

STATE OF LOUISIANA

COURT OF APPEAL, FIRST CIRCUIT

ISABELLE COLLINS

NO. 2026 CW 0629

VERSUS

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THE GREATER TRUE LOVE
BAPTIST CHURCH OF BATON
ROUGE & JERRY EWING CHAIRMAN
OF THE DEACON BOARD

AUGUST 28, 2026

In Re: The Greater True Love Baptist Church of Baton Rouge and
Jerry Ewing, applying for supervisory writs, 19th
Judicial District Court, Parish of East Baton Rouge, No.
753954.

BEFORE: McCLENDON, C.J., WOLFE, HESTER, MILLER AND STROMBERG, JJ.

WRIT GRANTED IN PART AND DENIED IN PART. The trial court's April 24, 2026 judgment denying the peremptory exception of lack of subject matter jurisdiction filed by defendants, The Greater True Love Baptist Church of Baton Rouge and Jerry Ewing, is reversed, in part, as to plaintiff's claims that defendants denied her access to the pastor's study and improperly unveiled the pastor's chair, thereby causing her emotional distress.

The protections afforded by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and article I, section 8 of the Louisiana Constitution prohibit civil courts from resolving disputes that require interpretation of religious doctrine or interference with matters of internal church governance. **Fairfield Pentecostal Church v. Johnson**, 2015-68 (La. App. 3d Cir. 6/3/15), 170 So.3d 357, writ denied, 2015-1531 (La. 10/23/15), 179 So.3d 607. Accordingly, civil courts are prohibited from adjudicating ecclesiastical matters, including those concerning religious discipline, rule, custom, or law. **LeBlanc v. Davis**, 432 So.2d 239, 241 (La. 1983). This prohibition, however, is not absolute. Where a dispute may be resolved through the application of neutral principles of law without interpreting or evaluating religious doctrine or practice, civil courts retain subject matter jurisdiction. **Id.**

Resolution of plaintiff's claims, alleging that she was denied access to the pastor's study and that defendants improperly unveiled the pastor's chair causing plaintiff emotional distress, require judicial inquiry into matters of internal church governance, administration, and custom, rather than the application of neutral principles of law. See **Glass v. First United Pentecostal Church of DeRidder**, 95-1442 (La. App. 3d Cir. 6/12/96), 676 So.2d 724. Therefore, we find that the trial court has no subject matter jurisdiction over these claims. Accordingly, the exception of lack of subject matter jurisdiction filed by defendants, The Greater True Love Baptist Church of Baton Rouge and Jerry Ewing, is granted, in part, as to these claims, which are dismissed without prejudice.

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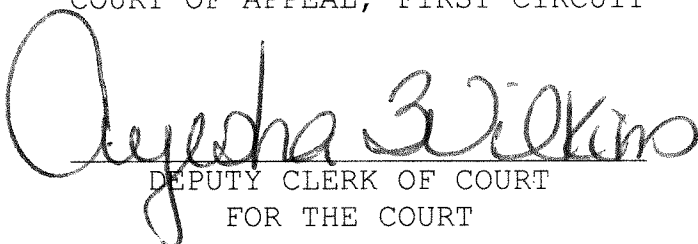
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Plaintiff's claim that defendants made defamatory statements about her, thereby causing emotional distress, however, may be resolved through the application of neutral principles of law without requiring interpretation of religious doctrine or church governance. Accordingly, the writ is denied as to this claim.

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Miller, J., dissents and would deny the writ, finding that the exception of lack of subject matter jurisdiction should not be granted in part.

COURT OF APPEAL, FIRST CIRCUIT


DEPUTY CLERK OF COURT
FOR THE COURT