

**News and Current Events :: Coalition: FBI probe of preacher 'alarming'**

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MOUNT VERNON -- The Rev. Randy Steele of Mount Vernon has found himself inundated with requests for interviews from media ranging from St. Louis to California this week.

"I was on Associated Press radio and that really set it off," Steele said.

The media has been telling the tale of the senior pastor of Southwest Christian Church being interrogated by FBI agents over the topics of some of his sermons, including the pastor's speaking out against abortion and homosexuality.

This week, the Rev. Louis P. Sheldon, chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition based in Washington, issued a formal statement calling the incident "alarming."

"This is designed to have a chilling effect on religious speech. Pastors who preach from the Bible about issues such as abortion and homosexual marriage may now be subject to a federal knock on their church door," Sheldon said.