

Church Files Lawsuit Against County Alleging Spying During Lockdown

A Northern California church, now known as Calvary Christian Fellowship, is taking legal action against Santa Clara County, accusing officials of engaging in surveillance on its members during the COVID lockdown.

As Charisma News reported, the church and Pastor Mike McClure faced fines and court orders for defying pandemic restrictions.

Advocates for Faith and Freedom, the church's legal representatives, filed the lawsuit. They claim that the county used geo-tracking on churchgoers, which they argue was not applied equally to all entities and lacked a proper warrant.

McClure emphasized that the lawsuit is not just for his congregation but for churches nationwide. He stated, "Our church believes in the rights and privacy of all our members ... We are standing up for people of all faiths across the country who have been, and continue to be, targeted by the government."

Get your FREE CHARISMA NEWSLETTERS today! Stay up to date with current issues, Holy Spirit news, Christian teachings, Charisma videos & more!

Mariah Gondeiro, vice president and legal counsel for Advocates for Faith and Freedom, said, "People of faith should never have to worry about the government spying on them in places of worship ... It is time to hold Santa Clara County accountable for violating the rights of Calvary Chapel members."

The county denied the allegations in the past, stating it did not use cell phone surveillance to track church members. A spokesperson explained that any data cited was analyzed after the fact for litigation purposes.

While the church faced fines for violating gathering restrictions, a three-judge panel ruled that CCF does not have to pay over \$200,000 in fines. McClure emphasized that the church cares for its congregation, and his goal was to preach the gospel while navigating pandemic restrictions.

Yet even with the dismissal of certain fines issued to CCF, a massive \$1.2 million fine was issued in April of this year by Superior Court Judge Evette D. Pennypacker, who ruled that the church flagrantly broke the county's mask mandates from November 2020 to June 2021.

While CCF claimed the government's orders violated its members' religious freedoms, the judge disagreed and said the mask mandate was "neutral and generally applicable" to other similar institutions in the county.

"It should appear clear to all—regardless of religious affiliation—that wearing a mask while worshipping one's god and communing with other congregants is a simple, unobtrusive, giving way to protect others while still exercising your right to religious freedom," Pennypacker wrote.

The lawsuit reflects concerns among religious communities across the country about potential overreach during lockdowns. As the legal battle unfolds, the case holds implications for the balance between government measures and the protection of religious rights.

"This is not just our First Amendment rights; it's really our biblical mandate not to forsake assembling with the saints," Pastor Ché Ahn, senior pastor of Harvest Rock Church in Pasadena, said during his church's 2021 battle with the California legal system. {eo}

Join Charisma Magazine Online to follow everything the Holy Spirit is doing around the world!

James Lasher is staff writer for Charisma Media.