

Can You Be Arrested for Praying Just Because of Where You Do It?

California, it seems, has invented an “Eleventh Commandment”: *Thou shalt not cross Planned Parenthood.*

Fr. James Linton, an Anglican pastor serving Christ’s Church in San Bernardino, California, and a father to Grace, 4, and Augustine, 3, says he felt convicted when he saw the undercover videos produced by the Center for Medical Progress that showed the body parts of aborted babies being harvested and sold for a profit. At the time, his wife was pregnant with their third child, Zoe, and it sparked a call to action.

“The combination of seeing abortion victims sorted through for parts and my wife being pregnant destroyed me,” he said. “She organized a protest and I’ve been in front of the clinic every Friday since.”

Every Friday, starting at 6 a.m., the San Bernardino Planned Parenthood performs abortions up to 20 weeks of pregnancy. Linton and other “sidewalk counselors” provide the men and women who arrive at the clinic with alternatives to abortion, and offer to pray with them in the hopes they will change their minds.

They have been particularly effective, prompting the clinic to build a wall to keep the sidewalk counselors out of sight. So they’ve moved to a public easement and continued their life-saving work.

Last month, Linton was arrested outside the clinic after offering to pray with women entering the abortion facility. Police held him for six hours and cited him for interfering with and obstructing access to a business, even though he did

neither.

Then, earlier this month, the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office formally charged him with violating the state penal code by interfering with a business. If convicted, he could be sentenced to up to 90 days in jail and fined up to \$400.

"The arrest of Fr. Linton is outrageous," said Allison Aranda, senior staff counsel for the Life Legal Defense Foundation, which has taken up Linton's defense. "Fr. Linton certainly did not intend to interfere with Planned Parenthood's ability to conduct its business. Rather, he simply offered assistance and alternatives to its patrons that could save the lives of their precious babies."

Aranda is a former prosecutor for Riverside County. She said the specific portion of California Penal Code that is being used to prosecute the pastor has a specific exemption for "those who are engaging in activities that are protected by the California and United States Constitution."

She added that Life Legal Defense will "vigorously defend Fr. Linton from these false charges and we will fight to preserve and protect the rights of all sidewalk counselors to share life-saving information with mothers entering the San Bernardino abortion clinic."