

Bullying Tactics, Harassment Mark Government Stance Against Churches

In Gov. Newsom's continued attempts to bully California churches, Los Angeles County notified Grace Community Church last Friday that it is being evicted from a large portion of the parking lot it has leased since 1975. The governor's orders prohibit all indoor worship services, including home Bible studies and fellowship for 80% of the population, while encouraging mass gatherings of protesters throughout the state. Los Angeles County was the site of 100,000 protesters who literally jammed the streets with no space between people.

In a letter dated Aug. 28, the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works informed the church, led by Pastor John MacArthur, it must vacate the parking area it leases from the county on Oct. 1. The county's letter read, "If Grace fails to vacate the premise as required, the District may enter the premises and remove Grace's personal property in accordance with the Agreement and applicable law, and Grace will be responsible for any resultant expenses incurred by the District."

Pastor MacArthur said, "Our church is not an event center. It is a family of lives who love and care for each other in very intensely personal ways. So essential to personal well-being that people rushed back as soon as they could. The utter unnecessary deprivation of all our people by completely shutting down the mutual love and care that sustains our people in all the exigencies, pressures and challenges of life, was cruel."

Grace Community Church is represented by Thomas Moore, and the state court hearing is scheduled for Sept. 4.

Liberty Counsel represents Harvest Rock Church and Harvest International Ministry. Pastor Che Ahn and Harvest Rock Church received a letter from the Pasadena prosecutor threatening daily fines and criminal charges, with each carrying up to one year in prison.

In Illinois, Liberty Counsel also represents two Romanian churches, Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church and Logos Baptist Ministries, which have filed a federal lawsuit against Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker for his unconstitutional executive orders that discriminated against churches by restricting in-person worship services to no more than 10 people while allowing commercial and non-religious entities to accommodate large crowds.

Gov. Pritzker quickly removed all restrictions on churches and houses of worship less than four hours before he filed his response to the U.S. Supreme Court to the churches' emergency injunction request brought by the two Romanian churches.

However, before that, Gov. Pritzker and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot bullied the Romanian churches when they began in-person worship services. The pastors received two "disorderly conduct" citations for holding a morning service and an evening service on a Sunday with more than 10 people.

Chicago Mayor Lightfoot blocked off nine blocks around the neighborhood posting "No Parking" signs, hoping she would get the neighbors angry with Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church and other churches. However, the churches do not use street parking. The aldermen sent letters to the neighbors of the churches instructing them not to park on the street from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. The letters stated the reason for the "No Parking" signs was due to the Romanian churches holding limited services. When Mayor Lightfoot realized this tactic did not work, she stationed police refusing to allow anyone to park on a Sunday night at the entrance to the private parking lot of Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church. The police trespassed

on private property and interfered with private contractual rights, not to mention grossly violating the Constitution. This tactic also did not work, and the church held its limited service.

Then the Chicago Department of Public Health sent a letter to Elim Pentecostal Church and other Romanian churches in the city threatening closure and "summary abatement." In the threatening letter, Commissioner Allison Arwady wrote: "I am authorized to seek to enjoin such nuisance or to cause the same to be summarily abated in such manner as I may direct." The letter ended by stating that "the City will take steps necessary to abate, including Summary Abatement."

According to the Illinois Supreme Court, "Summary abatement would mean to put down or destroy without process. This means the inspector can, upon his own judgment, cause the alleged nuisance to stop on his own authority and effect a destruction of property at his discretion" (City of Kankakee v. New York Cent. R. Co., 387 Ill. 109, 116, 55 87, 90 [1944]).

Liberty Counsel will file a petition for cert asking the Supreme Court to review the case of Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church and Logos Baptist Ministries in their federal lawsuit against Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker for his unconstitutional executive orders discriminating against churches.

Liberty Counsel founder and Chairman Mat Staver said, "The unilateral actions of Gov. Newsom and Gov. Pritzker are the classic example of tyranny often seen in communist countries. But this is America, and these governors do not have the authority to disregard the First Amendment rights of churches and houses of worship." {eo}

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