

FAITH & JUSTICE

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Minutes With Kristen

History Lessons

By Kristen Waggoner, CEO, President & General Counsel

Early this year, we were honored to welcome our founding CEO, Alan Sears, to an ADF team gathering as we kicked off a celebration of the ministry's 30th anniversary. Alan inspired us with stories from the early days of ADF — God's faithful provision of resources, the building of new alliances, the young girl who secured the right to carry her Bible on the school bus after ADF made a simple phone call.

In reflecting on those stories, I was struck by the fact that ADF has always sought to work in alliance and dared to strive for generational victories many thought were impossible. One of those wins, of course, was overturning *Roe v. Wade*, a monumental victory God delivered in the summer of 2022.

Thirty years on, ADF has become the world's largest legal ministry, with a near-80% win rate, 15 Supreme Court victories since 2011, more than 80 model bills passed in state legislatures since 2021, 2,285 Blackstone Fellows, and other successes we've celebrated alongside so many others who are contending for the Gospel. God has moved mountains. But new times have also brought new challenges, and some are of a different kind than anything we've faced before.

- More schools are confusing children by treating them as the opposite sex and then hiding it from their parents.
- Government and private censorship, in the U.S. and abroad, have grown and taken new forms.
- The current administration is relentlessly working to prevent states from protecting the lives of unborn children, put women in harm's way, and force doctors to perform abortions.

Sometimes, the challenges of today seem to dwarf those of yesterday. Even as I look back on all the "impossible" victories God has delivered, I'm tempted to say, "Well, that was another time. But now it's different."

In one sense, yes, it is a different season. In America, and across the world, it's clear that Christ and those who love Him are facing renewed hostility. But as we see throughout Scripture and modern history, God often does His greatest work in seasons of adversity. The God who moved mountains in the past is the same God who leads us today. It's inspiring to have a front-row seat every day to witness the mountains He's moving.

For 30 years, God has been pleased to use ADF to advance truth and freedom through the law. We tremble at that privilege. We give Him the glory for every victory. And we trust Him with the battles still to come.



Kristen Waggoner

The God who moved mountains in the past is the same God who leads us today.

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Kristen Waggoner

As we walk into the wind, full of expectancy, we remember that Christ is the source of our strength that will never fail: "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Correction: In our February Special Feature ("A Scientist's Stand Against Religious Discrimination"), we identified Answers in Genesis as the producer of the documentary "Mountains After the Flood." In fact, the film was produced, written, and directed by Thomas Purifoy Jr. of Compass Cinema.

News & Quick Takes

Case Updates From Around The World


Idaho

In April, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case in which the Biden administration is attempting to override an Idaho law that protects life.

Idaho's Defense of Life Act prevents doctors from performing abortions except when necessary to save the life of the mother. In 2022, the Biden administration sued the state, claiming that it could use the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA) to force emergency room doctors to provide abortions.

Enacted in 1986, EMTALA requires emergency rooms to treat patients who are unable to pay – but it says nothing about abortion. Idaho's law is consistent with EMTALA, which provides explicit protection for "unborn child[ren]" in four separate places.

The Office of the Idaho Attorney General, assisted by ADF and the law firm Cooper & Kirk, recently asked the Supreme Court to prevent the Biden administration from misusing EMTALA to force doctors to take vulnerable lives.



The Biden administration has no business rewriting federal law to override Idaho's law and force doctors to perform abortions.

“
Kellie Fiedorek, ADF Senior Counsel
Government Affairs Director

Michigan

ADF Allied Attorney Robert Muise secured the right of a Michigan Catholic group to create a prayer trail on its 40-acre rural property after a three-year zoning battle with a local government.

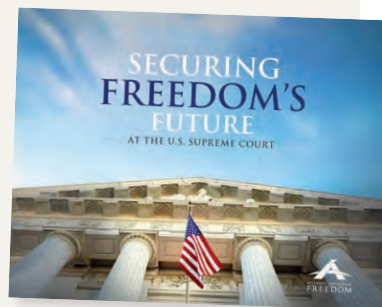
Genoa Township had denied Catholic Healthcare International the right to create a Stations of the Cross prayer trail, despite the fact that the township had approved a lion-themed children's reading trail in a nearby public park. The township had said the prayer trail required a special-use permit because the project was the equivalent of a church building. Organized gatherings at the property were also banned.

A federal appeals court unanimously ruled in favor of the group, saying the government had no justification for treating the trail like a church building rather than other recreational areas in the township.



SECURING FREEDOM'S FUTURE

In the past 13 years, ADF has celebrated 15 U.S. Supreme Court wins as lead or co-counsel. These victories have been on behalf of churches, family-owned businesses, college students, town councils, pro-life pregnancy centers, and many others.



DOWNLOAD *Securing Freedom's Future* to read about those victories and the impact they have had — and, by God's grace, will continue to have — on our great nation. Visit JoinADF.com/FJ-15Wins



Peter Vlaming

Virginia

In a landmark victory for free speech and religious freedom, the Virginia Supreme Court reinstated a high school teacher's lawsuit against a school board that fired him for declining to refer to one of his students using pronouns inconsistent with the student's sex.

ADF attorneys represent Peter Vlaming, who taught French in the school district for nearly seven years. After school officials ordered him to refer to a female student using male pronouns, Vlaming tried to accommodate the student by using the student's new name and avoiding the use of pronouns. But because he could not in good conscience use pronouns inconsistent with the student's sex, the school fired him.

"Thanks to Peter's stand for truth and the court's ruling, Virginia now offers stronger protection for religious freedom than any state in the nation," says ADF Senior Counsel Chris Schandavel, who argued before the Virginia Supreme Court on Vlaming's behalf.

Peter wasn't fired for something he said; he was fired for something he couldn't say.

“
Chris Schandavel
ADF Senior Counsel



Bishop Rolando Álvarez

Nicaragua

A Nicaraguan bishop imprisoned for expressing his faith has been released and exiled to the Vatican.

Bishop Rolando Álvarez was sentenced to 26 years in prison over a year ago based on sermons he had delivered from the pulpit about God-given freedoms and the government's human rights violations.

Bishop Álvarez's ordeal began in August 2022, when police prevented him from leaving his residence to celebrate Mass. Later that month police arrested him after forcibly entering his home. He was held in prison for nearly 11 months before his release.

International pressure for the bishop's release mounted after ADF International petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and advocated before the U.S. Congress on the bishop's behalf.



Jalil Mashali

Germany

The German city of Essen has accused a taxi driver of unlawful "religious advertising" for displaying a small Bible verse sticker on his car's rear window.

Though threatened with a fine in October 2023, Jalil Mashali has declined to remove the sticker, which reads, "Jesus – I am the way. The truth. And the life." He is challenging the fine with the support of ADF International.

Jesus is the best thing I could recommend to anyone because He changed my life.

“
Jalil Mashali

Born and raised a devout Muslim in Iran, Mashali relocated to Germany 22 years ago and converted to Christianity after he was healed of chronic leg pain that led him to consider suicide.

"Jesus is the best thing I could recommend to anyone because He changed my life," says Mashali. "I am grateful for this country where everyone should be free to share their faith. I hope to be able to continue to do so by appealing the unjust fine."

Special Feature

The Truth About Abortion Drugs

Two Women Speak Out



Dr. Christina Francis

For women and girls facing a pregnancy in difficult circumstances, abortion drugs can seem like a logical solution. They're "a safe and effective way to end an early pregnancy," Planned Parenthood claims on its website. "Safer than Advil," abortion advocates insist.

In reality, the two drugs — mifepristone and misoprostol — can cause serious, even life-threatening complications. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's own label for these abortion drugs says that roughly one in 25 women who take them will end up in the emergency room and up to 7% will require surgery.

When the FDA approved the drugs in 2000, it did so with important safety standards. Since then, it has removed safeguards such as in-person doctor visits, ongoing care, and other health protections. Now, women and girls can order abortion drugs by mail and take them alone in their homes or dorm rooms — often unaware of what they will experience or that emergency care may be necessary.

Alliance Defending Freedom is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to hold the FDA accountable for

As many women who have taken chemical abortion drugs told the U.S. Supreme Court, their experiences are far different from what they were promised.

“

Dr. Christina Francis

unlawfully removing crucial safeguards for the use of abortion drugs. Oral arguments in the case, *U.S. Food and Drug Administration v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine*, took place in March. A decision is expected in June.

Here, an OB/GYN and a woman who experienced a chemical abortion share their own stories of the abortion drugs' dangers.

Dr. Christina Francis

“Easy everywhere.”

According to Christian thinker Andy Crouch, this is what technology promises us all today. Look no further than the rise of artificial intelligence systems like ChatGPT over the last year to see this being promised even more. Need to write a difficult message to a friend? Have ChatGPT do it. With each keystroke, our human world becomes a little less human.

“Easy everywhere” is also the promise of chemical abortion drug manufacturers and the FDA. It's a promise that these drugs are not only safe for women, but that women can take them at home — alone — without even one in-person doctor visit. It's a promise that seeks to normalize what countless women tell me was one of the most painful, isolating moments of their lives.

As an OB/GYN who has cared for thousands of pregnant women, I know that women don't pursue abortion lightly or enthusiastically. It's never easy. It's tragic. Women are often pressured into abortion. A study by the Charlotte Lozier Institute found that over 60% of women reported feeling “high levels of pressure to abort from one or more sources.”

Women who take abortion drugs are promised an easy experience. Complications are rare, they're told.

The reality, though, is that a significant number of women will experience severe complications from these drugs that require immediate medical attention. Data cited by the FDA itself showed that hospitalizations increased 300% with no in-person doctor visit. Yet the FDA has removed nearly every safety standard it once provided to women using abortion drugs.

My colleagues and I see women in our hospitals on a regular basis who are suffering because of the FDA's reckless removal of these essential safeguards. We have cared for women who've required emergency D&Cs, antibiotics, blood transfusions, and hospitalizations for several days.

But as many women who have taken chemical abortion drugs told the U.S. Supreme Court, their experiences are far different from what they were promised. They bleed severely for weeks on end. The pain is overwhelming. They think they might be dying. They are not told that they will go into labor and deliver their dead babies all alone on the bathroom floor.

Another significant risk is an unknown ectopic pregnancy. Ultrasound is the most accurate way to diagnose the condition, which occurs in one in 50 pregnancies. If a patient with an undiagnosed ectopic pregnancy takes abortion drugs, she will think her symptoms are simply the drugs' side effects.

A friend and fellow OB/GYN treated a patient — let's call her Giselle — who experienced sharp abdominal pain after starting a chemical abortion, then days of worsening pain. Weeks later, she was rushed to the hospital when her blood pressure dropped to dangerous levels.

During emergency surgery, my colleague discovered that Giselle had experienced a ruptured ectopic pregnancy

— a life-threatening condition. A doctor visit and ultrasound prior to the chemical abortion could have prevented the emergency, which required Giselle to spend weeks in the hospital and much longer to recover emotionally.

A significant number of women will experience severe complications from these drugs that require immediate medical attention.

“

Dr. Christina Francis

These women are being sold the lie of “easy everywhere.” They've been failed by the government agency charged with protecting them in situations like this. Instead, they've been abandoned to the closest emergency room.

When they're left with the trauma of the experience, who will they turn to? That's not good medicine. It's putting women in danger.

For the sake of women and girls across the country, the Supreme Court should hold the FDA accountable for its actions.

Dr. Christina Francis is a board-certified OB/GYN who has cared for women for nearly two decades. She also serves as CEO of the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Physician clients and members of the ADF legal team exit the U.S. Supreme Court following oral arguments in *U.S. Food and Drug Administration v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine*.



Elizabeth Gillette

I was 24 years old and had a great life — a college degree, a good job, and a boyfriend I cared about very much. Then came a shocking complication: two pink lines on a pregnancy test. Suddenly, I had no idea what my future was going to look like. And my boyfriend made it clear he wasn't ready to be a dad.

"This is the worst thing that could happen to me," he said when I shared the news, scared and hoping for support. Instead, he pressured me into making an appointment at a local abortion clinic, even after I told him I didn't think it was the right thing to do.

The coercion started the moment I called the clinic. I'd need to come in right away to have the "easy procedure," the receptionist told me, explaining that once I was more than 10 weeks into my pregnancy, I'd have to have a "really terrible" surgical procedure. Abortion drugs, she said repeatedly, were the safe, easy way to end my pregnancy.

My experience was traumatic and terrifying. I can only imagine what women will face now, with the FDA removing even the initial in-person doctor visit.

“

Elizabeth Gillette

When I went to the clinic to pick up the drugs, I was told that I would experience a double period and some light cramping — nothing that a heating pad and some Tylenol wouldn't take care of. But my experience was so much more traumatic than that.

I had intense cramping and waves of pain from my head to my toes. I bled profusely, blood running down my legs and pooling on the bathroom floor. *Something is wrong*, I thought. *I'm going to die on this bathroom floor*. But I felt that I'd made this choice and would have to see it through. *If I die, my parents are going to find out what I've done. So, I'd better not die.*



Elizabeth Gillette

The worst part — what nobody had told me about — was when I delivered the amniotic sack with my tiny child inside. I held my baby, saw its eyes and fingers ... then flushed it down the toilet. But I still see it. You can't unsee something like that.

My bleeding continued for more than a month. I had residual cramping that lasted even longer, as well as headaches, nausea, and tremors. No doctor ever checked on me or told me to come in for a follow-up visit to check for severe bleeding or life-threatening infections. Today, I still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

I was shocked when I heard that the FDA was removing the abortion drugs' safety standards. My experience was traumatic and terrifying. I can only imagine what women will face now, with the FDA removing even the initial in-person doctor visit.

Women taking these drugs without that initial doctor visit are at risk for so many devastating consequences. Who's going to check them for an ectopic pregnancy? Who's going to protect them from bleeding and sepsis? Who's going to counsel them about the reality of chemical abortion and the physical, emotional, and psychological risks?

These are high-risk drugs that should never be available over the counter with no ongoing care from a doctor. When the FDA recklessly removed its original safeguards, it betrayed women like me. The Supreme Court needs to recognize this truth.

It's time for the Court to say enough and to defend women's health. **A**

Elizabeth Gillette is the mother of four children and resides in Salem, Oregon. Watch her share her chemical abortion story at JoinADF.com/FJ-Elizabeth.

Alliance Profile

David Fischer

By Nick Schober

David Fischer is in the business of creating environments.

The Blackstone Fellow and feature film producer has plied his trade to the tune of four inspirational feature films, including one opening this Memorial Day weekend.

His latest, *Sight*, is based on the true story of Dr. Ming Wang, a poor Chinese immigrant who defied all odds to become a world-renowned eye surgeon in the United States. Telling a story set partly in 1970s China, Fischer faced a daunting test of his business acumen when he had to recreate the environs of the world's most populated country inside the confines of Vancouver, British Columbia.

But creating environments is more than just a career for Fischer.

"You've got to create environments everywhere you go," he says. "How clean the house is and the kind of food that is served when hosting ... mean nothing if it's not filled with people who actually care, right?"

It's a skill he developed over several formative periods — his

childhood acting career on stage at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and his law school days at the University of St. Thomas being two of the most important.

But the concept truly blossomed the moment Fischer arrived for his first day of the Blackstone Legal Fellowship — Alliance Defending Freedom's leadership training program that brings together exceptional Christian law students and prepares them for careers marked by integrity, excellence, and leadership.



David Fischer

"I'll never forget people knowing my name," he says. "When I walked through the door, I was known and loved immediately. I walked into an environment filled with people who cared about me."

And found himself in renowned company. One member of Fischer's 2004 Blackstone class, Joshua Davey, had been in the news years before when a case he was named in (*Locke v. Davey*) made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Davey had challenged the state of Washington when it would not allow him to use his publicly funded scholarship to major in theology.

"I remember thinking, 'I read about you in law school. You're just a kid,'" Fischer says. "You stood up for something that made a difference.' One person can make a difference, and it can actually start something."

One person can make a difference, and it can actually start something.

“

David Fischer

That realization stuck with Fischer, resurfacing when he met Dr. Wang at an art gallery in 2014.

Dr. Wang grew up during the Cultural Revolution of China, experiencing the atrocities perpetrated by Chairman Mao.

The concept of one man standing up against the horrors of communism was not lost on Fischer.

"I hear his story, and it just resonates with everything that I'm about, both as a Christian ... and also having come from Blackstone," he says.

"I thought, 'Has everything led to this moment?'" Six years later, the film based on Wang's life was in production.

The business of creating environments just keeps booming. **A**



David Fischer's production company, Open River Entertainment, has partnered with Angel Studios (known for *The Chosen* and *Sound of Freedom*) to release *Sight* in theaters across the country May 24.

Cover Story

Sidelined

Vermont Officials Penalize A Small Christian School For Standing By Its Religious Beliefs

By Chris Potts

It's a small school, but there are those who love it," Daniel Webster reportedly said, defending his *alma mater* in an 1818 U.S. Supreme Court case. Most people can understand that kind of affection for a particular

institution of one kind or another. Harder to grasp is the deep antipathy others seem to feel for a place they've never experienced, whose ideals they can't seem to grasp.

Mid Vermont Christian School (MVCS) is a small, K-12 academy of about 100 students in Quechee, Vermont. The kind of place where "everybody knows everybody," says Chris Goodwin, who's worked with student-athletes at MVCS for nine years now. And while the school doesn't offer all the amenities of larger, public campuses, it does encourage the special unity that comes with being among others who share one's deepest religious beliefs.

Chris and his wife, Bethany, chose the school for their children for that reason.

"It's a family atmosphere," says Chris, who coaches the girls' basketball



Chris Goodwin with the girls' basketball team he coaches at Mid Vermont Christian School.

It's a family atmosphere. And faith is the defining issue. It's paramount.

“

Chris Goodwin

team. "And faith is the defining issue. It's paramount." And the Bible, he says, is "the filter that this school runs everything through. You wouldn't go to the school or be a part of it if that wasn't the most important thing you wanted for your child."

Apart from biblical instruction and strong academics, Mid Vermont also works to give its students as many extracurricular opportunities as possible, including sports — in which MVCS's athletes have acquitted themselves particularly well. In 2020, the girls' basketball team tied for the state championship. (The COVID-19 outbreak ended the season before a final game could be played.)

That's a feat Chris and the families of Mid Vermont are understandably proud of. But it's also one the Vermont Principals' Association (VPA), which runs athletics in the state, is ensuring the school won't be repeating anytime soon.

Unless, that is, the staff, students, and parents of Mid Vermont agree to renounce the truths their school is built on.

Quechee is an unincorporated village of less than 400 residents, one of five hamlets that make up the small town of Hartford, in southeastern Vermont. The whole village covers less than two square miles and is home to Quechee Gorge on the Ottauquechee River — at 165 feet, the deepest gorge in all of Vermont. Unless you count the one that runs between the values cherished by MVCS families and those that state officials want them to celebrate.

It was that particular gulf that prompted a crowded living-room discussion among a handful of Quechee parents one summer evening in 1986. Each mom and dad had their own reason for being there ... their own collected concerns for what their children were missing — and learning — attending classes elsewhere. The concerns were similar enough that the parents all agreed to a three-point plan. Over the next two weeks, they would pray about a) whether to start a Christian school, b) if so, when, and c) where it would be.

Two weeks later, the living room was full again. The parents agreed that God was leading them to launch a school and open it the following school year ... somewhere. A year later, they had the place, a teacher, and five students. Today, they have 20 times that many youngsters and an academic program that — in the proud-but-proven words of the school website — “significantly outperforms its public-school counterparts in the state.”

We believe in the mission of the school. And we believe that the decision we made is the right one.

“

Chris Goodwin



Recent victories in state basketball tournaments point to the strength of MVCS's athletic program.

Mid Vermont graduates have attended the world's top universities and carried their skills to places far removed from the towering aspens of Quechee Gorge: Jordan, Kazakhstan, Madagascar. Meanwhile, back home, the current class studies hard and plays a pretty fair game of basketball.

Provided, of course, the game is fair.

Leading up to last winter's girls' championship tournament, MVCS learned that the school it was scheduled to play was allowing a boy over 6 feet tall — identifying as a girl — to play on its girls' team. After prayerful consideration and conversations with the school's leadership and parents, Mid Vermont opted to forfeit that game.

“You hear all the time that the only way things will change is if girls choose not to play: ‘If there's a male athlete playing, we're just not going to play,’” says Chris. “But most people end up playing the game anyway and saying, ‘We can think about it after.’ I think we're the only school that's done this.

“The school believes, I believe, and the parents believe that God created men one way and women another way,” he says. “The Y chromosome means something. As an extension of those differences that God created, men as a whole are bigger, faster, stronger.

“It's just discouraging to have your girls play against a male who has such a significant physical advantage,” Chris says. Still, as last year's tournament approached, MVCS didn't ask the other team to bow out; it simply withdrew its own girls from competition.

“Almost immediately,” Chris says, “the Vermont Principals' Association announced that they'd kicked us out of the league. Not just our women's basketball team — but the entire school wasn't allowed to play sports in the state of Vermont anymore.” Nor, remarkably, to participate in any *academic* coed competitions: the Geo-Bee, the Science and Math Fair, the Debate and Forensics League.



Chris and Bethany Goodwin say they chose Mid Vermont Christian School for their children because of its biblical instruction and family atmosphere.

What's more, Mid Vermont is now banned from participating in a long-standing exchange program that allows students from all schools taking part in the VPA to join sports at other schools, if their own campus doesn't offer that opportunity. In other words, a young person who wants to play baseball but is enrolled at a school that doesn't offer a baseball program can sign on to run the diamond at some nearby school that does.

Not only has the VPA put a stop to Mid Vermont students doing that — it has forbidden students from all the other schools in Vermont to take advantage of any programs unique to MVCS. In years past, students from nearby public schools have joined the girls' volleyball team at MVCS since their own schools did not run a volleyball program. This is no longer an option for those student-athletes from neighboring schools who wish to play volleyball. So, in unjustly punishing Mid Vermont, the VPA is also penalizing young people far removed from MVCS's decision.

Dawna Slarve and her family have experienced the effects of that boycott firsthand. The two youngest of her four children attend Mid Vermont. Her 10th grade son plays basketball, while her eighth grade daughter plays volleyball. Their two teams are taking what competition they can find. Since teams aren't allowed to play in the VPA league, MVCS — trying to provide continuing opportunities for its students — has joined the New England Association of Christian Schools (NEACS), a multi-state league.

It's something, but the opportunity has its drawbacks. The closest school in the NEACS is over an hour away. That's a lot of travel time, infringing on study hours and needed rest.





Though they've enjoyed being part of the MVCS family, Nate and Dawna Slarve say Vermont's withdrawal of tuition support may make this their last year at the school.

"It was a long season for my son," Dawna says. "A lot of missed homework nights, nights that went later than the typical sports season. He was pretty much dragging by the end. Instead of being excited that there was one more game, he was like, 'I don't know if I have it in me to travel three hours.'"

Her daughter wants to play softball, but Mid Vermont doesn't field a team. "We've been looking at where she could join in the local towns," Dawna says, "but they're all turning us down because of the situation with the VPA. We just kept getting the door shut in our face."

"It's something that's being discussed all the time in our household," Dawna says. Her children "are aware of everything that's happening. It doesn't make a lot of sense, but this is where we're at, and we want to stand firm on our beliefs. It's disappointing to my daughter, but as much as she's frustrated, she understands that it's not something that we caused ... and not something that we can bend on."

And for the Slarves, it's getting harder. Even apart from what's happening with their children's sports, Dawna and her husband, Nate, are having to weigh the growing possibility that, next year, the children may not be able to attend Mid Vermont at all.

Like a lot of parents, the Slarves came to Mid Vermont for a variety of reasons. The family had moved to the area because it offered their two older sons the option of attending one of two nearby public high schools (or a private, state-approved school). The boys each chose to attend a different public high school, and each was pleased with his choice. But, as their two younger children approached high-school age, the family became aware of a third option: Mid Vermont.

That awareness coincided with several experiences that undermined the Slarves' enthusiasm for public-school education. With the arrival of COVID-19, for instance, their decision not to vaccinate their children

It feels like a community. A second home, a second family. There's a lot of fellowship that happens that I don't necessarily feel we had in the public school.

“

Dawna Slarve

put them at odds with a local government official increasingly insistent that all local students receive the shot. Their son, in particular, found himself ostracized by peers and staff for not having taken the vaccine.

About the same time, Dawna says, their daughter came home from school "with information about how she could change her gender, how boys can wear dresses." Upset, Dawna called the school's principal, who said the material would be required in the girl's class going forward. The Slarves were welcome to see about opting her out, but it was clear "this was the direction the school was taking."

Not long after that conversation, Dawna was baptized, and her daughter went to school excited to share that happy news with her classmates. School officials were less thrilled with the tidings, telling the girl, "You can't talk about religion in school."

"This was very conflicting for me," Dawna says. "My daughter can't share the joy of her mom being baptized, but the teachers can share with her how boys can wear dresses." Enough, the Slarves decided, was enough.



Students at MVCS exemplify the message of Romans 15:5-6 displayed on the student-crafted sign: "... live in such harmony with one another ... that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."



The state is trying to extinguish these schools and families from the public square, simply because they disagree over a controversial issue.

“

Jake Reed, Legal Counsel
ADF Center For Christian Ministries

"We were like, 'Yep, we're done,'" Dawna says. "We want to go someplace that's going to teach our children about God and allow us to have the peace of mind that we have some medical freedom and some say in our children's education. And avoid any of the lessons that they're giving in the public school on puberty blockers

and gender identity stuff." A month into the new school year, the Slarves moved their children to Mid Vermont, "and we've been here ever since."

The benefits of a private, Christian education soon became apparent.

"Being in a science class that's not pushing evolution is great. Having a Bible class elective has been really wonderful ... it's helped us on our spiritual path. We really feel like we're heard, and part of the family and community here — compared to being just another number in the public school. Our kids have enjoyed being in smaller classes: a better teacher-to-student ratio, and connecting with other kids."

"It feels like a community," Dawna says. "A second home, a second family. There's a lot of fellowship that happens that I don't necessarily feel we had in the public school — families reaching out and helping each other, helping carpool, helping get to sports and back. Very friendly, supportive. Overall, it's been a very positive experience."

"I've had four kids, and my first two went completely through public school," Dawna says. "If I had to do it over, I would have them here."

Unfortunately, due to the machinations of state officials, even keeping the two she has at Mid Vermont may soon be impossible.

The reason why has nothing — and everything — to do with Mid Vermont's decision not to play against the girls' team that put a boy on the court.

Nothing, in the sense that what's tripping up the Slarves' plans to give their children a solid Christian education isn't athletics; everything, in that it involves that same MVCS commitment to its religious views and policies.

Until recently, Mid Vermont had been participating in a Vermont public benefits program that gives families who do not have a public high school in their district the freedom to choose for themselves which school their children will attend. Through what's called "town tuitioning," students in communities like Dawna's can attend any school given "approved" status by the state.

And for a little while, Mid Vermont was on that approved list. Recently though, the state changed how private schools could maintain their approved status. Now, to participate in public programs like town tuitioning, schools are required to comply with new "antidiscrimination" rules — rules that force Mid Vermont to base its policies on restroom use, pronouns, student dress, and athletic teams on so-called gender identities, not on its religious beliefs about sex.

The new rules also require the school to hire individuals who do not share and live out its faith and convictions. And, although the school requires one parent of each student to be a born-again Christian, the new rules prevent that, too.

"The state of Vermont has essentially adopted its own orthodoxy around the idol of self-identity,"

says Jake Reed, legal counsel with the ADF Center for Christian Ministries, which is representing Mid Vermont in a lawsuit challenging the state's persecution of the school. "The state believes individuals get to decide what their sex is. And that is diametrically opposite of what Mid Vermont Christian School believes and teaches — that God uniquely and immutably created men and women. That truth is why families like the Slarves and Goodwins choose Mid Vermont."

We're seeing a continuous, growing hostility toward people of faith in this state.

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Ryan Tucker, Senior Counsel & Director
ADF Center For Christian Ministries

Mid Vermont is not the only school facing this sort of religious discrimination, Reed says.

"We've had three prior cases in the state where Vermont was excluding Christian schools from participating in public programs. The state doesn't like what they teach, what they believe, how they operate according to their faith — so they're essentially trying to ostracize them from every aspect of high school education."

Remarkably, the state of Vermont has already lost a series of decisions in recent years involving these same issues, including one at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit that "literally changed a couple of decades of discrimination against religious schools in the state," says Ryan Tucker, ADF senior counsel and director of the Center for Christian Ministries.

That win, combined with another recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, opened the way for religious schools all across the U.S. to receive state funds without forfeiting their Christian principles. Nevertheless, Tucker says, Vermont officials persist in trying to get around the law.

"We're seeing a continuous, growing hostility toward people of faith in this state," he says. "They fail to recognize that the U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land."

"The state is trying to extinguish these schools and families from the public square," Reed says, "simply because they



has us kind of in limbo. We're looking at other options, trying to figure out the what-ifs." She knows of at least two or three other MVCS families in the same boat.

Her children, she says, "do worry about what it's going to cost. And, depending on the day, they'll speak out loud about 'What can we do so we can stay at Mid Vermont if this court case doesn't go through for us?' Other days, they're ready to throw in the towel: 'We're struggling with sports, we're struggling with tuition — this is a lot of work.'

"But, at the end of the day, we are all in agreement that we are very, very blessed to have this. To get up and leave home every morning and come to this place and feel like we're safe and secure ... is just a great feeling. To be with like-minded people, who are proud to say that they're Christian, is really important to us."

If private Christian schools can't participate equally in public programs ... their doors will eventually shut.

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Jake Reed

disagree over a controversial issue — one where state officials are completely ignoring biological reality as well as the religious liberty and free speech rights of the school and its students and parents."

It's a danger not just to Mid Vermont, Reed says, but to other Christian schools all over the country.

"If private Christian schools can't participate equally in public programs and are treated as second class," he says, "their doors will eventually shut. As the number of students goes down, tuition rates will have to go up — just to continue operating. Families will have to start taking their children elsewhere. And eventually, private Christian schools will cease to exist."

"The Supreme Court has answered the question, but state governments aren't learning," he says. "Schools like Mid Vermont have to keep making a stand for their faith because if they don't, they'll be pummeled into non-existence."

Dawna Slarve doesn't know if her children will be able to return to Mid Vermont next year or not.

"We're supposed to be re-enrolling," she says, "but I haven't filled out my papers. We've looked and looked at our budget, and there's just no way. Not knowing whether the tuition program is going to go through

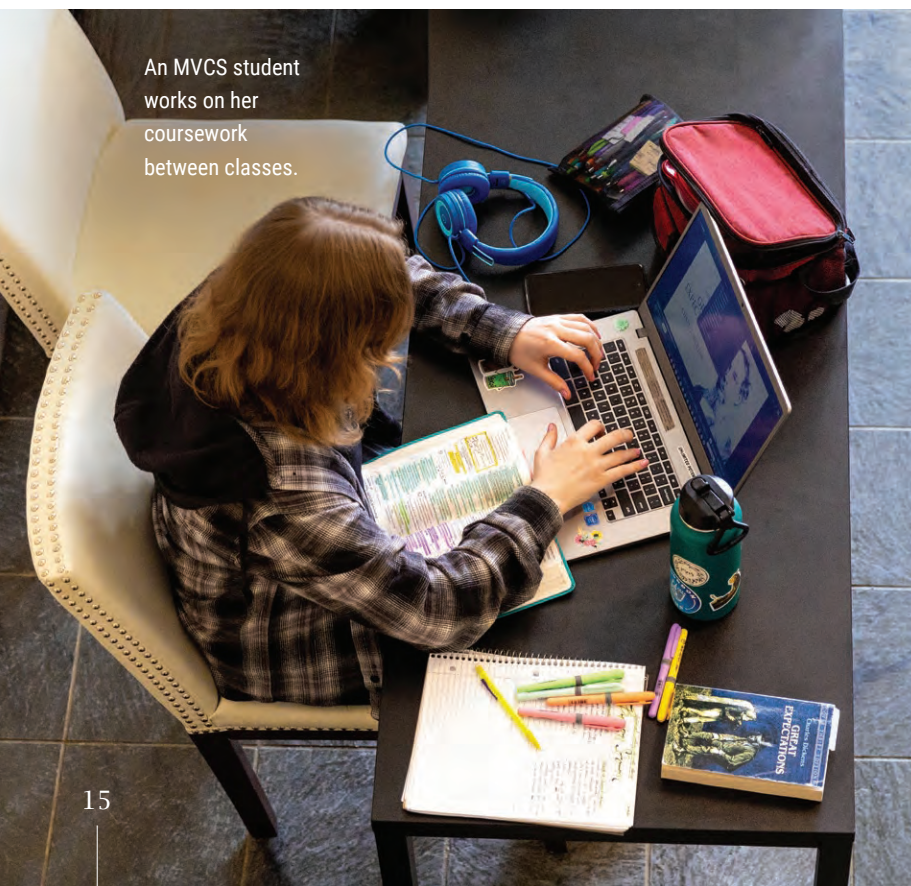
Coach Goodwin says that, even with the challenges of playing outside the state's leagues, his athletes share that appraisal.

"It's more difficult to get around to the games," he says. "The teams we play may not be as competitive. The gyms we play in — sometimes they double as the lunchroom. But we put it together because we believe in the mission of the school. And we believe that the decision we made is the right one."

"This is a battle," Reed says, "for the hearts and minds of our next generation. Families like the Goodwins and the Slarves can only take so much. At some point, you have to make a stand."

"There are sacrifices that everybody makes in life, for different reasons," Dawna says. "For our family, the things we feel we're sacrificing by being here ... we've made those things a priority. We're proud of those sacrifices because we know we're standing on our two feet and firmly on our faith — and on what we believe is right."

An MVCS student works on her coursework between classes.



My View

How Bank Of America Threatened Our Ministry To Impoverished Ugandans

By Steve Happ

I'll never forget my first trip to Uganda. And now I'll never forget the day Bank of America put my ministry's help to the people there into disarray.

I had never seen poverty like I saw on that initial journey to the African nation. I walked by people carrying jugs to the nearest river — sometimes several miles away — to fetch water. While it's common in America for college students to gain the “freshman 15,” there I met students who considered themselves blessed to get one meal a day. These students often didn't know when they'd find their next.

But while I saw deprivation, I was also profoundly moved. I knew I wanted to help them.

Founded in 2015, Indigenous Advance Ministries, based in Memphis, Tennessee, serves impoverished people in Uganda — including widows, orphans, prisoners, and single mothers — with the goal of lifting people out of poverty. In the long term, we hope to see lives changed as more and more people in Uganda embrace the life-changing Christian message of hope and salvation.

But last year, our ministry and our work were thrown into disarray when we were suddenly de-banked. Starting in April, Bank

of America sent me a series of letters stating that it was closing our ministry's deposit and credit card accounts within 30 days. I also received a letter informing us that the bank was closing the account for a local church that occasionally supports us.

The whole ordeal was a nightmare for me and for the ministries I support.

Worst of all, we were forced to tell our hardworking Ugandan employees that they would have to wait an extra week to receive a paycheck. Even with our help, these men and women often struggle to put food on the table. As bad as this was, it could have been much worse. We regularly feed orphans through our partner ministries, and thankfully this cancellation came at a time that didn't deprive children of the chance to eat.

I was never given a specific reason for why the bank had suddenly closed our accounts.

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Steve Happ

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Steve Happ

I spent many frustrating hours on the phone and in person at my local Bank of America branch. But I was never given a specific reason for why the bank had suddenly closed our accounts. The only response employees would provide was reading from the letters I had received, which merely stated that Bank of America no longer works with our “business type” and that our ministry “no longer aligns with the bank's risk tolerance.”

Had I done something wrong? No one at Bank of America could tell me. In fact, it wasn't until late August that I heard anything beyond the minimal explanation contained in the letters as to why our accounts were canceled. That's when news broke that we had worked with Alliance Defending Freedom to file a consumer complaint asking Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti to investigate whether our account had been canceled because of our religious views.

When a reporter with the UK's *Daily Mail* reached out to Bank of America, the bank suddenly conjured a series of after-the-fact and flimsy excuses for why they had canceled our accounts. None of these rationales appear to hold water, and none explain why our accounts were canceled.

The reality is that someone at Bank of America had decided to close our accounts, and it appears

to be because of our religious work. The bank has little insight into the lives that our ministry touches every day. Bank of America hasn't witnessed the smiles on the faces of children when we hand them something as simple as a bottle of water — or the relief etched on young graduates' faces when we assure them we can provide honest jobs that will put food on their families' tables. Real people in Uganda rely on us, and their needs matter.

If Bank of America can cancel Indigenous Advance's accounts, they can do the same thing to other religious groups and individuals. That's why we're supporting state legislation, corporate reform, and other solutions that would stop banks from this kind of discrimination and require them to be more transparent when they deny or cancel services.

This should never have happened to us, and I don't want it to happen to anyone else. That's why we're standing up. We're not the first victim of the de-banking phenomenon, but we'd like to be the last. **A**

This was adapted from an article that appeared in The Republic Sentinel on November 7, 2023.

De-banking On The Rise

ADF Senior Counsel Jeremy Tedesco testified in March before the U.S. House Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government about political and religious bias that pervades the financial industry.

The committee had previously disclosed that federal law enforcement agencies asked major banks and payment

processors to flag Americans' purchases from stores like Cabela's, Bass Pro Shops, and Dick's Sporting Goods, as well as those related to “religious texts,” including Bibles.

Calling this “the tip of the iceberg,” Tedesco testified that viewpoint-based de-banking is on the rise.



Jeremy Tedesco

For instance, JPMorgan Chase de-banked the Arkansas Family Council for being “high risk.” Wells Fargo denied payment processing to the pro-life group Ruth Institute for promoting “hate.”

De-banking stories like these highlight the vague and subjective policies that bank employees and government banking regulators can use to withdraw financial services based on a customer's exercise of his First Amendment rights.

“We cannot live in a free country if access to the marketplace depends on our political or religious views,” Tedesco said.

VISIT [JoinADF.com/FJ-Viewpoint](https://www.adf.org/joinadf.com/fj-viewpoint) to read Tedesco's full testimony.

Q & A

Alan Sears and Michael Farris

Former CEOs Reflect On ADF's 30-Year History

By Chris Potts and Charles Snow

In 1993, attorney Alan E. Sears was asked by a group of Christian ministry leaders to become the president, CEO, and general counsel of a new legal organization, Alliance Defense Fund. ADF would fund efforts nationwide to strengthen religious freedom by challenging laws and practices that were proving increasingly hostile to people of faith.

Sears served as ADF's founding CEO from 1994 to 2017 and a member of its Foundation Board until 2022. He was succeeded as CEO by attorney Michael P. Farris, who led ADF (now renamed Alliance Defending Freedom) from 2017 to 2022.

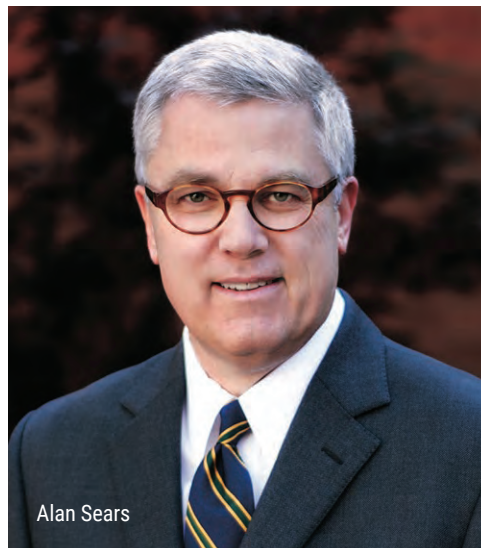
Between them, these two men laid the foundation for a ministry that by God's grace has become one of the most influential Christian legal organizations in the country. On the occasion of the ministry's 30th anniversary, we talked with them about their feelings for the organization and its future.

F&J: Mr. Sears, what inspired the creation of ADF?

AS: There was a great sense that we were losing religious liberty in America — that religious freedom was on its way out. And everybody had their own stories about something that had happened in their ministry's experience or in their close circle that led them to say, "It's time, finally, to go from talk to action."

I'd heard so much talk. I remember this little adage about conservatives and Christians: "We love to meet, eat,

bleat, and retreat." So, to hear people say, "It's time to do something" — and then make steps toward doing something — was kind of a unique moment in time.



That's the most exciting thing about ADF: it can be a part of the vast future of winning and keeping this nation not only in existence but thriving for Christ.

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Alan Sears

fighting battles, fighting one-offs, wanting to win a case or get a newspaper article published or get on a TV show. It's another thing when you want to have a multi-generational win.

F&J: Mr. Farris, how did you first become aware of, then involved with, the work of ADF?

MF: Before ADF was first launched, the leaders that formed the initial board conducted a feasibility study. Since I'd launched the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) about 10 years earlier, I was one of the few people with experience in running a Christian nonprofit law firm. I was interviewed to give my feedback and suggestions.

Then, in the years after ADF launched, I taught First Amendment Law to the second and third Blackstone classes. I also taught a parental rights session at one of ADF's legal academies and wrote a joint brief with ADF.

F&J: Both of you set great stock on the importance of winning.

AS: I asked [the founders], "Are we here to win or just fight a good fight?" Because, bluntly, I didn't want to be part of any effort that wasn't here to win. It's one thing when you're

MF: I came to ADF believing that we could do more than just fight for the causes we believe in. We could win. And by "winning," I mean more than just winning individual cases. We could win victories that would not just protect a single client, but secure freedom for an entire generation.

I was not under any illusion that our five Generational Wins [right to life, religious freedom, free speech, parental rights, marriage and the family] would be obtained easily or quickly. But our goal became to conduct our litigation with the idea that we needed to win the case in front of us while also working strategically to advance the ultimate victory for one of our Generational Wins.

F&J: What is a highlight that brought you particular joy during your time at ADF?

MF: I got the idea for the Church and Ministry Alliance (CMA) when I was still at HSLDA. I saw that many churches were afraid because of threats from cancel culture and similar forces. When I pitched the idea for the CMA to the HSLDA legal team, they replied, "It's a good idea, but we are the wrong group to do this. Go tell your friends at ADF and let them take this on." Six months later, I was suddenly the CEO of ADF.

One of the key fruits of the CMA was demonstrated when our country faced massive shutdowns, including closing churches, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the CMA, we had a team in place that could handle the lion's share of the litigation and other help that ADF was called on to give during those dark days. Without the preexisting CMA team, we would have been buried.

I never could have imagined the COVID scenario. But shortly into it, I knew that God's timing for this ministry had been perfect.

AS: One week, early on, we could not, for the life of us, raise a dime to reach the biweekly payroll. It was Thursday afternoon, and the funds had to be deposited by midnight or the paychecks would bounce on Friday. I tried to call everyone we could think of to ask for some immediate



I came to ADF believing that we could do more than just fight for the causes we believe in. We could win.

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Michael Farris

international team that does such good work all over the world. We also have a clear understanding that without Christ, we can do nothing. I hope 30 years from now, people will say ADF was a key part of a greater alliance that brought Generational Wins to the right to life, religious freedom, free speech, parental rights, marriage and the family — and the glory all went to God.

AS: The possibility of being part of mega-wins for the Kingdom that have eternal consequences. I hope and pray that there are many people headed to heaven now because of the ministry, who would not otherwise have been. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, "The struggle of today is not altogether for today — it is for a vast future also." That's the most exciting thing about ADF: it can be a part of the vast future of winning and keeping this nation not only in existence but thriving for Christ.

And — if we stay on our knees — that future is unlimited.

help but couldn't get anybody on the phone. About 6 that evening, I was sitting at my desk alone, very discouraged, praying and thinking, when a knock came on the locked door.

It was a FedEx driver: "I have an envelope for you that I missed delivering when I was here earlier today." I thanked him, opened the package, and inside was a check from an entity I'd never heard of ... with \$5 more than the gross payroll. Meaning that God had already answered our money prayers before I even tried to make all those fruitless calls.

Victory doesn't mean to us what it means to the world. Being here to win means total dependence on Christ, as expressed in our theme verse of John 15:5. Because without the Lord, we can do nothing.

F&J: What excites you for the work of ADF going forward?

MF: ADF has a solid foundation, a clear mission, a great new CEO, and a robust and important

VISIT ADFLegal.org/30-years for more historical highlights.

Opinion

Why ADF Is Defending Women’s Sports

By Christiana Kiefer

She calls it “the biggest heist in sports history.”

Former British Olympic swimmer Sharron Davies missed out on a gold medal in Moscow in 1980, losing to a drug-enhanced competitor. She was 17 and “in the form of my life for the 400 meters medley final,”



Sharron Davies

she recounts in her book *Unfair Play*. But as she lined up in the pool, she knew she couldn’t win the top medal because the three muscular East German women in the lanes next to her were “programmed to be decades ahead of their rivals.”

Davies won silver, setting a British record that wasn’t broken for more than two decades. But she could have — *should* have — brought home gold.

Her East German competitors were part of a secretive decades-long program that forced

athletes to take performance-enhancing drugs to achieve success in international competitions and bolster the country’s image. By the time the doping system was uncovered in the 1990s, countless competitors had been cheated out of medals.

Today, the fraud continues, this time in plain sight. It’s happening in swimming pools, on soccer fields, on

basketball courts — from middle school track meets to the Olympic Games. Athletic organizations and government officials are allowing males who identify as female to take women’s medals, titles, and awards. Science and common sense have been replaced by a radical gender ideology, and women and girls are suffering as a result.

This is why Alliance Defending Freedom is defending women’s sports and female athletes who train their hardest, only to be forced to compete against bigger, faster, and stronger males — and lose top rankings in the process.

The legal effort began in 2019, when three high school track athletes in Connecticut filed a Title IX complaint. In 2020 ADF filed a lawsuit, later joined by a fourth athlete, to challenge a state policy allowing males to compete in girls’ athletic events. The girls had been forced to compete against two male athletes who together had won 15 women’s track championship titles — titles once held by nine different girls.

WATCH Connecticut athletes Chelsea, Alanna, and Selina tell their stories. Visit ADFLegal.org/Fairplay

Chelsea Mitchell, one of the female athletes ADF represents, lost four state championship titles and two All-New England awards to the two male athletes. She was the fastest girl on her team and one of the fastest in the state of Connecticut.

“It was heartbreaking,” she said. “I never won a single race when I had to compete against both biologically male athletes.”

The athletes’ public stand sparked a nationwide legislative movement. Since then, 24 states have enacted a women’s sports law to protect equal athletic opportunities. Other female athletes across the country are speaking up for their sports as well.

Fairness in women’s sports is in jeopardy, and there’s no platform as prominent as the Olympic Games.

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Christiana Kiefer

Science and common sense have been replaced by a radical gender ideology, and women and girls are suffering as a result.

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Christiana Kiefer

In 2021, West Virginia enacted its law to protect women’s sports, the sixth state to join the nationwide movement. Almost immediately, the American Civil Liberties Union sued to prevent the law from going into effect. ADF intervened in the case on behalf of Lainey Armistead, a former soccer player at West Virginia State University.

Lainey heard about the Connecticut case when she was playing at WVSU and was appalled to learn that the state’s athletic association was forcing female athletes to compete against boys. Growing up in a house full of brothers who also played soccer, she became well acquainted with the physical differences that give males an athletic performance advantage. She knows how important it is to protect fairness for female athletes.

When she learned that West Virginia’s women’s sports law was being challenged in court, Lainey decided to join the lawsuit. Now, the case is at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.



ADF Senior Counsel Christiana Kiefer (second from left) with Connecticut high school athletes Alanna Smith, Selina Soule, Ashley Nicoletti, and Chelsea Mitchell outside Thurgood Marshall United States Courthouse in New York City in June 2023.

Clearly, fairness in women’s sports is in jeopardy, and there’s no platform as prominent as the Olympic Games. Three years ago, we watched in dismay and disbelief when a male weightlifter brazenly competed in the women’s division at the Tokyo Olympics. All eyes are now on Paris as we approach the 2024 Summer Games. Thankfully, some common sense has been restored.

World Athletics, the governing body for track and field, prohibits male athletes who have gone through puberty from participating in women’s world rankings competitions. “Those regulations are here to stay,” said World Athletics President Sebastian Coe regarding the decision. “It is absolutely vital that we protect, we defend, we preserve the female category.”

Protect, defend, preserve. Amen!

When gender ideology activists demand total compliance with unjust policies, we must hold the line and stand for truth and biological reality. I hope that the world is waking up to the damaging effects of believing a lie and manipulating God’s perfect design for men and women. We desperately need a return to truth and common sense. **A**

Christiana Kiefer is senior counsel for the Center for Conscience Initiatives at ADF.



Lainey Armistead

WHAT IS YOUR LEGACY?

*The decisions you make
when planning your estate
can make an impact for
generations to come.*



Pass on a Legacy of Freedom.

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