Written by **Dave Bohon** on April 16, 2012

Unwed Teacher Fired From Texas Christian School for Pregnancy

Samford told ABC News that she and her fiancée were in a stable long-term relationship and planned to get married. "I'm not just some teacher that went out to a bar and got pregnant, [then] went back to school saying it's okay," Samford insisted. "I was in a committed relationship the whole time, and probably would have been married if things had gone differently and this would be a non-situation."

But the school's headmaster, Dr. Ron Taylor, said Samford's contract included the understanding that teachers are considered Christian ministers and must be good biblical role models for the students at the school. "I understand some people that would say it's a heartless thing to do," Taylor said concerning the school's decision to terminate Samford. He told ABC News that it was not an easy decision to make. But "everything that we stand for says that we want our teachers, who we consider to be in the ministry, to model what a Christian man or woman should be," he explained. "How is it going to look to a little fourth grade girl that sees she's pregnant and she's not married?"

While Samford was doubtless aware of the moral code of the school, she insisted to ABC News that "we all have different views and interpretations. It's not necessarily the Christian thing to do to throw somebody aside because of those." As for her moral behavior negatively impacting her students, she assured that "they know me. I'm not someone who goes out and parties and is crazy and gives bad advice, trying to lead them in a certain direction."

Samford said that she will file a lawsuit against the school, citing the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's prohibition against pregnancy discrimination. Her attorney, Colin Walsh, said that the school's actions violated both state and federal statutes. "You can't contract around anti-discrimination laws," he said. "Just being generally religious or upholding Christian values is not enough to evoke the ministerial exception."

But Taylor noted that while a public school could not fire a teacher for a similar infraction, because his school is a private, religious institution where teachers are expected to model their Christian faith, Heritage Christian Academy (HCA) is immune under the ministerial exception rule. "The Supreme

Court, as a matter of fact in the last month, has ruled nine to zero that a Christian school does have that right, because this is a ministry, so we have the right to have standards of conduct," Taylor told ABC News.

Taylor was apparently referring to *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*, in which, reported *The New American*, the Supreme Court ruled in early 2012 that "a religious organization has the right to fire an employee under the 1964 Civil Rights Act's 'ministerial exception' clause."

The case "centered on the right of a Michigan elementary school, operated by a Missouri Synod Lutheran church, to dismiss an instructor who wanted to return to work after a disability leave for narcolepsy," reported *The New American*. "The teacher filed a claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), charging that in firing her, the church had violated the Americans with Disabilities Act."

In their decision, the first ever in which the High Court has applied the ministerial exception rule to federal anti-discrimination statutes, "the justices ruled that religious workers may not sue on the basis of job discrimination, determining that religious institutions rather than the courts are the best judge of whom they should employ," reported *The New American*.

Writing for the Court's unanimous opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts explained that the justices agreed that "there is such a ministerial exception. Requiring a church to accept or retain an unwanted minister, or punishing a church for failing to do so, intrudes upon more than a mere employment decision. Such action interferes with the internal governance of the church, depriving the church of control over the selection of those who will personify its beliefs." Roberts added that the "interest of society in the enforcement of employment discrimination statutes is undoubtedly important. But so too is the interest of religious groups in choosing who will preach their beliefs, teach their faith and carry out their mission."

In a concurring opinion, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that a "religious organization's right to choose its ministers would be hollow … if secular courts could second-guess the organization's sincere determination that a given employee is a 'minister.'"

In the Heritage Christian Academy case, reported Dallas television network WFAA, mediation between the school and Samford did not resolve the conflict, and the school has refused to settle the case with its former teacher. "Taylor said HCA was contacted by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regarding the firing," reported WFAA. Meanwhile, "the fired teacher and expectant mother said she did nothing wrong, and faces financial problems now, including giving birth without insurance."

The *Huffington Post* reported that Samford's firing "comes in the wake of a similar case involving Jarretta Hamilton, a fourth grade teacher at Southland Christian School in St. Cloud, Fla., who was fired after school officials discovered her child was conceived before she and her husband were married." The news site noted that in legal action "a federal judge ruled against Hamilton, claiming she 'failed to prove she was treated differently than other Southland employees who engaged in premarital sex.'"