

Westboro Baptist Church Founder Fred Phelps Sr. On Edge Of Death
News

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Posted on : 2014/3/17 4:13:33

Kansas City, MO (AP) - The estranged son of the founder of the Westboro Baptist Church said his father is "on the edge of death."



Fred Phelps Sr. became famous for organizing picket lines of brightly-colored signs carrying hateful messages against tolerance during the funerals of military personnel and famous figures. His actions led to at least two federal and several state laws restricting protests during military funerals.

In a statement on his Facebook page, Nathan Phelps, who has been estranged from his father for 30 years, said the senior Phelps was dying in hospice care in Topeka, Kan., and that he had been excommunicated from his own church in August of 2013.

"I'm not sure how I feel about this. Terribly ironic that his devotion to his god ends this way. Destroyed by the monster he made," Nathan Phelps wrote.

"I feel sad for all the hurt he's caused so many," he continued. "I feel sad for those who will lose the grandfather and father they loved. And I'm bitterly angry that my family is blocking the family members who left from seeing him, and saying their good-byes."

A spokesman for the Westboro Baptist Church said Sunday that the elder Phelps, 84, was being cared for in a facility in Shawnee County, Kan. Spokesman Steve Drain declined to identify the facility or to characterize Phelps' condition.

"I can tell you that Fred Phelps is having some health problems," Drain said. "He's an old man, and old people get health problems."

Drain declined comment Sunday on whether Fred Phelps had been voted out of the church.

Just last week, a federal judge upheld a Missouri law requiring protesters to stay at least a football-field length away from funeral sites, beginning an hour before they start until an hour after the services end.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Fernando Gaitan Jr. caps a nearly eight-year legal fight over Missouri's funeral protest restrictions that were prompted after members of a Kansas church opposed to homosexuality protested at the funeral of a Missouri soldier who had been killed in Iraq.

Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster said the law is now in effect.

"No parent who has lost a child should be confronted by the hate and intolerance of strangers, and today's ruling means parents and other loved ones will have a protective boundary from protesters," Koster said Tuesday in a written statement.