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## Judge blocks New Orleans law that prevents preaching in French Quarter

by Bruce Nolan by Religion News Service

**NEW ORLEANS** -- A federal judge has temporarily blocked enforcement of a city law recently used to arrest Christian evangelists preaching on Bourbon Street during Southern Decadence, the annual celebration of gay culture in the French Quarter.

Part of the city's recently enacted "aggressive solicitation" ordinance orders people not to "loiter or congregate on Bourbon Street for the purpose of disseminating any social, political or religious message between the hours of sunset and sunrise."

"That's no longer in effect," American Civil Liberties Union lawyer Justin Harrison said.

U.S. District Judge Eldon Fallon granted a temporary restraining order Friday and set a hearing for a preliminary injunction for Oct. 1.

Nine Christian preachers and activists were arrested in one well-publicized incident during the gay-themed celebration. One reportedly held a sign reading "God Hates Homos," and others shouted what witnesses characterized as slurs.

But Harrison said his client, Kelsey McCauley of Kenner, La., had nothing to do with that incident.

He said McCauley belongs to a group called Raven Ministries, which was preaching Christianity on Bourbon Street on Sept. 14 when police arrested the Rev. Troy Bohn and several others under the ordinance.

Violating the law constitutes a misdemeanor, punishable by six months in jail and a \$500 fine.

Harrison said McCauley and her group are not confrontational. "They don't follow people or touch them at all. They don't even engage specific people unless they want to be engaged."

A group of French Quarter residents and business owners initially proposed the law to crack down on people who would harass or intimidate Quarter residents and tourists while asking for money for themselves or various, often bogus, charities.

After the arrests on Southern Decadence weekend, City Councilwoman Kristin Gisleson Palmer, who sponsored the ordinance and who represents the Quarter, defended it.

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"The ordinance imposes specific time, place and manner restrictions on solicitation and associated conduct in certain limited circumstances; namely, at locations or times deemed particularly threatening or dangerous, or in places where people are a 'captive audience' and there is a wish to avoid or reduce a threat of inescapable confrontations," she said in a statement.

[Bruce Nolan writes for *The Times-Picayune* in New Orleans]

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