

Judge in Schiavo case asked to leave church: Greer ordered feeding tube removed

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Judge George Greer, a Florida county judge in the spotlight three times for ordering Terri Schiavo's feeding tube removed, was advised by his Southern Baptist pastor to leave the congregation—despite the judge's reputation as a conservative Republican and conservative Christian.

Greer, 63, a Pinellas County circuit judge based in Clearwater, also rejected an attempt by the U.S. House to subpoena the brain-damaged woman as a means to force reinsertion of her tube.

Protesters have shown up at the home of Greer, who has been under protection of armed guards, according to the Associated Press. The news service reported in late March that a letter to Greer from his pastor, William Rice of Calvary Baptist Church, suggested that it would be best if Greer left the congregation, which advocated keeping Schiavo alive.

"I hope you can find a way to side with the angels and become an answer to the prayers of thousands," Rice wrote in the letter that later became public.

Media reports also said that Greer resigned his membership after receiving Rice's letter, but that the judge had already stopped attending services and contributing financially to the congregation in the fall of 2003 because of mounting tensions.

Calvary is regarded as one of the Florida (Southern) Baptist Convention's most prominent conservative churches. According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, Greer became inactive in the congregation because of its free distribution to members of the *Florida Baptist Witness*, one of the denomination's most conservative publications.

Rice, the church's pastor since last fall, wrote a guest editorial in the *Witness* comparing Schiavo's fate to that of his severely disabled sister. The editor, James Smith, repeatedly criticized Greer's decisions in the Schiavo case, calling the judge "dead wrong" in one editorial.

Mary Repper, a longtime friend of Greer, told AP that while Greer took comfort in being upheld by higher courts, he was upset by the church's stance. "The people in that church should be ashamed of themselves, to demonize George and to ask him to leave for doing his job, for upholding the law," she said. "To me, that was the most offensive thing that has happened so far."