

IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 1 Adventist Church,
Others Respond to Equality
Act

PAGE 2 Chik-Fil-A Texas
Airport Ban Addressed

PAGE 2 Christianity Touted
as "Enormous Harm" by
Chinese Officials

PAGE 3 States Making
Changes to Abortion Laws

PAGE 3 Religious Liberty
Symposium

PAGE 4 Adventist Convert
Inmate Sings Hymns Before
Execution

EDITOR: Sheila Elwin
religiousliberty@southernunion.com

2019 | Volume 3

**"[The Equality Act]
is an attempt by
one side to grab
all the disputed
territory and to
crush the other
side."**

Adventist Church, Others Respond to Equality Act Religious Freedom Issues

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Equality Act (H.R. 5) on May 17, 2019, extending many U.S. civil rights protections to gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that every human being is created in the image of God and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, but is also concerned that the bill makes no allowance for communities or individuals of faith who hold traditional views of marriage and gender. The World Church website says, "We recognize LGBT individuals often suffer unjust discrimination and are in need of legal protection.... Unfortunately, in attempting to provide protection for some, the Equality Act unnecessarily infringes upon the rights of others."

Douglas Laycock, University of Virginia Law School, notes that religious schools and nonprofits would be affected. A longtime supporter of same-sex marriage and of enacting a federal gay-

rights non-discrimination law, he nonetheless doesn't support the new act because it would "crush conscientious objectors."

The Equality Act could greatly affect religious schools and any regulations regarding gender and related issues, as those schools would be viewed as "public accommodations," even if they refuse all federal funding. Schools would still be protected for teaching a religion class or providing worship services, but not necessarily any further.

In an email to *National Review*, Laycock said the bill "goes very far to stamp out religious exemptions. It regulates religious non-profits. And then it says that [the Religious Freedom Restoration Act] does not apply to any claim under the Equality Act. This would be the first time Congress has limited the reach of RFRA. This is not a good-faith attempt to reconcile competing interests. It is an attempt by one side to grab all the disputed territory and to crush the other side."



Chik-fil-A Texas Airport Ban Addressed as Possible Religious Discrimination

Texas Governor Ken Paxton has announced an investigation into the San Antonio City Council ban of Chik-Fil-A from its airport due to "a legacy of anti-LGBT behavior" from the company. In March the Council voted 6-4 to approve a food and beverage concession agreement, as long as it excluded Chick-Fil-A.

Councilman Robert Trevino said of San Antonio that "we do not have room in our public facilities for a business with a legacy of anti-LGBTQ behavior."

Paxton has asked the Transportation Department to investigate, because "excluding Chick-fil-A from a

government program based on ... the religious beliefs of its leadership raises serious constitutional questions." He noted that "the Supreme Court has affirmed that the Free Exercise Clause protects individuals and organizations of faith alike," citing *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 573 U.S. 682 (2014). The investigation may address whether a vendor may be banned because of religiously-motivated company policies, as well as what a corporation may claim regarding religious liberty.

Currently, following a similar situation in Buffalo, New York, the FAA is investigating.

"...excluding Chick-Fil-A from a government program based on religious beliefs ... raises serious constitutional questions."

- *Lawmakers in New York have approved legislation to strengthen protections for religious attire in the workplace. The bill explains the state's anti-bias rules, and says employers may not discriminate due to clothing, head coverings, or head styles that are worn because of the worker's religion. Several years ago Sikh and Muslim transit workers reported discrimination related to their head coverings. The New York bill addresses similar situations.*

- *The Supreme Court is considering a full hearing of *Patterson v. Walgreen*, in which Seventh-day Adventist Darrell Patterson says that his employer, Walgreens, did not accommodate his Sabbath observance when he refused to conduct training on Sabbath. The Court may address what exactly constitutes "reasonable accommodation" for employees' religious practices.*

- *Twelve Chinese Adventists have been sentenced to prison in China, accused of "illegal business operations" for printing sermons and other faith-related materials. The pastor was sentenced to five years, head elder to four years, and nine co-workers to one to 3 1/2 years; one was exempted. The defense attorney maintains they were within the law.*

NEWS OF THE WORLD

Christianity Touted as "Enormous Harm" by Chinese Officials

"Christianity's Enormous Harm on China's Security" was presented to Communist Party members in the central Chinese city of Hebi during a city administrative bureau seminar. Members were encouraged to maintain "correct views" about religion and avoid its ideology. Hebi Municipal Radio Administrative Bureau confirmed that they had held the online seminar, but then deleted it later in the week.

Some residents believe the Bureau has been linked to national security agencies through business, and that China's president, Xi Jinping, is interested in showing the threat of religion as part of a continuing crackdown on religious minorities, including Christianity.

"The Chinese government often views religions, including Christianity, as foreign attempts to undermine its rule, even though

there is no evidential basis for such a claim," reports ChinaAid, a Christian human rights organization in China. "As a result, they often try to suppress religious adherents, and they openly forbid Communist Party members from practicing a religion."

Christianity in China has grown rapidly since the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976, and is predicted to have the largest Christian population in the world by 2030.

States Across America Making Profound Changes to Abortion Laws

In January, on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Reproductive Health Act (RHA) was signed in New York. Previously, abortions after 24 weeks were allowed only in cases where the mother's life was at risk. The RHA changed that to allow abortion for "absence of fetal viability" or to "protect the patient's life or health," seen by many as a highly undefined area. It also removed abortion from the criminal code, which raised concern over potential consequences for crimes against pregnant women.

Backlash has been evident in numerous states. Georgia signed a bill to prohibit abortions after doctors detect a fetal heartbeat. Legislators in Ohio, Kentucky, and Mississippi passed similar laws banning abortion after six weeks. Alaska introduced a bill that would treat abortion the same as murder, punishable by 30 to 99 years in prison. Alabama made performing abortions a felony unless pregnancy is a serious risk to the woman's health, even if the pregnancy was the result of sexual violence.

While abortion has become a wildly divisive issue in politics, it may be ironic to Seventh-day Adventists that until the late 1960s, the primary anti-abortion stance came from Catholic Democrats. Many conservative Republican Protestants would not involve themselves, seeing it as a position of their theological adversaries. Eventually though, abortion politics became a bond between Catholics and Protestants, encouraging the rise of the two groups as the "religious right." As that entity has

grown in strength, so has the Catholic-Protestant alliance. In fact, a number of conservative activists have converted to Catholicism, including columnist Robert Novak; Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas; former House Speaker Newt Gingrich; Judge Robert Bork; Kansas Governor Sam Brownback; and pundit Laura Ingraham.

For the Adventist Church's stance on abortion, see <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/-/abortion/>.



OCTOBER 26, 2019 | COBB GALLERIA CENTRE, ATLANTA, GA

Keynote Speaker: Ivor Myers

This one-day event is packed with information and presenters covering a broad spectrum of issues relating to religious liberty and last day events. Get up-to-date with what is happening in the political world and how it is affecting religious liberty in light of Bible prophecy.

REGISTER NOW. SPACE IS LIMITED.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION, PLEASE VISIT:
SOUTHERNUNION.COM/RELIGIOUSLIBERTY**

Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Public Affairs and Religious Liberty
P.O. Box 923868
Peachtree Corners, GA 30010

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MAILED FROM
ZIP 30304
PERMIT NO. 6849

Adventist Convert Inmate Sings Hymns Before Execution After Clemency Appeal Denied

Donnie Edward Johnson, on death row in Tennessee for three decades for murder, was executed May 16, 2019, after his clemency appeal to the Governor was denied. Johnson, who accepted Christ and became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church while incarcerated, was reported to sing, "Soon and very soon we are going to see the King," as the sedative took effect.

Johnson sang about re-

demption and love in the minutes preceding his execution by lethal injection. He had spent nearly 35 years in prison following conviction for the murder of his wife. In 1990 Johnson was introduced to Adventism by two fellow inmates, and eventually became an elder in the Adventist Church, leading prayer services for his fellow inmates.

General Conference president Ted Wilson wrote a letter on his behalf, plead-

ing for clemency. "Over the many years since 1984, Johnson ... has gone from being a hard-hearted criminal to a man who cares for others and seeks to share the hope he has found in his Savior, Jesus Christ, with those who do not yet know Him," wrote the president.

Before his execution, Johnson said, "I accept whatever the Lord allows to happen, even my death. If my work is done, then I am content."

"I accept
whatever
the Lord
allows to
happen,
even my
death."