

Southern Baptists Say No to Gay Weddings for Military Chaplains

The agency that commissions Southern Baptist military chaplains says no Baptist chaplain will be allowed to perform, attend or support a same-sex wedding either on or off base.

The Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board released guidelines on Aug. 29 stating that endorsed chaplains will not "offer any kind of relationship training or retreat, on or off of a military installation, that would give the appearance of accepting the homosexual lifestyle or sexual wrongdoing."

The updated guidelines were issued in response to the military's repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and the Supreme Court's decision this summer to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act.

"A lot of our chaplains were asking for clarification," said Mike Ebert, spokesman for the NAMB, which is based outside Atlanta. "We wanted to clearly articulate in writing for the Department of Defense that these are our expectations."

Last year, an Associated Press article included mention of a 20-year Southern Baptist Air Force chaplain who attended a same-sex wedding on his base. Col. Timothy Wagoner initially assured his NAMB superiors that his quotes were misunderstood. He later resigned his Southern Baptist Convention endorsement and was re-endorsed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Ebert said that Wagoner's case was the only one he knew of where a Southern Baptist-endorsed chaplain had left the chaplaincy over a gay wedding. Southern Baptists have nearly 1,500 endorsed chaplains serving in the U.S. military, more

than any other denomination or faith group.

Earlier this week, the Pentagon began allowing gay and lesbian service members who plan to wed to take travel leaves for up to 10 days as long as those service members live 100 miles or more away from one of the 13 states that allow same-sex marriages.

A 19-year evangelical Air Force veteran says he was relieved of duties at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, after a dispute with his commanding officer over gay marriage. Senior Master Sgt. Phillip Monk said his commander, who is a lesbian, tried to pressure him into agreeing that opposition to gay marriage is a form of discrimination. Monk said he declined to answer her based on his convictions.

Last year, Congress approved conscience protections for military members, allowing them to express their personal beliefs without fear of punishment. Pending versions of the 2014 defense authorization bill would expand the conscience protections for service members.

Earlier this year NAMB President Kevin Ezell joined a statement of concern about the religious liberty of military chaplains, including ambiguity about the military's distinction between "evangelism" and "proselytizing."