

Support grows for dad of slain Marine told to pay Westboro Baptist Church, which cheered son's death... *Continued from Page 1*

From across America, the rich and poor are rising to help Albert Snyder battle a bizarre church that has stained the memory of his hero Marine son.

"I was appalled," said Sally Giannini, a 72-year-old retired bookkeeper from Spokane, Wash., told the Baltimore Sun. Giannini told the Sun she was sending \$10 to help offset Snyder's \$16,510 legal bills.

Snyder was ordered to pay that amount to Fred Phelps, leader of the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kan., an anti-gay group that travels the country picketing military funerals, after his lawsuit was overturned last week by a federal appeals court, the Sun reported. Phelps' group says military deaths are God's punishment for America's tolerance of homosexuality.

Snyder sued Westboro after its members waved signs saying "God hates fags" and "God hates the USA" at the 2006 funeral in Westminster of his son, Lance Cpl. Matthew Snyder, who had been killed in Iraq.

A federal jury in Baltimore awarded Snyder \$11 million in damages in 2007, saying Phelps' group intentionally inflicted emotional distress on the family. The award was later reduced to \$5 million, and eventually overturned on appeal. It is currently scheduled to be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court.

As news of the order to pay some of the court costs spread through the news media and online, strangers were moved to send money and set up funds to support Snyder's court battle. Tuesday night, commentator Bill O'Reilly of Fox News Channel offered to pay the court costs owed by Snyder, according to WBAL Radio in Baltimore.

Mark Seavey, new-media director for the American Legion, also posted a message Tuesday on his Legion-affiliated blog, The Burn Pit, urging readers to donate to the Albert Snyder Fund. The American Legion's message was picked up by conservative political blogger Michelle Malkin, who called the Westboro protesters "evil miscreants" and urged readers to donate.

"Regardless of how you feel about the merits of the Snyders' suit, the Snyders deserve to know that Americans are forever grateful for their son's heroism and for the family's sacrifice. We shouldn't stand by and watch them bankrupted," Malkin wrote.


Money from donations will go toward covering the money owed to Phelps, and beyond that, toward preparing further appeals, Seavey said.

"As soon as we heard this, we just knew that it was going to go through the roof, and people were going to be upset. We seized on it," Seavey said. "On an issue like this that cuts across political lines, it's relatively easy, and it's the kind of fight we want to wade into because it's not right or left, it's right or wrong.

"We're going to do the best we can to make sure that Mr. Snyder doesn't have to deal with this. We're going to make sure he doesn't have to pay a red cent."

From Web sites to Twitter pages, people were galled that the grieving father of a fallen Marine would have to pay a group that uses such inflammatory tactics. A Facebook group called "I support Al Snyder in His fight against Westboro Baptist Church" had drawn nearly 12,000 members by the end of the day Tuesday.

In a phone interview with the Sun Tuesday, Snyder said he was "exhausted" by the long legal ordeal but heartened by the outpouring of support. He said he has received about 3,000 e-mail messages from people across the country who planned to contribute.

"It kind of restores your faith in mankind after dealing with this wacko church," Snyder said. "Win or lose, I'll know that I did everything I could for Matt, and for all the soldiers and Marines who are still coming home dying." 



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