

# Ten Commandments - Georgia is down, but not out

By Joe Westbury, Managing Editor

Published: August 4, 2005

WINDER - Ten Commandments - Georgia (TCG) may have been dealt a blow with the district Supreme Court ruling requiring the removal of the Ten Commandments from the Barrow County Courthouse, but it is not giving up in its battle to restore moral and spiritual values to society. Ten Commandments - Georgia president Jody Hice said the group's resolve has only strengthened since the court's decision. "We had three objectives from our founding," says Jody Hice, pastor of Bethlehem First Baptist Church and founder of the organization. "We may have lost the legal front - and we knew we had our back against the wall the entire time - but we are determined to continue the battle on the political and religious/spiritual fronts. (See story at bottom.)

"It was not that many years ago that we could keep the doors to our homes unlocked and leave the keys in our cars because we had a common moral code that virtually everyone shared. But I don't feel that the last 40 years of a liberal political agenda has brought us to a safer place in society. Ten Commandments - Georgia wants to play a role in restoring those values to America," he explained. Hice said a more visible placement of the Commandments in homes and yards will also have an evangelistic role in transforming society.

"I believe that the Holy Spirit will use those Commandments to convict people of sin in their life and point them to a need for a Savior. I truly believe we could see a great evangelistic harvest as a result of this campaign.

"We do not want to see a token placement of the Commandments in yards and homes - we want them to be incorporated in personal lifestyles as a moral barometer for everyday living," he added.

## **New executive director hired**

Hice said the group recently elected Mike Griffin Sr., pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Hartwell, as executive director. The organization's headquarters will be relocated to Hart County within three weeks.

Griffin will continue in his pastoral role at Liberty while overseeing the operation of TCG and Hice will continue as president and as pastor at Bethlehem First Church.

"I'm sold on the fact that the best way to change society is from the bottom up (grassroots level) and not from the top down. We have our work cut out for us as we work to place the Ten Commandments in homes and business across the state, but the most important place for them to be housed is in the hearts of our citizens," he said.

A decision concerning a display of the Ten Commandments at the Barrow County Courthouse recently dealt a blow to the objectives of Ten Commandments - Georgia. "Our goal is to restore the moral code based on God's direction as given in the Commandments. We know that we have a large pool of people in our state who support the public display of the document; we just have to locate them, educate them, and train them in how to play an active role in transforming society."

Griffin said fighting the ACLU lawsuit was expensive but it was still the right thing to do.

"It's always the right thing to do even if it costs us financially. Now that we lost we can turn out energy to our other two objectives. (See story at bottom.)

"Georgia Baptists are a tremendous moral force in society and we are grateful for the financial support we received from the churches through the state convention. We look forward to continuing that relationship, both financially and through prayer and moral support, in the coming years.

Griffin concluded by stating that now is the time for citizens to become involved and be the salt and

light in society.

## **Legal defense fund \$50,000 short**

"TCG made it clear that it would pay the legal defense of the Barrow County commissioners who were unanimous in their stand to keep the Ten Commandments in the Courthouse. But we made it clear that if the case was lost we would not be willing to pay any legal fees or penalties - we were not going to ask churches to pay any funds to the ACLU," Hice said.

"We are still about \$50,000 short of paying those initial defense costs and are looking for supporters to help us erase that debt."

On July 19, United States District Court Judge William O'Kelley ruled against the Barrow County display and forbid the county from posting similar religious displays on public property.

O'Kelley, on many occasions during the case, had expressed his stern disapproval at the display. As part of his ruling he saddled the County Commissioners with \$150,000 of legal fees to be reimbursed for losing the case.

The order came after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in late June that Ten Commandments displays would need to be decided on a case by case basis at the local level.

The split decision agreed that displays that were originally placed by non-partisan groups were allowed to stand but those placed to make an overt religious statement were unconstitutional. It ruled that a Kentucky display must come down but a Texas display was allowed to stand.

Hice said he had mixed feelings about the District Court ruling, though it was not unexpected. He said Ten Commandments signs cropping up in front yards statewide affirm the group's ongoing com-