

'I Would Go to Jail over Jesus' Name,' Says Public Official

Robin Bartlett Frazier, a two-term elected official in Carroll County, Maryland, isn't shy about her Christian faith.

It's what almost landed the granddaughter of a Methodist minister on the wrong side of the law in March 2014.

"Thinking of what Jesus did for me on the cross, I would not say his name because I might go to jail?" Frazier pondered. "I just couldn't do that."

No Public Prayers to Jesus?

Frazier made waves when she defied U.S. District Judge William D. Quarles' order that banned the Board of Carroll County Commissioners from opening meetings with prayers to Jesus, which they had done since January 2011 when they were sworn in.

One day after the temporary injunction against sectarian prayers came down, she made the following declaration at a commission hearing, which coincided with her turn to lead in prayer:

"I think that is an infringement on my freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and I think it's a wrong ruling," she announced. "And just as I wouldn't give up my guns or I wouldn't allow my children to be palm-scanned or I wouldn't give up my property rights with 'PlanMaryland,' I'm not going to give up those rights. But out of respect for my colleagues, I'm not sure how strongly they feel about it, I'm willing to go to jail over it. I believe this is a fundamental of America. And if we cease to believe that our rights come from

God, we cease to be America. We've been told to be careful, but we're going to be careful all the way to communism if we don't start standing up and saying 'no.' So, I say no to this ruling."

Shortly after the statement, Frazier recited a prayer which she attributed to George Washington, though experts dispute its true author.

"I didn't want to be directly defiant to the judge," she told CBN News. "I prayed about how I could draw a line, [but] the more I thought about it, the more it made me angry that we would be told not only that we couldn't pray to who we wanted to but that we couldn't use certain words."

Residents Say Prayers are Divisive

Frazier, who became a Christian around the age of 14 at a Youth for Christ event in nearby Hampstead, Maryland, says ultimately it was an easy stand to make, even though she and the commission were in the middle of a lawsuit with the possibility of tens of thousands of dollars in fines.

The legal challenge came from a group of residents who said the prayers were divisive.

Frazier insists that was never the intent, telling CBN News that the commissioners researched the law and tried to be respectful of others while remaining true to their own religious convictions.

"The idea of inviting people to pray with us, we said we wouldn't do that. It would just be the board," she explained. "So, we kind of looked at the law and tried to be within it, but still asked for wisdom and guidance as we conducted our business."

Prayer Policy Coercive and Insulting?

However, the plaintiffs argued the prayer policy was coercive

and insulting.

"I reached a point, as others had, you just get tired of going to the meetings and being in an excluded class of individuals," Neil Ridgely explained in a documentary produced by a local student at McDaniel College in Westminster. Ridgely is one of the named plaintiffs in the lawsuit against the county.

Some residents who support the commissioners describe the challenge as Christian discrimination. But the plaintiffs' attorney, Monica Miller, told CBN News she rejects that notion, noting one of the plaintiffs is a practicing Catholic.

"This isn't about atheism being pushed down someone's throat," Miller said. "This is about being inclusive to everyone, including Christians."

Sign of the Times

The case is still pending, but Frazier remains hopeful she's on the winning side of the law after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of sectarian prayers in another case, *Greece v. Galloway*, in early June.

Frazier believes her case and others, like the recent Hobby Lobby contraception case, point to a decline in religious liberties.

"All of these things are to try and limit religion," she said. "That's what motivates me to stand up for the Lord because we will not be America if we push God out."

While she has received plenty of support for taking a stand for Judeo-Christian values, she also has faced a lot of backlash.

Some have even suggested this was all a political stunt to sway voter support in her favor.

“That was the furthestest [sic] thing from my mind,” she explained. “I even tried hard not to politicize it, which is one of the reasons why I’m having this interview now and not before the election—because I didn’t want to even give the impression that I was trying to do that, because this wasn’t about that at all.”

For those who know her best, like lawyer and longtime friend Bob Lennon, they say Frazier is as genuine as they come.

“She’s an amazing person. She doesn’t have an ego,” Lennon said. “She’s just a genuinely good person. And she’s exactly what a public servant should be. She’s there to serve people.”

But county voters had the final say in June’s Maryland primaries. Frazier lost her re-election bid to represent her district to fellow Republican Steve Wantz.

She conceded the loss was, at least in part, possibly the result of the battle over prayer backfiring.

I Wouldn’t Change a Thing

Unfazed, she told CBN News she wouldn’t change a thing and is proud of her political record and the stand she made for her Christian faith.

Keeping taxes low, defending property rights and fighting an “overreaching” state government are among her proudest accomplishments. But two others top her list: leading a local newspaper reporter in the prayer of salvation and fighting for the right to reference Jesus in public prayers.

“It was much, much bigger than me, and it made me know that I was in the right place at the right time to be used of God,” she said. “And maybe that was the full purpose I was in here this [sic] four years.”