



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 14, 2013

Christian Businesses in Trouble Over Christian Policies

A Mennonite couple in Iowa may be forced to choose between financial penalties or disregarding their own principles after the Iowa Civil Rights Commission filed suit against them for refusing to host a same-sex wedding. Dick and Betty Odgaard, who operate The Gortz Haus Gallery in Grimes, Iowa, has filed a [counter-lawsuit](#) against the state's Civil Rights Commission in the hopes that they may be able to maintain their own convictions without penalty.



The Odgaards' Gallery served as the location of a Lutheran church for over 60 years, but is now a bistro, floral and arts shop, as well as a wedding facility. They declined a request from Lee Stafford and his partner Jared to host a same-sex wedding in August. According to their countersuit, they did so "because their religion forbids them from personally planning, facilitating or hosting wedding ceremonies not between one man and one woman."

His wife Betty explained to local television station KCCI that the company policy reflects their Christian faith. "That decision is based on our religious beliefs," she stated. "And we want to honor that. We want people to know that is our stand, [which] comes from our faith and convictions, and I think we should stand by those [convictions] no matter what."

The Odgaards did offer to provide the flowers or cake for the ceremony, but indicated that they were not comfortable allowing an exchanging of vows between the two men on their premises. "I would serve them in every other way; we simply don't want to take part.... It just comes down to that final line of taking their vows in our facility," she told reporter Billy Hallowell. "I do not hate these people and they have the right to do what they want to do under the law and in humanity."

Their offer was not well-received by Stafford, who filed a complaint with the Iowa Civil Rights Commission and accused the Odgaards of violating state law, as same-sex "marriage" was legalized in Iowa in 2009 after a state Supreme Court ruling. "They discriminated against us based on our sexual orientation. Iowa code says if you have a public accommodation, you can't discriminate based on sexual orientation," said Stafford.

On October 7, the Odgaards responded by filing a counter-lawsuit through the Beckett Fund for Religious Liberty.

"The Iowa Civil Rights Commission is now seeking to force the Odgaards to plan, facilitate and host same-sex wedding ceremonies at the Gallery," the suit reads. "Publicly associating with a wedding ceremony that violates their beliefs would send a message to others who share their beliefs, including some of their employees, that those beliefs are untrue or unworthy of devotion, and thereby cause others to sin."

Meanwhile, Stafford found another facility at which to host the ceremony for him and his partner. But that has not stopped angry critics from hurling angry expletives at the Odgaards. After the incident at the Gortz Haus Gallery became public knowledge, the couple indicates that they began receiving



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harsh and angry e-mails. “You are mean, rude, selfish, [expletive] racist sons of [expletive] from Hell,” one message stated. “[Expletive] your God. [Expletive] your religion.”

“Betty, you’re very old and almost dead,” another e-mail read. “How do you both feel knowing that America and the world will be a better place without you?”

Likewise, the incident has been harmful to their business. Christian News [reported](#), “Two clients also canceled their reservations, and several others have asked for their money back.”

Others within the community, however, have reportedly been largely supportive of the Christian couple.

And Betty Odgaard does not believe that she should feel anymore guilty for maintaining her own views on the subject as those who have grown angry over the incident. “Can’t I have my beliefs without being ostracized for that?” she opined. “I think that I have my right, too, to stand firm on my convictions and beliefs.”

But the Odgaards do fear that they may be forced to shutdown if they continue to refuse to host same-sex weddings.

And the Odgaards are not the only ones who have found themselves in legal troubles because of their strict adherence to their beliefs.

A Christian couple in Oregon was forced to [close](#) their bakery business because of the harassment they had received from homosexual advocates after they refused to make a cake for a lesbian wedding.

“It’s a sad day for Christian business owners and it’s a sad day for the First Amendment,” Aaron Klein, co-owner of Sweet Cakes by Melissa in Gresham, Oregon, told commentator Todd Starnes. “The LGBT attacks are the reason we are shutting down the shop. They have killed our business through mob tactics.”

“I believe marriage is between a man and a woman,” he stated. “I don’t want to help somebody celebrate a commitment to a lifetime of sin.”

Across the ocean, in Cornwall, England, another Christian couple [experienced](#) a similar dispute that resulted in the couple selling their business.

Peter and Hazelmary Bull, Christian owners of the Chymorvah Hotel, were forced to sell their bed and breakfast, which also served as their home, after legal costs and harassment from opponents drove them out of business.

In 2008, Martyn Hall and Steven Preddy reserved a double room but were turned away by the Bulls because of their homosexuality, and the Chymorvah Hotel does not permit unmarried couples — homosexual or heterosexual — to share a room.

“Please note that as Christians we have a deep regard for marriage (being the union of one man to one woman for life to the exclusion of all others),” the business website states. “Therefore, although we extend to all a warm welcome to our home, our double bedded accommodation is not available to unmarried couples.”

The Bulls were forced to pay restitution to the Hall and Preddy of nearly \$3,000 each. The couple also accumulated a considerable amount in legal fees.

Furthermore, they have been targeted by vandals who have also been issuing death threats. Christian



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News reported, “They told reporters that a dead rabbit was once nailed to their fence, the bolts were removed out of the wheels of their car, and they were infected with pornography on their computer.”

The Bulls attempted to remain strong in the face of such intolerance but were ultimately forced to close their doors and sell their business when the financial impact of the dispute began to take its toll.

It is becoming increasingly clear that some of the loudest proponents of “tolerance” are intolerant of beliefs that are not their own.



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