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No Christmas break for blue laws

By Jenny Hartley

[The Lord triumphed in County Council chambers Monday night.](#)

Council voted against repealing the blue laws in the county through Jan. 4.

County Administrator Steve Willis said he brought up the ordinance for council to consider in light of the national economic downturn.

Willis said surrounding counties, such as York, and Union and Mecklenburg in North Carolina, don't have blue laws, which prohibit the sale of certain items before 1:30 p.m. on Sundays. He hoped repealing the blue laws would give Lancaster County merchants a boost for the holiday season.

The ordinance council considered would not have changed laws prohibiting Sunday alcohol sales, and would have affected four Sundays through Jan. 4, if the ordinance had received final approval on Dec. 1.

Pastors speak out

Several pastors spoke against repealing the blue laws before Monday's vote.

The Rev. Rex Faile, pastor of Lakewood Christian Church, said repealing the blue laws could create a "slippery slope" that could lead to Sunday alcohol sales, which would make Sunday seem like any other day of the week.

"And that's a sad day for us all," Faile said.

The Rev. Dale Roach, director of Moriah Baptist Association in Lancaster, said churches are now having to compete with society.

"We're really serious about seeing this as the Lord's day and seeing it as a sacred day," Roach said.

Dr. Bert Welch, pastor of Covenant Baptist Church, said he was at the meeting representing the spiritual dimension. He said Lancaster County's faith community is striving to make a difference in people's lives.

"The kingdom of God is being marginalized daily in this culture," Welch said. "We're going to fight against that marginalization."

Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce President Dean Faile said he once owned a business and never opened on Sundays. At the same time, he believed it was a right for businesses to open on Sundays if they wished.

Faile said he believes blue laws are administered unfairly by the state and the state has put the burden on counties to deal with them.

"I understand that Sunday is a day of rest, but the ordinance protects an employee's right to work," Faile said. "I believe (the laws are) unfair and I believe it should be revoked."

No merchants showed up to address County Council about the proposed ordinance.

Council discussion

Councilman Bryan Vaughn said the county could "swing the door wide open" and people still aren't going to shop in Lancaster.

"They're going to Charlotte," he said. "I don't think opening for four Sundays is going to make or break a business. I think there's something nice about the blue laws, about having a day for family."

Vaughn also said he believes repealing the blue laws would be a "gateway" to Sunday alcohol sales.

Councilman Jack Estridge said repealing the laws would lead to more crime and traffic around local stores.

Councilman Wayne Kersey said Lancaster already seems like the “thug” capital of America, and was deemed “one of the worst places in America to live” by a recent Internet article.

“I don’t know where we’re headed in this county, but it’s not up,” he said.

Council Chairman Rudy Carter said he’ll be in church this Sunday, by choice. He said people should be able to shop on Sunday if they choose.

“People are going to go to church by choice,” he said. “You cannot mandate morality.”

Council’s vote was 3-4. Carter and Councilmen Fred Thomas and Larry Honeycutt voting for repealing the blue laws until Jan. 4. Councilman Wesley Grier, Vaughn, Estridge and Kersey voted against it.

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