

A Win for the House of God: Minnesota Governor Drops Church Attendance Restrictions

Gov. Tim Walz recently rescinded all occupancy requirements on Minnesota's houses of worship with the issuance of his latest executive order 21-11.

Walz has ended the state's 50% occupancy requirements on church attendance. In January, the 250-person limit was revoked, but the 50% capacity restriction remained. However, that ended March 15.

Thomas More Society represents three Christian churches—Cornerstone Church of Alexandria (Minnesota), Life Spring Church (in Crosby, Minnesota), Cavalry Chapel (in St. Paul, Minnesota), along with their respective pastors—that filed suit in district court last August against Walz and Attorney General Keith Ellison challenging the worship restrictions.

The complaint stated that Walz's executive order "[criminalizes] conduct of church attendees, suppresses plaintiffs' ability to worship and practice their religion in houses of worship, and restricts the ability of the plaintiffs to associate with other members of the faith."

The religious freedom turning point against COVID worship restrictions on churches begin with last year's ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court granting an emergency petition for an injunction pending appeal on behalf of New York City synagogues and Roman Catholic churches in Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn v. Cuomo and Agudath Israel v. Cuomo. Then in February, the high court ruled in favor of Harvest Rock

Church and Harvest International Ministry and partially granted the injunction pending appeal in the federal lawsuit against California Gov. Gavin Newsom's total ban on indoor worship. This was the second time Liberty Counsel appealed to the high court on behalf of these churches. The ruling also included South Bay United Pentecostal Church. Liberty Counsel represents Harvest Rock Church, HIM and Pastor Ché Ahn.

Liberty Counsel founder and chairman Mat Staver said, "The impact of the recent Supreme Court rulings in favor of churches is finally bringing a welcome relief from governors' executive edicts. The High Court has already issued the constitutional roadmap, and now it's past time to end these restrictions on places of worship." {eo}

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