be clear that Christians still have the right to express their belief that marriage is between a man and woman. Christians have every reason to be confident and bold in upholding the truth about marriage.”

“This is just the kind of thing we feared would happen,” says Colin Hart, campaign director of the Coalition for Marriage,

which spearheaded opposition to the introduction of same-sex marriage.

“If this has already happened in Essex, there is a real danger that this kind of pressure will be applied by unelected officials across the country,” he warns.

The letter “lifts the lid on the Orwellian future that this ill-thought-through law creates,” Hart says.

Hart calls on the government to urgently issue advice to all local authorities in light of the new law and says Essex Council should conduct an urgent investigation as to “why this threatening letter was sent out to churches that are supposed to be exempt from the effect of the legislation.”

A spokesman for Essex County Council says, “Essex County Council’s guidance on registering a building certified as a Place of Religious Worship for same-sex marriages applies only to those institutions which want to conduct such ceremonies.

“A letter sent to churches in April may have created a different impression, and we issued a clarification within a week explaining the correct procedure.”