

Home Bible Study Fined in California

Did you ever think you'd see the day in America when the government would harass you for studying the Bible in your own home? That day has finally come, and it's a danger to the home church movement that's spreading across the U.S.

A Southern California city is demanding that a small home Bible study group stop meeting unless they obtain a cost-prohibitive permit.

Homeowners Chuck and Stephanie Fromm were fined \$300 for holding the Bible study. The Fromms appealed the ruling to the city of San Juan Capistrano, which was ironically founded as a mission in the late 1700s. In fact, San Juan Capistrano is home to California's oldest building still in use, a chapel where Father Junipero Serra celebrated mass.

"Imposing a heavy-handed permit requirement on a home Bible study is outrageous," says Brad Dacus, president of Pacific Justice Institute. "In a city so rich with religious history and tradition, this is particularly egregious."

A hearing office told Fromm that regular gatherings of more than three people require a conditional use permit. Officials also stated that further religious gatherings in the home would be subject to a \$500 fine per meeting. Fromm appealed. The city rejected the appeal. Now, the Pacific Justice Institute is taking the next step by appealing to the California Superior Court in Orange County.

Fromm says there was no noise beyond normal conversation and quiet music on the home stereo system. The Christians met inside the Fromm's family room and patio area. Many neighbors have written letters of support, denying they were disturbed by the presence of the Bible study.

The group is not affiliated with any particular church, nor is it seeking to establish a church in the home. However, the city of San Juan Capistrano is insisting the home Bible study is not allowed because it is a "church," and churches require a Conditional Use Permit in residential areas.

"An informal gathering in a home cannot be treated with suspicion by the government, or worse than any other gathering of friends, just because it is religious," Dacus says. "We cannot allow this to happen in America, and we will fight as long and as hard as it takes to restore this group's religious freedom."