

Pastor defends teacher accused of anti-gay rant

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UNION, N.J. (RNS) The pastor of a high school teacher who has been vilified for an anti-gay tirade on Facebook came to the woman's defense, calling her a "very loving person" who should not be fired for expressing her religious beliefs.

The Rev. Milton B. Hobbs, pastor of New Covenant Fellowship in Clark, N.J., said special education teacher Viki Knox is not homophobic and that her comments, when taken in the context of the Bible, were not false.

Knox, 49, an ordained minister at the church and a faculty adviser for a student Bible study group, wrote on her Facebook page that homosexuality was a "perverted spirit" and a "sin" that "breeds like cancer."

"No one is pointing to homosexuality as the ultimate sin. We all have sinned," her pastor said. "It's not saying that people who are gay sin any more or less than anyone else. But to say that the Bible doesn't say it's a sin would be untrue. It does say that."

Hobbs said his greater concern is the possibility Knox will be disciplined for expressing an opinion on a personal Web page, noting she did not incite violence or advocate harm.

"Any Christian who makes a stand that's unpopular can expect to be persecuted. That's in the Bible, too," Hobbs said. "But no American should expect to be prosecuted for exercising free speech. At what point does that stop?"

Union schools Superintendent Patrick Martin said the district is investigating and would take "all appropriate action" after an investigation. "Nothing has been determined to be right or wrong yet," Martin said.