

Church Sues Maine for Targeting Churches, Banning Drive-In Services

Calvary Chapel of Bangor has filed a federal lawsuit against Gov. Janet Mills for targeting churches and prohibiting in-person and drive-in, stay-in-your-car worship services with a criminal penalty of up to six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine for violating her executive orders. The federal lawsuit requests an emergency order against the unconstitutional orders.

However, Gov. Mills has allowed so-called “essential” commercial and non-religious entities that include liquor stores, marijuana dispensaries, warehouse clubs, and “big box” and “supercenter” stores to accommodate gatherings of people without threat of criminal sanctions.

The Maine State Police, acting under the direction of Gov. Mills’ orders, have publicly declared that they would enforce the orders and have threatened to impose criminal sanctions on those found in violation of them, including *any* gathering for worship, regardless of whether the church meets or exceeds the state social distancing and hygiene guidelines.

People may gather in offices, liquor stores, supercenters and a list of other secular venues, but not in churches. People may gather in secular or commercial parking lots, but not in churches. While people may gather in secular parking lots and listen to the pastor on the radio, they may not park in a church parking lot and listen to the pastor.

Calvary Chapel Pastor Ken Graves said, “It is the language chosen by our governor’s order that reveals the Christian church is in fact being targeted and discriminated against.

Our state government has told the church that it is nonessential. I disagree in the strongest terms. We are among the most essential things that must remain open. Wiser governments in the past actually looked to the churches to gather and pray and to pool their resources in times of crises. The government has told the church that it is irrelevant and that it offers nothing. I reject that. We are not irrelevant, and we have more to offer than our governor apparently realizes.”

“The government wrongly presumes to have the authority to violate our constitutionally guaranteed and God-given rights to freedom of religion and peaceful assembly,” said Graves.

Liberty Counsel Founder and Chairman Mat Staver said, “The Maine orders which prohibit any religious gathering while allowing many secular gatherings violates the First Amendment. Gov. Janet Mills has banned even parking lot services where people remain in their vehicles. The state has no authority to dictate the form or manner of worship for every church or house of worship. This unequal treatment will not stand. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights do not disappear during a pandemic. In fact, they are even more important during a crisis.” {eo}

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