News



The U.S. Supreme Court in Washington is seen Sept. 26. The Supreme Court's busy docket includes religious liberty. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

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Conservative African-American clergy accused LGBT activists of hijacking the civil rights movement and launched a campaign to support a Colorado baker who refused to create a cake for a gay wedding.

The Rev. William Avon Keen, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Virginia, told reporters on Monday (Oct. 23) that the civil rights movement's efforts to gain equal facilities for schooling and health care do not equate with a gay couple's wedding cake request.

"We had to fight for equal treatment because of the color of our skin," he said, standing with other black clergy at a news conference held outside the Supreme Court. "Christians should not be forced to support sin."

Using provocative videos and images, the "We Got Your Back, Jack" campaign's message is that the African-American civil rights struggle and LGBT rights are not comparable, adding to the fierce debate surrounding the case scheduled to be heard by the court on Dec. 5.

One of the images depicts "white" and "colored" water fountains along with an "LGBT" rainbow-colored bubbler — all topped with the words, "One of these never happened."

The Rev. Dean Nelson, chairman of the Frederick Douglass Foundation, a public policy group mostly comprised of Republicans, said the aim of the campaign is the "support of Jack Phillips and all people of faith and conscience who simply want to live their lives, who simply want the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

"The government exists to protect those who have diverse opinions and viewpoints, not to punish them," added Nelson, who also is a senior fellow for African-American affairs at the Family Research Council.

The high court case, Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission, stems from a request in 2012 by David Mullins and Charlie Craig, a Denver gay couple, who wanted a wedding cake from Phillips' shop. Phillips, the owner, refused, saying baking such a cake would violate his deeply held Christian beliefs.

The couple filed discrimination charges against him and won before the Colorado Civil Rights Commission and in the state courts.

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The clergy were joined by staffers from Alliance Defending Freedom and Family Research Council Action, advocacy groups siding with Phillips, as well as Janet Boynes, founder of a Minneapolis-based ministry that offers "spiritual guidance for those who choose to walk away from homosexuality."

Boynes, who described herself as an "ex-lesbian," also objected to activists' efforts to equate the civil rights and gay rights movements.

"I resent having my race compared to what other people do in bed," she said. "There is no comparison. It only trivializes racial discrimination."

Reached after the press conference, the Rev. Cedric Harmon, executive director of Many Voices — a pro-LGBTQ black church movement — rejected the premise of the campaign.

"As a believer myself and a Christian, I don't believe that anyone in business should be using their religious beliefs to discriminate against any member of one marginalized community because to do so would open the door to discriminate against all other marginalized communities," he said.