

Court Drops Charges Against Chicago Churches for COVID Violations

The city of Chicago has dismissed both “disorderly conduct and mob action” citations against Pastor Cristian Ionescu of Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church and Pastor Florin Cimpean of Philadelphia Romanian Church for holding a morning and an evening service on May 17, 2020. The pastors were charged for having more than 10 people in their large sanctuaries for worship.

Liberty Counsel represents Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church and Logos Baptist Ministries, and will file a motion for summary judgment to the lower district court in their federal lawsuit against Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker. The churches are returning to the district court with the now overwhelming number of decisions from the Supreme Court and other federal courts of appeal striking down discriminatory executive orders against churches and places of worship.

This past Sunday, Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church dedicated its new building which seats 1200 people. Liberty Counsel vice president of legal affairs and chief litigation counsel Horatio G. Mihet spoke during the morning service and Pastor Ionescu presented him with a plaque in appreciation of Liberty Counsel’s defense for the church. Mihet was born and raised in Romania and immigrated to America with his family in 1990.

Mihet spoke at the Sunday morning service in Romanian and at the English service Sunday night. Inscribed on the plaque is the following Scripture verse: “I can testify that by their own free will they have given to the utmost of their ability, yes, even beyond their ability. They begged us earnestly for the privilege of participating in this ministry to the saints.

We did not expect that! They gave themselves to the Lord first and then to us, since this is God's will" (2 Cor. 8:3-5).

The Sunday dedication service was packed with people to participate in this historic day in the new sanctuary. These Romanian churches, like the other churches Liberty Counsel represents around the country against the COVID restrictions, are experiencing revival with many new people coming to the church and being baptized.

Under Gov. Pritzker's executive orders, churches could have an unlimited number of people for nonreligious activities to feed, shelter and provide social services, which includes unemployment or disability counseling. However, religious gatherings, in the same church with the same people, were limited to 10. These restrictions were removed in May 2020, when Liberty Counsel filed a petition for an injunction pending appeal at the Supreme Court. However, during oral argument last year at the Court of Appeals the governor argued that he should be able to impose his discriminatory orders once again.

Liberty Counsel founder and chairman Mat Staver said, "After 52 Sundays, the city of Chicago has finally dropped these outrageous 'disorderly conduct and mob action' charges against Romanian pastors for simply having more than 10 people in their church services. The pastors and the Romanian churches understand communism and they are resolved to continue to fight for religious freedom." {eo}

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