



**PASTOR TIM SMITH** of First Baptist Church, Judson, looks out on a audience which includes several pastors from across the area including Fr. Nolan Lowry now of Athens. Behind the Roman Catholic priest is his father, Vance Lowry. East Texans for Liberty sponsored the meeting Saturday outside the Upshur County Courthouse.

(Mirror photo by Mary Laschinger Kirby)

## Rally in support of traditional marriage held

By Phillip Williams

About 50 persons, including several speakers, attended the East Texans for Liberty's rally to support traditional marriage on the south lawn of the Upshur County Courthouse in Gilmer on Saturday.

The approximately two-hour gathering featured eight in-person speakers, ranging from County Judge Dean Fowler to ministers from various churches and representatives of conservative groups, and recorded statements from U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Tyler), Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and state Attorney General Ken Paxton.

Billed as "Upshur County's Traditional Marriage Rally" by the conservative ET4L, the event was designed to show support for restricting marriage to one man and one woman in the wake of last June's U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage.

Fowler, who acted as master of ceremonies, said that U.S. courts in the 1960s and 1970s began interpreting family laws in ways which gave individual interests a far higher priority than "social interests, which knocked the legal and social system off balance." Specifically, he cited no-fault divorce and the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion.

Noting that no nation had legally recognized same-sex marriage as of only 17 years ago, Fowler said that idea "burst upon the international scene" likely because the "personal autonomy" theory of the initial "U.S. pro-same-sex-marriage case in 2001 simply extended the same individualistic legal concept that had created no-fault divorce."

"Clearly God loves all of His children and expects us to treat one another with compassion and tolerance—regardless of private conduct we do not condone and may or may not understand. But it is a very different matter to endorse or promote that conduct by altering a legal concept like marriage—whose historic purpose was to promote society's interest in having biological parents rear their own children in stable homes," Fowler said.

Tim Smith, senior pastor of

the First Baptist Church in Judson community, noted that Genesis chapter 2 in the Bible states that "God created one man and one woman," not two men or two women, for marriage. He quoted noted conservative James Dobson as writing that children raised by "traditional parents" are less likely to be addicted to drugs, commit suicide, become juvenile delinquents or become teen-age mothers.

Former Gilmerite Nolan Lowry, priest for the St. Edward's Catholic Church in Athens, said last June's "appalling" Supreme Court decision left most good Christians he knew "frustrated, angry and just in utter disbelief."

"Objectively, it's (same-sex unions) not marriage," said Lowry, who quoted an area Catholic bishop as saying Catholics had a duty to "emphatically oppose" the ruling. Lowry also said that what formerly was called "insanity" is now law, and that the nation was going down the "slippery slope" of basing morality on feelings "instead of what is right and what is wrong."

In his recording, Gohmert said traditional marriage was the "building block" of stable societies and "tampering with the natural order has proved disastrous." Patrick added that "more supporters are needed to fight for" traditional values' survival, and he and Paxton both praised the Pastor Protection Act approved by the state legislature, which attempts to protect ministers from having to perform gay weddings.

"Your voices are being heard," Paxton told the rally.

Ann Hettinger, state director of Concerned Women for America, asked how long it would be before a legal marriage includes more than two people and decried schools using curriculums that "normalize" same-sex unions.

Nicole Hudgens, state outreach coordinator for Texas Values Action, said she is 27 years old and that the media will assert that all millennials are "sold on same-sex marriage." But "many of us" in that age group believe marriage is defined as one man and one woman, Hudgens said.

Damien Reese, pastor of the

St. James Missionary Baptist Church in Gladewater, said that "only a woman can be to a man" what he needs.

"We believe that God has created this (marriage) union (between a man and woman) that should not be corrupted," Reese said.

Dennis Abernathy, a Gladewater resident who is minister of the White Oak Church of Christ, condemned the Supreme Court decision, saying "We continually hear that love won, but in actuality sin won." He said the nation is confronted with "the destruction of the traditional family."

Sociologists worth their salt know "that when the family starts to disintegrate, so does the nation," Abernathy asserted.

Attorneys for the Obama administration have said they do not know the impact of the court's ruling on religious institutions opposing same-sex marriage, but "it is infringing upon our rights" and citizens should "speak out against the unfruitful works of darkness" by telling "people what God has said about marriage," Abernathy added.

David Watts Jr., who has been a preacher in the Church of Christ and is now an East Mountain businessman, challenged the Upshur County Commissioners Court to pass a resolution supporting traditional marriage and businesses' right to practice their religion without threat of a lawsuit. He authored the city of Longview's proclamation supporting traditional marriage.

Watts said the lesbian, gay and transgendered community is "hostile" to people practicing their faith. A couple who owns a Longview bakery, and who declined to provide a cake for a same-sex wedding because of "their conviction and their faith," has "endured vile hostility publicly" and even been threatened with having their house burned down, he said.

"That's what we face," Watts said. "Stand up and speak up and do not shut up."

ET4L President Stacy McMahan, who opened and closed the late morning and early afternoon rally, declared at the end that it was "absolutely wonderful."

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