

Ché Ahn's Church Takes Worship Ban to Court of Appeals

Harvest Rock Church and Harvest International Ministry have appealed their case to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals regarding Gov. Gavin Newsom's unconstitutional orders. The governor's orders prohibit *all* worship, including home Bible studies and fellowship with anyone who does not live in the home. Yet, Gov. Newsom continues to encourage mass gatherings of protesters throughout the state.

Following the argument on Aug. 12, Judge Jesus G. Bernal orally denied the request for a preliminary injunction. However, he waited until Sept. 2 to release the written order. The appeal was filed, but it could not be effective until a written order was issued. Now that the order has been issued, the appeal can proceed. Liberty Counsel will also file for an injunction pending appeal.

On Aug. 13, the Pasadena assistant prosecutor in the Criminal Division sent Harvest Rock Church and Pastor Ché Ahn a letter demanding that *all* in-person worship services cease. The letter threatens daily criminal charges and fines to Ahn, the church, staff and parishioners. The letter states that each criminal charge is punishable by up to one year in prison.

The lawsuit challenges both the total ban on in-person worship (including in private homes) in the counties on the "County Monitoring List," and the ban on singing and chanting in the remaining counties. In addition to in-person worship at Harvest Rock Church, the church also has many "life groups," which are home Bible studies and fellowship groups. These too are prohibited under Gov. Newsom's July 6 (no singing and chanting) and July 13 (no worship) orders. Yet while he

discriminates against churches, home Bible studies and fellowship meetings, the governor continues to encourage thousands of protesters to gather throughout the state. Like Gov. Newsom, Pasadena has allowed hundreds and thousands of protesters. Neither the Pasadena Public Health Department nor the Pasadena prosecutor has attempted to stop the protests in which people are crowded together, many of them not wearing masks.

In Gov. Newsom's response to the motion for the temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction, he argues that churches are not "essential." Regarding feeding, counseling and housing people in the same building where worship services occur, he argues that only the worship services should be prohibited while the other nonreligious services should be allowed.

Concerning home Bible studies, Gov. Newsom argues that he has authority to prohibit home fellowship groups. As to protests, he publicly encourages them, saying "God bless you. Keep doing it."

Liberty Counsel Founder and Chairman Mat Staver said, "Now that we have the written order from the court, we can finally move forward with the appeal. The Supreme Court has clearly stated that under the First Amendment, the state cannot prohibit people from attending church against their will. Yet, that is what Gov. Newsom has done. The church has been essential for 2,000 years, and the First Amendment recognizes that the free exercise of religion is essential. The church is now more essential than ever because there are so many hurting people, especially in California, where the governor has decimated the economy and hurt many people by his draconian restrictions." {eo}

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