

Visiting Missionaries Draw Ire of Parents Over VBS Invitation

A simple invitation to a Vacation Bible School in New York City has turned into a battle of theology between a Baptist church and parents of children from a local elementary school.

With the help of a youth group from South Carolina in New York doing missionary work, Sixth Avenue Baptist Church recently handed out flyers promoting the Vacation Bible School to children of Slope Elementary School as the children were leaving school grounds.

The gesture provoked outrage from parents accompanying the children partly because of the church's opposition to gay marriage.

"I know this church. Every summer they truck these kids up to proselytize," parent Ernestine Heldring told . "It's a brand of Christianity that's homophobic."

Heldring told that a number of students at the school have gay parents.

As of this writing, no formal complaint had been filed against the church to the New York Department of Education.

The controversy took Sixth Avenue Baptist Church pastor Richard Johnson by surprise.

"It's really sad that a group like the gay and lesbian crowd that preaches a message of tolerance can be so very intolerant of somebody else that may happen to have a little bit of a different view," Johnson told *Fox News Radio*. "There are some who are opposed to the message of Christianity and we understand that—but they took it to the next step and verbally

attacked us—when we did not pick a fight.”

The week-long Vacation Bible School, held in late June, featured singing, crafts and Bible teaching, according to the church’s website. Johnson told *Fox News Radio* that the flyers were “very generic” and “non-offensive.”

“The gay marriage agenda is the farthest thing from that particular series of events,” Johnson said of the Vacation Bible School. “We decorated T-shirts, tied-dyed baseball caps and had Bible stories.”

Johnson told *Fox News Radio* that Sixth Avenue Baptist Church would hold steadfast to its ideals.

“We don’t deny the fact that we believe the Biblical definition of marriage is what it is,” Johnson said. “We can’t allow some of the hate-mongering as they reject the Gospel to spill over onto us. We still need to make sure we are gracious and loving. ... We are to stand out for the love of Christ—the death, burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the World.”