[Alumni Profile]

By Betsy Rogers

Church and State

Winston Calvert Achieves Landmark Ruling for Embattled Church

Growing up in a Southern Baptist family, with parents deeply involved in church life, Winston Calvert, JD ‘05, says religion has always been “an animating idea” for him. In law school, he studied religion law and wrote his note for the Washington University Law Review on “Judicial Selection and the Religious Test Clause.” His religious interests also led to his serving as counsel in a landmark religion lawsuit.

When his employer Armstrong Teasdale LLP agreed to represent the people of St. Stanislaus Kostka Roman Catholic Church in their David-and-Goliath battle against the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Winston Calvert jumped at the chance to join the team. “It became more of a cause than a case for me,” says Calvert. “It changed my career and my life in many ways.”

The St. Stanislaus case has riveted public attention for nearly 10 years, pitting all the might of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in a deeply Catholic city against a historic Polish Catholic parish. St. Stanislaus dates to 1880, a time in American Catholic history.
wants. That’s not impeded by neutral principles. What is impeded, he adds, “is the idea that he can then enforce that declaration in violation of secular legal rights, in the secular courts.”

In a March 2012 decision, the court ruled for St. Stanislaus and affirmed the parish’s control of its property. The archdiocese has filed an appeal and pledged to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court if need be, but Calvert doubts that it will go that far. “It’s a matter of state law,” he explains, “and it’s well settled Missouri law.”

THE CONTROVERSY has caused grief in the parish, especially since parishioners, according to Calvert, “have been made out to be radicals, when really, these are just the same people who have been going to St. Stanislaus for generations.”

Calvert adds that this case means so much to him and the parishioners because: “There’s no way to quantify what it means to go to your home church. You can’t put a dollar figure on your religious identity.”

As for his client’s recent successful outcome in the lawsuit, Calvert is quick to credit the entire legal team. “The victory was the product of a seamless team of dedicated lawyers who shared a passion for protecting the unique status of St. Stanislaus,” he says. Led by Richard Scherrer, BSBA ’69, the St. Stanislaus legal team also included Ken Vuylsteke, JD ’80, and George von Stamwitz.

Calvert has worked on a variety of religion-related legal issues for churches, municipalities, and seminaries. He also represents clients in general litigation and environmental law matters. Interestingly, Calvert’s initial career path was entirely different. As an undergraduate at Southern Illinois University–Carbondale, he majored in clarinet performance and performed with the Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra. Though he doesn’t play as much as he’d like now, he remains active in community arts organizations, including Prison Performing Arts. The innovative group takes drama into several Missouri correctional centers, exposing prisoners to culture, while teaching them empathy. It also couples as a literacy program.

“My arts education was transformative for me,” Calvert says. “I think it’s important to make sure that others have these experiences.”