



Gay group challenges Swaggart tax status

Advocate staff report

A Baton Rouge gay rights organization is asking federal authorities to investigate whether Jimmy Swaggart Ministries should lose its tax-exempt status for comments the evangelist made about homosexuals.

At a news conference Tuesday, Capital City Alliance Co-Chairman Joseph Traigle announced he has asked both the Internal Revenue Service and U.S. Attorney David Dugas of Baton Rouge to consider whether the ministry broke any federal tax laws.

In a Sept. 12 broadcast, Swaggart told his congregation he's "never seen a man in my life I wanted to marry. And I'm going to be blunt and plain: If one ever looks at me like that, I'm going to kill him and tell God he died."

Swaggart has since apologized and said his comments were "silly" and intended as a joke, and he is opposed to violence. A spokeswoman for Jimmy Swaggart Ministries did not return several calls to its headquarters Tuesday.

IRS spokesman Eric Erickson in Atlanta said disclosure laws bar him from discussing the specifics of the case or how it will be handled.

Dugas said he had not gotten a copy of the letter and could not comment.

The alliance, in a letter to the IRS, does not cite any specific provision of the tax code.

The letter concludes "Common sense, and a fair IRS ruling would prevent the continuance of a tax-exempt privilege for any organization that believes in and verbalizes violence against American taxpaying citizens."

According to the IRS "Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations," religious entities maintain their tax-exempt status as long as no "substantial part" of their work attempts to influence legislation and they refrain from intervening in political campaigns.

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