

Covenant Church ends ties with congregation in Portland over LGBT stance

by [Kevin Eckstrom](#) in the [March 18, 2015](#) issue

An up-and-coming pastor has been told his denomination will no longer support his church plant in Portland, Oregon, because of his support for gay and lesbian people.

Adam Phillips arrived in Portland in 2013 to start Christ Church, a congregation sponsored by the Chicago-based Evangelical Covenant Church. Phillips, 35, had previously worked in Washington with faith-based advocacy groups.

On February 4, Covenant officials told Phillips they were dropping support for Christ Church because of his “personal convictions and advocacy for the full inclusion and participation of LGBT Christians in the church at all levels of membership and leadership,” he said in a statement.

Phillips remains an ordained Covenant pastor, and the church plans to continue without the three-year, \$150,000 support from the denomination.

Phillips said he agrees with the denomination’s position, which calls for “celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in heterosexual marriage,” but that the same standards should extend to LGBT members. Since 2004, the Covenant’s official position has been not to allow gay marriages, and pastors are told that individual beliefs “must never overshadow” denominational policy.

In an interview, Phillips said “there was a clear red line . . . in terms of performing gay marriages, and I was more than ready to uphold that,” but he also said he supports “the invitation and welcome of gays and lesbians into full inclusion of the church, and that includes the invitation to marriage, or the invitation to celibacy.”

Phillips said he was assured “that the Covenant was a safe place for me to hold these personal convictions” before and after he was ordained in 2007 and that wide-ranging discussions would continue.

“The Covenant assured me everything was OK, until it wasn’t,” Phillips said in a video posted on the church’s website, adding that he was “heartbroken” to be told he and his church were no longer “Covenant-compatible.”

Phillips said including LGBT parishioners “was not only consistent with the whole arc of scripture, but was where the Holy Spirit was guiding the church today.”

The Covenant denomination, founded by Swedish immigrants in the late 1800s, has not made homosexuality a marquee issue and has not been torn by the same internal fights over human sexuality that have divided Episcopalians, United Methodists, and Presbyterians.

Calls to officials at church headquarters in Chicago and the church’s Seattle-based Pacific Northwest Conference were not returned. —Religion News Service