

CA County Tells 'Church on the Beach' to Go Away, Nonreligious Groups Still Welcome

A Los Angeles County church that has been having services on a public beach for the last 18 years is now being told by city officials that they must worship Jesus elsewhere.

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) is taking action against Los Angeles County after the Department of Beaches and Harbors officials changed its policy to no longer give out yearly permits for religious activities.

For nearly two decades, King's Harbor Church has been faithfully serving its community by holding worship services or "Church on the Beach" at Redondo Beach with proper permits from Los Angeles County.

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According to the ACLJ, 120 churchgoers gather every Sunday morning to worship for "Church on the Beach" adding that many attendees go to the church because "they have had difficult or negative experiences in traditional church buildings."

"The beach location isn't merely a preference – it's a crucial component of their ministry's outreach to those who might never step foot in a conventional church," explains Nathan Moelker, Associate Counsel for the ACLJ.

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Additionally, leaders and members complied with regulations to meet. They did not obstruct traffic nor did they solicit to

the public in any way. And in cases, when they are a large gathering at the beach where the church's presence might arguably cause any possible disruption, they relocate.

Last July, Church on the Beach became a 501(c)(3), and by September it had become officially a separate entity from King's Harbor Church, but still met with their support.

After the church's new status was finalized last October, a pastor contacted the county to have a permit reissued. But county officials said they would be changing their policy by the end of that month to prohibit the LA County Department of Beaches and Harbors from issuing yearly permits.

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The church was "grandfathered" into the new policy, but under the new guidelines, the group was limited to only six religious activities per year.

However, none of these requirements applied to nonreligious groups gathering on the beach.

"Even more concerning, a county official told the pastor that churches 'don't need the beach' because they can 'meet in a building' – a statement that demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of both religious freedom and the specific ministry of Church on the Beach," Moelker shared.

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