

NC Judge Resigns Rather Than Perform Gay Marriages

A North Carolina judge has resigned rather than being forced to perform same-sex marriages, because they collide with his religious beliefs.

Swain County Magistrate Gilbert Breedlove, 57, said he resigned Monday because of his personal objection to same-sex marriage. He said his Christian faith and adherence to biblical standards left him no choice in the matter.

Breedlove has been a magistrate for nearly 24 years. He started in 1990 and became ordained as a pastor in 1997.

"I was Christian when I started," Breedlove told the *Citizen-Times* newspaper in Bryson City for a story on its website. "Then, the law didn't require me to perform something that was against my religious belief. Now that law has changed its requirements."

North Carolina's same-sex marriage ban was struck down Oct. 10. The judgment followed an announcement made by the U.S. Supreme Court that it would not hear the appeal of the July ruling by the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals striking down Virginia's gay marriage ban. The 4th Circuit has jurisdiction over North Carolina.

There have been sporadic reports across the state of magistrates stepping down due to their personal objections to same-sex marriage. However, a statewide LGBT advocacy organization said there have been more than 600 licenses issued in over 60 counties.

On the broader picture, things are going smoothly, said Chris Sgro, executive director of Equality North Carolina.

"Certainly, our hope is not that anybody feels like they need to resign from their position," said Sgro. "Our hope is that people across North Carolina will support same-sex marriage, and do their jobs and conduct same-sex marriages the same as they would for opposite-sex couples."

Breedlove says that Bryson City is a conservative, Christian-based community, and that his friends and family are supportive of his decision.

Although employed as a part-time pastor at his church, Breedlove's main source of income came from his position as a magistrate. The former staff sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps is not worried about the pay cut, he told the *Citizen-Times*.

"That's one of things about being a Christian," said Breedlove, who would not identify his church by name, saying he didn't want it to get negative attention in response to his personal decision. "You are able to serve the Lord, and the Lord will provide."

Breedlove, who also served as a deputy sheriff before becoming a magistrate, spent several years translating the Bible into the Choctaw Indian language. His wife was raised on a Cherokee Indian reservation.