

Conservative Christian groups join legal fight to keep Michigan's gay marriage ban

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Stacy Swimp of Revive Alive Ministry in Flint speaks on behalf of mostly African-American pastors who are conservative and in solidarity against same-sex marriage. The group announced filing a brief with the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals at the First Baptist World Church in Detroit Wednesday. They say the gay marriage movement is not equivalent to the black civil rights movement.

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Declaring “the fight is on,” a formidable coalition of conservative Christian groups filed legal briefs in federal appellate court Wednesday supporting Michigan’s ban on gay marriage.

Representing potentially millions of worshipers in the state, the [Michigan Catholic Conference](#), the [Thomas More Law Center](#) in Ann Arbor, and a national coalition of Baptists, Lutherans, Mormons and evangelicals led by Catholic bishops filed three separate briefs Wednesday in the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati. The briefs back Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette in his efforts to defend the state’s voter-approved ban on same-sex marriage, which was overturned earlier this year by a federal judge in Detroit.

Gay marriage would “destroy the backbone of our society,” said the Rev. [Stacey Swimp](#) of Flint at a Wednesday morning rally held by African-American ministers at [First Baptist World Changers International Church](#) in Detroit.

Joining him were leaders with various Baptist, Pentecostal, Catholic and non-denominational churches in Michigan, including the head of the influential Council of Baptist Pastors of Detroit and Vicinity. The pastors represent hundreds of churches across metro Detroit and included leaders with denominations such as Church of God in Christ (COGIC) that are popular in Detroit and strongly opposed to same-sex marriage.

The ministers criticized people who compare the struggle for same-sex marriage to the black civil rights movement, saying such a comparison is offensive and historically inaccurate. Noting that million of blacks were killed by slavery and public lynchings, Swimp said that backers of gay marriage who compare their movement to black struggles are being “intellectually empty, dishonest.”

Catholic leaders in Michigan also oppose same-sex marriage, saying in their brief Wednesday that the voters’ will must not be overturned. Archbishop of Detroit Allen Vigneron, spiritual leader of 1.3 million Catholics in metro Detroit, has said that people who support gay marriage [should not present themselves](#)

for holy Communion.

The Thomas More Law Center — an Ann Arbor-based conservative legal center founded by conservative Catholic businessman Tom Monaghan — filed a brief on behalf of Swimp and hundreds of other black ministers in Michigan and Ohio supporting Schuette's defense of a 2004 voter-approved law, the Michigan Marriage Amendment Act, which says marriage is between one man and one woman.

U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman [struck down that law in March?](#) after a Detroit trial involving a lesbian couple who wanted to adopt each other's children. Schuette is appealing that ruling, and Wednesday was the last day to file briefs with the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati.

In their recent decisions legalizing gay marriage, judges have referenced the 1967 court case *Loving v. Virginia*, which legalized interracial marriage in the U.S.

The brief from the black ministers criticized the idea that allowing same-sex marriage is the same as allowing interracial marriage. Comparing the gay rights movement to black civil rights is "ignorant and myopic," said Richard Thompson, president of the Thomas More Law center, who attended the rally in Detroit to show support.

"Hallelujah" some in the crowd said as speakers attacked gay marriage and same-gender sexual relations. They criticized celebrities and sports stars such as Ellen DeGeneres and Michael Sam who identify themselves as gay.

"We believe in the Judeo-Christian conception on which America was founded upon," said the Rev. Rader Johnson of Greater Bibleway Temple in Bay City.

Many quoted from the Bible and the history of Christianity to back up their beliefs. They also portrayed themselves as under attack from a secular culture that's hostile to religion.

"God does not agree with this kind of behavior," the Rev. James Crowder, president of Westside Ministerial Alliance Of Detroit, said of gay sexual acts. It's "despicable, an abomination."

"We love everybody, but we don't love the (gay) lifestyle," said the Rev. Rex Evans, pastor of Free Will Baptist Church in Ypsilanti. He said there's a "small group of people trying to destroy the foundation" of the U.S. "It's time to take our nation back."

The Thomas More Law Center's brief came about after Thompson and Swimp discussed ways to preserve traditional marriage. Speakers at the rally vowed marches and to speak out publicly. They also criticized pastors who support same-sex marriage.

"The fight is on," exhorted the Rev. Roland Caldwell, pastor of the Burnette Inspiration Baptist Church of Detroit, during the rally. "We've come together to say, 'Hell no. We're not going to sit back.'"

The Michigan Catholic Conference is the public policy voice of 2 million Catholics in the state. In its legal brief, it said that "through the democratic process, Michigan voters reaffirmed the traditional view of marriage ... that policy choice cannot ... be cast aside in favor of the ascendant views of a currently popular minority."

Traditional marriage is an institution which “by its nature is ordered towards our survival,” the brief said.

A separate brief was filed Wednesday by the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops \(USCCB\)](#), the lead public voice of the Catholic Church in the U.S.

They were joined by the National Association of Evangelicals, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon Church), the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S., and Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. All of the groups have substantial numbers in Michigan.

Other Christian groups are in favor of the legalization of same-sex marriage. In March, Episcopal leaders in Michigan [came out in favor?](#) of it. And other pastors in metro Detroit, such as the Rev. Bob Cornwall of Central Woodward Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), also endorse it.

“As a Christian pastor who holds marriage to be a sacred covenant, I have come to believe that this institution should be extended to committed gay and lesbian couples,” Cornwall said Wednesday. “Current law ... infringes on the rights of gay and lesbian couples to marry ... and on the religious freedom of those faith communities who have recognized the validity of same-gender marriages.”

Dana Nessel, attorney for the Oakland County couple who filed a lawsuit challenging the 2004 law, said of Wednesday’s legal briefs: “The viewpoints expressed by these organizations now represent a radical fringe among the religious community as a whole. Our clients and our case have enjoyed wide support by a panoply of religious groups who find the demagoguery of hatred against LGBT citizens and their children to be reprehensible.

“Ultimately, though, this case does not rest upon any single religious doctrine but upon the rule of law, in which the Constitution of the United States dictates that all persons must be treated equally, irrespective of the gender of our parents or of those we love.”

While surveys show growing numbers of people support same-sex marriage, the groups in favor of the ban say the will of the voters in Michigan made it clear the majority is on their side.

“We say to the judge: we believe in marriage as it has been and as it should be,” said the Rev. Lawrence Glass, president of the Council of Baptist Pastors and Vicinity, which consists of hundreds of congregations in metro Detroit.

Contact Niraj Warikoo: nwarikoo@freepress.com or 313-223-4792. Follow on www.twitter.com/nwarikoo