



Photo by Greg Ears, Messenger-Inquirer/ears@messenger-inquirer.com

Jodi Herron of Owensboro waves a flag Tuesday at a Religious Liberties Rally on the north lawn of the Daviess County Courthouse. The rally was sponsored by the Family Foundation of Kentucky and was intended to inform people of their religious freedom and to notify them of what they can do if it is threatened.

Crowd rallies for religious freedom

Hundreds gather to defend faith

BY JAMES MAYSE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

At least 400 people gathered on the Daviess County Courthouse lawn Tuesday evening to stand against what a series of speakers called an assault on the right of Christians to express and exercise their beliefs.

The speakers, who included two Owensboro ministers, the heads to two state conservative advocacy groups and Republican gubernatorial candidate Matt Bevin, said the country was founded on

Christian principles and the expression of those principles is imperiled by governmental policies.

"We are really worried," said Terry Smith, who attended the rally with Martha Hall and Doris Keith. "I think we need to wake up and look at the fact that Christians are being slaughtered and our religious freedoms are being taken away."

Smith said examples of Christians losing the freedom of religious expression included an action earlier this month in Oklahoma, where a

monument of the Ten Commandments was removed from the state Capitol in compliance with a June order from the state Supreme Court.

—Doris Keith

Keith said, noting that when she was a teacher in Ohio County, students were not allowed to say the Pledge of Allegiance in school.

The rally was important, Keith said. "There are people who do think the same as we (do) and aren't afraid to use God's name in the right way,"

she said.

Although the topic was religion, the message at times had a decidedly political slant.

"We're about ready to elect the next legislative branch," said Kent Ostrander, executive director of the Family Foundation. "... I want you to recognize that you, the children of God, are the best-suited to bring his perspective to the ballot box," Ostrander said.

"It's very much a responsibility of us as citizens to help affect public policy, to vote and to get out and be

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Bevin energizes party faithful at Republican

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informed," said Bill Barron, who spoke briefly at the end of the event. Barron, a Republican, previously ran unsuccessfully for state representative.

"I would encourage you to get out to the voting booth ... and take as many people with you as you can, because we need a good turnout," he said.

Ostrander spent much of his time at the podium criticizing decisions of Gov. Steve Beshear before and after he was elected governor, such as a 1981 opinion issued when Beshear was attorney general that said schools could not legally display the Ten Commandments. As governor in 2013, Beshear vetoed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, Ostrander said.

"Gov. Beshear is an American and can believe whatever he wants," Ostrander said. "... But as a public official, he should not be able to legislate it on anyone else."

Ostrander also praised Kim Davis, the Rowan County clerk who went to jail after defying a federal court order to issue marriage licenses; Davis' office stopped issuing licenses because she said giving licenses to same-sex couples violated her religious beliefs.

"In this battle for religious liberty, God gave us three standards. They were Kim Davis, Kay Schwartz and Casey Davis," Ostrander said. Casey Davis is Casey County clerk, and Schwartz is clerk in Whitley County; both also refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

"Because they stood, we could rally around them for religious liberty," Ostrander said. "I thank God for Kim Davis, but Kim Davis went to jail not for something she did, but for something the governor did not do. Gov. Beshear did not fulfill his duty."

Richard Nelson, executive director of the Commonwealth Policy Center, a conservative group, said, "Religious freedom is trampled when a county clerk is jailed when she refuses to put her name on a license affirming a same-sex union."

"When God is removed from the public arena, rights are lost," Nelson said. "... The world desperately needs the church. It just doesn't know it yet."

State Sen. Joe Bowen, an Owensboro Republican, said "so many of my colleagues and those in elected positions are so concerned about being politically correct" that they

are not "spiritually correct."

"I would suggest to you that it's people of faith who built our White House, our state house and this very courthouse," Bowen said. "We cannot let the candle of Christianity burn out."

Bevin said the group's religious beliefs "were given to us by our creator."

"How fragile is this religious freedom, how fragile is this gift," Bevin said.

When speaking about the upcoming election, Bevin said "it saddens me when I realize only one-third of us will bother to vote."

The Rev. Garswa Matally, pastor of Church For All in Owensboro, talked about how he and others who fled Liberia during its civil war were stripped of their freedoms as refugees.

"While we were there (as refugees in a neighboring country), I realized the first freedom we found again was religious freedom," Matally said. "As we worshipped, we gained new strength ... that liberty helped us not only to survive, but thrive again."

Liberians lost their liberties, including their freedom of religion, because "we began to take them for granted."

Matally immigrated to the America in 1991.

"It dawned on me in a big way that religious freedom ... was the womb for all other freedoms," Matally said. "When you chip away at religious freedom, when you cut down that mother tree, eventually, the branches will wither as well. If we want to be free for any length of time going forward, we have to champion religious freedom."

The Rev. Jamus Edwards, pastor of Pleasant Valley Community Church, said Christians are instructed to do things such as pay their taxes and are not instructed to revolt. But Edwards said government does not have the right to control "things that are God's," such as religious freedom.

"The attack on our religious liberty should be a great concern to us all," Edwards said. "We need less Christians sitting on their couches complaining ... and more Christians getting off the couch and making their voices heard."

"We cannot and will not render to Caesar what is God's," Edwards said.

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