

NORTHSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

*1250 Columbia Road
Orangeburg, South Carolina 29115*

Telephone: (803) 534-1199
www.nbc4christ.org

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

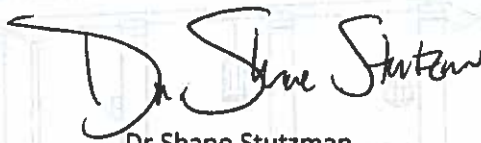
The Honorable Nikki R. Haley

I recently became aware of a standard that has been adapted by Governor Rick Scott of Florida called the Pastor Protection Act. In this Act it protects pastors from being forced to do ceremonies of people that do not connect with a pastor's spiritual beliefs. I would love to have the opportunity to talk with you about why I think that this law is so important to our state as well.

I am enclosing a copy of an article if you are not aware of this Act. (Although I know you probably are well aware)

If there is any way that we could talk one day concerning this matter I would greatly appreciate it.

In Christ



Dr Shane Stutzman
Senior Pastor

Doing Whatever It Takes to Share Jesus!

News / Lake County News

Petition seeks 'Pastor Protection Act' in wake of gay-marriage ruling



By **Bethany Rodgers** · **Contact Reporter**
Orlando Sentinel

JULY 7, 2015, 7:29 PM

More than 11,000 people have signed on to a **Clermont** pastor's petition pressing Florida Gov. **Rick Scott** to back a bill that would shield clergy who refuse to marry same-sex couples.

The Change.org drive launched by the Rev. Chris Walker comes on the heels of the landmark **U.S. Supreme Court** ruling guaranteeing a nationwide right to gay marriage. Walker says he was dismayed by the high court's decision in late June and fears pastors are in increasing danger of suffering legal backlash for following their consciences.

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"We're not here to say who can marry whom, and we're not here to change what the Supreme Court did," said Walker, who leads the Cathedral of Power International Church in Clermont. "But we also have the right as clergy for our First Amendment rights to be protected if we don't agree with it."

The petition Walker created July 1 had gathered more than 11,100 supporters by Tuesday afternoon, some posting comments that underscored their belief in heterosexual unions.

"Pastors should be free to preach what the Bible clearly says. They should not be forced by government to violate their faith on any matter," one commenter wrote.

Florida Rep. Scott Plakon says he is drafting a version of the so-called Pastor Protection Act endorsed by Walker. The measure, based on a new Texas law, will state that churches and ministers don't have to participate in marriage ceremonies that run counter to their "sincerely held" convictions, he said.

A similar proposal has also passed in Oklahoma and is under consideration in Tennessee.

Some LGBT-rights groups say the measure is redundant, because free exercise of religion is already constitutionally protected. A spokeswoman for the advocacy organization Equality Florida said the proposal and petition send a dangerous message that same-sex marriage is threatening religion.

"I think there's an implication that LGBT people and people of faith are at odds, and that couldn't be further from the truth," said Equality Florida spokeswoman Hannah Willard, who added that most clergy have embraced same-sex couples.

Walker contends that First Amendment safeguards are under assault, pointing to a complaint filed against a Colorado baker who turned away a gay couple asking for a wedding cake.

Plakon, R-Longwood, said many religious leaders share Walker's perspective, and the legislation he's drafting could help allay these concerns.

The Texas bill drew support from an openly gay representative and a lawmaker who identifies as pansexual, Plakon noted.

However, Marla Montgomery, member of a Lake County LGBT community group, says she believes the proposal Walker supports would give churches a "license to discriminate."

"If he's going to marry Fred and Ethel and not Fred and Frank sitting next door, then it's discriminatory," said Montgomery, who serves on the board of Mount Dora Pride.

Walker says that his online petition does not promote intolerance and that his roughly 160-member church welcomes people of any sexual orientation. During his 12 years as pastor of the nondenominational congregation, no one has ever asked him to officiate a same-sex wedding, although a lesbian couple did get married elsewhere while attending the church.

When asked whether Scott would support Plakon's legislation, press secretary Jeri Bustamante responded that the governor would "review any legislation that makes it to his desk."

Plakon said he views the petition as a positive sign of public interest in the pastor-protection bill that he plans to submit in coming weeks.

brodgers@tribpub.com or 352-742-5927

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