

Clash Between City and Pastor Over Church Property for Homeless Shelter

Pastor Moses Colbert, a dedicated pastor in Gastonia, North Carolina, has been hit with a \$60,000 fine for his compassionate work of providing shelter and support on church property to homeless persons in the community.

City officials claim that Colbert has violated safety codes and lacks the required permits for his outreach efforts. With a two-month deadline set by the judge, the pastor must now make the necessary changes.

At Faith, Hope and Love Community Enrichment Ministries, Colbert has placed trailer homes to accommodate the homeless, while approximately 100 more people reside in nearby tents. In addition to providing meals, education, counseling and addiction-recovery services, Colbert's ministry aims to uplift and assist those in need. However, city leaders argue that safety regulations must be followed, emphasizing that good intentions do not excuse non-compliance with zoning laws.

Pastor Colbert, who has dedicated two decades to helping the homeless, had previously faced closure of a shelter due to fire and safety violations. Councilman Robert Kellogg, acknowledging the urgent need but prioritizing safety, regretted the closure. Community pressure and assistance from the organization You Are the Power allowed Colbert to reopen the shelter, acquiring trailers. Nonetheless, fines have accumulated as the church property's zoning permits only a church building.

Spike Cohen, founder of You Are the Power, expressed concerns on Facebook, accusing Gastonia of attempting to seize Pastor Moses' property and force the church and shelter out of

operation.

Cohen emphasized that Colbert has done more for the homeless community without burdening taxpayers, unlike the city's utilization of significant public funds.

Supporters rallied behind Colbert in a recent community gathering and city council meeting, where individuals who received help from the ministry shared emotional testimonies. Warning of the consequences if the shelter were to close, one person highlighted the potential dispersion of homeless people throughout the county.

Pastor Colbert urged local leaders to cease demonizing his ministry, stating, "It looks like you're discriminating against me, but it's these (homeless) people bearing the brunt of it." During a court hearing, Colbert's attorney affirmed his client's intention to do what is right but requested additional time.

The judge granted a continuance until August, cautioning against non-compliance excuses in the future. Colbert intends to seek proper permits while maintaining the trailers on church property.

City officials attributed inspections of the church property to public complaints regarding trash and debris. Records revealed that emergency personnel responded to 163 calls for assistance at the encampment between January and early June. Fourteen of these calls related to overdoses. Assistant City Manager Quentin McPhatter stressed the requirement for city permits and proper inspections, prioritizing citizen safety.

Pastor Colbert firmly believes the homeless should be seen as opportunities rather than obstacles. He emphasized that local leaders perceive them as liabilities, while he views them as valuable assets.

Colbert expressed that the \$60,000 fine could significantly

contribute to meeting the needs of the community. In the past, he adopted a defiant stance, stating, “I’d much rather ask for [the city’s] forgiveness than ask for their permission, ’cause I’m not getting their permission.” {eo}

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