

Maine Congregations Faced With 'Stay Away From Church or Go to Jail'

"Unconscionable and frightening." That's how Pastor Ken Graves describes the impossible choice Maine Gov. Janet Mills is forcing on Calvary Chapel of Bangor. In essence, it's "Stay away from church or go to jail."

We are back before the courts, fighting to free the faithful of Maine from Mills' outrageous church shutdown and restriction orders. Read on to learn what's next.

"I am responsible for overseeing and managing all of the affairs that the Lord Jesus Christ gave me in my role as undershepherd of His church at Calvary Chapel." That's what Graves declared in court filings yesterday. Graves takes his calling, and his Lord, very seriously.

Liberty Counsel is defending Graves, Calvary Chapel of Bangor and the Calvary Residential Discipleship program against Mills' unconstitutional COVID orders which, since our Supreme Court victory in California, are now the most severe in the nation. Those illegal orders have been in place for an unbelievable 340 days, as of this email.

Graves has been ministering to the broken for decades. By God's grace, the Calvary Residential Discipleship outreach has rescued addicts from the abyss, redeeming their souls and renewing their lives.

This 12-month residential program houses 48 men and women, looking to free themselves of addiction and re-learn life at the foot of the cross. Group Bible study takes place daily, and CRD participants attend church twice a week with the seven or eight pastoral staff members. On Sundays, the residents

meet and worship with Calvary Chapel's full congregation—an important part of their recovery program.

And that's where the problem comes in. Mills initially banned all worship, then raised the number to 10 and now 50. Substance abuse treatment centers were deemed "essential" and have no numerical limit.

The CRD residents can receive counseling, but as soon as the Bible is opened and they worship, the assembly becomes illegal. And that continues to this day.

Under Mills' COVID orders, secular programs can serve any number of people assembled. But the moment a group of 50 or more worships, the entire meeting comes under the restrictions on places of worship.

The CRD residents and staff alone have 56 people—six more than Mills allows to worship. And that number does not include the rest of the Calvary Chapel members who also meet for church.

Mills' orders place Calvary Chapel members and CRD participants in a terrible predicament, forcing them to choose to either forsake the worship of God or be charged with a crime.

Graves and Calvary Chapel cannot keep CRD residents or members away from church, as Mills demands, because the church itself is essential for everyone who attends.

It is not an option for Calvary Chapel to preclude its members and congregants from attending religious worship services at Calvary Chapel. That is the reason Calvary Chapel exists—to be a church—a place of healing and redemption for members, congregants and visitors.

Calvary Chapel cannot abide by government dictates that contradict those fundamental beliefs and cause them to sin against their Lord. Yet, that is exactly what the governor's

orders have done in this case.

The governor's narrow view of "church" wrongfully assumes the church can be reduced to an online podcast. But church and worship are far more than downloading a pastor's message to watch on a smart device or computer.

"As a pastor who has firsthand experience with the evils of substance abuse and who has worked nearly my entire life to help people trapped in bondage by their addictions," wrote Graves in the court filing, "I know that Bible studies and worship are essential. But the governor's orders presented a Hobson's Choice—the Calvary Residential Discipleship program could continue without numerical restrictions, but we could not gather for Bible studies and worship. I could not and cannot in good conscience remove worship from the Calvary Residential Discipleship program."

May God bless this pastor and his church for their resolve to serve the Lord no matter what. {eo}

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