

GoFundMe's New Policy Persecuting Christian Fundraisers

The crowdfunding website GoFundMe has revised its policy to make it easier to shut down fundraising campaigns the company does not support.

Critics argue the change in the company's policies targets Christian campaigns such as the fundraisers for Arlene's Flowers and Sweet Cakes by Melissa.

A campaign started for Melissa Klein of Sweet Cakes by Melissa was shut down last week after raising a little over \$100,000. The campaign was started by a friend of the Kleins after an Oregon judge ruled the family owed \$135,000 to the lesbian couple whose wedding the bakery refused to cater in 2013.

After news broke of the incident, the Kleins were forced to close the bakery after the same-sex couple filed a complaint saying the bakery had discriminated against them because of their sexual orientation.

Shortly after the judge's ruling, the Kleins announced on Facebook that the \$135,000 would not come from the now closed business but would come from personal funds.

"He (the judge) is ordering that we pay \$135,000 in emotional damages," they wrote. "This money will not come from the business, but instead would have to be paid from money that should be going to pay for food and housing for us and our five children... This amount will financially ruin us."

The Kleins continued, saying, "Our government was put in place to protect the people, not to punish people because of their faith. We have had many people ask to help. Someone kindly set

up a GoFundMe for us. Thank you to all who are willing to fight for religious freedom.”

But GoFundMe removed the campaign, citing its old terms which said, “Campaigns in defense of formal charges of heinous crimes, including violent, hateful, or sexual acts” are removed.

The site claimed the Kleins fell under “the heinous crimes” category.

GoFundMe issued a statement to *CNN Money*, saying, “The campaign entitled ‘Sweet Cakes by Melissa’ involves formal charges. As such, our team has determined that it was in violation of GoFundMe’s terms and conditions.”

Over the weekend, the company revised their policies to now specify the website bans “campaigns in defense of formal charges or claims of heinous crimes, violent, hateful, sexual or discriminatory acts.”

Kristen Waggoner, an attorney with the Alliance Defending Freedom, condemned the move.

“It’s really quite startling, the approach that GoFundMe has taken,” she told the *Washington Times*, “because it’s clear that it’s not enough to have the government just redefine marriage or punish those who disagree, but they’re really trying to ruin every aspect of the lives of those who disagree.”

The Kleins have said they were able to keep approximately \$100,000 that had been raised before the campaign was shut down. In the meantime, a new fundraising campaign for the couple has been set up on Samaritan’s Purse’s website.