

Haynes Boone Secures Church Autonomy Victory in Federal Class Action Against Gateway Church

June 24, 2026

RELATED PRACTICES [Litigation, Religious Institutions](#)

Haynes Boone secured a significant victory for Gateway Church after a federal judge dismissed a proposed class action lawsuit challenging the church's handling of member donations, holding that the claims are barred by the First Amendment's ecclesiastical abstention doctrine.

In a June 23 order from the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, Judge Amos Mazzant dismissed all claims asserted against Gateway Church and directed the clerk to close the case. The lawsuit sought class-action status and alleged fraud, breach of contract and RICO violations based on claims regarding the allocation of church tithes and donations.

The court found that resolving the claims would require judicial review of how Gateway Church allocated tithes among ministry and charitable purposes and evaluation of representations made in religious contexts, inquiries that are prohibited under the First Amendment's church autonomy protections.

The court's decision relied heavily on the Fifth Circuit's recent landmark decision in *McRaney v. North American Mission Board*, which clarified the broad scope of the church autonomy doctrine and reinforced constitutional protections limiting judicial involvement in matters of church governance, doctrine and internal decision-making.

The Haynes Boone team representing Gateway Church was led by Litigation Partner [Ron Breaux](#) with support from [Brad Foster](#), [Ryan Paulsen](#) and [Chris Knight](#).

"This decision reinforces longstanding First Amendment protections that preserve the autonomy of religious institutions in matters of faith, doctrine and internal governance," said Breaux. "We are pleased the court recognized that these claims could not be adjudicated without impermissibly entangling the judiciary in ecclesiastical matters."

Haynes Boone's [Litigation Department](#) handles disputes of all sizes with a focus on achieving results that align with clients' business objectives. The team represents industry leaders, startups and a full range of other businesses in contract disputes, class actions and regulatory matters. The firm's skilled trial and appellate teams have secured numerous jury verdicts, bench verdicts and summary judgments ensuring efficient, client-centered strategies that drive successful outcomes.