
WilmerHale Secures Maryland Congregation's Right to Vote on Its Church's Future

AUGUST 13, 2019

WilmerHale achieved an important pro bono victory for members of a Maryland church seeking to safeguard their right under state law to vote on their church's future.

WilmerHale lawyers won a favorable verdict for our clients, members of Church of the Great Commission located in the Washington DC suburb of Prince George's County and incorporated under Maryland law.

Our clients' suit alleged that the church's leaders, without members' consent, attempted to take all Great Commission's assets and merge with another church. In November 2017, the pastor shocked the congregation when he announced plans to end worship services and merge with another church holding strikingly different beliefs.

When members objected, they were told, wrongly, they had no say in the matter. Great Commission held its last service on February 2018 and, when WilmerHale stepped in, was proceeding toward dissolution, with a plan to transfer millions of dollars in assets to the new church where the pastor would join the staff.

WilmerHale achieved an initial victory in April 2019 when the defendants agreed to hold the member vote required by Maryland law. But there were procedural problems in the process that tainted the outcome. At trial, WilmerHale lawyers convinced the court to throw out the results and order a new vote.

At a one-day trial held on June 25, 2019, WilmerHale presented six witnesses and cross-examined the pastor of the church. The court ruled that Maryland Corporations and Associations Code § 3-508 had been violated and ordered the defendants to conduct a new vote to get member approval before any further attempts to merge.

Senior Associate [Ericka Aiken](#) handled all aspects of the trial, including pre-trial motions, the opening, all directs and crosses, and the closing. Ms. Aiken also took the lead at the preliminary injunction hearing, with Partner [Thomas Saunders](#) handling three witnesses. Former Associates

Tiffany Wright and Rahel Boghossian helped during earlier stages of the case.