



No more discrimination against Louisiana pro-lifers

Jefferson Parish officials settle out of court in light of ADF lawsuit

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GRETNA, La.—The Jefferson Parish Council has agreed to a settlement instead of going to court to defend their actions in interfering with the free speech rights of organizers of a pro-life march and memorial service.

"The local ordinances that the parish was using to keep the organizers of a somber rally memorializing the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision were clearly vague and unconstitutional," said Mike Johnson, an Alliance Defense Fund attorney based in Shreveport. "The council has done the right thing with this settlement. We wish they would have acted when we first brought this matter to their attention, but better late than never."

In January of last year, parish officials applied the local "circus ordinance" to impede Rev. Bill Shanks and friends' annual gathering on public property. Sheriff's deputies were instructed to prevent event organizers from using low volume amplification equipment, using a small "soapbox" stage, and from playing religious songs to a peaceable crowd of nearly 300.

Johnson had previously sent a letter to the parish demanding that the First Amendment rights of these citizens be respected. When the parish refused to comply, Johnson and other ADF attorneys filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana in New Orleans. In response, the council made emergency changes in June 2004 to its ordinances regulating speech.

"No longer will obscure, unconstitutional ordinances be used to impede a pro-life group's free speech rights on public property in Jefferson Parish," said Johnson. "ADF is glad to have been a part of ensuring that such rights will be protected as the founders of this country intended."

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