Religious Liberty: Still a Vital Issue

The issue of religious liberty remains an important one for all of us, and the courts here in the United States have continued to respect that. A number of interesting cases have arisen in recent months, including a 9-0 ruling that an Arizona town could not place restrictions on a church sign announcing its sermons and other events and an 8-1 Supreme Court ruling that employers must provide religious accommodation to a prospective employee’s religious beliefs involving dress. Both of those decisions were lauded by the Adventist Church and other religious liberty...
Still pending at a lower level is an interesting case where ushers for the Washington Nationals baseball team declined to work on Sabbath and were fired due to missing more than 20% of the scheduled home games. The Washington Nationals had accommodated the ushers in 2013, but stopped doing so in 2014. The legal requirement to provide religious accommodation in such cases seems clear, so some who are following the case expect it to be settled out of court rather than going to judgment.

The Supreme Court decision that has generated the most headlines was the recent ruling that same-sex couples have as much right to marry as traditional opposite-sex couples. The Court based its decision on the Constitution’s 14th Amendment provisions regarding equal protection of the laws and due process of law.

Although the decision was not directly related to religious liberty issues, its potentially far-reaching aspects have aroused significant concern among many conservative Christians. Much debate is likely in coming months and years as government and society work out how to handle the ramifications of the case.
It is important that we keep in mind that the Constitution’s 1st Amendment protections regarding freedom of religion remain in place, and no one expects that ministers or churches will be required to perform or host same-sex marriages. Religiously affiliated organizations such as universities, hospitals, adoption agencies, and others will need to study the decision and subsequent legal requirements carefully.

It is unclear how things will work for business people who might wish to sell goods or services for opposite-sex weddings only, stating that their religious convictions prevent them from assisting with same-sex weddings. This issue may work out differently in different jurisdictions, with some states considering that the religious freedom aspects are of primary importance while other jurisdictions hold that if one wishes to be in business, one must treat all potential customers equally, and that business discrimination against some legal marriages is no more legitimate than is business discrimination against some racial, ethnic, or religious groups. Most of these issues will work themselves out over time.

The bottom line, however, is that we as Christians have a duty to treat others in a Christ-like
manner. In at least eight different Biblical passages we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, and that includes those with whom we may disagree. As we consider how to react to them, the first and foremost thing to keep in mind is, “How did Christ treat others?”

*by John Nay, PMC Religious Liberty Officer*

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**A GC2015 Experience**

It's been 10 years since the my last GC session. My level of excitement has been on a high for several reasons. I'm a bit older now, I'm much more interested in being involved with my church. Also it's great to see old friends and family too. But I'm especially excited for the decision for women's ordination, which I'm in agreement that it should be passed. Thus far, the tone hasn't been promising, which makes me worried how
everyone that is for women's ordination will react.

by Joshua Martin, recent Andrews University graduate

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